Bakhouch, Mohammed,
Poétique de l'éloge.
Le panégyrique dans la poésie d'al-Aḫṭal.

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This is a remarkable book. The author formulates a serious goal, to describe and understand the notion of *madīḥ* in Arabic poetry, and he succeeds in achieving this to a large extent.

Just a few decades ago Arabic studies produced what we might call "portraits of poets" like Gabrieli's book on al-Kansā' and Wagners on Abū Nuwās. But the present publication goes some steps further in focusing on one specific poet and analyzing one genre in his opus that he was famous for: al-Akṭal and his laudatory poetry, mainly addressed to the Umayyad rulers of his time.

The main objective of the author is to define the *madīḥ* genre and unravel its relationship with the *qaṣīda* and to contribute to understanding *madīḥ* as a form of communication between the poet and his addressee.

The general opinion about *madīḥ* is not really favourable: it is often associated with flattering and material gains. Its motivation is suspicious because it is said to over-emphasize the qualities attributed to the addressee and therefore be subjective, even insincere. This is what the author is up against and what he argues against quite convincingly.

Of course the first question would be: what is *madīḥ*? The problem that lies behind this question is, that in early Arabic poetry *madīḥ* could be a part of a "normal" *qaṣīda*, ususally at the end of the poem. In later poetry – and certainly in the Umayyad era – *madiḥ* could be an independent poem as well.

The *madīḥ* as part of the *qaṣīda* makes the author wonder what the relationship could have been between the *madīḥ* part on the one hand and the *nasīb* and *raḥīl* on the other. In order to do that, he defines two types of *raḥīl*: the *raḥīl* of the *ẓaʿā'īn* (camel-borne chairs for women) and the other about the poet himself, travelling through the desert on a camel's back. This distinction might look a bit artificial, but ultimately it works out fine within the framework of Bakhouch's analysis.

The first type of *raḥīl* can be understood as an extended part of the *nasīb*; the second would function in the communicative situation that the poet creates with his addressee: the open space of the desert, the camel as a poetic object and the description of the various qualities of this object contribute to the poet's *ḥāja*, a notion that will be explained later.

The desert, the heat and the inimical creatures living there, are the barriers that the poet has to overcome before reaching the addressee. The qualities of the camel, still healthy despite the heavy journey, or worn-out by fatigue, all contribute to this image of the poet as the stern, dedicated hero and to the importance of his message.

In constructing two kinds of camel images, the poetical and the mythical, the author goes astray a little in the realm of anthropology by associating it with water, fire and comets, even ascribing to it the possibility of metaphorical death.

To investigate the relationship between *qaṣīda* and *madīḥ*, the author first discusses the components of the *qaṣīda*, especially the *nasīb* and the *raḥīl*. His referential theoretical framework consists of Ibn Qutayba's description of the *qaṣīda* and modern research by Ḥifnī (*Maṭlaʿ al-qaṣīda al-ʿarabiyya* etc., 1987), ʿAṭwān (*Muqaddimat al-qaṣīda al-ʿarabiyya* etc., 1987) and ʿIzz al-Dīn (*Qaṣīdat al-ẓaʿā'īn* etc. 1993). He mentions the article *nasīb* by Jacobi in *EI2* VII, 978-83 but apparently omits the background of other works by her hand. Considering this unbalanced use of her work, it seems to me that Bakhouch goes a bit too far when he cites Jacobi in these words: "Le *nasīb* umayyade se développe en contact avec le *ghazal* et assimile certaines innovations dans le fond et la forme, (comment? lesquelles? R. Jacobi ne le dit pas)". From other remarks that he makes about her work and from the "Bibliographie" it seems clear that he only had access to a limited part of her work.

The first two of these authors define the *nasīb* as "*captatio benevolentiae*" (Ibn Qutayba of course) and as a means for the reader (sic) to probe the psychology of the poet (Ḥifnī). The contribution of ʿIzz al-Dīn and Jacobi to this discourse is left unclear in this Introduction.

For the *raḥīl* Bakhouch first echoes the ideas of Wahb Rūmiyya's *al-Riḥla fī l-qaṣīda l-jāhiliyya* that mainly concern the anthropomorphic nature of the images witnessed in descriptions of animals in early Arabic poetry.

ʿIzz al-Dīn's interpretation of the *raḥīl* is quite difficult to understand, because in his view a *qaṣīda* is a bipartite composition, consisting either of a *nasīb* and a *raḥīl* or of a *nasīb* followed by a *fahr* part. His discussion of the *qaṣīda* apparently leads him to the conclusion that a "*qaṣīda* of *ẓaʿā'in*" is a symbolic model of a war poem (poème de guerre), an interesting and innovative position but a bit difficult to share.

Jacobi is quoted as saying that the origin of the *raḥīl* is *fakr*, and that its interpretation as a journey to the *mamdūḥ* is a secondary development.

Against this last view Bakhouch offers a number of opposing ideas, too many to repeat in this context,

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but to mention one: he points out that Jacobi fails to treat the "other" constituent in the *raḥīl* – that is other than *waṣf* – which is space (l'espace).

Although Ibn Qutayba does not mention this element of space, Bakhouch argues that the passage in which he treats the *raḥīl* and certain poems that he quotes are haunted by this idea of space.

However important this space-theme may be, it is probably worth noticing that the same theme might as well be expressed in some *aṭlāl*-passages in which the poet mentions *nomina loci* in his immediate environment, cf. the *aṭlāl* in Imru'l-Qays's *muʿallaqa*.

The final part of this introductory chapter is dedicated to the *qaṣīda* as a whole in which the author summarizes the positions of Blachère, Bencheikh and finally Pinckney-Stetkevych, a much appreciated but also often rejected approach of Arabic poetry along the paths of anthropology.

In Part II Bakhouch translates 5 panegyrics, composed by al-Akṭal, that are dedicated to Bišr b. Marwān, who was appointed *wālī* of Kufa by his brother, the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān. The loyalty of al-Akṭal for the Umayyad caliphate and his depreciation of their enemies is commonly known and of course reflected in the panegyrical poetry for Bišr as well as for the caliphs that were his contemporaries.

Following a number of common themes the author elaborates an intelligent and appealing analysis of these poems, even establishing an intertextual relationship between one poem of al-Akṭal and a poem by Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā.

The most important theme that the author discusses is the poet's *ḥāja* in relationship to the *madīḥ* part. To define this *ḥāja* in a few words: it is the communicative aspect of the *madīḥ* between the poet and the *mamdūḥ*. This relationship may seem unequal, but Bakhouch puts his finger on some aspects that go deeper than this: on the one hand the poet will praise the rulers generosity, courage and noble descent, but on the other he offers the ruler/*mamdūḥ* the reasons for legitimacy of his rule and the right to repel his adversaries. This complicated system of "do ut des" on a variety of levels is the arena of the poet's *ḥāja*.

This chapter concludes with an intelligent analysis of the results of this preliminary investigation of *madīḥ* by al-Akṭal.

In his chapter about the *raḥīl* in al-Akṭal's poetry the author decides to treat his corpus as bipartite *qaṣīda*'s in the sense that they contain one of three types of *raḥīl*

– that of the *ẓaʿā'in*,

– the following of his beloved

– the *raḥīl* towards the *mamdūḥ*.

The second part is a *madīḥ*.

I find it hard to completely agree with this approach: the poem that has number 7 clearly shows at least a trace of the *aṭlāl* theme (1. *Al-Bulḥ, al-Ruḥab, al-Maḥlabiyyāt, al-Kābūr* et les cimes des montagnes sont désertés …. 2. Tels des vestiges d'un peuple anéanti, seules leurs demeures sont [encore] visibles).

Poem number 11 starts with a *nasīb* of about 7 verses (1. Le cœur guérit de son amour pour Arwā ….). The *raḥīl* starts in 8 and ends in 32, followed by *madīḥ*.

Poem number 13 however is constructed differently: *fakr* (1-7), *nasīb* (8-15), *raḥīl* + *waṣf* of the camel and other animals (16-33), *madīḥ* (34-39. The other poems also show traces of *aṭlāl* and *nasīb*, so much so that they might just as well be regarded as a continuation of the *qaṣīda* model, but with (minor) variations.

Bakhouch sketches the *raḥīl* along the following two themes:

– A The desert

1. Space and endlessness, 2. The animals found in the desert (a.o. gazelles, ostrichs and foxes), 3. The unbearable heat and various kinds of heat (*ḥarūr, waqda* etc.), 4. The jinn and 5. The mirage.

– B The camel

As a reference for the image of the camel Bakhouch uses a study by Abū Suwaylim: *al-Ibil fī l-šiʿr al-jāhilī*. One can have his doubts whether he was well advised to do so. Abū Suwaylim writes about the totemism of the camel, the camel as an object of adoration and the legends associated with it, its association with stars and the firmament, rain and finally the religious interpretation of camel poetry.

More convincing and instructive is Bakhouch's collection of terminology for the camel: its capabilities, color, positive and negative qualifications including several kinds of comparisons that are used for the camel. Some of these go a bit far and one of these is really far-fetched: the camel is connected to the universe because of the word *ʿudāfira*, used for a camel; this is because (sic) the word *ʿudāfir* is used for a comet. It seems to me that, in the best case, a comet, star or planet would be named after an object, an animal etc., and not the other way around. The *Lisān* translates *ʿudāfir* as strong, big (*ṣulb, ʿaẓīm, šadīd*) and not as "evil" (maléfique). Bakhouch proposes this translation because of the verb *taʿadfara*, "to boil for anger", which can only be found in Kazimirski's dictionary, not in the *Lisān*.

Other comparisons used for the camel are sacred and desired water, the oryx, the stallion and finally the camel can also die metaphorically, it seems.

Chapter III describes all the states that a camel can be in during the *raḥīl*: its healthy as well as its

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degraded conditions. The latter of course are used to stress the difficult journey to the *mamdūḥ*.

The last part of the book is the most interesting one. It focuses on the relationship between the poet and the *mamdūḥ* and explains this relationship as a kind of sequential dialogue.

Pivotal in this sequence is the attitude of the most appreciated virtue: generosity. The author uses a theoretical framework provided by M. Mauss in his *Essai sur le don, forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*.

There are three basic actions: giving, accepting and returning the (value of) the gift. Through this process the social hierarchy is established and acknowledged. Bakhouch outlines this process in the *madīḥ* poems that he studies along the lines of describing the "givers", the gift and the receivers. Who are the giving parties and to whom is the benefactor expected to return the gift? These may be third parties, like women or *ṣaʿālīk*, or it may be the poet himself.

Possible remunerations are food, of course, shelter and safety. Omnipresent, like in all ancient Arabic poetry, is the image of water in the form of rain or an abundant river as images for the benefactor's generosity.

Second to generosity is the outstanding virtue of the Umayyad leader's courage. Bakhouch shows us how al-Akṭal praises the courage of practically all of the Umayyad rulers of his time to whom his political loyalty belongs. Vivid images of war and battle of course help to enliven this image.

Chapter III of this part characterizes the leader/hero/caliph as the ideal human being. Bakhouch lists all of the qualifications that al-Akṭal uses to confirm and underline this extremely positive ideal. Epithets like *qā'id, mu'min, malik, imām, fatā* and *khalīfa* are always present as titles for the invincible leader as well as are designations borrowed from the animal kingdom and also physical characteristics show up in the poets stockpile. Another theme that the poet dwells upon is that of *nasab* and *ḥasab*: *nasab* indicates the noble ancestry as legitimization for his leadership whereas *ḥasab* refers to the leader's individual merits.

The author turns to the question: is there a difference – if any – between the poetical type or genre "*qaṣīda*" and "*madīḥ*"? He sums up four structural distinctions that focus on the thematic sequence of these poems:

– the panegyric poems of al-Akṭal are not in conformity with Ibn Qutayba's description of the *qaṣīda*,

– the thematic sequences of the *qaṣīda* can contain more or less than the three normal sequences,

– *nasīb* nor *raḥīl* are required as parts of a *madīḥ* poem,

– a *madīḥ* poem can contain *hijā'* and *fakr* elements.

Another difference is, that if the *madīḥ* poem contains a *nasīb* and a *raḥīl*, then these sequences are functionalized in a way fitting with the poets *ḥāja*. A *nasīb* expresses the poet's desire that he tries to satisfy, and the *raḥīl* – sometimes minimalized to expressions like *ilā* or the use of verbs like *atā* or *daʿā* – functions as the way to express the poet's *ḥāja*, his reason to turn to the *mamdūḥ* and the hardship of his journey.

This is a remarkable book. Although it has a few weak points it still contributes to a worthwhile discussion: the constituents of the genres of early Arabic poetry. The author's merit is that he dived into a seemingly non rewarding theme (*madīḥ*), but managed to uncover striking and unexpected features of this theme or genre, features that can almost all be considered as constituents. He does so in a nicely structured book – parts, chapters – always neatly built, starting with a "bilan", an inventory, followed by linguistic and lexical analyses and ending with a preliminary conclusion. It just makes me wonder what the analysis of the defining constituents (éléments constitutifs) would lead to in the context of the notions *ġaraḍ* and *maʿnā*. Especially if we do not understand these notions as opposite but as complementary in the way that mathematics works with subsets.

Finally: it seems clear that the author had only limited access to publications in German and English. This disadvantage is partly outweighed by the Arab publications that he uses.

The bigger picture however touches upon another regrettable development. A few decades ago I would not have had to advocate a translation of this book into English. But the innovative quality of this book definitely deserves a broader readership.

Nowadays this is necessary because less and less scholars in Arabic studies are able to read the three modern languages that our discipline is historically based on: English, German and French. A deplorable development.

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