The transformation of the Arabic ghazal: Nasb and ghazal in 11th- and 12th-Century Andalusian Poetry
Schippers, A.

Published in:
Ghazal as World Literature I

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
NASIB AND GHAZAL IN 11TH AND 12TH CENTURY ARABIC AND HEBREW ANDALUSIAN POETRY

Arie Schippers
(Amsterdam)

This contribution is about the distinction between nasib and ghazal as made by Renate Jacob, Thomas Bauer and others. They define nasib as an elegiac evocation of memories in a Bedouin setting, and ghazal as the expression of an existent love affair, or of one that is not yet existent although there is still hope of coming into contact with the beloved. In ghazal, the beauty of the beloved, the sufferings of the lover and his reproaches to his beloved (or other forms of communication between lover and beloved) are described.

I will discuss the function of nasib and ghazal in a selection from the oeuvres of three poets: the Arabic poet Ibn Khafaja (1058-1139) and the Hebrew poets Moses ibn Ezra (1056-1138) and Yehudah ha-Levi (1074-1141). All three are considered exponents of the final stages of a long tradition of Arabic poetry, in which poetic themes and motifs have lost their primordial Bedouin character and become highly rhetorized and stylized.

The two genres of love poetry are also considered expressions of youth and primordial Bedouin character and become highly rhetoricized and stylized. Examples of nasib-like as well as ghazal-like poetry by Ibn Khafaja, and investigate how far this distinction can be made in his poetry.

The poems in which Ibn Khafaja mentions Bedouin place names should be considered nasib-like. Ibn Khafaja himself makes a statement in the prose part of poem number 150: "these place names in his love poems have a nostalgic function." They should be connected with his poems of old age, in which he deplores his lost youth and remembers his past love affairs. Poems in which Ibn Khafaja describes the beauty of a young lad or a rendezvous with a young girl can be considered ghazal-like, although these poems often contain mere manneristic conceits rather than descriptions of real love affairs.

But in his poetry, the lines between ghazal and nasib are sometimes blurred: Bedouin place names often occur amidst typical ghazal motifs. In some of Ibn Khafaja's nasib-like poems, other classical motifs also play a role, such as the passing of the watchman of the tribe, as they did in the famous Mu'allaka of Imru'ul-Qays and the poetry of 'Umar ibn Abi Rabia. In this connection, the theme of the wind as a messenger from the remote campsite is one of the more frequent motifs in Ibn Khafaja's poetry. A nasib beginning in Ibn Khafaja's poetry can be an introduction to

1 Art. Nasib (Renate Jacob) in EI², Encyclopaedia of Islam² VII, Leiden 1992, 982.
5 ibid., 62-64.
6 I am aware that the artistic standards of pre-Islamic poetry were already highly developed, but from the point of view of later poets who practise rhetorization and conceptualization as a principle of art, pre-Islamic poetry must be labelled as 'primordial.'
9 Ibid., 203 (no. 150; prose part). There are many poems with the heading: "wa-qala il-ghazal:" ibid. 62 (no. 15); 63 (no. 45; "yalghazala''); 124 (no. 74); 236 (no. 178); 271 (no. 212); 280 (no. 219; "yalghazala''); and others. In his preface (ibid., 48) the poet speaks of "mixing love poetry with heroic poetry" ("Haf al-ghazal li-l-hamadah"). Interesting remarks about nasib and ghazal are to be found in al-Nowaihi: The Poetry, 54 (the boy's face as a former encampment), 145, 158.
10 Ibid., 204 (no. 150; prose part).
12 Arie Schippers: Ibn Khafaja (1058-1139): Analysis of a Laudatory Poem addressed to a Member of the Almoravid Clan. In: Otto Zwierjes et al. (eds.): Poetry, Politics and Polemics. Cultural Transfer Between the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa. Amsterdam et al. 1997, 13-33; this deals with poem no. 1 (Dhu'ain, 23-32). The poet boasts in lines 3: "Many a maiden's apartment I came to at night, and only I made the dove's nest permitted to the falcon."
a correspondence poem rather than a panegyric in the traditional sense: the poet is corresponding with friends rather than with Maecenas. Instead of a successive laudatory passage on a friend, an elegiac passage on his past friends can follow the elegiac nasib. This is another connection between the nasib poems and the poet's old age.

Here are some nasib-like examples. The first lines of poem no. 7—which ends as an elegy—go as follows:

1. Oh is in what the wind brings a smell of a greeting and belongs to what the lightning kindles, the fire of love?
2. And if not, what makes the wind so perfumed in the early morning, so that I kindle the blazing of a fire in my inner parts?
3. Oh by the pearls of a new love affair, in which an old man trembles as a bow supple as a young man.
4. The necks of the benevolent days of old adorned themselves between Salma and Man'ij.
5. The pearls shook me so much in the fullness of old age that this trembling made me see before me the youth I had left behind.
6. Were there not the protection of God, I would have erred from the right way by love passion, and I would have crossed its wadi dragging the nose-ring of my camel.
7. Oh many a night I spent sleeplessly at al-Ghamim because of sick-eyed gazelles sleeping at the Euphrates.
8. Long is for me the night, oh Umm Mālik, whereas all the nights of a lover are like one full night.

I wipe out of my eyes [those tears] of love. Use, oh wind, some of my tears to get satisfaction.

Oh smell of a wind coming from the valley of La'la', which drags the tow of the reins over the dewdrops,

With what we had at al-Ḫiqf near Raml 'Alīj and at Multaqā l-Arṭā near Saḥf Shimām.

Turn to the left and to the right in Dār al-Qasf and bring a precious greeting to its boon companions.

And say to a cloud which envelops the earth with his tail and wraps mountain roads under it with hills:

Don’t you have shadow to cool my sleeping place, don’t you have dew to moisten my thirst.

After this conversation with the wind, the poet goes on to the elegy; here there is no transition to a laudatory poem but general grief about the many acquaintances of the poet who have died:

What dew or coolness of a shadow of a rain cloud is good enough for generous comrades whom I lost?

I was standing still like mothers bereft of their children between the graves, honouring them because of the bones and the tombstones.

I was bewailing them with a moaning sadder than that of a dove, and I wept and fulfilled the honour of the rotten bones.

These lines manifest the poet’s interest in describing nature: in his poems, there are always clouds - whose rains are like tails on the hills - wind, doves, lightning, dawn and dew, and there is the contrast between dark and light, black and white.

The contrasting of colours other than black and white is mainly to be found in the poet’s more ghazal-like poems, as is witnessed by the following fragment from poem 113. Here, the appearance of a phantom of the beloved (khayāl) is the only relic of the nasīb. In this composition we find characteristic features of a short ghazal poem by Ibn Khafījā, such as the equivalence of saliva and wine, two things that are often compared with each other. Moreover, there is mention of the colour contrast red-black between cheeks and hair, whose blackness introduces the embedding of the poem in a nature description, describing the slowly proceeding night and the arriving dawn.

A cloth of a night in which a phantom of a gazelle on a green sandy hill was the one who embraced me.

During this night I brought together his saliva and his wine: I drank saliva and red-yellow wine.

I kissed in the dark night of thick and long hair the twilight of a red cheek.

The description of the night-time is then introduced:

And a night grey of forelock because of old age, crept in its weakness, leaning on the stick of Gemini.

With its mainly ghazal features this poem contrasts with the preceding poet, which is more nostalgic and nasīb-like. But the appearance of the beloved as a phantom makes the poem ambiguous: is it a past love, or a love adventure that can be repeated in present time? In Ibn Khafījā’s ghazal poems, as in the last poem, the focus is on the description of the beloved rather than on the nostalgic feelings of the poet, as is the case in the nasīb-like poems.

We can observe the same descriptive features in the following ghazal fragments. In poem number 116, a rendezvous between the poet and his boy is described, with the stress on colour contrasts and colour comparisons:
1 A young man, sweet of the redness of his lips and tender, on whose cheeks the coals are lit.
2 I spent the night whispering with him, while no suspicion or sin was attached to me during it.
3 Because the night was a veil hung down upon us, a veil which the brilliant stars had embroidered.
4 I wept, so that he was ashamed that on my cheek was water, and on his cheek wine.

A similar redness is to be found in the description of the boy in the next example [number 129].17 which is embedded in a description of nighttime showers and lightning. We find only descriptions here, and the surrounding nature is personified as though sharing the longings of the lover:

1 Oh lightning cloud, who strikes fire with a steel, and oh cloud which appears in the sky raining abundantly and riding on the winds so that it goes on.
2 Say you both to a red-lipped one at al-Liwa who became a Christian (mutanassir), because meagreness has knotted around his waist a girdle [= zumdr; wordplay with tazznara = becoming slender].
3 Oh branch of beauty, who just spreads the locks of his hair as leaves, and opens his light as blossoms.
4 It would not damage you if I pull you towards me at night, so that you can scatter kisses on me as fruits.

Here the past of the nasib and the presence of the ghazal are mixed: on the one hand, the remembrance and the too-distant beloved, and on the other hand, the hope of union with the beloved. Thus, judged on the basis of such poems like the latter, there appears to be a certain ambiguity when one tries to make a clear-cut distinction between ghazal and nasib.

But when considering most of the poems by Ibn Khafaja which contain love motifs, I found that the Orientalists’ distinction between nasib and ghazal can be used with certain reservations. In my opinion, his ghazal poems are short poems with a description of the beloved boy comparable to those given in the aforementioned poems 113, 116, 129 and 212. As nasib we can consider those longer pieces which often function as an introductory theme to a laudatory part of a poem and which can also be an elegy, such as the introductory part of poem 7. Moreover, nasib-like passages in the poetry of Ibn Khafaja can also be poetic compositions in their own right, such as poem no. 74,18 which contains the famous lines:

17 Ibid., 171 (no. 129).
18 Ibid., 271-72 (no. 212).
1 NASIB AND GHAZAL

7 Whatever I would forget, I shall never forget a night near al-Hima, when he shined from brilliance and elegant of beauty.

8 The moon of darkness visited in this night the little star al-Suha, so that they both spent the night as the two shining stars of Ursa Minor.

9 When a lighting mouth is my guide in this night, the darkness of his locks of hair cover-it, so that I am erring in despair.

Even in this poem we find the description of the beloved boy with colour contrasts described in metaphorical terms adapted to the night-time surroundings (line 9). Normally, we would expect descriptions of boys only in ghazal.

The contents of an Ibn-Khafajian nasib, however, often differ from those of the nasib of early periods: not only because of their very consciously conceived rhetorical wordplay, but also because in the Ibn-Khafajian nasib we find the expression of the poet’s nostalgic feelings per se rather than with respect to individual love affairs.

This function of the Ibn-Khafajian nasib – in which the solitude of the poet and his separation from his beloved ones of the past is stressed – is comparable with the function of the nasib-like introductory parts of laudatory poems by the Hebrew Andalusian poet Moses ibn Ezra. Hebrew Andalusian poetry developed from a late Arabic model in which an overwhelming rhetorization of poetry had become normal practice. The ‘amazing, wonderful’ style (badi’) that makes conscious accumulation of rhetoric embellishment a principle of art is clearly present in Ibn Khafaja’s as well as Moses ibn Ezra’s poetic oeuvre. Moses ibn Ezra explicitly states that he likes practising badi’-style. Hence, ancient topics such as those of the Bedouin nasib were especially subjected to rhetorical elaboration. In Moses ibn Ezra’s oeuvre, as in that of Ibn Khafaja, the elegiac nasib passages written in old age – when he was sadder and wiser – contrast with his juvenile ghazal poetry. As far as his nasibs are concerned, Moses ibn Ezra is a very elegiac poet. In poem number 91, Moses ibn Ezra wrote a nasib-like introductory passage to a laudatory poem, which runs as follows:


1 The dwellings of my beloved people are abandoned like ruins, palaces have become again like deserts;

2 As a meadow [for the sending forth of cattle] they were prepared for the daughters of the does and as a place for the rearing of lesser cattle they were claimed for the young gazelles;

3 Instead of them lie nowadays panthers and amidst them are the rams;

4 And gardens where swallows and cranes made their nests; now there assembled vultures and owls to mourn;

5 I wander around now above destroyed walls and go along broken fences which have been cast down;

6 And I have some compassion for the dust [of these places] and stones to be revived from their barren lands;

7 I shed brooks of blood from my eyes [= my tears], [so large] that a sailor can traverse them in boats;

8 I speak there, but no-one is listening and only the jackals answer, their lamentations;

9 With its mighty hand and stretched-out arms, Time threw their inhabitants away;

10 All their delights went away while our souls were captured by their love and their hands [i.e. because of our love];

11 How should I live without them, when they are like souls and we, the bodies?
12 Am I weeping for my friends who have left me, or because of the departure of my brothers or because of my separation from my sisters?

13 Because of the fire [i.e. burning pain] of whose departure my heart and the fat above my kidneys are melting away;

14 And, if I wail about separation from Solomon whose friendship [love] is like sweet honey to the mouth —

15 Who is my choice of all men, that all favours may be his portion —

16 This is because I desire him for his good deeds, which are precious stones for the crown of the praiseworthy man.

Here we see at the beginning how the poet describes the transformation of the Bedouin camp into a barren desert. However, his beloved ones are in the plural and described as daughters of the does and as young gazelles, which is quite anachronistic for a traditional nasib because the gazelles that regularly appear in wine and love poetry by poets such as Abi Nuwās (768-817) do not really belong to the early nasib, where the poet mostly deplores his separation from one beloved female. Here, before the camp was destroyed, gazelles were the beloved.

We should keep in mind that in the nasib of the pre-Islamic poets, gazelles were not considered beloved ones, but as wild animals which came to the encampment after its destruction. In Moses ibn Ezra’s poem, the wild beasts that came after the destruction of the encampment are panthers and lions. Then in the next few lines the gazelles turn into his brothers, sisters and friends who have departed, after which comes the transition to the laudatory part on his friend Solomon.

In Moses ibn Ezra’s poetry, nasib contrasts with ghazal. In his case, there are spectacular descriptions in muwashshah form of rendezvous with young boys, love poetry which he later called ‘juvenile sins.’ To give an idea of these sins, here is a short passage from his muwashshah number 249, in which he describes his love affair with a young boy:

17 The wish of my heart and the lust of my eye
18 is a gazelle next to me and a cup of wine in my hand.
19 Finally he was seduced and we went to the house of his mother.
20 And he inclined his shoulder under the yoke of my love passion.
21 Night and day I was only with him.
22 I took off his clothes and he took off my clothes.
23 I kissed his lips and he sucked me.

Yehudah ha-Levi — a pupil and colleague of Moses ibn Ezra — continues in the same style. His introductory nasibs are heavily rhetoricized. In laudatory poem number 94, Yehudah ha-Levi describes his sadness at the departure of his beloved. He compares his heart with the ruins of the deserted abodes:

24 3 My eye goes weeping over the remnants of the encampment of the beloved, which do not hear a sound, let alone a speaker.
25 4 Was the destruction of their camp not enough, next to sleeplessness, so that the walls of my heart destroy its beams?
26 5 They are strangers to me as though I have never known them, but my heart recognizes what my eye does not recognize.
27 6 Towards my lord was the path of their wanderings taking away with the sleep of my generous eye which scatters the multitude of its wealth.

Although in these introductory lines the poet speaks about a specific beloved who has departed from the campsite with his tribe, the description remains very abstract. Unlike in the ancient nasib, the beloved here is probably a boy, not a maiden. A similar rhetoric description of the campsite can be found in Yehudah ha-Levi’s poem 100. Again he describes an interaction between the campsite and his heart:

23 See, for instance, Charles James Lyall (ed.): The Musaddaliyat, an Anthology of Ancient Arabian Odes. Oxford 1918, poem XXV (by al-Harith ibn Hilliza), line 5: “The gazelles wrapped themselves in the skirts of the shade and sought the noon-tide shelters they had made.”

2 I came across the ruins of the abode of the gazelle in order to ask, where has he gone to, while I do not ask whither has gone my heart;

3 The remnants of the encampment of a lover I embrace, while I announce bitter complaints and I weep for their desertedness, and they (= the remnants of the deserted encampment) weep for my burning passion;

4 He has travelled away and ploughed his ways amidst the pieces of my heart, while I find my way between the deserts of his abode;

5 Ruined walls [of these remnants] cry with bitterness: "What is the matter with you that you are here, and who are you?"; I answer them: "Wait a moment in order that I may dig my grave";

6 The [destroyed] courtyards of my beloved dominate [these] grasses! I weep for them and they melt away because of my weeping [i.e. the traces of the camp are becoming effaced];

7 From the day that your gazelle has gone away, my bread will be the dust of your campsite; and in the [nearly effaced] footprints of a gazelle (i.e. my beloved) I will seek my rest;

8 I go to look for a place of embracing which my soul has destroyed, and would that my loss (= my death) might be there!

12 The walls of my heart have uttered [lamentations] to the walls of his camp, from the time when I asked them, but they were too weary to give answer to me;

13 Would that my heart gave it (= the camp) the stones of its own building, lest it should become weak because of my sighs!

In the last part of this poem, as the poet speaks about his gazelle, the nasib turns into a ghazal and the past turns into the present. The poet asks himself why his beloved has taken away his heart, and as a punishment for what:

because the poet's eyes shed the blood of the lad's face, or because the poet stole a bit from the lad's roses [blushing cheeks]?

14 People say: "Does your lover know your calamity?" and I answer them: "Why should he not know it, since he is ploughing with my calf [= my heart]?"

15 Has my soul not been carried away by him together with my heart? They have both taken counsel together to bring near the time of my death.

16 When by my eyes yesterday the blood of his face was shed (i.e. red tears taken from the redness of the beloved's cheeks), was my bitter gall shed because of the blood of his cheeks?

17 Or did I do wrong to steal from its roses a bit (i.e. plucking kisses from his cheeks)? Or do I pay with my heart for my theft?

18 For a poem which answers these questions, not for gazelles is my demand; My violence and complaint is directed to the masters [of poetry].

The nasib becomes a ghazal and then turns into a laudatory poem, because the poet wants from his addressee a poem in return, in which the aforementioned question will be answered.

Conclusions

The three poets we have dealt with here were the greatest poets of eleventh- and twelfth-century Andalusia. All three have the same tendencies as far as their use of nasib and ghazal is concerned. Nasib and ghazal are rhetorized, and sometimes the lines of distinction between the two are blurred: thus a phantom or a Bedouin place name appears in a short ghazal-like composition, and a manly gazelle appears in a nasib-like composition. I mentioned in passing ghazal-like compositions by Moses ibn Ezra and Yehudah ha-Levi, which exist even in the form of muwashshahāt. It appears from Ibn Khafaja’s and Moses ibn Ezra’s nasih-like compositions that they are looking back on a former, happy life. These poets use ghazal-like poetry to denote youth, and nasih-like poetry to denote old age. The individualistic, sad, elegiac style of these two poets makes the nasib into a very individualistic genre. In Yehudah ha-Levi’s poetry we found a ghazal and a nasih structure together in one poem. However, it was easy to individuate what was nasih and what was ghazal.