Guinle Francis,
Les stratégies narratives dans la recension damascène de Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybarṣ.

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The essay *Les stratégies narratives dans la recension damascène de* Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybarṣ by Francis Guinle is devoted to the analysis of the narrative strategies characterizing the Damascene recension of the *Sīrat al-Malik al-Ẓāhir Baybarṣ*, a long Arab epic cycle (in Arabic *sīra*, pl. *siyar*) preserved in several manuscripts and printed texts that recount the life story of Baybars I, sultan of Egypt and Syria, who ruled from 1260 to 1277. Guinle's volume is the result of a valuable research work. It is divided into three main parts, respectively entitled "La recension damascène" (p. 41-122), "Les éléments structurels du récit" (p. 123-322), and "Ritualisation et procédés narratifs" (p. 323-503), with a CD attached that includes materials not printed in the volume but still important for the analysis of the *Sīrat Baybarṣ*.

In the "Introduction" (p. 13-40) Francis Guinle presents some methodological issues regarding Arabic epic by citing a variety of quotations in which various approaches are envisaged. It must be said that if, on the one hand, it might be problematical to place epic in the wider context of the literary production in Arabic, on the other all of the most recent publications (such as the special issues of the *Oriente Moderno* and *Arabica*, the monographs by C. Ott, F. Doufikar-Aerts, R. Kruk, M.C. Lyons, T. Herzog and the last volume of the series CHAL, *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*) take this genre into account, now considered fully representative of the post-classical period. In this view it is no longer necessary to oppose the various critical research perspectives that propose, alongside the "préjugés" of the Orientalists, those of the "critique littéraire des arabophones" (p. 19). That said, a number of the issues highlighted by Guinle are still awaiting proper analysis.

Another problematical point regards the choice of focusing on the narrative strategies *by opposing* a philological approach. In doing so, Guinle fails to address a number of key issues that cannot be circumvented, at least in an introductory section, such as the origin of the *sīra*, its relationship with the historical sources (in particular in the case of Baybars), its transmission over the centuries, and finally the development of various recensions, versions and textual variants. It is also true that Guinle's purpose is openly "purement synchronique, à partir d'un récit reconstitué par un *ḥakawātī* du xx^{e} siècle qui utilise des manuscrits plus ou moins récents (les plus anciens datant du xix^{e} siècle), et un état constitué de l'ensemble de la *Sīra* proche de la *performance*" (p. 133, n. 14). In any case it would have been helpful to have an overview of all the existing manuscripts for a better understanding of the specificities of the "recension damascène" chosen by Guinle for his analysis.

Turning now to the distinctive trait of this essay, the strength of Guinle's approach is his considering the manuscript "comme un état du récit à un moment donné, état représentatif (autant que faire se peut) de la *performance*" (p. 30). Guinle therefore examines "schémas actantiels, certaines fonctions, certains motifs, tels qu'ils peuvent être décrits par les différentes approches de la grammaire du récit", in order to study the main "narrative strategies" of the recension of Damascus.

The last part of the "Introduction" is restricted to considerations on the language of the text and the choices of how to present it. Ideally Guinle opts for using transliterations as little as possible, and when necessary by means of a "translittération dialectalisée, en conservant le plus possible les signes conventionnels utilisés pour la translittération de l'arabe littéral" (p. 38).

The first part of the essay is entitled "La recension damascène" and is divided into two chapters, "Le manuscrit de Damas" (p. 47-69) and "La recension damascène et la grammaire du récit" (p. 71). In the first chapter, Guinle gives a description of the Damascus manuscript that is characterized by being "composé, rassemblé et ordonné par le conteur de la région de Damas". Specifically, it consists of 195 "fascicules" (a sort of booklets), twelve of which are doubles, "de mains variées, mais que l'on retrouve toutes dans le manuscrit principal" (p. 47). To these, Guinle adds another 17 "fascicules" from a private collection and three more "consecutive" in Guinle possession (p. 50, n. 10). The so-called main manuscript of Damascus is a set of 180 "fascicules" numbered in an order adopted by the *ḥakawātī* and slightly modified on the basis of further studies on the text. Guinle identifies four "mains" A AA, B, C, D (it is not always clear whether it is a matter of handwriting or writing style) who copied the main parts of the manuscript at different times. The fact that the manuscript is preserved in Damascus at Ifpo (MS Damas, Ifpo, 8° 29995/1-83) is clear from bibliographic references (p. 525).

To show the "variations du récit dans la recension damascène" Guinle compares excerpts from various episodes, such as "le martyre du capitaine Ǧamr" and "'Arnūs et la vallée du Feu" (in Arabic and translated into French), from both the Damascene recension and double "fascicules". He then analyses the main differences in terms of content,

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formulation, and language; this last is certainly the most interesting field of investigation.

Precisely the dynamic relationship between "variants" and "invariants" that characterize the *sīra* both internally (ratio between the various versions) and externally (ratio between the different recensions or even between the cycles) is at the heart of the discussion of the second chapter (p. 71-126). On a theoretical level, Guinle refers to the studies of Saʿīd Yaqṭīn, Fārūq Ḫūršīd, Vladimir Propp, Tzvetan Todorov, and A.J. Greimas by using a range of patterns of interpretation of the folklorist (*i.e.* narrative motifs), the specialist in narratology (narrative functions), the scholar of semiotics (acts) or even of those who consider that a particular grammar of the *sīra* exists as a genre. As a result Guinle proposes to study the issue of the invariants, the various stages of construction of the story and the birth of the hero through a wide selection of episodes taken from the *sīra*. The part devoted to the comparison between the recension of Aleppo, that of Damascus, the printed version in Cairo and MS London BL Or. no. 4644 is particularly noteworthy (p. 76-85). The analysis of the dream of the king al-Ṣāliḥ al-Ayyūb is also important.

The second part of the essay looks at the main structural elements of the story, such as the construction of the *sīra* by episodes (p. 127-237), the issue of time and space (p. 239-279), and some of the so-called patterns of initiation (p. 281-322).

The first chapter of this second part, "la structure par épisodes", is the most voluminous of the entire essay. Through Danuta Madeyska's studies Guinle proposes a definition for episode: it could be determined not from the titles on the "fascicules", but rather by a series of formulas that delimit themes (or motifs) within the narrative. At this point two more structures are identified, a so-called mirror structure (*i.e.* "la stratégie narrative qui consiste à mettre en parallèle des éléments du récit qui se répondent trait pour trait, faisant apparaître à la fois des similitudes et des différences", p. 133) and the cycle of episodes.

Regarding the first, Guinle examines the way in which a few cycles were inserted in the narrative, such as the *Sīrat* Maḥmūd and the *Sīrat* Ǧawān (p. 135-145). He then analyses the transition from the part of the story set in Damascus to that set in Cairo, a change of time and place which creates a sort of break in the narrative, which is however offset by a series of narrative procedures examined in detail (p. 145-168). As regards the cycle of episodes, Guinle analyses some cycles subordinate to the main one, such as that of Šīḥa and the *fidāwīyeh* and the succession of Marʿūf, the cycle of ʿArnūs and the various false conversions (p. 169-238). The conclusion reached by Guinle proposes a branched and complex structure of the *Sīrat Baybarṣ*, thus described: "épisodes à l'intérieur d'épisodes, cycles à l'intérieur des cycles, nous sommes face à une stratégie d'enchevêtrements, de liens qui se tissent entre les divers événements et les différents personnages" (p. 237).

The second chapter of the second part is entirely devoted to the analysis of space and time, in more detail all those narrative strategies relating to the organization of space, the double movement created by the structure for episodes, linearity and circularity, the use of magic and the moving in parallel planes. Each section is accompanied by several examples in Arabic drawn only from the recension of Damascus.

The third chapter is entirely devoted to the issue of the "initiation". Here three important characters are presented: ʿAlī Āġa al-Warrāq, Šīḥa and ʿUṯmān, a groom friend of Baybarṣ, in addition to a few episodes of initiation that concern them. As for other narrative strategies, for these too Guinle finds some significant "rites de passage" (p. 291) that mark equally important stages in the narrative.

Connected with rituals and ritualization there are a number of narrative procedures such as repetition, the use of formulaic style, the use of dramatic features. All of these strategies are fully examined in the third part of the essay, in turn divided into three chapters, "de la marge au centre" (p. 327-381), "répétition et variation" (p. 383-441), "doubles et substitutions" (p. 443-503).

With regard to the first chapter, Guinle focuses on what he defines as the relationship between manifest (*ẓāhir*) and hidden (*bāṭin*), namely "dans le cas de *Sīrat Baybarṣ*, cette « mission » pourrait se définir comme la nécessité de faire apparaître dans la *dunyā* ce qui est déjà inscrit dans le Monde du Secret" (p. 336). This relationship touches both the naming of the characters (p. 339-343) and some exterior and distinctive signs (p. 344-370). In particular Guinle studies the narrative sequence that involves Marʿūf, ʿArnūs and the sons of ʿArnūs. Ceremonies in which the formulas *hātū kurk* are pronounced (p. 370-376), pacts between opposing factions (p. 376-380), and narrative passages in rhymed prose and rhythm (p. 380-382) are the three "rhetorical devices" that Guinle identifies in participating in the so-called ritualization.

On the subject of repetition and variants, Guinle investigates the issues of the formulaic style within the *Sīrat Baybarṣ* (p. 383-390), together with a number of "episodes-type", e.g. the conquest of the Frankish cities such as Tripoli and the ride of the children of the heroes against Islam (Qaṭmūriǧ, Mīrūniš, the Queen Maryam al-Ḥamqā').

The third chapter deals with "doubles" and replacements. At this point Guinle examines a few

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"types" and "dramatic functions", in particular in the so-called heroic triad of the *Sīrat Baybarṣ* composed of Baybarṣ, Šīḥa and Ibrāhīm. The first case considered, "double et substitution dans la diégèse", concerns the main hero Baybars (p. 445-462). The second, "double et substitution dans les fonctions dramatiques" (p. 462-503), concerns the substitution Aḥmad Āġā – ʿUṯmān - Šīḥa. This part is full of quotes and excerpts from the *Sīrat Baybarṣ*.

Still playing on the double meaning of *sīra* as "biography" and "way of life", as he does in his entire analysis, Guinle concludes his essay with some general remarks relating to the grammar of the *Sīrat Baybarṣ*. The most important themes and episodes in relation to the structure of the narrative, its functions, elements and strategies, are briefly re-outlined. The volume closes with a bibliography (which contains some forgivable mistakes) divided into topics and a useful index.

The choice of setting an absolute synchronic analysis on a body of research otherwise studied from a diachronic point of view (see T. Herzog) is undoubtedly one of the most challenging, though problematic, aspects of the volume here reviewed. Nevertheless the numerous inner workings of the grammar of the *Sīrat Baybarṣ* revealed by Guinle can certainly serve as a starting point for further research. The doubt (though honestly exposed by Guinle in his conclusions) which still remains is that this kind of analysis is not sufficient for a satisfactory and complete understanding of the text, and it should be accompanied by an analysis of the language and, I would add, a (necessarily diachronic) comparison with the other manuscripts and recensions of the *sīra*.

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