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ANIMAL DESCRIPTIONS IN TWO QAṢĪDAHs
BY DHŪ L-RUMMAH: SOME REMARKS.*

The received view of Dhū l-Rummaḥ is largely a negative one, founded on what might be termed this poet's 'lexical' inspiration. However, as Blachère mentions, he was popular with medieval grammarians by reason of his animal descriptions and with singers because of his amatory odes devoted to his beloved Mayyah. Blachère further notes that Dhū l-Rummaḥ clearly belonged to the milieu of the grammarians and philologists, who found his archaic language much to their liking. The popularity of his odes in honour of Mayyah may, in Blachère's scheme of things, have attracted many imitations and false ascriptions, although this chain of reasoning should perhaps be deemed somewhat perverse.¹ Interest in the structure of the *qaṣīdah*, as manifested, for example, in works by Bateson, Jacobi and Badawi,² may help to promote this aspect of Dhū l-Rummaḥ's oeuvre, in addition to the philological work of Abū Ṣāliḥ 'Abd al-Quddūs which resulted in the publication in Damascus of a new edition of the poet's *dīwān*,³ based on a collation of several manuscripts unavailable to Macartney in his early, but nonetheless useful, edition of 1919.⁴ Mention should also be made of Yusūf Khalīf's study, *Dhū l-Rummaḥ, shā'ir al-ḥubb wa-l-ṣaḥra*, Cairo 1970.

Dhū l-Rummaḥ stands as the major representative of the archaic ode in the Umayyad period: he is often deemed the last poet in the *Jāhilī* manner.⁵ It is difficult to determine how his *qaṣā'id* differ from pre-Islamic prototypes. Sells, in the introduction to his recent translation of a poem by Dhū l-Rummaḥ, discerns a difference of approach between the poet and his *Jāhilī* forbears:

The poet speaks directly of his feelings rather than mediating them, in pre-Islamic fashion, through the images of the *aṭlāl*. He makes, for example, copious use of the words *hawā* and *ḥubb* ('passion' and 'love'); in lines

* I should like to acknowledge the help and advice given to me by Dr J.E. Montgomery of the University of Oslo in the preparation of this essay.

¹ R. Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, Paris 1966, III, 534-5.

² M.C. Bateson, *Structural Continuity in Poetry. A Linguistic Study of Five Pre-Islamic Odes*, The Hague 1970; R. Jacobi, *Studien zur Poetik der altarabischen Qasīde*, Wiesbaden 1971; M.M. Badawi, 'From Primary to Secondary *Qasīdas*', *JAL* 11 (1980), 1-31.

³ *Dīwān Dhī l-Rummaḥ*, Damascus 1973.

⁴ C.H.H. Macartney, *The Dīwān of Ghailān ibn 'Uqba known as Dhu 'r-Rummaḥ*, Cambridge 1919. In this essay, references are to Abū Ṣāliḥ's edition (AṢ) first and then to Macartney's (Mac).

⁵ *Aghānī* 1, XVI, 113; *Aghānī* 2, XVIII, 9; F. Sezgin, *GAS* II, 394-7.

3-10 [of the translated poem] *hawā* is used five times and *ḥubb* three times. In contrast, the pre-Islamic and *mukhaḍram* poet Labīd, in the famous *aṭlāl* scene of his *Muṣallaqah*, uses neither word at all.⁶

In this respect Sells echoes a comment made by Ḥusayn ʿAṭwān concerning the disparity in tone between Labīd and Dhū l-Rummah, viz. that the former is deficient in genuine feeling, whereas the latter is remarkable for his sincerity.⁷ However, given the profusion in pre-Islamic poems of amatory terms, as can be discerned most clearly from Lichtenstadter's list of references in her article 'Das *Nasīb* der altarabischen *Qaṣīde*',⁸ a more complete data-base is required, before generalised and impressionistic statements concerning the poet's use of amatory terms can be validated.

In her article 'The Camel Section of the Panegyric Ode',⁹ R. Jacobi makes little mention of Dhū l-Rummah, when treating of the Umayyad poets, for this poet is somewhat singular in this respect; the camel sections in Dhū l-Rummah's poetry tend to encompass substantial animal descriptions, which tendency is anomalous when compared with the three main Umayyad poets, Jarīr, al-Akḥṭal and al-Farazdaq. Such scenes are found in the verse of the renowned *mukhaḍram* poet of Hudhayl, Abū Dhuʿayb,¹⁰ and *Jāhili* poems also feature passages in which the camel is compared with the oryx bull (and this may include a description of a hunter with his gazehounds), the wild ass, the ostrich and a bird of prey.¹¹ What marks Dhū l-Rummah's verse as remarkable is the consistency with which the poet's *diwān* is peppered with such descriptions.

S. Jayyusi takes issue with Blachère's slighting judgement of Dhū l-Rummah and lauds his poetry, fully rehabilitating the poet as one of 'the greats' of the period:

A desert poet, he found out that he possessed one of the widest vocabularies of any poet in his age, a richness of language which few poets could combine, as he did, with fine poetic creativity ... Everything is invested with emotion and meant to enhance the poignancy of experience. The desert, which forms the background on which the drama of life, love, struggle and death is enacted, is itself variable in appearance; a sea of

⁶ M. Sells, 'Dhū al-Rumma's "To the two abodes of Mayya"', *Al-ʿArabiyya* 15 (1982), 52-65, esp. 53 = *Desert Tracings*, Connecticut 1989, 67-76, esp. 67. Sells uses Macartney's text except for lines 23 and 40: cf. AŞ 39/Mac 10.

⁷ *Muqaddimāt al-qaṣidah al-ʿarabiyyah fī l-ʿaṣr al-umawī*, Cairo 1977, 234 ff.

⁸ 'Das *Nasīb* der altarabischen *Qaṣīda*', *Islamica* 5 (1932), 17-96, esp. 73.

⁹ *JAL* 13 (1982), 1-22.

¹⁰ J. Hell, *Neue Hudhailiten-Diwane 1: Diwān des Abū Duʿaib*, Hanover 1926, 1 ff.; A. Farrāj, *Kitāb Sharḥ Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*, Cairo 1965, III, 3 ff.; A.M. Shākir & 'A.M. Hārūn, *Al-Muḥaddaliyyāt*, Cairo 1964, no. 126.

¹¹ Cf. Jacobi, *Studien*, 56-9.

mirages, full of fountains but without water, of phantoms that move but do not move; a treacherous wilderness, a cauldron of fire, an unfathomable maze, a deep valley that merges in complete oneness with the pitch-black of night.¹²

She considers Dhū l-Rummaḥ to be “the finest continuation in the Umayyad period of the pre-Islamic poetic tradition”, who nevertheless endows the pre-Islamic motifs and themes with new dimensions.¹³

An especial characteristic of Dhū l-Rummaḥ’s poetry has recently been highlighted by Ewald Wagner,¹⁴ viz. the *Dinggedichte*, or riddles, of which is the so-called *Uḥjīyyat al-‘Arab*, ‘The Riddle of the Arabs’, a poem introduced by a standard *nasīb* in honour of Mayyah. The riddles in this poem refer to an anthill, to bread and to a chameleon.¹⁵

Although living in a time of ever increasing urbanisation, Dhū l-Rummaḥ is to be reckoned among a small group of poets who were inspired by Bedouin poetry and who remained true to the old poetic traditions. In this connection he is often mentioned together with Jarīr and al-Farazdaq; however, al-Iṣfahanī tells us that the poet’s contemporaries did not always find his poetry to be of the same calibre and quality as that of these rival poets.¹⁶ As an imitator of ancient verse and, in the opinion of some critics, a more persistent practitioner of it than the *Jāhili* poets themselves, he was unsurpassed;¹⁷ indeed, the grammarian Abū ‘Amr b. ‘Alā’ (†770) reckoned Dhū l-Rummaḥ to be the last poet.¹⁸ His language is archaic, perhaps even archaizing, and it at times appears to belong to another form of Arabic, with its fondness for four radical nouns and adjectives, scarce in later poetry, as, for example, *ṣaḥbal*, *samādīr*, *laghāwis*, *jalāmūd*, *sabārūt*, *ḥurjūj* and *sumāḥjīj*. Mention may also be made of the use of the less common *amraqtu* for the more obvious *akhrajtu*.¹⁹ Desert themes and motifs dominate his poems: the poet travels from one desert to another, mounted on his camel Ṣaydaḥ, encountering *fatae*

¹² S.K. Jayyusi, ‘Umayyad Poetry’, in A.F.L. Beeston *et al.*, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge 1983, 429.

¹³ Ibid. 430.

¹⁴ E. Wagner, *Grundzüge der klassischen arabischen Dichtung*, Darmstadt 1988, II, 135-7; cf. AṢ 49/Mac 24.

¹⁵ Cf. also, for example, AṢ 82/Mac 85, translated by Wagner, *op. cit.*, 136.

¹⁶ *Aghānī* 1, XVI, 122; *Aghānī* 2, XVIII, 33.

¹⁷ G.E. von Grunebaum, ‘Wesen und Werden der arabischen Poesie von 500 bis 1000 nach Crh.’, in *Kritik und Dichtkunst*, Wiesbaden 1955, 23.

¹⁸ *Aghānī* 1, XVI, 113; *Aghānī* 2, XVIII, 9.

¹⁹ *Ṣaḥbal*, corpulent: AṢ 50.58/Mac 67.57; *sumdūr/samādīr*, blurred vision: AṢ 67.27/Mac 39.27; *laghwās/laghāwis*, greedy: AṢ 36.33/Mac 41.33; *jalmūd/jalāmūd*, boulder: AṢ 36.30/Mac 41.30; *subrūt/sabārūt*, barren, devoid of vegetation: AṢ 5.27/Mac 7.27; *ḥurjūj*, slender and spirited: AṢ 30.6/Mac 9.6; *sumḥūj/samāḥjīj*, long and lean on back: AṢ 30.13/Mac 9.13; *amraqa*, to discharge: AṢ 30.12/Mac 9.12; Mac 75.36 (omitted in AṢ 12).

morganae which, in the poet's travel-worn imagination, can assume almost any shape or form—a pool of water, not yet dried up, tattered rags strewn hither and thither throughout the desert, a revolving spinning-wheel, wind-driven rain;²⁰ he quenches his thirst at hitherto unfrequented wells or at those which have long been abandoned by humans (*qadīmu l-ʿahdi bi-l-nāsi*), visited only by the sandgrouse, their cawing and clucking like the gibberish spoken by Nabateans (*tarāṭunu anbaʿīn*), the water brackish and fetid (*ājīn*), like the urine of camels, amniotic fluid, or water commingled with extract of the *ghisl* plant, used for washing.²¹

The greater part, however, of the poet's oeuvre is devoted to desert fauna. The chameleon, for example, is described by Dhū l-Rummaḥ in at least ten places, as a crucified Indian or Christian, a criminal supplicating God for forgiveness, a praying Yemenite reciting the longer *Sūrah*s of the Qurʾān, its variegated colours now white and green, now green and gray.²² Al-Jāḥiẓ in his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* makes extensive use of Dhū l-Rummaḥ's *diwān*, as the chapter dealing with chameleons testifies.²³ The desert is also the stage for other creatures described by the poet: the wild ass, the oryx, the gazelle, the ostrich, the wolf, the fox, the hyaena, the locust, the frog, the serpent, even the *jinn* and the *ghūl*.²⁴

It is proposed now to examine in greater detail the rôle within the *qaṣīdah* accorded to zoological description by analyzing two long poems by the poet, namely nos. 1/1 and 14/68, which contain respectively 126 (or 131 in some recensions) and 92 verses. The latter was compounded from juxtaposed fragments, according to Blachère, an evident animadversion to the poem's anomalous structure in that the *nasīb* is resumed by the poet in verse 69, a clear indication, in this view, that the

²⁰ Cf. Khalīf, op. cit., 163-5; AŞ 23.23/Mac 46.23 (pool); AŞ 23.26-7/Mac 46.26-7 (rags); AŞ 39.45-6/Mac 10.45-6 (sword); AŞ 27.36-7/Mac 11.36-7 (curtain); AŞ 50.71/Mac 67.70 (spinning-wheel); AŞ 30.14-19/Mac 9.14-19 (rain).

²¹ AŞ 15.30-1/Mac 29.30-1 (for the formula *haraktu l-dimnah* cf. AŞ 36.33/Mac 41.33), AŞ 50.62/Mac 67.61, AŞ 67.27/Mac 39.27 (fetid watering-hole); AŞ 13.47/Mac 52.47 (unfrequented by humans); AŞ 33.43-4/Mac 78.43-4 and AŞ 12.36/Mac 75.35 (the clucking of the sandgrouse); AŞ 5.22/Mac 7.22 (water like camel's urine); AŞ 67.25/Mac 39.25 (*sukhd*); AŞ 16.23/Mac 30.23 (*ghisl*).

²² Cf. Khalīf, op. cit., 172; AŞ 58.4/Mac 4.4 (Indian); AŞ 16.32-4/Mac 30.32-4 (Christian); AŞ 5.30/Mac 7.30 and AŞ 27.32-3/Mac 11.32-3 (criminal); AŞ 100/Mac Appendix 75 (Yemenite); AŞ 26.44-5/Mac 5.44-5 and AŞ 16.32-4/Mac 30.32-4 (colouration).

²³ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. 'A.M. Hārūn, Cairo 1969, VI, 363 ff.

²⁴ Cf. Khalīf, op. cit., 168 and 175; for examples, cf. AŞ 27.47-73/Mac 11.47-73 (wild ass); AŞ 9.53-73/Mac 14.53-73 (oryx); AŞ 39.11-5/Mac 10.11-5 (gazelle); AŞ 5.48-52/Mac 7.48-52 (ostrich); AŞ 67.42/Mac 39.42 (wolf); AŞ 5.27/Mac 7.27 (fox); AŞ 87.9/Mac 38.9 (hyaena); AŞ 26.41 & 57/Mac 5.41 & 57 (locust); AŞ 67.57/Mac 39.57 (frog); AŞ 14.52-54/Mac 68.52-4 (snake); AŞ 27.34/Mac 11.34 (*jinn* and *ghūl*).

poem is a fabrication.²⁵ The first poem is also one of the poet's most characteristic pieces, comprising an extensive *nasīb*, centered on the description of the physical and moral attributes of Mayyah, and substantial depictions of desert wildlife. The typicality and popularity of this poem have ensured that it is placed first in most versions of the *dīwān*. That the *qaṣīdah* is bereft of laudatory conclusion (the *madīḥ*) may be attributable to the poet's awareness of the unpopularity of his laudatory verse in the eyes of his contemporaries.²⁶ Moreover, his laudatory poems are poorly proportioned: the poet seems to have considered that a few, sparse lines to cap the preceding verses would mollify the patron's thirst for eulogy—he had to make do, instead of vainglory, with the phenomena and the animal inhabitants of the desert wastes.

The first ten lines of Poem 1 are a variation on the *aṭlāl* theme:²⁷

1. What ails your eye that water should stream from it, like drops seeping from the patches of a tightly-stitched waterskin,
2. Capacious, tanned with the *gharf*, its stitch-holes punched /by an awl/, through which the thongs allow water to drip and be lost?
3. /Is it that/ the troop has acquired some tidings of their clans or has the heart been revisited by one of its emotions,
4. Or is it a dung-pile from which the east wind has scattered flecked droppings like folded codices (or, rolled scrolls), outspread,²⁸
5. Its familiar markings covered by a stream of sand from the smooth dune, raised by a side-wind that pulled at its surface and met with no resistance?
6. No, it is yearning for an abode wasted by the pounding of the clouds and by a burning sand wind!²⁹
7. Despite its antiquity, your eye can make out a trench, a dilapidated hearth and the place where firewood was stored,
8. And even shimmering, dark traces, like well-burnished, filligreed scabbards
9. Beside al-Zurq, its cairn-stones have not been obliterated by the dust and sand borne violently on the wind, by the rains or by the aeons—
10. Abodes of Mayyah when Mayyah reciprocated our love, when neither Arab nor Barbarian had seen her like:

There now follows a description of Mayyah's beauty in the traditional manner:

²⁵ Blachère, op. cit., III, 535.

²⁶ Aghānī 1, XVI, 121; Ibn Qutaybah, *Kitāb al-Shi'r wa-l-Shu'arā'*, ed. de Goeje, Leiden 1904, 341; Khalīf, op. cit., 185 ff.

²⁷ Mention should be made of Smend's capable Latin translation: R. Smend, *De Dsur' Rumma Poeta Arabico et Carmine eius Mā Bālu 'Aynay-ka min-hā l-mā'u yansakibu Commentatio*, Bonn 1874.

²⁸ Cf. Lane, *Lexicon*, London 1863, 1899.

²⁹ Ibid., 826.

11. Shining bright, her neck and breasts like lightning, a gazelle lured into the open by the fine sand
12. Of a dune where desert-grass and acacia twigs grow on its slopes, at twilight;
13. Ample are her buttocks, round and smooth are her legs, her bejewelled girdle clatters (around her waist), her body and her bones are perfectly developed;
14. She adorns her dresses: even if, one day, the clothes that rest upon the bustle were to be removed, this would adorn her! (i.e. her vital statistics would still conform to the fashionable norm, even if it became apparent that they are enhanced by artificial means).
15. She reveals to you the shape of her face, the face of a free-born noble woman, smooth, unblemished by mole or scar.
16. When the seeker of worldly pleasure penetrates her, the tent above them veiled in the night,
17. She breathes through a sweet-scented nose, its nostrils besprinkled with musk and Indian amber (?).
18. Ravishingly sumptuous to the eye when unveiled; when veiled, the eye stares intently at her;
19. A deep, dark red are her lips, her gums and incisors are bright and cool,³⁰
20. Black are her large, round pupils, golden-bright are her irises (or sclera), she is like gilt silver,
21. Her earrings hang from noble lobes, the threads stretching so far from the studs that they swing to and fro.

The poet essays a description of her character, remembering his relationship with her in the past and uttering sundry reflections on Fate. The, somewhat banal, lines contained within the following brackets { } are included in the text by Smend and Macartney but not by Abu Ṣāliḥ:

- {21.a/Sm 22/Mac 23}. She is not foul-mouthed in the tent of her neighbour, she is not reproached and doubt is not cast upon her.
 {21.b/Sm 23/Mac 24}. If she is their neighbour, they do not adopt her character, and if they fabricate lies about her, she does not know what anger is.
 {21.c/SM 24/Mac 25}. Silent are her anklets: a tender maiden who derives no pleasure in weaving tales among the tribe or in raucous tumult.
 {21.d/SM 25/Mac 26}. Love for her causes me to quake in the black of night, like a fire which blazes just when it seems to have died.
 {21.e/SM 26/Mac 27}. Alas! Woe is me! Fie! My body is riddled with poison and grief!
 22 [SM 27/Mac 22]. By chance, I became attached to that girl—both the magnanimous noble and the man of Islam can be seduced—
 23 [SM/Mac 28]. During the nights when dalliance summoned me and I followed, like a swimmer at play on a bottomless ocean,³¹

³⁰ Ibid., 1604.

³¹ Ibid., 1782.

24. Thinking that Time would never destroy any novelty and that the vicissitudes would never sunder and divide one party of people.³²

The *ṭayf al-khayāl* visits the poet, whose *raḥīl* leads into the *wasf al-nāqah*. This is an interesting and quite bold departure, a stylistic feature of Dhū l-Rummaḥ's poetic technique, from the traditional structural pattern of the *qaṣīdah*. The camel descriptions is itself divided into four sections; the *wasf* proper (27b-34), the wild ass tableau (35-61), the oryx tableau (62-101) and the ostrich tableau (102-126):

25. Mayyah's phantasm visited a slumberer with whom the desert wastes and the noble Mehari camels had toyed,
26. Alighting when the morn was bright, and, save for that, the rest of the journey had been at full pace,
27. The companion of desert wastes, who dozed beside an emaciated /she-camel/, her smooth side /covered in/ scabs caused by /the friction of/ her saddle-girth,
28. Complaining of the nose ring and the galling of the girth-thongs, as the disease-ridden invalid complains to his visitors;
29. She is like a robust bull-camel: nought remains of her save her natural physique—bones and sinews,
- 30 [Sm 35/Mac 36]. She does not lose her footing and thereby occasion complaint, although the wastelands have caused her to amble until her back is gibbous,
- 31 [Sm 36/Mac 37]. Her rider seems to be swooping in a region where the blustery South Wind squalls, when the troop accelerates,
- 32 [Sm 37/Mac 38]. As she canters with /him/, his doublet torn to shreds, full of energy, as /sharp and effective as/ a cutting sabre, when his comrades are exhausted,
- 33 [Sm 38/Mac 35]. The whitish-brown camels, some with necks outstretched, some jogging and trotting, are pounded /with stones kicked up by her/ on all sides as she speeds on,³³
- 34 [Sm/Mac 39]. Attentive, when he binds the saddle to her, bending down, until, when he has balanced and affixed the girth, she springs to her feet,

The Wild Ass Section. The wild ass is always portrayed amidst his females, often heavy with young and tormented with thirst. He leads them to a water-hole, where, not infrequently, there lies concealed a hunter armed with his bow and arrows. This encounter climaxes with the timely escape of the asses. Such is a standardised digest of the wild ass tableau, the general principles of composition to which the poet adheres in his *dīwān*, despite some minor, occasional variations. Other natural phenomena are introduced into the tableau:³⁴

³² Ibid., 1557.

³³ Ibid., 2041-42.

³⁴ Cf. Khalīf, op. cit., 176 ff. and 181 ff.

35. As leaps a stallion ass, of the wild herds of Ma'qulah, his hide lacerated with bites, who appears to be limping (?), or to be afflicted by a stitch in his side,
36. Driving on barren she-asses, similar in appearance, compact, wearing ash-grey garments, streaked with black;
37. He brayed at them in al-Khaṣā', his grazing ground, in al-Fawdajāt and the twin slopes of Wāḥif
38. Until, when he was afflicted by the searing, torrid heat of summer which evaporated the water and dried the moist grass,
39. When the herbage was scorched in the season of the Simoom, brought by a blazing wind from the Yemen, catastrophe in its wake, (or, which blows across one as it passes),
40. When the contents of their bellies were affected and the smell of stagnant water was in the air,
41. They stood, gathered around him one day, watching him, reddish-brown, long-legged, their insides lean and hungry,
42. Until, when the horn of the sun turned golden or was about to set, he departed (the night-journey to water was a matter of moment in his soul),
43. And sped on his night-journey, driving his consorts ahead: his slowest speed was the amble or the trot,
44. He climbed with them for a time through the hard, uneven grounds, to exhaust them, seemingly battling with them—exhaustion did not neglect them—
45. Like a wailer bemoaning his troubles when one of them, injured in the hoof, strayed from their midst,
46. Like a madman as he snapped at their withers, when his harem split asunder in al-Ṣulb;
47. They were like camels herded together and led hastily away by a band of marauding outsiders.³⁵
48. Their object was the oasis of Uthāl. No other aim distracted him from watering there.
49. They arrived, as the pillar of morning broke to reveal them, its remainder veiled in night,
50. At a swollen oasis, its sides covered with duckweed, where frogs croaked and fish swam,
51. Filled by a stream, brisk, like a sword, amid small palms, their branches rising high all around;
52. On the left there lurked in his lair a hunter from Jillān, dressed in filthy clothes, concealing his person,
53. Preparing steel-blue arrow-heads atop shafts, thick in the fore-shaft, smooth-backed, urged on by the fletchings and the sinew—
54. When similar asses had approached him, some of them had been separated from their companions—
55. Until, when the animals were hidden in the hollow of the watering-hole, they were alarmed by suspicious fears,

³⁵ Abū Ṣāliḥ's interpretation of the line can be rendered as: They were like camels with which a band escapes, having plundered them from another tribe whom they had raided.

56. And stretched their necks at a gallop, in terror,³⁶ but the murmur of the running water called them back.
 57. So the white-bellied asses returned, their livers pulsating, throbbing, where the lower ribs meet the guts,
 58. Until, when the gulps had slid down every gullet but had not quenched the burning thirst,
 59. He shot and missed—the Fates were uppermost. Off they sped. Curses and rage were his lot.
 60. They pounded the foothill so vigorously, because of their experience, that the stones of the rocky terrain were almost set ablaze:
 61. Like the secondaries of a slender saker, hungry for meat, as it pursues a male houbara which has turned to outstrip it over the rocky terrain.

The Oryx Bull Section. The oryx is alone as darkness falls and the rain and wind come on. It seeks shelter in the *arṭā* brake. The oryx, like the asses, is hunted. On this occasion, it is pursued by well-trained salukis. As in the Wild Ass Section, this encounter ends with the timely escape of the oryx. Thus, the comparison between the fleet camel and these swift animals is most effective.³⁷ Other natural phenomena may be introduced into the section.³⁸

62. Is it this or an energetic, mature oryx, his legs variegated with tattooing, his cheek burned black, as he sallies forth in the morning?
 63. He passed the summer heat in the dune until the puffs of the cold wind rippled his regenerated herbage—his life knew no hardship—
 64. *Rabl* shrubs and *arṭā* brakes, the forelocks of which protected him from the hot constellations until their scorching stars died.
 65. At night he passed through Wahbayn on his way to his grazing ground at Dhū l-Fawāris,³⁹ his nose summoned thither by the moist plants,
 66. Until, when he was surrounded by the crests of the ripplings mounds of a vast sand tract,
 67. Darkness cast its cloak upon the beast and a night cloud, piled high, brought on by Aquarius, poured rain over him.
 68. So he spent the night as a guest of an *arṭāh* tree which provided warmth and shelter, growing where the dune was massed,
 69. Bushy, solitary and distant, the haunt of herds of oryx, their dung piled high on the mounds surrounding it:

³⁶ Or, reading, *firaqan*, 'in scattered groups.'

³⁷ It is only in the elegy, as al-Jāḥiẓ remarks, that the situation differs: "It is the custom of the poets, when the poem is an elegy (*marthiyyah*) or a spiritual counsel (*maw'izah*), that it is for the hounds to kill the oryx does. When, however, the poem is a *madīh* and the poet says: 'My camel is like an oryx doe because of such and such qualities', then it is usual that the hounds are the ones to be killed. This is not a representation of a real event; the bulls may wound the dogs or even kill them. In most cases, the bulls are caught and the dogs remain unharmed and victorious, with their master taking the spoils".

³⁸ Cf. Khalīf, op. cit., 181 ff.

³⁹ Or, on his way from Dhū l-Fawāris to his grazing ground.

70. Decaying leaves, of those which fell in the course of the year, some fluttering around the roots of the tree, had begun to turn grey;
71. The discarded fruits, withering all around, were like mulberries and grapes;
72. It was like the abode of a perfumer which he crams full of pouches of musk: he prepares them and they are snatched /by his customers/ as prizes;
73. When a shower of rain soaked it, the litters of the wide-eyed kine exhaled a perfumed scent so sharp that even the wood exhaled the scent.
74. The lightning-clouds revealed an oryx, curled up, brilliant-white, like a solitary drover dressed in a *yalmaq*.
75. The drizzle ran from the crest of his dorsal stripe, tumbling like pearls when the string has been cut;
76. He struck the den with his horns, causing it to collapse. Some of the running sand crumbled, some was massed in heaps.
77. When he tried to take shelter there, one of the tree's tendrils became visible to him, lying before the root.
78. A quick-witted desert creature, he had heard a faint noise, a muffled sound—his hearing did not lie—,
79. And so throughout the night he was discomfited by the cold and kept awake by the veering of the souging wind and the rain
80. Until when the dawn, its neck raised amid the lingerings of the night, revealed his face,
81. (The twilight darkness of an interminable night which had been intensified by thick dark clouds, so that it seemed to have no apertures),
82. He sallied forth, as if affrighted by a *jinn*, fearfully looking all around,
83. Until, when he had taken his fill of the *jadr* grass and the sun produced the streaked rays of early morning,
84. And he shone forth, gleaming brightly, remarkable for his colour, like a blazing flame as he ascended a barren dune,
85. He excited the longing of the famished, blue-grey dogs, lean in the waist, slender, emaciated by starvation and running with a stitch,
86. Lop-eared, their jaws open wide, trained to the chase, like wolves, with leather collars on their necks,⁴⁰
87. And of a hunter whose sustenance was his prey, whose livelihood was his quarry, whose father had made the same living,
88. His hair cropped close, wearing blackened rags, with no possessions but the hounds and their catch.
89. He turned to his right and they darted after him: neither the hunters nor the hunted spared any effort.
90. Until, when they had continued for some distance, he was overtaken by pride—had he wished, he could have saved himself by running away—⁴¹
91. Shame commingled with rage overtook him as he leapt in flight from the bank of the dune,
92. So he curbed his keenness. He could hear the lop-eared hounds sobbing behind his tail-tuft, from the effort,

⁴⁰ Lane, op. cit., 1982.

⁴¹ Ibid. 936.

93. Until when they were within his reach, as he swerved and changed direction, or his hock and tail were almost within their reach,
 94. They attacked him hard, but he was not perplexed or startled as they wheeled on a battle-field where perdition was to be feared.
 95. He turned and charged, nimbly thrusting at their chests, as if he reckoned that there was remuneration in advancing;
 96. From time to time he would jab at their necks from the side, and their lungs and diaphragms would be strung together (or, pierced),
 97. Striking them with the point of his horn, now piercing their abdomens, now, sharp and light, it would miss the target,
 98. Until when they had been repulsed and put to flight (or, slaughtered) by a keen-cutting weapon and both his horns were dyed with blood,
 99. He turned and ran swiftly through their midst, cheerful and joyous, his heart freed from anxieties,⁴²
 100. Like a shooting star hurled after an *ʿifrū* in the black of night.⁴³
 101. Some of them trod on the twisting folds of their intestines, others whined and sobbed as the veins of their bellies bled continuously.

The Ostrich Section.⁴⁴ Like the two preceding sections, this passage follows a fairly formulaic sequence of events; the quest for food leads the male to stray too far from its young and a violent storm imperils the return of the bird and its mate, though they reach their chicks in safety. The similes, too, are also somewhat formulaic; the male resembles a Bedouin tent, propped on two poles, an Ethiopian, a camel which is in danger of loosing its poorly secured load, while the hen is like a bucket falling down a well.⁴⁵

102. Is it that or a male ostrich, his skin dark red, his browsing ground in al-Siyy, the father of thirty young, as he returns in the evening,
 103. Slender of leg, the rest of him is like a camel-skin tent, tall, large, of vigorous physique,
 104. His legs are like two tent-poles of *ʿushar* wood, long and thin, from which the bark has not been peeled,
 105. Distracted by (feeding on) the *āʾ* and *tannūm*, followed by the glinting *marw*: browsing has its stages.
 106. He is seen with his neck lowered for a long time, but you fail to recognise him immediately, and then he stretches his neck and his lineage is obvious—
 107. Like an Ethiopian searching for a track or one of the peoples who have pierced ears⁴⁶
 108. Enormous, dressed in a black, nappy *qaṭīfah*, with the unwoven ends worn on the outside of his garments,

⁴² Ibid., 1188.

⁴³ Cf. T. Seidensticker, *Das Verbum Sawwama. Ein Beitrag zur Problem der Homonymenscheidung im Arabischen*, Munich 1986, 43.

⁴⁴ Cf. Khalif, op. cit., 174 ff.

⁴⁵ Cf. A. Benhamouda, 'L'autruche dans la poésie de Dhū l-Rumma', in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, Damascus 1956, I, 199-205.

⁴⁶ I.e. a nubian. Cf. ibid., 205.

109. Or a teething (i.e. growing) camel, whose loader had weakened the girth on the previous day so that the saddle-bags and the pack-saddle hang to the rear,

110. Misled by the two pastors of a Kalbī herd as they came out of a distant watering-hole, their necks swaying from side to side (?).

111. In the morning the young camel is alone, without its masters, searching for dried *naṣī* thistles, the roots of which are all that remain,

112. Laden with provisions, quilts and coverlets which the hind-girth has virtually dragged from its back.

113. —The first description is a likeness of the whole ostrich. The latter (i.e. the camel) and these two (racial types) depict the shape of his body and his colour (respectively)—

114. Until when it was evening, the long-necked one looked for his chicks, and they were neither dispiritingly distant nor close-by,

115. Hastening in the shadow of a lightning cloud, buffeted by the souging wind, the pebbles raised by its first onset,

116. In competition with a small-headed (female) with mottled plumage, her neck lowered, as the desert that lay before the daughters of the eggs was devoured,

117. Like the bucket of a well; the water-drawer has toiled hard until when he sees it, it is betrayed by the rope.

118. What a return she has, while the wind howled, the cloud thundered and the night advanced!

119. They did not withhold any pace: their hides were almost ripped from them,

120. And in all of the places which they traversed in the course of their race a wonder was worked,

121. Secure from neither predators nor hail, if darkness fell before they reached their clamorous young,

122. Who emerged naked from their eggs, with scant plumage, protected only by the soft soil, a dutiful mother and a father;

123. It was as if, in the desert plain, they cracked open dried skulls or split colocynth pods

124. (Consisting of) the broken shells which had revealed (chicks) crooked and bent, their skins seemingly covered in the mange.

125. Their beaks were like split *nab*^c wood, attached to heads like balls of dung, the plumage having not yet sprouted,

126. Their necks like the *kurrāth* growing in sandy ground, their beards having been blown away, or like the spiky *hayshar*.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Al-Damyātī, *Muṣjam Asmāʾ al-Nabātāt*, Cairo 1965, identifies the botanical items mentioned in this poem as follows; *gharf* (1.2): *Cordia gharaf* (p. 113); *rabl* (1.64); *Pulicaria undulata* (p. 62); *arṭā* (1.64): *Calligonum comosum* (p. 11); *ushar* (1.104): *Asclepias procera* (p. 102); *marw* (1.105): *Maerua crassifolia* (p. 144); *nab*^c (1.125): *Grewia populifolia*; *kurrāth* (1.126): *Euphorbia aculeata* (p. 133)—it is unlikely to be the leek (*Allium porrum*); *hayshar* (1.126): *Cynara cardunculus* (p. 157), the cardoon. The *ā*², a shrub similar to the Tamarisk which grows in the Nejd, like *tannūm*, a tree with purgative berries (1.105) and the *jadr* (1.83), possibly a form of clover or truffle, have not been identified. The *naṣī* of line 111 is a type of desert-grass.

This massive monument of the desert stands as a poetic manifesto of the concerns and preoccupations of Dhū l-Rummaḥ's career. It is 'open-ended' like some of the poems of his pre-Islamic forebears,⁴⁸ entirely focused on the desert and its fauna. The poet's eye for detail and breadth of imagination, his disregard for the fluidity of *Jāhili* syntax, his accumulation of minutiae to the point of surfeit, the vividness of the tableaux and the urgent energy of the narrative passages, make of this *qaṣīdah* a masterpiece, albeit a controversial one. It is by no means an easy poem: indeed, it has proved to be a stern test for the translator and many of the translations remain speculative. This poem marks the gauntlet which Dhū l-Rummaḥ threw down to challenge the poetic developments and predilections of his contemporaries. He intended it to be a *tour de force*, an uncompromising evocation of the literary heritage as perceived by a very individual mind. Ironically, the poem which stands as the culmination of that tradition also sounds its death-knell.

Poem 14/68 is an example of what has, traditionally, been considered to have been Dhū l-Rummaḥ's weakest poetic genre, the *hijā'* (vituperation). The recipients of this vituperation are the Banū Imri' al-Qays, a clan of Tamīm, against whom some ten other attacks are directed. Verses 1-18 constitute the *nasīb* section, one of Dhū l-Rummaḥ's more successful erotic pieces, in which a relatively simple diction is combined with 'scientific' analysis of the malady caused by the frustration of unfulfilled passion: the memory of Mayyah reappears constantly; lethargy creeps through his bones. The extent of the poet's obsession is conveyed by the continued occurrences of his beloved's name. The inner logic of the *ṭayf al-khayāl* motif is expanded to stand, functionally, as the transition to the *waṣf al-nāqah* in verses 15-19. Subsequent to 12 verses of camel description is the wild ass tableau,⁴⁹ the narrative sequence of which is as follows: the she-asses have begun to moult as the summer heat sets in and withers their grazing grounds; some are pregnant, others remain infertile; they begin their search for water, hesitating as to which oasis to visit; their choice is Uthāl, despite the fact that they had been hunted there in the past and in other poems by our poet (cf. poem 1 *supra*); the stallion comes on stage, his flanks scarred with bite-marks left by his harem, and he guides them relentlessly; they arrive at nightfall, awaited by a poor hunter who shares his wattling with his bow, arrows and two snakes.

⁴⁸ Al-Nābighah Poem 23 in W. Ahlwardt, *The Divans of the Six Ancient Arab Poets*, London 1870, and Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā poem 24 in F. Qabāwah, *Shi'r Zuhayr*, Aleppo 1970, are fine examples of this. One cannot, of course, dismiss the possibility of a defective textual tradition.

⁴⁹ Cf. Khalīf, *op. cit.*, 179 ff.

Despite the hungry expectations of his wife and eight children and his prior successes with the wild ass, his arrows are fated to miss the mark and the asses speed into the distance, in a cloud of dust.

28. When we had made them penetrate the heart of a desert waste, barren and lifeless, its terrors causing our hearts to leap,
29. Wide and flat, its surface outspread, unvaried, where death and going astray are feared by travellers,
30. Where the wolves yelp after the /camels/ wearied by it, like the yelping at night of young camels in a scattered, pasturing herd,
31. They purposefully crossed the wastes and a Yemeni /she-camel/ exerted herself, her gallop bringing the distant near—
32. Long of neck and of hind-leg, like long-legged, narrow-waisted /she-asses/ from whom the moulting flies,
33. Which grazed on the brome grass when it first sprouted, then grew thick and green and then burgeoned, until its thorns hurt their noses,
34. In Rabba, then on to the lea of al-Qidhāf, to al-Mi‘ā and Wāḥif, cropping and roaming.
35. When the vegetation in the arroyos had withered and the parturition of the recusant asses was evident, as were the barren among them,
36. They ascended the rugged ground of al-Qarīn, for it had occurred to them to depart for the land of al-Sitār,⁵⁰
37. Standing on three legs; they did not value anything as highly as going to water, but they wavered as to which of two holes,
38. Whether it was to be Ghumāzah, the oasis of the Banū Baww (of the Banū ‘Āmir), there to drink at the onset of darkness, or Uthāl.
39. When there appeared in the night a light like a rainbow amid clouds whose shadows have lifted,
40. They made for one of the oases of Uthāl, a salubrious sea, its flood casting forth the croaking /frogs/,
41. In the command of a /stallion/ whose immature pelage had been shed, like the staff of a divine in a hermitage, supple and well-proportioned;
42. When one of them, barren for some time, was refractory, so high spirited that her legs seemed to be shackled tightly,
43. He launched himself against her, his head held to one side, the stones crushed by his streaming pace and her flowing run—
44. His driving and thrusting of his consorts through the place of the cairns was like the tumbling of a bucket down a well.
45. At al-Qidhāf his braying resembled the alternate wailing and howling of /mothers/ bereaved /of their children/.
46. In his seventh year; from the time when the trees leafed, he inflicted upon them rancorous wounds, for which revenge was not sought,
47. By biting their thighs and haunches, when their refractoriness and vacillation perturbed him.
49. That night /a hunter/ remained awake, the possessor of a curved, yellow bow made of *nab*^c and blue-grey arrows, recently fletched and sharpened—

⁵⁰ Reading *arḍi l-sitāri* for *ahli l-sitāri*.

50. Often had been the braying, coughing and sobbing of the dying asses, because of the /wounds/ which they (the arrows) had left in their midriffs—

51. A wretched creature who took shelter with the mother of eight children, whose sole income was game.

52. He lay in wait for them (the asses) inside a gibbous lair, its walls too small for him, if he had not twisted himself,

53. Where he was accompanied by a black /snake/ like the cord tied around the foreleg of a young camel let loose by the ropes,

54. And by a horned /viper/, which he identified by name, even in the dark, by the sound it made or by its winding, should he have seen it (?),⁵¹

55. And which continuously, for part of the night, slithered because of the noise he made, its rustling like that of a mill, its skin made of hide.

56. They arrived at the foredawn, sticking to a track where they had been shot and ensnared in the past.

57. When their treading on the soft ground alerted his hearing and he sensed that they had slipped in among the small palms,

58. He crouched until, when they were in range, despite the terror which assailed them from all sides,

59. He shot as they were like spears which protect another line of spears that have not entered the fray,

60. Hastening to quench their thirst, having but rarely visited such abundant water,

48. And to drink brackish water when the stars were like the lamps of a hunter, the wicks kindled.⁵²

61. The arrow shot past the furthest female, deflected by the remainder of their span, as yet incomplete,

62. Though similar asses had previously been reduced to misery by it when he had fired at them, their livers and their spleens.

63. They wheeled around kicking up a cloud of dust like smoke from thickets set aflame.

The poet now returns full circle to his point of departure, the camels speeding through the desert wastes (64-67). In verses 68-70 he apostrophizes Mayyah, and follows this with an invocation of his two companions in verse 71, seeking advice from them concerning his predicament with Mayyah, only to return to addressing her in 73-5, informing her that her name is always on his lips as he travels mounted upon his camel. The poem concludes with the vituperation of the Imru' al-Qays, accusing them of an unwarlike character, a dedication to agriculture and a stingy reluctance to entertain guests. It is not readily

⁵¹ The 'black' snake is probably the *Walterinnesia aegyptica*, the Desert Black Snake, encountered throughout the Arabian Peninsula. The 'horned' snake is either the *Cerastes cerastes gasperetti*, the Arabian Horned Viper, or the *Pseudocerastes persicus persicus*, the False Horned Viper.

⁵² I have followed Abū Šāliḥ's suggestion that this verse, wanting in Macartney's MSS, should follow verse 60.

apparent how the themes of the rest of the poem contribute to the vituperative purpose, which strikes one as being a virtual afterthought.

In the two poems discussed, animal descriptions are the most dominant feature of the poetry of Dhū l-Rummah: the *nasīb* takes second place. Laudatory and vituperative passages are of less poetic significance, a feature noted and commented upon by the poet's contemporaries.⁵³ The camel section as developed by Dhū l-Rummah is constituted of extensive animal tableaux: this is unusual when compared with the big three of Umayyad verse, Jarīr, al-Farazdaq and al-Akhṭal.⁵⁴ Poem 1 is most original in that it spotlights so prominently and vividly three of the four animals customary in these similes,⁵⁵ although the poet has chosen by far the most conventionally appropriate animals, given that the bird of prey is of relatively infrequent occurrence.⁵⁶ The juxtaposition of the three animals in one and the same *qaṣīdah* is a distinct innovation on the practices of pre-Islamic and early Islamic verse.⁵⁷

A further innovation is the length devoted to the descriptions, also in cases when two comparisons refer to the same object, following each other immediately. Unlike the poems appertaining to Jacobi's corpus, the first comparison in Dhū l-Rummah's poems need not necessarily be shorter than the second.⁵⁸ The paratactic formulae in poem 1, however, are identical with those already encountered in earlier poems.⁵⁹

⁵³ *Aghānī*, XVI, 121; *Aghānī* 2, XVIII, 31.

⁵⁴ As demonstrated by Jacobi, 'Camel Section'.

⁵⁵ Cf. C.J. Lyall, 'The Pictorial Aspects of Ancient Arabic Poetry', *JRAS* (1912), 133-52, esp. 143 ff. and Jacobi, *Studien*, 56-59.

⁵⁶ The bird of prey as *tertio comparationis* of the camel is not found in the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*. The most famous example is the poem of 'Abīd sometimes numbered among the *Mu'allaqāt*. A horse is compared with a hawk in *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* poem 62. In Imru' al-Qays Ahlwardt 55.12-4 and Ahlwardt 52.54-6 a camel and a horse, respectively, are compared with an eagle.

⁵⁷ The double simile is comparatively rare in pre-Islamic verse: cf. Imru' al-Qays Ahlwardt 34.6-8 (camel description), 9-11 (ostrich simile), 12-25 (wild ass simile); al-Nābighah Ahlwardt 23.18-9 (she-ass simile), 20-3 (oryx); Zuhayr Ahlwardt 1.15-6 (ostrich), 17-30 (wild ass). In the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* the double simile is found only in Abū Dhū'ayb's celebrated threnody. Cf. further J.E. Montgomery, 'Al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī, Arkhilokhos and a Medieval Complaint Against Blacksmiths. Or, a funny thing happened to me...', *Edebiyat* (forthcoming), and M. Theyban, *Das Tier in den Sechs Diwānen der altarabischen Poesie*, Giessen, diss. 1987.

⁵⁸ Cf. Jacobi, *Studien*, 56.

⁵⁹ In his *Mu'allaqah*, the poet Labīd, whose verse is not included by Jacobi in her survey, treats, in some length, with a double simile: ll. 25-35 (the wild ass bereft of hunting scene) and 36-52 (the oryx doe escaping from archers and their hounds). The connecting formula is *a-fa-tilka am waḥshiyyatun* (C.J. Lyall, *Ten Ancient Arabic Poems*, Calcutta 1894, 67 ff.; I. 'Abbās, *Sharḥ Diwān Labīd b. Rabi'ah al-ʿĀmirī*, Kuwait 1962, poem 48; Bateson, op. cit., 162-5): cf. Zuhayr Ahlwardt 1.17, Imru' al-Qays Ahlwardt 34.12, al-Nābighah Ahlwardt 23.20.

The wild ass sections in poems 1 and 68 are of greater compass than similar similes found in earlier verse, and the poem owes much to the tradition represented by Aws b. Ḥajar and Ka'b b. Zuhayr. However, the wild ass section can also be less developed, as in Macartney 10 (translated by Sells, op. cit.). These poems came to represent exemplars of the Bedouin style for later generations and find echoes in poems which treat of the desert. Dhū l-Rummah's divergence from his poetic forebears remains, however, most evident in his *nasīb*s, the other mainstay of his oeuvre.

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