Negotiating Abbasid Modernity:

The Case of al-ʿĀṣmaʿī and the Rearguard Poets

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Abstract

This study investigates the term and the poetry of, the Rearguard Poets (sāqat al-shu’arā’). It demonstrates through the investigation of both literary and non-literary texts of the Abbasid era that socio-political circumstances were major factors in forming the critical thinking of Abbasid critics as exemplified by al-Aṣma’ī. The study argues that the grouping of the rearguard poets (without their consent) indicates that al-Aṣma’ī and his fellow critics were interested in the poetry of this group not merely because they found in it the ‘purity of the Arabic language’ (faṣāḥa) free from linguistic errors or because of the poets’ eligibility to be included among the champion poets (fuḥūl al-shu’arā’); they were concerned with a much bigger issue: the mission to preserve Arab cultural identity, which those critics felt was being threatened by the changing atmosphere of Abbasid politics, as Chapter One shows.

Reverting to the life of the desert and the Bedouin language to create a standard language (‘Arabiyya) marked an important stage in Arabic intellectual life which left its mark on generations of critics and the criteria they used in selecting and judging poetry, as Chapter Two shows. One of the most important features of Bedouin poetry is the predominance of unusual vocabulary (gharīb), which served as both a linguistic treasury for philological critics and a foundation for creating a distinctive linguistic identity impregnable to foreigners, as Chapter Three demonstrates. In Chapter Four the norms and values of Bedouin society, which had the tribe at its centre, are analysed using examples of the poetry of the rearguard poets; these are identified with major themes occurring in the poets’ panegyrical and satirical poetry.

Turning to the inner-self and the persona of the poets themselves in Chapter Five, it becomes clear that although the critics relied on them to provide contemporary examples of Bedouin poetry, the poets for their part were preoccupied by their own interests and were trying to fight for their own causes: for their tribes, for their patrons and for their own concerns as a part of the wider society, which may or may not have intersected with the agendas and concerns of the critical and cultural authorities. Chapter Six examines the stylistic features of the poetry in question, and investigates the influence of Abbasid modern (muhdath) poetry and the refined (bāḍī’) style. Examples of Ibn Harma’s poetry in particular are thoroughly analysed due to his perceived position as a pioneer poet composing in the new style of the Abbasid era.

The study has found that although the creation of the ‘rearguard poets’ group served the critical authorities’ cultural and ideological interests rather than to show the linguistic and artistic value of their poetry, this does not imply that the representation of those poets as providers of good examples of Bedouin poetry in the Abbasid era is invalid. Moreover, the creation of this group was a reaction to the dominance of Persian culture in al-Aṣma’ī’s time. Furthermore, the poets’ language, themes, motifs and imagery served to showcase the interests of early critics and their preferences in poetry despite the lack of compelling evidence that both parties collaborated to promote one unified and clearly stated purpose.
Declaration

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Notes on Transliteration

This thesis follows the transliteration system used by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* which is reproduced below with minor modifications:

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Notes:
- The Arabic article (ال) is written as (*al-* / -l-) regardless of whether it is followed by a ‘sun letter’ or a ‘moon letter’.
- In cases where the first letter of the transliterated word is *hamza* (‘) followed by a vowel the *hamza* is omitted.
- The letter (ṣ) is transliterated as (a) except when it occurs in a noun phrase (*idāfa*), in which case it is transliterated as (at).
- In the main text I have not transliterated any word which appears in the “IJMES Word List - Last Revised 5 October 2010” as they have become familiar to the general reader, e.g. a term such as hadith or a proper name such as Muhammad. In references however, since not all Arabic names appear in the IJMES word list, to be as consistent as possible I have transliterated all names of Arab authors of books published in Arabic even if the name appears in the list (e.g. ʿAli is written ʿAlī).
Introduction

I. The Study

Misconceptions often occur when one does not distinguish between abstract scientific or social ideals and their implementation in reality or when one underestimates the impact of socio-political factors and of conflicts of interest between the personal and the societal, or between factions of society. These misconceptions often lead to misinterpretations of historical realities. When one looks at the past with an admiring eye one can easily overlook many contradictions or even not recognise them as problematic.

When reading histories, especially those written by the victors, one should strive to discover the cracks, paradoxes and contradictions in order to reveal the unvoiced or unexplained realities hidden between the lines, although, of course, this must be accompanied by due caution not to over- or under-interpret any indication one might find interesting. However, it remains challenging for us today to try on the one hand to understand the past without fully comprehending the circumstances which produced that history, and on the other to set ourselves free from the constraints which these contexts sometimes dictate to us. Nonetheless, researching the past will always be an adventurous task full of risks and surprises for someone aiming to formulate his own understanding of the realities and to discern the most likely course of events.

One of the most interesting periods in the history of Arabic literature is that straddling the end of the Umayyad and the beginning of the Abbasid eras during the second hijrī century (the 8th century C.E.), which I call ‘an era of transitions’ not only because of the many political changes and conflicts but also because of their aftermaths. The rule of the Abbasid dynasty was established in 132 A.H. / 750 C.E., with the aid of Arab and, decisively, Persian soldiers; the revolution secured for the Persian faction high positions in the Abbasid court, and within a few years the style of Abbasid rule had become similar to that of the Sassanid emperors, and life in Baghdad had become strongly influenced by Persian ways. The new Abbasid state moved eastward from Syria not only to establish its capital in Iraq, but also to maintain strong ties with its military forces, which were mainly from Khurāsān.

A great writer of the third hijrī century (9th century C.E.), al-Jāḥiẓ, famously declared that the Abbasid dynasty was Persian, unlike the Umayyad, which was of Bedouin and Arabic identity (‘arabiyya a’rābiyya) with Syrian soldiers. Similarly, al-Īṣfahānī asserted that the
Abbasid state was the state of the Persians (dawlat ahl Khurāsān). These identifications of an apparently Arab dynasty as in effect Persian are statements from eyewitnesses who lived under the rule of that dynasty and thus indicate the extent of Persian influence on the Abbasid state and its ruling elite.

However, little attention has been devoted to studying the impact of the new Abbasid dynasty and lifestyle on the Bedouin Arabs and the Arabist scholars, who were not necessarily Umayyad sympathisers but were certainly concerned by the shift of power, from the Arabs in Umayyad times to the Persians at the Abbasid court. Socially, the Arabs needed to readjust to the new conditions but at the same time, after virtually losing political power to their non-Arab co-religionists, they needed to rediscover a source of pride which would ensure their distinction within the Muslim community, one that the newcomers could not share or appropriate, and so they turned to their history, finding there the ancient pre-Islamic poetry and the classical Arabic language.

Assuredly, the pre-Islamic Arabs’ political power had produced nothing to match the Sassanid emperors or civilisation, and after the Persians became Muslims the Arabs could no longer take exclusive pride in their faith (although some boasted of their historical role), but now the Muslim identity was common to Arabs and non-Arabs alike. It was true that Persians had had powerful emperors, but that power had been a privilege reserved for their dynastic ruling families, and not shared by their subjects. The Arabs could take pride in the rhetorical and linguistic abilities of individuals, be they leaders or subjects, a heritage the population shared; and although not all Arabs were eloquent or talented poets, the philologists of the eighth century documented the language of the Bedouins (indiscriminately, regardless of the qualities of their speech or the level of their eloquence) and made it the standard language to which everyone was expected to conform.

This was a readjustment which enabled the Arabs to maintain cultural power despite losing political power, and this study presents an example of how the custodians of a culture react when they feel that the dominance of their culture is threatened or attacked; the more they feel threatened, the more extreme their response. Hence, in such chaotic situations ideology finds fertile ground in which certain criteria and measures are introduced to ensure exclusivity of the factions included in the culture and the expulsion of the unwanted ones. This thesis argues that the phenomenon of the ‘rearguard poets’ (henceforth, the sāqat al-shu’arā’) was a product of the cultural reaction that occurred when philologists of the early Abbasid era felt that the dominance of Arabic culture was under constant threat by the newly-empowered Persian culture.
Stephen Greenblatt argues that “works of art, however intensely marked by the creative intelligence and private obsessions of individuals, are the products of collective negotiation and exchange. Why should works of criticism be any different?”¹ This study aims to explain how the socio-politics of the Abbasid era contributed to the shaping of not only the works of poets but also the critical products of that era. The social, political, ideological and cultural factors shaped artistic taste, and traces of artistic and non-artistic criteria can be identified by close examination of the evidence, and by attention to the contexts of the literary and non-literary texts. This study offers a parallel reading in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ and the philological and critical discussions from the period in which the poets lived and worked.

Manifestations of ideologies can be sensed in the assertions of the superiority of the Arabic language and poetry, and hence the Arabs themselves, the pro- and anti-Arab (shuʿubiyya) discussions, and heresy (zandaqa). These ideologies were both the products of the contest for power between the Arabic and the Persian cultures and the weapons with which these social forces fought each other. These conflicts impacted not only on the lives and works of poets and critics, but also on historians’ accounts of the era, and therefore we need to re-evaluate the history as well as the literary works.

As this study will show, the poetic value of the work of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ was not always fully recognised by contemporary philologists, although its social and linguistic value was observed and highlighted by some. One aim of this thesis is to point out the extent of the achievements of the critical practices of the early philologists, not for their own sake but to draw as true and precise a picture as possible of the era and its impact on the following generations of practitioners of criticism in the field of classical Arabic literature. So, the efforts of the early philologists will serve as merely the starting point of an exploration of the poetic value of the work of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ and not as providing the ultimate criteria in our judgements.

In every society and every period of history there have been, and will always be, conservatives and innovators, but what matters to this study is what motivates these groups, both those who attempt to preserve the influence of the past on the present and resist change and those who try to live in their own time and bring about change. Change is part of human nature and can be driven by different needs, and the arts are products of human creativity. But to define ‘creative’ or ‘innovative’ one has to begin with a

comparison between the ‘existing’ and the ‘new’, and to point out the ways in which this ‘new’ is different from the ‘existing’ and if possible how far the ‘new’ differs from the ‘existing’.

In classical Arabic criticism poets faced constraints on innovation, some of which were partly related to the nature of the Arabic poem (qasīda) while others were due to the strict measures critics usually applied in assessing poetic productions. Some of these measures were contradictory; for example, poets were expected to follow the ancient model of the poem and imitate earlier, established poets, usually pre-Islamic, but at the same time they were likely to be accused of poetic appropriations (sariqāt) once a critic had identified the influence, on a motif or an image, of an ancient poet on a contemporary one.

Few poets could face such a daunting task, managing to remain faithful to the old style and yet allowing themselves the space to experiment whenever this became possible. What makes the sāqat al-shuʿarā’ interesting is that they lived at a time in which many of their contemporaries could not achieve success in this task of cultural negotiation, as the critics allowed certain poets some space for innovation provided the majority remained imitative and faithful to the ancient.

II. Methodology of the Study

The term sāqat al-shuʿarā’ is found in classical Arabic texts of both a philological and a critical nature, but those writers who employ it do so without providing any precise definition of its meaning or without making explicit the criteria being used when it is applied. Studying this term and the work of those poets who are usually classified as belonging to the sāqat al-shuʿarā’ requires an approach which considers literary and non-literary texts. In order to evaluate the notion behind the creation of such a group and at the same time analyse the poetry, a parallel reading of the texts and the contexts is essential, thus the relevant literature produced toward the end of the Umayyad era and in the first decades of the Abbasid period will be investigated in this study.

Using the new historicist approach to highlight ‘cultural poetics’, the study aims to investigate in detail anecdotes and historical accounts to reveal the origins of the term sāqat al-shuʿarā’ and its relations to the salient features of the Arabic culture of that time. It also aims to explain the contradictions found in historical sources about the era and the poets in question. The new historicist approach has been summarised by Greenblatt as follows:
Methodological self-consciousness is one of the distinguishing marks of the new historicism in cultural studies as opposed to a historicism based upon faith in the transparency of signs and interpretative procedures - but it must be supplemented by an understanding that the work of art is not itself a pure flame that lies at the source of our speculations. Rather the work of art is itself the product of a set of manipulations, some of them our own (most striking in the case of works that were not originally conceived as “art” at all but rather as something else - votive objects, propaganda, prayer, and so on), many others undertaken in the construction of the original work. That is, the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society.

This study demonstrates that the creation of the group of sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ was amongst the ‘products of collective negotiation and exchange’ by the critics of the Abbasid era, and that the poetry of those poets was the product of a negotiation between the poets and the conventions. In this light classical Arabic sources will be investigated, starting from the initial appearances of the term sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ in the writings of early Arab philologists and critics. In addition, philological and critical statements will be analysed in order to illuminate some features of the literary criticism of the era. These texts also provide much valuable information about the nature of the critical thinking of the early philologists and the factors which shaped it.

The principal objective of this investigation is to reconstruct the meaning of the term as it was understood by those early philologists who coined and developed it. Particular emphasis will be placed on analysing the critical texts related to the era of the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ within their general historical contexts. It will also entail identifying the problems in relation to, first, the usage of the term within medieval literary circles and second, how it has been interpreted by contemporary literary scholars: Ḥaddād, Sulṭān, Ḥusayn and Gruendler. This will be conducted by addressing some apparent shortcomings in how the term has been used and interpreted.

The second half of this study will probe the assumptions on which discussions of the term have been based and the connotations with which the term is associated, by analysing the thematic and stylistic features of a representative sample of the works composed by the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ. The suitability of the sample to represent the works of the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ will be established by means of a general survey designed to determine statistically the dominant themes in their poetry, then this sample will be analysed and often compared with examples drawn from predecessor and successor poets such as Jarīr,

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al-Farazdaq, and Bashshār ibn Burd. The aim of investigating the stylistic features and poetics of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ is to establish, as far as possible, whether there was a particular style shared by the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ group which was unlike that of any of their contemporaries, and to describe that style.

III. The Contribution of this Study

This study is the first in any language to be devoted entirely to the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ and the poetry of the group. A comprehensive investigation of the implications of the term has not been previously provided, nor has an exploration of the extent of the similarities amongst the poets been conducted. This study, therefore, proposes to explore the reasons for the choice of this term to designate a specific group of poets, none of whom consented to his inclusion. It also aims to identify and give a clear description of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ style by analysing the poetry in order to discover similarities and common stylistic features. Moreover, it is the overall aim of the study to provide a deeper understanding of the early stages of criticism in the classical period which will, in turn, offer a valuable insight into the cultural poetics, the ways of thinking and the intellectual activities of that time.

This study intends to answer the following questions:

- How did the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ represent the conflict over cultural dominance in the Abbasid era?
- What were the implications of the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ as used by critics to describe a group of poets active in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras?
- What were the criteria employed by the philological critics in their classification of poets into classes including that of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ?
- Was the inclusion of Ruʿba ibn al-ʿAjjāj, who wrote only rajaz, unlike the other sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, justifiable?
- What themes and motifs were dominant in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ and were the poets imitative or innovative in their choice of motifs and poetic expressions?
- What patterns of poetic composition were followed by the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ?
IV. Sources of the Study

Studies and sources in Arabic and English have been consulted before and during the production of this thesis; however, due to the relative lack of English-language studies of the work of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, this study will rely heavily on classical Arabic sources in addition to modern English and Arabic studies which relate to any aspect of this topic. It should be noted that most of the sources listed in the literature review serve to position this study within the field of medieval Arabic literature and within the existing literature about the topic in a general sense.

Primary Sources

The primary sources for this study come from the poetry collections of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. However, it should be noted that, with the exception of Ruʿba, who left a genuine poetry collection (dīwān) written and collected in his time, the poetry of most of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ was not published in manuscripts devoted to individual poets.

The poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ was gathered later from various historical, lexical and literary sources and although these collections were referred to as dīwāns by their collectors, they cannot be regarded as complete. Nevertheless, those interested in this poetry owe a great debt to the efforts which have been made to assemble these collections since the late 1960s. These efforts have laid the foundations for studying the lost poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ.

i. Poetry Collections

These collections form the main corpus. They are mainly preceded by a brief introduction elaborating on the poet’s life and his status in the literary sources, sometimes accompanied by a brief critical assessment of the poetry. At the time of writing, the following collections were available. Al-Muʿaybid’s Dīwān Ibn Harma was printed in Iraq in 1969.³ In the same year another collection of Ibn Harma’s poetry, compiled by Naffā and Ṭāwān was published in Syria.⁴ The latter was a collaborative production sponsored by the Syrian Academy of the Arabic Language; the former enjoys a better reputation today and contains a greater number of poems and fragments than the latter collection.

Shiʾr Ibn Mayyāda by al-Dulaymī was printed in Iraq in 1970.\textsuperscript{5} Twelve years later another collection appeared when Ḥaddād published his Shiʾr Ibn Mayyāda, printed in Syria.\textsuperscript{6} The latter contains more poems and is better in several respects since Ḥaddād had studied the previous version, identified its weaknesses and tried to correct the many mistakes evident in al-Dulaymī’s version of the dīwān.

A collection of poetry by ’Umāra ibn ‘Aqīl, compiled by al-ʾĀshūr, appeared in 2006.\textsuperscript{7} Dīwān ’Umāra Ibn ’Aqīl is relatively small compared to the collections of poems by the other sāqat al-shuʿarā. The introduction includes a short biography of the poet and some observations about his poetry.

The fourth and final collection consists of the rajaz of Ruʾba ibn al-ʿAjjāj, Dīwān Ruʾba ibn al-ʿAjjāj by Nawāṣira, printed in 2010.\textsuperscript{8} Nawāṣira notes in his introduction that the German orientalist Ahlwardt was the first to publish (in 1905) the manuscript of Ruʾba’s poetry and write an evaluation of different copies of the manuscript.\textsuperscript{9} Nawāṣira then reproduced the poems in two volumes followed by extensive notes explaining the odd vocabulary in each poem.

These four collections constitute the primary sources for the thesis and form an important part of the literature, especially considering the primary observations they provide. However, they will be supplemented by general modern studies regarding the era or the poets together with some other primary materials listed below.

ii. Limitations of the Sources

It is unfortunate that all but one of these collections are in effect ‘reproductions’ and that the originals have disappeared. The collections which we have today do not include all the poetry composed by the sāqat al-shuʿarā’. Moreover, the poetry written by three of them, namely Ḥakam al-Khudrī, Makīn al-ʿUdhrī and Ṭufayl al-Kīnānī, has yet to be collected and remains scattered in various literary sources.

Thus, of the original seven poets, only five will be included in this study. The four sāqat al-shuʿarā’ whose poetry has already been collected will feature most prominently, namely

\begin{itemize}
\item ’Umāra ibn ’Aqīl, Dīwān ’Umāra ibn ’Aqīl, ed. by Shākir al-ʾĀshūr (Damascus: Dār al-Yanābīʿ li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawziʿ, 2006).
\item Rāḍī Nawāṣira, Dīwān Ruʾba ibn al-ʿAjjāj: Dirāsa wa-Taqāṣiq (Amman: Dār Wāʾil li-l-Nashr, 2010).
\item Ibid. p.9.
\end{itemize}
Ibn Harma, Ibn Mayyāda, 'Umāra ibn 'Aqīl and Ru’ba ibn al-‘Ajjāj. In addition, Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī is known due to his association with Ibn Mayyāda; the pair used to exchange refuting satirical poems (naqā‘īd), some of which are documented in al-Aghānī and a few other sources. Therefore, Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī’s work will be analysed in the light of his relationship with Ibn Mayyāda and with reference to the satirical poetry exchanged between them.

Given the lack of information about Makīn al-‘Udhrī and Ṭufayl al-Kinānī and that collecting their poetry would be an onerous and time-consuming task, which unfortunately cannot be undertaken within the timeframe of this research, both of these poets have been excluded from this study. This means that the findings of this research cannot be applied to them, unless this is explicitly stated.

Although all of the poetry of Ru’ba ibn al-‘Ajjāj is of the ṭajaz type, it is important, I would argue, to study his poetry in order to evaluate the philological and linguistic implications of the term sāqat al-shu’arā’. Moreover, the study of ṭajaz generally can be developed further in future research by studying the work of individuals who composed ṭajaz in the classical period of Arabic literature.

### iii. Other Primary Sources

We should expect that the compilers of the collections already available would have searched all the appropriate classical sources to extract any poetry attributable to the sāqat al-shu’arā’. Nevertheless, in the case of Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī, whose poetry has not been collected, a number of classical sources will be investigated by this study.

More importantly, these sources will be useful references in the interpretation of the poetry of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ in its original contexts when examining both the poetry and any narratives regarding the poets. Sources including al-Aghānī by Abū al-Faraj al-İṣfahānī, al-Shi‘r wa-l-Shu’arā’ by Ibn Qutayba and Mu’jam al-Udabā’ by Yāqūt al-İhamawī represent the other primary sources consulted.

Other sources are used to assess critical practices in the classical era, especially within philological criticism. For instance, two collections of poetry which are representative of the philologists’ choices are analysed: al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt, collected by al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī of the Kufan School, and al-Aṣma’iyyāt by al-Aṣma’ī of the School of Basra. It is hoped that this analysis will help in identifying the type of poetry the philologists most admired. Moreover, Ṭabaqāt Fuhūl al-Shu’arā’ by Ibn Sallām al-Jumāḥī, being a typical
example of the studies written by philological critics, is also analysed to clarify the critical criteria used when assessing the merits of poetry.

In addition, compilations of classical poetry by non-philological authorities are analysed and discussed; comparing their methods of compilation with those used by the philologists helps to clarify the different perceptions of poetry held by both groups. This comparison serves to highlight the main features and underlying principles of both main types of criticism at that time, the philological and the artistic. These non-philological compilations include *al-Ḥamāsa* by Abū Tammām, *al-Ḥamāsa* by al-Buḥṭurī and *al-Asḥbāh wa al-Naẓāʾīr* by al-Khālidīyyān.

**Secondary Sources**

The secondary sources for the study are in English and Arabic and encompass a diverse range of works. They provide a contextual background to the topic. These sources include histories of Arabic literature and criticism such as *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, and *Early Islamic Poetry and Poetics*. It should be noted that these are merely illustrative examples of the types of secondary sources used in the study.

**V. Organisation of the Thesis**

Realising that not every aspect related to this subject can be thoroughly investigated, I decided to include only the most important. Two chapters provide the setting for the subject and indicate the extent of its full potential, and four chapters are devoted to analysis of the poetry. These six chapters are preceded by an introductory chapter explaining the methodology and the contribution of this study and its place in the field of Arabic literature, and are followed by a conclusion summarising the findings of the research and the study’s recommendations for future research.

Chapter One investigates the historical context in which the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* lived and worked. A survey of the literature is then conducted to assess the achievements and the shortcomings of previous studies. Problems that arise from the examination of these studies are discussed, and how this study proposes to overcome the difficulties they present is explained and justified.

Because the term *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* appeared in the eighth century C.E., which is an interesting and understudied period in classical Arabic criticism, Chapter Two investigates
the critical practices of that era, and how Bedouin poetry and poets were treated by early philologists. Also, the anthologies compiled by both philological and non-philological authorities in the eighth and early ninth centuries C.E. are examined to assess their critical criteria, since these are the only sources in which those criteria can be identified and analysed. The influence of philology on literary criticism is also investigated since al-Aṣmaʿī and most of the critics in that era were philologists.

Chapter Three is devoted to exploring rajaz as an unusual form of poetry treated differently by many medieval and modern scholars. Their various perceptions of rajaz are discussed, as are the relevance of rajaz to the philologists and the reasons for the inclusion of Ruʿba ibn al-ʿAjjāj in the group of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ although he only wrote rajaz. Samples of sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s rajaz poems are analysed to demonstrate the similarities and differences between the poets who composed in this genre, and the extent of the uniqueness of rajaz in al-Aṣmaʿī’s era.

Since a major premise of this thesis is that the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ were valued by al-Aṣmaʿī for their relevance to cultural and social issues, typical themes and motifs found in their poetry are analysed and discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

In Chapter Four the major themes of panegyric and satire, and the motifs in which the poets speak of other individuals (or tribes), be they patrons, peers or opponents are examined to assess how imitative or innovative the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ were when dealing with these major themes. It aims to show how the poets negotiated the poetic and social conventions of their time and to describe the considerations they had to deal with when producing their work.

Chapter Five is devoted to analysing motifs in which the poets view themselves and their time and its issues and beliefs. The aim is to assess whether their views agree with what has been written about them and their era by analysing how each presents his persona when they speak about - or for- themselves and what concerns are emphasised in their poetry.

Chapter Six considers some stylistic issues related to the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ and their era; thus much of the discussion is devoted to ‘modern’ (muḥdāth) poetry and the refined (badīʿ) style of composition, and to the devices of embellishment and ornamentation which were becoming popular. The discussion investigates assumptions about the causes of the emergence of that style and the popularity of such devices. Samples of the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ are then analysed to explore their poetic language.
and imagery, and to determine the extent of their participation in the development of poetic composition and, conversely, its influence on their work.

Finally, I should mention a few points concerning translation, explanation and identification. Firstly, as I had to draw heavily on the classical Arabic sources, many quotations had to be translated into English and all these translations are mine unless otherwise stated. When translating poetry I sometimes provide semi-literal and semiliterary translations depending on the point under discussion. In the cases where I translate a technical term or an ambiguous phrase I write the translation first and transliterate the Arabic term or phrase between parentheses.

Secondly, in the cases where I feel an explanation is needed in the middle of a quotation, such explanations will be added between brackets; this applies also to the cases where I think that the reader will benefit from knowing the date of death of an individual, thus I provide the hijrī date followed by the C.E date.

Thirdly, this study adopts the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) referencing system (the third edition)\(^{10}\) with minor modifications to suit the special nature of some of the primary sources in which the poet or author is famously known by his agnomen such as Abū ʿUbayda or by his nickname (e.g. Ibn Harma) rather than his real name or surname. In such use I write the agnomen or the nickname, so that the individual can be easily identified. For example, al-Murrī is the surname of Ibn Mayyāda, al-Rammāḥ ibn Abrad, but in most of the indigenous sources he is known as ‘Ibn Mayyāda’; therefore, in repeated citations ‘Ibn Mayyāda’ is used rather than ‘al-Murrī’.

\(^{10}\) Available as a printed book and an online (PDF) document. See: <http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Books/StyleGuide/>
Chapter One: Contexts, Backgrounds and Literature

Review

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will devote a section to a discussion of the statements of medieval critics regarding the sāqat al-shu’arā’ and how these were interpreted by some modern scholars. Then, an overview of the historical context in which the sāqat al-shu’arā’ lived and worked will be provided. I will investigate the influences which affected the works of the critics and the circumstances which shaped the experiences of the poets, notably the political, cultural and social transitions that shaped late Umayyad and early Abbasid times. The aim of this discussion is to shed light on the contexts of the poets and critics whose works are investigated in this research. Then, a review of the relevant studies will be conducted to assess their achievements and shortcomings and to position my study within the field.

1.2 Definitions and Necessary Elaborations

The term sāqat al-shu’arā’, as I have noted elsewhere, refers to a group of poets who lived under both Umayyad and Abbasid rule. The poets were seven in number: ‘Umāra Ibn ‘Aqīl, Ibn Mayyāda, Ibn Harma, Ru’ba, Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī, Makīn al-‘Udhrī and

12 Ibn Mayyāda is the agnomen of al-Rammāḥ ibn Abrad ibn Thawbān al-Murrī. Ibn Mayyāda took his name from his mother, who was a barbarian slave called Mayyāda. Ibn Mayyāda was born in the second half of the Umayyad era in the second century A.H. and witnessed the emergence of the Abbasid state. He died in 149 A.H. (766 C.E.). Ibn Mayyāda, Ḥ, pp.13,19.
13 Ibrāhīm ibn Ṭāl al-Qurashī lived in Medina and its outskirts during the late Umayyad and early Abbasid eras. Although he claimed to belong to Quraysh, this claim was disputed by many, even the poet himself. Later his clan denied that his family were members of the Quraysh, which seems to have annoyed the poet as he composed an emotional poem reproving them for their denial of his affiliation to them. Ibn Harma died in 176 A.H. (792 C.E.). Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī, Kitāb al-Aghānī, ed. by Iḥṣān ‘Abbās, Bakr ‘Abbās, and Ibrāhīm al-Saʿāfīn (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 2008), pp. 257-258. Ibn Harma, M, p.11.
14 Ru’ba was the son of the famous rajaz composer al-‘Ajjāj ibn ʿAbdullah. He was a Bedouin poet who lived in Basra and his poetry was highly regarded by philologists. Ru’ba’s life straddled the late Umayyad and early Abbasid eras; he died in the reign of al-Manṣūr in 154 A.H. (766 C.E.). Al-Īṣfahānī, Aghānī, vol. 20, p. 220; Nawāṣira, vol. 1, p. 31.
Do you not know that the poet Ibn Harma (al-Kinānī) is famous for exchanging refuting satires with some of his rival poets. This is the only mention of Ibn Udhayna in which he is likened to Ibn Harma; other statements which use the term *ṣāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* to describe the group never mention him as one of those poets; thus he will not be included in the investigation.

In *al-Aghānī* we find the following anecdote about al-ʿAṣmaʿī (d. 216 A.H./ 828 C.E.), who seems to have been the first to classify the *ṣāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* as a group:

Al-Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī, Ibn Mayyāda, Ruʿba, Ibn Harma, Ṭufayl al-Kinānī and Makīn al-Udhārī were the *ṣāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*, and Ibn Harma was at the forefront of them when he composed:

I never let the newly born camels enjoy their mothers and I only buy camels which I soon slaughter

ʿAbdul-Rahmān [the nephew of al-ʿAṣmaʿī] added that his uncle was a great admirer of this verse and quite often said: “Do you not see how he [Ibn Harma] spoke?! I swear to God that if Ḥātim himself were to try and compose he would not compose a better [verse]!” And he [al-ʿAṣmaʿī] used to say: “Nothing would prevent him [Ibn Harma] from being included among the champion poets (*al-fuḥūl*) except for the fact that he is close to our time!”.

Al-ʿAṣmaʿī quotes one poem by one of the *ṣāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*, Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī, in his selection of the best poems composed since pre-Islamic times and goes on to say:

Ibn Harma is established (thabt) and eloquent (faṣīh), and Ibn Udhayna is established too and to be classed with Ibn Harma, but poetically he is less than Ibn Harma […] and Ṭufayl al-Kinānī is like Ibn Harma.

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16 Alqarnī, p.112.
17 ‘Umāra ibn ‘Aqīl ibn Bilāl ibn Jaʿrīr descended from a family of poets; his great grandfather, Jaʿrīr, was a famous Umayyad poet. ‘Umāra left the desert of al-Yamāma to live in Baghdad and praise its notables until the reign of al-Maʿmūn; besides al-Maʿmūn he also praised al-Wāthiq and al-Mutawakkil. He was also famous for exchanging refuting satires with some of his rival poets. ‘Umāra died in the reign of al-Mutawakkil, about 240 A.H. (854 C.E.) or 247 A.H (861 C.E). ‘Aqīl, pp. 11,16,22-24.
19 He is referring to Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾī, famous for his generosity towards his guests. This suggests that al-ʿAṣmaʿī is praising Ibn Harma for his eloquent advocacy of a moral virtue (generosity); he seems less concerned with how the poet conveys this aesthetically.
21 In his statement regarding the *ṣāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* he explicitly states that he has seen them all, but nothing further is recorded about when or where they met or what outcomes emerged from these meetings. ‘Abdullah ibn Muslim Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-Shuʿarāʾ*, ed. by Aḥmad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1982), vol.2, p.753.
22 This is the only mention of Ibn Udhayna in which he is likened to Ibn Harma; other statements which use the term *ṣāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* to describe the group never mention him as one of those poets; thus he will not be included in the investigation.
Other statements regarding the term *sāqat al-shuʾarāʾ* give some indirect clues to the type of poets being referred to. In his *al-Wasāṭa bayn al-Mutanabbī wa-Kuṣūmih*, ’Abdul-ʿAzīz al-Jurjānī includes the term twice; the first mention is in a long statement in which he defends the *muḥdath* (literally, modern; technically, Abbasid) poets,24 including al-Mutanabbī. The relevant sentence is:

وُهَؤلاء مُحدثون حضريون، وفي العصر الذي فسد في اللسان، واختلطت اللغة وحظر الاحتجاج بالشعر، وانقضى من جعله الرواة ساقة الشعراء.

Those [*muḥdath* poets] are city dwellers who lived in an era during which the Arabic tongue was corrupted by mixing [of Arabs and non-Arabs] and quoting poetry in philological studies became prohibited and those who were regarded as *sāqat al-shuʾarāʾ* were already dead.25

Al-Jurjānī (d. 392 A.H. / 1001 C.E.) seems to have adopted the view that unlike compositions by the *sāqat al-shuʾarāʾ*, *muḥdath* poetry was deemed unfit as a source for philological quotation because of the status of the Arabic language at that time. Another passage from al-Jurjānī’s work further clarifies his criticism of those who created the classification of the *sāqat al-shuʾarāʾ* as comprising the last poets writing in the archaic style, as they advocated the idea held by many early critics that ancient poetry was superior:

إِنْ خَصَصْنَاهَا الرَجُلُ فِرْقَةٌ: أَحَدُهُمَا يَعْمَلُ بِالْبَقْلَةِ كُلّ مَحْتَدٍ، وَلَا يَرَى الشَّعْرَ إِلَّا الْقَدِيمَ الْجاهِلِيِّ وَلَا يَعْتَبَرُهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِهِ الْمَهْتَدُ، وَأَحَدُهُمَا يَعْمَلُ بِالنَّقْصِ كَلِلّ مَحْتَدٍ، وَلَا يَرَى الشَّعْرَ إِلَّا الْقَدِيمَ الْجاهِلِيِّ وَلَا يَعْتَبَرُهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِهِ الْمَهْتَدُ.

The opponents of this man [al-Mutanabbī] form two groups: one criticises every *muḥdath* poet and does not recognise any poetry except that which is pre-Islamic or imitates its style. They claim that Ruʿba, Ibn Harma, Ibn Mayyāda and al-Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī are *sāqat al-shuʾarāʾ*, but when they come to those who came after them, like Bashshār and Abū Nuwās and the poets of their class, they classify their poetry as merely entertaining and amusing. Furthermore, when they reach the poetry of Abū Tammām and his kind they are prepared to swear by God that those

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24 Gruendler defines *muḥdath* as “a poetic style flourishin in the Abbasid era, as opposed to ‘ancient’ poetry from the pre-Islamic through the Umayyad periods” and as an “epithet of a poet using this style (pl. *muḥḍathūn*)”. As for *badīʿ*, she gives three definitions: “poetic mannerism [that] arose during the Abbasid era”, the “tropes and rhetorical figures characterizing this style” and an “attribute of good verse in this style”. She rightly notes the intersection of *badīʿ* with *muḥdath* to form a style developed in the Abbasid era by some poets that was distinctively different from that of the ancients: the pre-Islamic and Umayyad poets. Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. xv-xvi.

individuals have never uttered a single verse of poetry and that they are hardly poets.  

Al-Jurjānī is referring to al-ʿAṣmaʿī together with other philologists and transmitters of poetry who concentrated on pre-Islamic poetry and favoured its style, meaning that they admired only the poetry which imitated this. Al-Jurjānī’s claim is supported by other statements which indicate that some philologists gave little or no credit to early Islamic and Umayyad poets and poetry.

Other literary critics seem to have used the term sāqat al-ʿshuʿarāʾ with little or no critical scrutiny regarding its meaning or validity as a category. In Al-ʿShīʿr wa-l-ʿShuʿārāʾ, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276 A.H. / 889 C.E.) merely refers to al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s statement regarding the group:

كان إبراهيم بن هرمة من ساقة الشعراء. حدثني عبد الرحمن عن الأصمعي أنه قال ساقة الشعراء ابن ميادة، وابن هرمة، وحكم الخضري، حي من محارب، ومكين العذري، وقد رأيتهم أجمعين.

Ibrāhīm ibn Harmā was among the sāqat al-ʿshuʿārāʾ. ʿAbdul-Raḥmān told me that al-ʿAṣmaʿī states that Ibn Mayyāda, Ibn Harmā, Ḥakam al-Khūḍrī, of a branch of the Muhārīb tribe, and Makīn al-ʿUdhīrī were sāqat al-ʿshuʿārāʾ and I have seen all of them. 

These statements provide the primary observations made by medieval Arabic critics on the subject of the sāqat al-ʿshuʿārāʾ and their poetry. It is assumed that if these poets were described as a group they must have been thought of as representing a particular trend, and sharing certain common thematic and stylistic features in their poetry.

However, several modern studies make some reference to the term sāqat al-ʿshuʿārāʾ or attempt to interpret it, though briefly: Ḥannā Ḥaddād, the collector of Ibn Mayyāda’s poetry suggests a possible meaning of the term sāqat al-ʿshuʿārāʾ which al-ʿAṣmaʿī may have intended to convey:

وهو بذلك يعني أن هؤلاء هم أخر الشعراء الذين يجوز الاستثناء بشعرهم والإطعام إلى فصاحة لغتهم.

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26 Ibid., p.52.
27 For example, al-ʿAṣmaʿī recounts that his master, Abū Ḥumayd ibn al-ʿAlāʾ, held strong views against early Islamic poetry: “I stayed with him for eight years and I never heard him quote a single Islamic verse as evidence, and when he was asked about the Islamic poets he said: “Whatever they did well had already been achieved before them, and whatever they did ill was their own”. Al-Ḥasan ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, al-ʿUmda fi- Maḥāsin al-ʿShīʿr wa-ʿĀdābih wa-Naqdiḥ, ed. by Muḥammad Muḥīy al-Dīn ʿAbdul-Ḥamīd (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1981), vol.1, pp. 78-79.
28 Ibn Rashīq in Al-ʿUmda describes Ibn Mayyāda as a member of the sāqat al-ʿshuʿārāʾ. Ibid., p. 72. Abū Bakr al-Ṣūfī also states that scholars (who remain unnamed) place ʿUmrā ibn Aqīl among the sāqat al-ʿshuʿārāʾ. Al-Ṣūfī, Akhābār Abī Tammām, p. 63.
29 Ibn Qutayba, al-ʿShīʿr, vol.2, p. 753
He (al-Aṣma‘ī) means that those poets were the last poets whose poetry is permitted to be quoted, and an assurance about the purity of their language [can be given].

Similarly, Ramzi Ba’labakki interprets the phrase as a statement proving the suitability of their poetry for philological quotations, and asserts that those poets “described by al-Aṣma‘ī as sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ are the last individuals whose poetry may be used as testimony of correct usage”.

Some interpretations are contradictory. For example, Munir Sulṭān discusses al-Aṣma‘ī’s statement about the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, and suggests in a footnote that this phrase “means the last genuine poets” (ākhir al-shuʿarāʾ al-uṣalāʾ) and in this context ‘uṣalā” means ‘original’ as it comes from ‘aṣāla’, which implies innovation. In contrast, Beatrice Gruendler describes ‘Umāra ibn ’Aqīl as “the last epigone of the archaic style”, which rather implies imitation.

The most recent and perhaps the clearest interpretation of what the phrase sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ means is given by ‘Abdul-Karīm Husayn. He claims that the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ represent the eleventh class (ṭabaqa) of those classified by the philologists and transmitters of poetry under the term ṭabaqāt fiḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ. Husayn then differentiates between the concepts of the ‘seal of poets’ (khitām al-shuʿarāʾ) and sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ:

Sealing the poets whose poetry can be quoted [in philology], by naming a single poet, four poets or any number does not mean only this specific poet, it rather means that it is his generation whose poetry can be quoted […] The concept of sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ carries a critical purport which is not conveyed by seal of poets (khitām al-shuʿarāʾ) because it combines a philological and a critical sense. While (sāqat) implies that their language could be quoted, their poetry could also be quoted as that of natural poets (shuʿarāʾ al-tab) whose poetry was not yet affected by mannerism of composition. They were laggadly in their artistic paces compared

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to their peers who had preceded them on the path of poetry and its art and aesthetic.\textsuperscript{34}

I agree with Ḥusayn’s placing of the \textit{sāqat al-shu’ārā’} after the classes of the \textit{fuḥūl}, but one cannot ignore the fact that Ru’ba ibn al-‘Ajjāj was already counted among the \textit{fuḥūl} of the ninth class, \textit{al-rujjāz} (rajaz composers).\textsuperscript{35} It seems that he was being considered from two perspectives: his excellence in the composition of \textit{rajaz} compared to other \textit{rujjāz}, and his general status as a poet when compared with the rest of the poets regardless of the type of poetry they composed, i.e. \textit{rajaz} or \textit{qaṣīd}, as I will discuss in the third chapter.

The above statements, both medieval and modern, present or interpret the phrase \textit{sāqat al-shu’ārā’} as a concept or a term which still needs some effort to assess whether or not it can be used as a critical concept that can be applied in the classification of other poets. In other words, can \textit{sāqat al-shu’ārā’} be used to describe a certain style of poetic composition, as \textit{badī’} (new or refined) is? Or can it be used critically to assess poetic skill using a set of criteria, whether primitive or developed, which distinguishes it from the impressionist statements found in some medieval literary sources such as, ‘\textit{amdaḥ bayt qālathu al-‘Arab}’ (the best panegyrical verse composed by an Arab)?

\textit{Sāqat al-shu’ārā’} is a composite term, formed of two elements which need to be deconstructed in order to clarify its connotations. According to \textit{Lisān al-‘Arab}, \textit{sāqat} denotes the rearguard of an army, perhaps suggesting that these poets were regarded as defenders of literary tradition. It is also used to refer to the last camels in a caravan of pilgrims,\textsuperscript{36} implying in our context that ‘the last’ poets were perhaps those who lived during al-Aṣma’ī’s lifetime and of whom he approved. \textit{Sāqat} also may have the connotation of the English word ‘stragglers’, especially if the poets so described are compared with their predecessors, as Husayn does above.

Although the second element in the phrase, \textit{al-shu’ārā’} (the poets), could simply refer literally to ‘those who compose poetry’, in this context its meaning remains vague. To whom precisely did this term refer - the ancient (pre-Islamic) poets, or all those who lived before al-Aṣma’ī’s time? Discussing all the possibilities seems essential in order to come to a conclusive decision on what the term implies. However, it seems that a large


proportion of the answers to these questions is extractable from the contexts rather than from the critical texts; thus we need to examine the various relevant aspects of the era during which the term was coined.

1.3 General Overview of the Era of the Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ

In order to contextualise this study, a brief survey is included here of those events and aspects of the late Umayyad and early Abbasid eras which served to shape poets, poetry and criticism during that period. In this study, the period of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ covers the years between 85\(^37\) and 239 A.H. (704 – 853 C.E.) This period is an especially interesting one in medieval Arab history generally and in Arabic literature in particular. Arab society at that time underwent a political, social and intellectual transformation, and Arabic poetry was transformed, too, as new poetic trends emerged in the wake of these changes, which could not but affect the lives of these poets.

The Umayyad dynasty was toppled by a revolution which led to the establishment of a new state and ruling family.\(^38\) Inevitably, since this political system brought a new elite to power, this affected everyone who dealt with them and led to changes in many aspects of life including poetic traditions.

Al-Jāḥiẓ (d.255 A.H./868 C.E.) famously commented: “The state of the sons of al-ʿAbbās was a non-Arab Khurāsānian state while that of Banū Marwān was a Bedouin Arab state with Syrian soldiers”.\(^39\) Similarly, Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (356 A.H. / 967 C.E) refers to the Abbasid state as “the state of Khurāsān people” (dawlat ahl Khurāsān).\(^40\) These statements define the ethnic identity of the Abbasid state, in so far as this influenced its political affairs. The Abbasids relied heavily on the services of the Persians both during and after their successful revolution against the Umayyads, employing them in their armed forces, administration, courts and palaces.

\(^{37}\) Ruʿba ibn al-ʿAjjāj was probably born in 65 A.H., so is regarded as the earliest of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. However, it can be assumed that the political events which took place in his early life had a minimal influence on his poetry, considering that he spent his youth herding his father’s camels in the desert. Therefore, 85 A.H. is taken to be a suitable starting date since at that time the poet was 20 years old.


As for the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*, they lived in different areas including Medina and its surrounding villages, Basra and its Bedouin desert, the Yamāma desert and Baghdad. Outside the control of the central authorities, Bedouin tribes frequently engaged in warfare. In *al-Aghānī* there are many references to tribal wars in the Arabian Peninsula’s desert.\(^{41}\) The *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* often travelled to deliver their panegyrics at court and receive their rewards, and then returned home. In the Abbasid era, however, one poet, ‘Umāra ibn ‘Aqīl, left the Basra desert to spend a considerable time in Baghdad.

Many references are found in the poetry of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* to the major political event of the eighth century: the Abbasid revolution against the Umayyads, and to the disruptions which followed the establishment of the Abbasid dynasty. Ibn Harma’s poetry, for example records some of the incidents which occurred during the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya against al-Manṣūr and the Abbasids in 145 A.H. (762 C.E.).\(^{42}\) Uncertain of his position, the poet was hesitant about openly expressing support for one side or the other:

\[
\text{أرى الناس في أمرّ مٍّمٍّزٍّا}
\]
\[
\text{وأمسِك بأطراف الكلام فأبةّء}
\]

I see people in an uncertain situation, so observe it carefully till it has been settled, And hold on to your words, as this will be your salvation, being fearful of such an undecided state.\(^{43}\)

But as soon as al-Manṣūr had crushed the rebellion Ibn Harma hastened to compose:

\[
\text{ذَٰلِكَ نَفَعَتِيّ إِنّهُّ نَمِ اّخِـفّتّاّمَرٍّمُـجَـمجَما}
\]
\[
\text{وَأُوقِـدُّلِلغـاوينَّنارُّالحَباحِّ}
\]
\[
\text{وَأَبِاللَّيـثِّتَـغـتَرُّونَّيَحميّعَرينَهُّّّّ}
\]
\[
\text{وَتَـلقَـونَّجَهلاًّأُسدَهُّبِالثَعالِبِّ}
\]

They had invited me when Satan’s flag was hoisted aloft and the little fires of the misguided were lit.

Were you deceived, O people? He [al-Manṣūr] was a lion protecting his den and you naively met his lions with foxes!

My old age would not have benefited me if I had not discouraged you, and my past experiences would not have brought me wisdom.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{41}\) See, for example in *al-Isfahānī, al-Aghānī*, vol.13. p.127, the wars between the tribes of the Yamāma desert, some of which were referred to in the poetry of `Umāra ibn `Aqīl; see especially his poem satirising his rival Nāhid ibn Thawma of Kilāb. ‘Aqīl, p.82.

\(^{42}\) Faruq ‘Umar discussed this event and many of its stages such as the negotiations between al-Manṣūr and al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, which lasted three years, during which many letters were exchanged. Faruq ‘Umar, *The Abbasid Caliphate: 132/750-170/786* (Baghdad: National Print, 1969). See also: Hugh Kennedy, pp.68-70, 204.


\(^{44}\) Ibid., p.63.
This illustrates that the period was one of rapid changes and shifting loyalties, which, for professional poets such as the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, meant frequent moves between patrons in order to maintain their professional status and sustain themselves with their patrons’ rewards and gifts.

1.3.1 The Intellectual Life and the Social Structure of the Late Umayyad - Early Abbasid Era

Islamic intellectual life began its development in the time of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. It is important to state that most Islamic knowledge in the first hijrī century had its origins in the study of the Holy Qurʾan and the Prophet’s hadith:

> The earliest attempts to achieve correct recitation of the sacred texts had provided a powerful stimulus to the cultivation of the sciences of language: phonetics, writing-systems, morphology, lexicography, etymology, accidence and, above all, syntax. The amazing advances made in the first/seventh century are already apparent in the quality and detail of the work of the leading second/eighth-century linguistic specialists.45

These intellectual activities were carried out by both Arab and non-Arab scholars; nonetheless, it is useful to remember that in their statements on social conditions the Abbasids and their supporters highlighted the injustice with which the non-Arabs had been treated within Islamic society in the Umayyad period in order to justify the revolution. With this in mind one should look at the social conditions affecting the learned and scholars in order to paint a more accurate picture of that Muslim society and in particular the smaller communities of scholars in Basra and Kufa.

While many scholars were Arabs, many were not, and some were non-Muslims; and what was known as Islamic knowledge was in fact a combination created from Persian, Greek, and Indian sciences and the Arabic heritage. Theology, logic, mathematics, philology and literature were subjects of everyday debate in the mosques of Basra and Kufa. While different ethnicities and a variety of sources of knowledge contributed to strengthening Islamic sciences and helped greatly in spreading these further to new territories, ultimately these varieties and differences led to some negative outcomes.

It seems that peace and harmony did not always prevail throughout the second century A.H. between the Arabs and Persians, even in the scholarly environments of Kufa and Basra. This was, perhaps, for two reasons. The first of these was political and was evident

in the revolution against the Umayyads and the Arab tribes who were their allies. The revolution was carried out by some of the Arabs and many of the Persians who joined the Abbasid mission. The Persians were perhaps even more passionate than the Arabs that the revolution should succeed, for this would give them power in the new state. Competition between the Arabs and non-Arabs to win positions of influence in the caliph’s court was at its most intense during the latter half of the second hijrī century.

The second reason for the disputes between the Arabs and the Persians was ideological. Competition between the scholarly elite, the educated and the literati was intense, leading to a series of discussions about and attitudes toward race and ethnicity known as shuʿūbiyya, coined from shuʿūb (nations). These discussions addressed questions of the kind: were some peoples inherently noble? Were some races born to rule? Was one ethnicity superior to others?

While the role of ideology for both Arabs and non-Arabs cannot be ignored, several studies recognise the shuʿūbiyya as being only attempts by the Persians to undermine the status of the Arabs. Some others more inclusively regard the whole movement and all its participants as constituting the “shuʿūbiyya controversy”. According to Khalidi, the shuʿūbiyya controversy “was a crisis which swelled in the second and third centuries and engaged some of the finest minds of that age” including intellectuals such as the philologist and rhetorician Abū ʿUbayda, and literati such as Ibn Qutayba and al-Jāḥiẓ. Similarly, Mottahedeh states that “Arabs, Persians, and other participants insult one another’s customs and pretensions”.

46 It should be stated that some of the anti-Arab scholars were not Persian. Abū ʿUbayda, for example, was of Jewish descent, which according to Lecker made him “extremely unpopular among many of his Basran contemporaries”. Michael Lecker, ‘Biographical Notes on Abū ʿUbayda Maʿmar b. al-Muthannā’, Studia Islamica, (1995), pp.71-100 (p.71). On the other hand not all the pro-Arab scholars were Arabs by origin; some were Persians but supported the Arab cause such as al-Baladhuri. Sami A. Hanna and George H. Gardner, ”Al-Shuʿūbiyya” Up-Dated: A Study of the 20th Century Revival of an Eighth Century Concept', The Middle East Journal, 20 (1966), pp. 335-51 (p.338). This seems to be an interesting point for further exploration and investigation as it suggests that ethnicity was not always a clear-cut concept (Arab vs. Persian) but complex and involving individuals from different backgrounds.

47 For example, Loya defines the shuʿūbiyya movement as “local nationalism of the mawālī, mainly Persians’. Arieh Loya, The Detribalization of Arabic Poetry', International Journal of Middle East Studies, 5 (1974), pp. 202-15 (p.209). Also Larsson seems to have approved Goldziher’s suggestion that shuʿūbiyya was a Persian product developed in “Persia and Central Asia, [and] was seen as a clearly defined political party consisting mainly of well-educated non-Arab writers, poets and administrators”, Goran Larsson, 'Ignaz Goldziher on the Shuʿūbiyya', Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 155 (2005), pp. 365-72 (p.366).


Although the controversy was quite active in the second and third hijrī centuries, it has been suggested that its roots go back to the era of the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph, ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 A.H. / 660 C.E.) when he was confronted with the Kharijites.\(^{50}\) Their notion of political leadership in Islam was that it should be open to everyone without favouring any race or tribe, even Quraysh, the tribe of the Prophet.

Hanna and Gardner also note that the *shuʿūbiyya* continued into the Umayyad and Abbasid eras and developed more central debates concerning the identity of Islamic culture.\(^{51}\) Gibb asserts that in the second and third centuries the *shuʿūbiyya* was “not merely a conflict between two schools of literature, nor yet a conflict of political nationalism, but a struggle to determine the destinies of the Islamic culture as a whole”.\(^{52}\)

As the Persian side of the debate grew stronger thanks to the Abbasids’ reliance on the distinguished Persian writers in their courts, and with the Abbasid state as a whole turning eastward to embark on a Persian way of life, the Arabists and scholars supporting the Arab cause started defending Arabic values, culture, and art. These developments also affected the style of poetry; during the shift from Umayyad to Abbasid rule there was also a shift in literary traditions and in poetic styles, from the classical Umayyad to the *badīʿ* and *muhḍath* styles.

Generally, the role of the tribe became less prominent in the Abbasid era and the structure of society changed as well, creating a role for poets that was unlike their tribal role in the pre-Islamic, early Islamic and Umayyad eras. Ibn Rashīq (d. 436 A.H. / 1071 C.E.) explained the poet’s role within his tribe:

> When there appeared a poet in a family of the Arabs [...] feasts would be got ready, the women of the tribe would join together in bands, playing lutes[...] [and] the men and the boys would congratulate one another, for a poet was a defence to the honour of them all, a weapon to ward off insult from their good name and a means of perpetuating their glorious deeds and of establishing their fame forever.\(^{53}\)

This was the poet’s function within tribal society until the Abbasid era; they were entrusted with defending the honour of their tribe and glorifying its achievements. However, when

\(^{50}\) Sami Hanna and George Gardner quote from Gibb’s article *Social Significance of the Shuʿūbiyya*, which I was unable to consult directly: “The original *shuʿūbiyya* were the Kharijites, who on religious grounds maintained the doctrine that no race or tribe enjoyed any inherent superiority, and, in particular opposed the theory of the inherent right of the Quraish to the Caliphate [...] rejecting any inclusive superiority attaching to the Arabs”, Hanna and Gardner, p.338.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p.339.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.

Muslim lands expanded to form an empire the once tribal society became a complex urban nation, affecting the role of the poet. According to Loya,

Instead of mirroring the new social, ethical and psychological tribulations of the Arab torn between the simple values and tradition of his tribal culture and the complex ones of urban society, Arabic poetry found itself forced by political circumstances into deeper entrenchment in the past and its traditional tribal values.\(^\text{54}\)

Nonetheless, as was noted earlier, initially the Abbasid family maintained their alliance with the Persians and the various revolutionary factions that had helped bring them to power. This lasted for some thirty years, but then various conflicts broke out; consequently, “poetry, as the main medium of propaganda campaigning, was intensely enlisted in the political conflict of the Abbasids against the Shuʿūbiyya movement”.\(^\text{55}\)

In these circumstances Arabists and philologists concluded that ancient (pre-Islamic) Arabic poetry and the classical language were the source of Arabic identity and pride, which were being threatened by the innovations of Abbasid modernity. They took it upon themselves to preserve the Arabic traditions and conventions under the banner of ‘maintaining the purity of the Arabic language’ against the spread of linguistic errors and, more importantly, they aimed to preserve the old style of poetry, preferring imitations of pre-Islamic and Umayyad models of composition; both aims were essential to the creation of a distinct Arab identity.

Yasir Suleiman notes that in the standardisation of the ‘Arabiyya an ideology was established connecting the superiority of the Arabic language to the Arabs as a people:

It is during this period of inter-ethnic strife that grammar-making, as an on-going practice in a never-ending standardization enterprise, developed a heightened ideological edge that attempted to discover the wisdom of the Arabs in their language or, alternatively, sought to ascribe the excellence of the language to the character of its people under the “wisdom of the Arabs” principle. It is also during this period that linguistic works were written specifically to counter the shuʿūbiyya attacks against Arabic, the Arabs’ infatuation with their language and Arabic grammar.\(^\text{56}\)

The critics, moreover, went beyond extolling the linguistic virtues of classical poetry to praising its style, ensuring that poets would have to conform to the standard or traditional

\(^{54}\) Loya, p.208.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., p.209.

norm of poetry if they wished to gain recognition from philologists. This move by philological critics necessitated an analytical re-evaluation of large numbers of pre-Islamic and Islamic poets and their styles in general, which resulted in the creation of types and groups of poets according to the similarities in their poetry.

Another method practised by philologists was to categorise poets within these classes and groups. This tendency seems to have been introduced by the philologist Abū 'Amr ibn al-’Alā’, who in general regarded poets as belonging to one of four classes depending on the quality of their poetry: khindhidh (literally ‘thoroughbred’) connoting the highest quality; faḥl (literally ‘fertile’), connoting quantity and good but not outstanding quality; shāʾir (poet); and shuway’ir (petty poet), the quality of whose poetry is poor.\(^{57}\)

1.3.2 Al-Ąṣmaʾī: The Arabist

As a Basran scholar, al-Ąṣmaʾī engaged in debates with another Basran philologist, Abū ’Ubayda,\(^{58}\) who was famous for his anti-Arab views.\(^{59}\) He wrote a book entitled ‘The Defects of the Arabs’ (Mathālib al-ʿArab),\(^{60}\) while al-Ąṣmaʾī is reported to have authored several books which, to judge by their titles, seem to have been intended to promote the Arab cause. These include ‘The Arabian Peninsula’ (Jazīrat al-ʿArab), ‘History of the Early Arab Kings’ (Tārīkh Mulūk al-ʿArab al-Awwalīn), ‘Popular Arab Sayings that Are Frequently Spoken’ (Mā- Takallama biḥ al-ʿArab fa-Kathur fī- Afwāḥ al-Nās), ‘The Water

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\(^{59}\) Abū ’Ubayda was a controversial figure and many accusations are found against him in the sources, including Kharijite, Ibadism and shuʿūbiyya. Al-Ḥamawī, p.2705.

\(^{60}\) Abū ’Ubayda appears to have been a rival of al-Ąṣmaʾī in several ways. Their political views and religious doctrines were different (al-Jāḥiẓ, vol.1, p.347), as can be seen in Abū ’Ubayda’s Mathālib al-ʿArab. Although this book has not survived Ibn Qutayba reported that Abū ’Ubayda was fond of talking about this subject. ‘Abdullāh ibn Muslim Ibn Qutayba, Fadl al-ʿArab wa-l-Tanbīḥ al-ʿalā- Ulūmihā, ed. by Wafīd Maḥmūd Khāliṣ (Abu Dhabi: al-Mujamma’ al-Thaqāfī, 1998), pp. 37-38. According to al-Zubaydī, al-Ąṣmaʾī was less knowledgeable and authored fewer books, but was popular for his quick wit and memorisation of ancient poetry, while Abū ’Ubayda’s expertise lay in history, Muhammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Zubaydī, Ṭabaqāt al-Nahwiyīn wa-l-Lughawiyīn, ed. by Muhammad Abū al-Fadl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1973), p.171. Furthermore, the titles of the books authored by or attributed to the pair suggest something of their sense of competitiveness, with both of them writing books about horses, human beings and proverbs. More importantly, one book attributed to al-Ąṣmaʾī, al-Ąddād, is concerned with a controversial issue in the debate between the anti-Arab and pro-Arab factions. According to Sidīk “Adād refers to words with identical pronunciation but opposite meanings. Al-Annābī notes that the shuʿūbi attacked adād, arguing that if the same word has two different meanings, the person being addressed does not know which of the two the speaker has in mind”. Roziah Sidīk, ‘A Review of Kitāb al-ʿArab or al-Radd al- salarié al-Shuʿūbiyya’, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 30 (2003), p.81. All of this seems to suggest that al-Ąṣmaʾī can be viewed as an Arabist engaging competitively with Abū ’Ubayda in several debates.
Springs of the Arab’ (Miyāḥ al-ʿArab) and ‘Arabic Poetry’ (Ashʿār al-ʿArab). Unfortunately most of these are no longer available.

Interestingly, al-ʿĀṣmaʿī was among the few Arabists who found favour and appreciation at the Abbasid court. His eminence there lasted for about fifteen years, in the era of Ḥārūn al-Rashīd, who was responsible for eliminating the Persian threat to the Caliphate posed by the Barmakid family. Ḥamād Kamāl Zakī claims that al-ʿĀṣmaʿī played a crucial part in inciting al-Rashīd against them, but does not provide evidence; historical sources report, however, that poets with shuʿṭībī views were not fond of al-ʿĀṣmaʿī: Abū Nuwās for instance favoured Abū ʿUbayda over al-ʿĀṣmaʿī, and Bashshār satirised al-ʿĀṣmaʿī’s tribe Bāhila. As for their knowledge, it seems that although Abū ʿUbayda enjoyed a higher reputation generally, al-ʿĀṣmaʿī’s strength was seen to lie in his first-hand knowledge of the desert and its animals, and of the Bedouin’s language, poetry and way of life.

It seems possible that al-ʿĀṣmaʿī was brought in to establish some balance in a court dominated by non-Arabs. Zakī asserts that al-ʿĀṣmaʿī was among the Basran scholars patronised by al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ, who was in competition with Yahyā al-Barmakī, who patronised the scholars of Kufa. After the death of al-Rashīd, al-ʿĀṣmaʿī returned to Basra and never again set foot in Baghdad (Zakī points out that he departed shortly after the execution of the Barmakids).

However, the shuʿṭībīyya gained momentum after al-ʿĀṣmaʿī’s departure, with much clearer rivalry between participants in the debate: the anti-Arab side included al-Bayrūnī and Ḥāmjāz al-Iṣfahānī whilst Ibn Durayd, Ibn Qutayba, al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Balādhūrī were supporters of the Arab cause. Although the shuʿṭībīyya in poetry may have started with a

63. He states that the crucial turning-point occurred when al-Rashīd travelled for recreation to al-Raqqa and al-ʿĀṣmaʿī accompanied him. On that journey al-ʿĀṣmaʿī implicitly and explicitly highlighted the extent of the Barmakids’ influence and how powerless the Caliph had become. Zakī is not explicit about his sources, and his assertions need further scrutiny and verification. Ibid., p.268. However, al-Jihshiyāʾī states that al-ʿĀṣmaʿī praised the Barmakids at the beginning of his time in court but later turned against them. Muḥammad ʿAbūs al-Jihshiyāʾī, Kitāb al-Wizarāʾ wa-l-Kuttāb, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Hadīth, 1988), p.132. Al-Jūmār suggests that al-ʿĀṣmaʿī turned against them when he discovered their shuʿṭībī views. Al-Jūmār, vol 2, p.452.
64. Al-Ḥamawī, vol.6, p.2704.
66. In Mu Ḥam al-Udābāʾ, there is a anecdote that al-Rashīd tested both of them on their knowledge of horses; al-ʿĀṣmaʿī won. Al-Ḥamawī, pp.2707-2708.
68. Ibid., p.281.
couple of verses attributed to the Umayyad poet Ḥabīb ibn Yasar,\(^{70}\) it seems that al-Jāḥīẓ was the first to use *shuʿūbiyya* as a term referring to those anti-Arabs who prompted a clear set of ideas in the pro- and anti-Arab debate.\(^{71}\)

Since the Abbasid political atmosphere favoured the Persians, and as the learned and educated among them increased their power, Arabists such as al-Āṣmaʾī tried to maintain or re-assert the dominance of Arabic identity within the state by calling for the preservation of high standards in Arabic language and literature, which for the philologists meant going into the desert to document the language and poetry of the Bedouins, whose language had remained uncorrupted and whose poetic style was still classical, untainted by the experience of life in the cities.

It was in this environment that the term *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* was used for the first time. Al-Āṣmaʾī belonged to the second generation of philological critics, who went beyond valuing poetry for the amount of unusual words it contained. Bedouin poets were seen as primary linguistic sources of pure Arabic by these scholars; according to al-Jabri:

> The process of the collecting and unification of the language from the Bedouins, to the exclusion of any others, confines the world of this language to the boundaries of *their* world […] this must have influenced their way of thinking and consequently the language that was collected from them and evaluated according to their norms.\(^{72}\)

Al-Āṣmaʾī, as a student of the school of philology must have been influenced by its way of thinking. He developed the classification of poets, originated by his master Abū Ṭāhir ibn

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\(^{70}\) In his long poem; ‘*Māʿ al-ʾalā- Rasm Manzil*’ Ḥabīb expresses his pride in his Persian origins, insulting the Arabs by suggesting that in pre-Islamic times some of them used to kill their daughters while the Persians did not:

> إنْ سَفَاحًا بِنَاتٍ نَفْسًا إِن نُسَيَّ بِنَاتٍ وَتَدْسَى نَفْسًا بِنَاتٍ نَفْسًا فيَفْتَرُ أَذُنِي

> Ask, if you don’t know about us and yourselves, what we were like in the past.

We were bringing up our daughters while you were foolishly burying yours in the sand.  
*Al-ʾIsfahānī, al-Aghānī*, vol.4, p.287.

\(^{71}\) Al-Jāḥīz in his *al-Bayān wa-l-Tabyīn* devotes one long chapter entitled *Kitāb al-ʿAṣā* (Chapter of the Staff) to defending the Arab tradition of carrying a staff, a tradition for which they were insulted by the non-Arabs as it was considered to reflect their inability to abandon Bedouin customs and adopt an urban lifestyle where the staff is not needed.

In his defence al-Jāḥīz explains how and when the staff is used together with other customs such as the frequent use of head-dresses and sashes in debates and poetry recitations. He then quotes numerous examples to support the use of the staff on certain occasions including texts which report that the Prophet himself had used it in some cases. Al-Jāḥīz then proceeds to mention other traditional practices which he claims only the Arabs can perform skilfully, including attacking with lances and raiding enemies at night, and he then discusses sermons and eloquence in a quite long but interesting passage. Al-Jāḥīz, *al-Bayān*, vol.3, pp.5-7.

al-ʿAlāʾ, in a book about the second class entitled *Fuḥūlat al-Shuʿarāʾ*, which consists of critical judgements of poets and poetry and provides a platform for justifying critical argumentation within philological criticism, but more importantly he maintained a high regard for the Bedouin poetry and language.

Thus, it could be stated that although the term *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* seems to have stimulated philological criticism to respond to the need to use poetry for the purpose of proving linguistic hypotheses with poetic evidence, it served the cultural and ideological ends which aimed at promoting living examples, poets who maintained the Arab traditional conventions by using the Bedouin language and poetic style.

**1.4 Literature Review**

In this section I will consider some of the modern studies which have dealt with any aspect of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* or the era in which they lived; this list is provided here to indicate the scope of previous studies but is not comprehensive as other relevant studies will be discussed throughout the thesis when necessary. However, to the best of my knowledge, to date no comprehensive study has been conducted on the subject of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* and their poetry. Moreover, Western studies of classical Arabic literature have provided very little, if any, material which is of direct relevance to this research.

My previous work, “Beyond Language Correctness in *Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ* Poetry: Ibn Harma’s Poetic Imagery as a Case Study” acts as the departure point for the current study. Whereas the scope of the previous study was limited to investigating the use of the term in some important medieval critical texts, and focused on only one of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*, Ibn Harma, and his use of poetic imagery, this study will conduct a more comprehensive investigation of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* phenomenon in classical literature and criticism, including philological and literary sources. It will also include analysis of this group’s poetry.

In the previous study Ibn Harma was chosen as the representative example of the seven Umayyad and Abbasid poets collectively referred to as the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*. However, after investigating his poetry and analysing his imagery the previous study concluded that

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73 Although the book was written by al-ʿAṣmaʾī’s student, Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, it is still attributed to al-ʿAṣmaʾī because it mainly consists of quotations of his statements and judgements.

74 Al-ʿAṣmaʾī’s classification criteria were “excellence in construction, ingenuity in meaning and abundance in poetry”. Alqarni, pp.41-42.

75 In Chapter Two I will consider some classical anthologies as part of the assessment of the development of the criteria of judging poets and poetry in classical Arabic criticism.
in order “to give a definite and accurate judgement of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s style […] the poetry of the other six poets should also be studied” as a whole, instead of studying the poetry of just one of them.\textsuperscript{76}

The literature relevant to this study can be divided into two categories: general studies, which examine the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ in the context of wider literary or historical issues, such as Umayyad literature, and monographs devoted solely to the work of an individual poet such as Ibn Harma. This previous literature is discussed here chronologically, commencing with general studies of this topic.

\textbf{1.4.1 General Studies}

Perhaps the earliest of the general studies dates from 1948, when Gibb published an article entitled \textit{Arab Poet and Arabic Philologist,}\textsuperscript{77} in response to Goldziher’s analysis\textsuperscript{78} of the conflict between ancient and modern trends in Arabic poetry reflected in classical Arabic literary and critical sources. Gibb agreed that these poets appeared to be fighting a losing battle “to escape from the fetters with which the philologists sought to bind them of the pre-Islamic qasīda” and noted that the coercive power of the philologists was clearly acknowledged.\textsuperscript{79}

Here there is an indirect reference to the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ era, since this term appeared in the works of the early philologists such as al-Aṣmaʿī. More importantly, Gibb’s article highlights the extent to which philologists’ opinions about the classical model of poetry influenced attempts by poets to develop new forms, arguing that “the latter were for the most part at the mercy of the learned with their productions, and the learned were able to influence public opinion”.\textsuperscript{80} However, as Chapter Three will argue, some of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, especially Ruʿba, were able to challenge the philologists’ domination by influencing their opinions and persuading them that “the Arab poet and the Arabic philologist were close and natural allies in the perpetual struggle which had to be waged against the degeneration of the noble Arab tongue”.\textsuperscript{81} The key significance of Gibb’s article lies in this suggestion that an alliance existed between philologists and poets.

\textsuperscript{76} Alqarni, pp.111-115.
\textsuperscript{79} Gibb, p.574.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p.578.
In 1973 Heinrichs published a study of classical Arabic literary theory which argued that this had developed due to the endeavours of diverse groups, including philologists, “collectors and commentators of ancient poetry”, Qur’anic exegetes, Islamic theologians and their doctrine of Qur’anic inimitability, and the people and poets of ḍī‘, together with “the imprint of philosophy”.82

Some important issues arise in Heinrichs’ discussion, the first of these being his division of classical literary theory and criticism into two periods which he refers to as “pre-systematic” and “systematic”.83 According to Heinrichs’ division, the term ṣāqat al-shuʿarāʾ appeared during the era of pre-systematic criticism.

A second issue which arises from Heinrichs’ work relates to his observation that because pre-systematic theorists failed to perceive certain aspects of classical Arabic poetry, this resulted in “either a lack of appropriate terminology or – in cases where suitable terms are at hand – a failure to apply them”.84 However, Heinrichs does not illustrate his comments with any specific examples.

The beginning of the third century A.H. witnessed the birth of the systematic work in the classification of poets, Ṭabaqāt Fuhūl al-Shuʿarāʾ by Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 231 A.H. / 845 C.E.). Two scholars, Kilpatrick85 and Gamal,86 have investigated the critical criteria and principles underlying Ibn Sallām’s classification, and their studies make useful contributions to the topic of ṣāqat al-shuʿarāʾ since both highlight the extent of the systematisation carried out by philologists. In addition, they attempt to clarify the differences between the philological perceptions of the Basran and Kufan schools of poetry.

Both agree that Ibn Sallām adopts a more moderate attitude towards Islamic poetry than his fellow philologists, who asserted categorically that pre-Islamic poetry was superior, and that, unlike them, his critique goes beyond merely considering the linguistic value of poetry or searching for textual evidence of linguistic correctness.

83 Ibid., p.37.
84 Ibid., p.19.
However, the two authors differ in their opinions regarding possible influences on Ibn Sallām’s classification. Kilpatrick agrees with Hafsi’s assertion that in methodological terms, Ibn Sallām was greatly influenced by Ibn Sa’d, compiler of al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā (The Major Classes). Gamal, however, denies this, arguing that the most likely source of inspiration would have been al-Ašma’ī’s Kitāb Fuḥūlat al-Shu’arā’, supporting his assertion with an analysis of al-Ašma’ī’s concepts of ṭabaqa (class) and faḥūla (championship) and a discussion of the ways in which Ibn Sallām may have drawn upon these.

Gamal’s discussion goes some way to confirming al-Ašma’ī’s position as an influential authority in philological criticism but ultimately both studies focus on Ibn Sallām’s philological criticism and neither deals with the topic of sāqat al-shu’arā’.

Jayyusi’s *Umayyad Poetry* provides a solid review of the poetic traditions in the Umayyad era which touches upon other relevant topics. For example, her discussion of the theme of satire generally and naqā’iḍ in particular is of relevance to this present work because it clarifies the origins of this type of lampoon, which was further developed by two of the sāqat al-shu’arā’, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Jayyusi also devotes a significant section of the chapter to the Umayyad rajaz, briefly tracing the history of this type of poetry and describing its features and purposes in the pre-Islamic era. However, for the purposes of this study, perhaps the most important notion in Jayyusi’s discussion of rajaz is her claim that in the Umayyad era, the rujjāz felt it necessary “to respond to the insatiable linguistic needs of the philologists” by including “a vast assortment of gharīb in their arājīz”. Thus, she asserts that there was an interaction between the rujjāz and the philologists which entailed collaboration for their mutual benefit. This point is developed at length in Chapter Three, forming the grounds for proposing that Ru’ba Ibn al-ʾAjjāj was rightly included within the sāqat al-shu’arā’ group although his poetry is exclusively of the rajaz type.

Jayyusi’s evaluation of the Ḥijāzī style of poetry and, in particular, of the love poetry known as ‘chaste love lyric’ (al-ghazal al-ʿudhrī) that emerged in the Ḥijāz is also of

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88 Gamal, pp.197-198.
90 Ibid., pp.409-412.
91 Ibid., p.418.
92 Ibid., p.420.
relevance for our purposes since at least three of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ hailed from that province, and her description of the Ḥijāzī style will be explored in the discussion about the theme of amatory poetry (ghazal) in their work.

In her introduction to Literary Criticism in Medieval Arabic-Islamic Culture; The Making of a Tradition, Ouyang (1997) explains that “tracing the story of medieval Arabic literary criticism in its cultural context can offer a perspective from which to understand the field of literary criticism in general”. Unfortunately for our purposes, Ouyang begins her investigation of classical criticism and the discourse of cultural power with Ibn Sallām, despite admitting the importance of his master, al-Aṣmaʿī, who originated the critical terms and practices which were to be expanded and elaborated by later poetry critics.

However, this is understandable given Ouyang’s stated focus on literary criticism, which followed the era of philological criticism, and her concern with analysing critical works from this period rather than discussing al-Aṣmaʿī’s critical terminology or practices. Her study remains a key point of reference for students of the era following al-Aṣmaʿī and of critical activities generally in classical Arabic criticism.

Allen’s study The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of its Genres and Criticism, published in 1998, touches upon two issues of key relevance to the topic of sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, namely, the development of Arabic poetry and rajaz, and the move from philology towards criticism. Regarding the first issue, Allen proposes that rajaz can be understood as a poetic form which built on ‘rhymed prose’ (saj) “as an early manifestation of the poetic in Arabic”, emerging as “a further step in the development of a mode of discourse characterised by its rhymes and rhythmic pulses”.

More importantly, Allen suggests a connection between the rajaz poets and the Kufan and Basran philologists:

The studies undertaken at the schools of language study at al-Basrah and al-Kufah […] led certain poets in the period of the Umawī Caliphs to make use of the rajaz in

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94 Ibid., p.94.
95 Roger M. A. Allen, An Introduction to Arabic Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), is a revised and abridged version of his 1998 study, intended to serve as an introduction for new students of Arabic literature; Allen, Introduction, p.1.
97 Ibid., p.132.
order to compose virtuoso poems that have as a major purpose to explore the limits of Arabic lexicography. 98

He further notes that “al-ʿAjjāj (d.c.717) and his son Ruʿba (d. 735) are particularly famous for their efforts in this domain”.

Like Jayyusi’s assertion noted earlier, Allen’s claim suggests the possibility that there was a type of pragmatic relationship between the philologists and the poets, especially the composers of rajaz. This involved poets composing a poem or a verse to legitimise a philologist’s claim regarding a particular philological issue, in return for the philologist’s endorsement that the poet’s work followed the classical pattern. This hypothesis has been partially confirmed in a recent study, which will be discussed shortly.

The second issue in Allen’s work which merits discussion here regards the criteria employed by early philologists to form collections which were judged to represent the right poetic qualities:

The number of these early collections and the prestige they were accorded are a reflection of the fact that the earliest Arabic poetry had acquired canonical status; its lexicon became the basis for the beginning of semantics and its grammatical structures were the model for correct usage; its discourse principles and the imagery that it used to create and portray a pre-Islamic vision, were a yardstick by which later critics of a conservative bent judged the ‘naturalness’ of Arabic poetry.

Allen describes how different generations of philologists engaged with poetry in various ways: collecting, analysing, grouping and classifying. He then lists some of the pioneering philologists and their contributions to the critical analysis of poetry, referring to al-ʿAṣmaʿī as “the compiler of a collection of poetry, known as al-ʿAṣmaʿīyyāt”, and the composer of Fuḥūlat al-Shuʿārāʾ. He further notes that al-ʿAṣmaʿī was “a firm upholder of the ancient poetic tradition and its ‘naturalness’ as the norm for what was to be admired and emulated” but Allen does not discuss al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s critical activity beyond this, or make any mention of the issue of terminology in connection with the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ.

1.4.2 Focused Studies

In this section, studies which focus specifically on one of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ or on the historical period in which they worked will be reviewed. It should be noted that most of
these focused studies were written in Arabic and relevant quotes have been translated into English by the author of the thesis.

1.4.2.1 Ibn Harma

A Master’s thesis on Ibn Harma written by Rajā’ al-Jawharī and subsequently published with very few changes discusses Ibn Harma’s poetic style, but there is no mention of his inclusion in the group of sāqat al-shu’arā’. It merely states that al-ʿAṣmaʾī chose him as ‘the seal of poetry’. However, her study is of significance for this research, for it provides very useful analysis, especially her discussion of Ibn Harma’s badiʿ and the comparison she makes between him and Bashshār ibn Burd.

A year later, Shādin Abū Ṣāliḥ studied Ibn Harma’s poetry in her Master’s thesis but makes no reference to al-Jawharī’s study. Although she mentions Ibn Harma’s inclusion in the group of sāqat al-shu’arā’ in the context of elaborating on his status in literary circles, she neither explains the implications of sāqat al-shu’arā’ nor discusses the composition of the group.

Another study concerning Ibn Harma is by ‘Ali Ismāʾīl: Ibn Harma Bayn al-Dawlatayn al-Umawiyya wa al-ʿAbbāsiyya. This study tracks the evolution of Ibn Harma’s style from the Umayyad period to the Abbasid era. However, despite referring to Ibn Harma’s inclusion in the sāqat al-shu’arā’, Ismāʾīl merely mentions the suitability of his poetry to be quoted as an example of pure Arabic, and does not discuss the term’s implications or significance.

However, the most recent study about Ibn Harma appears to offer an insight into what the term sāqat al-shu’arā’ might imply. In his discussion of al-ʿAṣmaʾī’s statement about the sāqat al-shu’arā’ Sulṭān provides a footnote suggesting that this phrase “means the last genuine poets”. This suggestion is not developed, discussed or supported by evidence in the study.

1.4.2.2 Ibn Mayyāda

In 1970 Muhammad Nāyif al-Dulaymī undertook the task of re-collecting Ibn Mayyāda’s poetry and in the introduction to his edition he mentions al-ʿAṣmaʾī’s statement about the sāqat al-shu’arā’ which includes Ibn Mayyāda in the group and confirms that his poetry is

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104 Sulṭān, p.21.
regarded as suitable to be quoted in philological discussions.\textsuperscript{105} However, like the other authors mentioned, al-Dulaymī does not investigate the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ or its implications.

Later, in 1982, another edition of Ibn Mayyāda’s poetry was compiled by Ḥaddād and was supplemented by an introduction which discusses three important issues. Firstly, Ḥaddād investigates the matter of al-ghazal al-ʿudhrī as a genre in Ibn Mayyāda’s poetry and highlights its significance.\textsuperscript{106} Secondly, he reflects on Ibn Mayyāda’s relationship with Ḥakam al-Khūṭrī, and their exchange of satires.\textsuperscript{107} However, Ḥaddād does not study them in the specific framework of being sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, but simply as poetic contemporaries.

Thirdly, and most importantly, Ḥaddād refers to al-ʿĀṣmaʿī’s statement about the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. He then suggests a possible meaning of the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ; it means that those poets were the last poets whose poetry is permitted to be quoted, and an assurance about the purity of their language.\textsuperscript{108} This interpretation receives no further justification or explanation by Ḥaddād, however; he merely notes that the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ was suitable to be quoted as exemplifying pure Arabic and that the purity of their language was unquestionable. This interpretation differs from that provided by Sulṭān, as noted earlier, which refers to the “genuineness” of the poets and their poetic skills. Nevertheless, neither interpretation is justified, explained, or investigated further.

1.4.2.3 ʿUmāra Ibn ʿAqīl

The first study to analyse ʿUmāra’s poetry was conducted by Shākir al-ʿĀshūr, who compiled his poetry, in 2006. It provides a brief outline of ʿUmāra’s life and the status he enjoyed in Iraq as a poet in the service of al-Maʾmūn and many other notables. Although al-ʿĀshūr does not mention the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, he states that ʿUmāra was seen as a trustworthy source of pure language by philologists of the time. Moreover, al-ʿĀshūr quotes the statement from al-Aghānī:

The purity of the language in the mūḥdathūn’s poetry was sealed by ʿUmāra Ibn ʿAqīl.\textsuperscript{109}
This statement supports another, made by Ibn Rashīq, who placed Ibn Harma among the muḥdathūn who started the bādī‘ style. Further investigation of these statements will feature in Chapter Six. Al-‘Āshūr discusses neither the muḥdathūn nor the sāqat al-shu‘arā’.

In 2008 al-Muṭayrī conducted a comprehensive study of ‘Umāra Ibn ‘Aqīl’s life and poetry in his Master’s thesis, although more attention is paid to the poet’s life than to his poetry. He makes several important points. Firstly, he notes the inclusion of ‘Umāra Ibn ‘Aqīl in the sāqat al-shu‘arā’ and the purity of his language, but does not discuss the term or its implications.

Secondly, al-Muṭayrī describes ‘Umāra Ibn ‘Aqīl as following the classical pattern of poetry, especially that of his grandfather Jarīr and his rival al-Farazdaq. Moreover, al-Muṭayrī notes that there was a lack of innovation in ‘Umāra’s poetry and that he was dependent on meanings established by his predecessors. Thirdly, al-Muṭayrī names six poets with whom ‘Umāra Ibn ‘Aqīl regularly exchanged satirical poems (naqā‘īḍ).

Although none of the poets he mentions belong to the sāqat al-shu‘arā’ (since ‘Umāra was born after all the poets in this group had died), this statement by al-Muṭayrī is significant because ‘Umāra Ibn ‘Aqīl, Ibn Mayyāda and Ḥakam can be said to form a sub-grouping of poets who continued to compose on this traditional theme, a practice which could be said to constitute a feature of the sāqat al-shu‘arā’ style.

Lastly, Beatrice Gruendler, in her article ‘Qaṣīda: Its Reconstruction in Performance’ mentions an anecdote (khabar) in which ‘Umāra ibn ‘Aqīl listened to a poem recited by Abū Tammām and described him as “the best poet, based on criteria seldom conceded him, such as good wording, beautiful motifs, consistent intent, and uniform language”. On another occasion ‘Umāra favoured a poem by Abū Tammām over his own poem. More importantly, Gruendler describes ‘Umāra as “the last epigone of the archaic style”, which may be taken as summarising her understanding of sāqat al-shu‘arā’. Nonetheless she provides no further explanation concerning the term.

110 Al-Qayrawānī, p.112.
112 Ibid., p.64.
113 Ibid., p.365.
114 Gruendler, p.351.
115 Ibid., p.350.
1.4.2.4 Ru’ba Ibn al-ʿAjjāj and the Issue of Rajaz

There are some general studies, as mentioned previously, that refer to Ru’ba ibn al-ʿAjjāj or deal with the issue of rajaz; however, this section is devoted to those studies which focus on either Ru’ba or rajaz poetry as their main subject. In 1997 Frolov published ‘The Place of Rajaz in the History of Arabic Verse’, an English version of a chapter which appeared in his Russian language monograph. Frolov suggests that the rajaz appeared prior to qaṣīd as an early manifestation of poetry.

Frolov then traces the historical development of rajaz from the pre-Islamic to the late Abbasid era and makes a comparison between rajaz and saj. He also investigates the status of rajaz and its relation to poetic genres, suggesting that the separation between rajaz and qaṣīd originally occurred in the pre-Islamic era, and quoting Ibn Sallām, al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Rashīq, who all differentiate between rajaz and qaṣīd. However, Frolov’s investigation is conducted from a prosodic perspective which, despite its close attention to detail, is not intended to address all the various differences between rajaz and qaṣīd poetry.

In 2010 Nawāṣira published his two-volume doctoral thesis on Ru’ba ibn al-ʿAjjāj. Fundamentally, Nawāṣira’s study consists of two parts: a study of Ru’ba’s life and rajaz, and a re-annotation of the dīwān. The first part investigates many important issues relating to the history of rajaz and the status of Ru’ba’s rajaz, including a thematic and artistic analysis, while the second part provides a better understanding of Ru’ba’s poetry by elucidating its textual obscurities.

Although Nawāṣira’s study does not investigate or explain the term sāqat al-shuʿarā’, it does provide some useful explorations of the status of rajaz as seen by various critics, who debated whether this form should be regarded as poetry at all. The study also examines Ru’ba’s poetic style but, more importantly for the purposes of this work, it investigates Ru’ba’s relationships with philologists and concludes by suggesting that this poet had the upper hand over the philologists of his time, since they took on the role of his ‘followers’.

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117 Ibid., p.243.
118 Ibid., pp. 243-247.
119 Ibid., pp. 248, 250, 262.
120 He refers to rajaz’s accessibility, noting “it was often called ‘the mount of poetry’ (matiyyat al-shi’r) and ‘the donkey of poets’ (himār al-shuʿarā’)” in reference to its inferiority to qaṣīd poetry. Frolov, p.245.
121 Ibid., p.258.
123 Ibid., pp. 112-116.
seeking evidence from his poetry to support their opinions. Further discussion of this matter will follow in Chapter Three.

1.4.3 Problematic Concepts: Qaṣīda, Qiṭʿa, Aghrāḍ and Maʿānī

In this section I will discuss some issues which arise from previous studies of Arabic literature, the aim being to address these and describe my approach to them when analysing themes and motifs in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. It is of crucial importance to clarify the meaning of these terms and concepts as they are used in classical Arabic criticism, providing where possible their equivalents in modern Western studies of Arabic literature.

It seems that many scholars have faced this difficulty when discussing the Arabic qaṣīda, whether they employ the criteria of classical Arabic criticism or modern critical theories, as van Gelder observes:

> It is often claimed that traditional Arabic literary criticism and theory are not always very helpful, particularly not where the structure of the qaṣīda and its parts is concerned, or generic classification. This may be true; but it seems to me that also modern theories of genre and the history of genres, for all their methodological soundness and sophisticated critical techniques, are often inadequate for us, students of classical Arabic literature, as regards matters of evaluation and classification. The reason, of course, is that they rarely look beyond the usual western literary canon which includes classical Greek and Roman literature and modern European and American literature. The holy trinity of epic, lyric and drama still looms large in much of modern genre theory, even there where it is, rightly, attacked. Almost all western theorists take for granted that a poem is somehow coherent.124

I will consider these issues and then discuss the approach I consider the most suited to my analysis of the poetry and the most effective in overcoming these difficulties.

1.4.3.1 Polythematic and Monothematic Compositions

Jacobi defines qaṣīda as a “generic term denoting a polythematic poem with identical metre and rhyme”,125 observing that in Western studies this term is applied only to the polythematic form, whilst another term, qiṭʿa, is used to refer to a monothematic poem. She notes a further complication, namely that “in medieval sources the term [qaṣīda] is

applied to any poem of a certain length” and that this has become “a convention of modern scholarship”. Medieval Arabic sources, however, use different terms for poems according to length:

"يَسَمُّ الْبَيْتَ الْوَاحِدَ مَفرَداً، وَيَتَبَيَّنَ، وَيَسَمِّيّ الْبَيْتَانَ نَفْقَةً، وَتَسَمَّى الْكَثِيرَةَ إِلى الْسَّنَةَ قَطْعَةً، وَتَسَمَّى الْبَيْتَانَ قَصْيَةً،" 

The one-verse [composition] is called a singleton or orphan, the two-verse is called a nutfa (a small amount /little piece). The three-to-six verse is called a qiṭʿa (fragment) and for seven upwards it is referred to as a qaṣīda (poem).

إذا بلغت الأبيات سبعة فهي قصيدة، [...] ومن الناس من يعد هذا القصيدة إلا ما بلغ العشرة أو جاورها ببيت واحد

When there are seven verses then [they are called] qaṣīda [...] although some people do not regard this as a poem until it reaches ten [verses] or exceeds this by even one verse.

Jacobi’s definition seems to neglect the high status in which rajaz poetry was held in Umayyad and Abbasid times, during which the long urjūza, which adopted the structure and polythematic nature of qaṣīd poetry was referred to as qaṣīda (qaṣāʾid in the plural). She emphasises that the qaṣīda was composed “in one of the long metres with two complete hemistichs, the employment of which demanded professional skill, in contrast to mere improvisation”. This means that she does not regard as a qaṣīda a composition in short metres, such as rajaz, or improvised poetry; but it will be shown that the urjūza was no longer an occasional improvisation and that the long rajaz poem had been recognised as the equal of qaṣīd poetry by the early Abbasid era. An adequate treatment of rajaz needs a much fuller and deeper discussion, which will be provided in Chapter Three.

In their examination of the many varieties of Islamic qaṣīda which developed from the Arabic qaṣīda, Sperl and Shackle argue that a qaṣīda is not simply “a poem of some length, with verses divided into two hemistichs, a single metre and a monorhyme”. Given the varieties of qaṣīda compositions which have existed at different times, and in

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126 Ibid.
129 Al-Qayrawānī, vol.1.pp.188-189, where no explanation is given as to why these numbers are set as limitations. It is possible that the longer the piece, the better chance the poet has to express more and to include more motifs or sub-themes.
130 Jacobi, ‘Qaṣīda’, p.630.
different cultures and languages, they suggest that “the term ‘genre’ may be applicable to the qaṣīda tradition”.

It is necessary here to draw a distinction between Sperl and Shackle’s use of the term ‘genre’ in reference to qaṣīda and my own usage. Whilst I argue that Arabic poetry has two independent genres, qaṣīd and rajaz, they regard some types of qaṣīda as falling within the genre of qaṣīd poetry composed in different languages and cultures, using a comparative perspective to assess the influence of the medieval Arabic qaṣīda on other Islamic literatures.

Meisami, however, does not believe that “the qiṭʿa was derived by the ‘splitting off’ of one or another of the qaṣīda’s constituent elements” or that “the polythematic qaṣīda evolved from the accumulations of such ‘fragments’ into long poems”. It is possible that she is referring to theories regarding the origin of the polythematic ode such as that of Jacobi, who presumes that the themes within the poem must have been composed at different periods in time for different purposes and then later joined together to form one poem, producing the polythematic ode.

However, the focus here is on what may have happened prior to the composition of the poem rather than the manner in which it was transmitted and preserved. Thus, according to Meisami, the usage of the term ‘fragments’ in anthologies is misleading since it is used for “both short poems and for excerpts from longer poems”. This leads us to question the nature of the preserved poetry and whether it can be regarded as representative of the lost poetry, given that only fragments remain.

1.4.3.2 Theme, Genre and Purpose

Meisami applies the term ‘genre’ to gharad (lit. purpose or aim) in the absence of any equivalent term in Arabic for the concept of genre as “a notion in the mind, of classifications, distinctions, decorum, within which the poet works […] a framework that the poet may not only write within, but write against”. She suggests that the term which is most commonly used to convey the concept of the genre is “gharaḍ (generally in the plural aghrāḍ); often translated as ‘theme’, which refers to the ‘ends’ or ‘purposes’ of

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132 Ibid., p.3.
135 Meisami, p. 638.
poetry’. Similarly, van Gelder uses ‘genre’ to imply themes, although “in a loose sense”. He uses this in his assessment of the “juxtaposition of nasīb or ghazal and hijā’, the combination in one poem of tender, elegiac, chaste love poetry with scathing, foul-mouthed, obscene vituperation”.

In my opinion Hussein’s suggestion that the most appropriate equivalent for the term ‘genre’ is “jins adabi” is correct. Qaṣīda should be used only to refer to a poem composed in the classical mode of the pre-Islamic ode with any of its varieties, known as polythematic. Furthermore, the term aghrāḍ should not be used to refer to genres; rather it should be used to refer to themes or purposes.

The difficulty facing anyone studying classical poetry, especially a work which has not been preserved in a written dīwān but has been collected from literary and philological sources, like most of the sāqat al-shu’arā’s poetry, is how to treat the fragments (qiṭa’ or muqatṭa’āt) which are found scattered throughout various sources. Should they be treated as dependent parts of a longer poem, since we can tell in most cases what their purpose was, i.e. panegyrical (madīḥ), satirical (hijā’), or amatory (ghazal)?

The collectors of the sāqat al-shu’arā’s poetry have approached this issue by using two different methods. If the fragments have the same metre and the same rhyming letter (qāfiya) with the same vocalisation, they assemble these as one poem, placing each theme in its position according to the established classical order, for example amatory (nasīb), journey description (raḥīl), glorification (fakhr) and then panegyric. These fragments are often separated by lines of dots to indicate an omission. The other method is to present these as a series of fragments, without attempting to place them in thematic order and to accompany them with a footnote suggesting they may have belonged to the same poem.

This confusing situation is far from ideal, leaving us with a limited range of options. One option is to view these fragments in their new contexts in the anthologies and chronicle sources, and to examine them from different angles, similarly to Beatrice

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137 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
141 The term qiṭa’ or muqatṭa’ā (singualar of muqatṭa’āt) is used in some medieval sources such as al-Aghānī to refer to a short piece of poetry as opposed to a long poem. Al-İşfahānī, vol. 20, p.174.
142 The later collection of Ibn Harmā’s poetry by Ḥusayn ‘Aṭwān and Muḥammad Naffā’, and Ibn Mayyāda’s poetry used this method.
143 Al-Mu‘aybid suggests that certain fragments of Ibn Harmā may have belonged to one poem. Al-‘Āshūr, however, did not combine fragments of ‘Umāra ibn ‘Aqīl or give any suggestions.
Gruendler’s attempt to “approach these akhbār from a dramaturgical perspective”.144 This may shed light on the poems that were preserved entire in the dīwān of a poet and were subjected to fragmentation by the anthologists in order to provide relevant illustrative examples. However, the problem with the poetry of the sāqat al-shu’arāʾ is that most of it was not preserved as whole poems but rather as fragments in the akhbār and anthologies.145

The other option is to adopt the practice used by the collectors of the poetry of the sāqat al-shu’arāʾ and wherever possible to try to reassemble the fragments to form what might have been one poem. Usually there are a set of clues which can be used to help with the process of assembling the fragmented parts. The first of these is tasrīʿ146 or the internal rhyming of both hemistichs of the first line of the ode. According to Meisami, the presence of this device is a means of distinguishing between qīṭa and qaṣīda, as it usually occurs only in the latter.147

The second relates to the prosodic elements of the fragments: metre, rhyme and the vocalisation of the rhyming letter, qāfiya. Some letters such as rāʾ tended to be more popular among the poets, and this means it can sometimes be difficult to be sure about what might have been part of the original poem. This is especially difficult in the case of one- or two-verse fragments. It is usually much easier to reassemble a qīṭa since one can look at the motifs and determine the sub-themes of the poem.

A further problematic issue in this context relates to the number of themes and their order within the polythematic ode, which has long been debated. A quote from Ibn Qutayba is of central importance to the discussion of the form and sub-themes of the qaṣīda in many studies focusing on the structure of the classical qaṣīda and, thus, it is of relevance to discussions within thematic analysis. Since several aspects of his statement merit further consideration, this quotation is reproduced here:

144 Gruendler, Qaṣīda, p.327.
145 The existing sāqat al-shu’arāʾ fragments are mostly very short, so even methods like that employed by Montgomery in his Vagaries of the Qasidah are of limited use in reconstructing the original poems. He considers “variant versions of pre-Islamic poems in order to construct a putative original qasidah […] examines seriously the variant recensions of pre-Islamic poems, arguing that to do otherwise would be to ignore the nature of the sources – we only have the poems in such recensions – and the literary merit of the edited texts”. D. Stewart, ‘A Review of James E. Montgomery, The Vagaries of the Qasidah: The Tradition and Practice of Early Arabic Poetry’, Journal of Arabic Literature, 32 (2001), pp. 84-85 (p.84). The pre-Islamic poems investigated by Montgomery are usually more complete with differences in their transmitted versions, unlike the sāqat al-shu’arāʾ’s poetry which consists mainly of fragments.
146 This might not be helpful in all cases as van Gelder observes it is a misconception that the first verse of a qīṭa always lacks tasrīʿ. He found that about 60% of al-Mutanabbī’s fragments contain tasrīʿ. Geert Jan van Gelder, ‘Al-Mutanabbī’s Encumbering Trifles’, Middle Eastern Literatures, 2 (1999), pp. 5-19 (p.7).
147 Meisami, Qīṭa, p.639.
I have heard men of letters say, that one who intends to compose a *qaṣīda* begins by mentioning abandoned encampments, traces, and vestiges; he weeps, laments, apostrophizes the site, and begs his companion to stop, that he may make this an occasion to speak of those who have departed [...]. To this he joins the *nasīb*, and complains of the force of his passion, the pain of separation, and the excessiveness of his longing and desire, so as to incline hearts towards him and attract interest, and gain an attentive hearing. For the poetry of love is close to the soul and insinuates itself into the heart [...]. Once he is assured that he will be heard and heeded, he proceeds to the affirmation of his rights: thus he mounts up, in his poem, and complains of hardships and sleeplessness, night journeys, the midday heat, and the emaciation of his weary camels. When he is sure that he has convinced his addressee of his right to hope for reward and to expect satisfaction, and has established the hardships encountered on his journey, he begins the *madīḥ*, in which he urges him to requite him and incites him to generosity, elevates him above his peers and diminishes their stature (as compared to) his noble station. The excellent poet is he who follows these paths and observes a just balance between these parts, and does not make any one of them dominate the poem, nor make (one) so long that the listeners become bored, or cut it short while their souls still thirst for more.\(^\text{148}\)

Here there is a point which needs to be clarified regarding the context of Ibn Qutayba’s statement and whether this text was simply a description of the pre-Islamic ode or was intended to be prescriptive guidance aimed at his contemporaries. Van Gelder argues that “there can be no doubt that it merely describes and recommends the outline of one of the possible types of *qaṣīda*, the panegyric ode”, and believes it was not meant as a “prescription of rules of any *qaṣīda*”.\(^\text{149}\)

Ibn Qutayba stresses the apparent relevance and usefulness of the order of the sub-sections of the poem for Bedouin poets who may have had to endure a real journey across the desert to the patron’s court. Nonetheless this was adopted by Bedouin and non-Bedouin poets alike, although some poets viewed this model as unsustainable and “rebelled against the *qaṣīda* form as well as its contents on several occasions”.\(^\text{150}\) Loya highlights the “derisive


\(^{149}\) G. J. H. van Gelder, *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), p.44. This passage has been debated by several scholars including Meisami, who claims that Ibn Qutayba’s text is a definition of the *qaṣīda* and argues against those who view it otherwise, stating that: “prescriptions were, in his own time, more honored in the breach than in the observance; and that his resistance to departures from the *qaṣīda*’s traditional topos demonstrates his conservatism and anti-Shu‘ūbi prejudice”. She then proves her point by analysing a panegyric ode by Bashshār ibn Burd which is regarded as “virtually a textbook example of Ibn Qutayba’s definition” of the *qaṣīda*. Julie Scott Meisami, *The Uses of the Qaṣīda: Thematic and Structural Patterns in a Poem of Bashshār*, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 16 (1985), pp. 40-59 (pp.40-41).

\(^{150}\) Loya, p.204.
outcries of Abū Nuwās”, who replaced the nasīḥ with “a bacchic scene or a description of flowers and gardens”.

The themes in Arabic poetry in general and the sub-themes within the polythematic poem in particular have long been a subject of debate, initiated by Ibn Qutayba’s text, and of what has been termed the theory of aghrāḏ al-ši’r or the purposes of poetry. Other texts and anecdotes form the base from which this theory developed, according to Hussein. Meisami notes that “discussions of genre are complicated by the variations in terminology and by the proliferation of aghrāḏ treated by the critics”. Heinrichs identifies the same problem in classical Arabic literary theory, which manifests itself in the “lack of appropriate terminology or – in cases where suitable terms are at hand – a failure to apply them”.

Hussein has investigated both the modern and classical approaches to the division of Arabic poetry into themes, and the division of the polythematic poem in two articles. However, there are several problems with Hussein’s work. The first relates to the lack of clarity in his discussion of the concepts of theme and motif during his evaluation of al-’Askarī (d. 395 A.H. / 1005 C.E.). Elsewhere he argues that the most fruitful approach when dividing poetry is to adopt Ḥāzim al-Qarṭājanni’s division but then, after applying this to a poem, he is forced to admit that his method has a number of shortcomings.

When considering the medieval divisions of poetry into aghrāḏ mention must be made of Ibn Wahb’s classification of poetry into “four main types (aṣnāf), madīh, hijā’, hikma

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151 Ibid.
152 Jacobi, Qaṣīda, p.632.
153 Hussein, p.298.
154 As explained previously, she uses ‘genre’ to mean the themes or purposes of the poetry.
156 Heinrichs, p.19.
157 See his articles: “Classical and Modern Approaches in Dividing the Old Arabic Poem” and “An Analytical Division of the Old Arabic Poem: A Suggestion for a New Method of Dividing and Analyzing the Old Arabic Poem with Application to a Text by Hassān b. Thābit”.
158 Hussein justifies the usage of ‘themes’ to denote maʿānī (motifs) by making reference to Kanazi’s translation of maʿānī as ‘themes’ in his Studies in the Kitāb as-Ṣīnāʾi of Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (Leiden: Brill, 1989). Nevertheless maʿnā should be translated as ‘motif’ not ‘theme’.
159 Hussein, p.315. In his critique of other approaches to the analysis of qaṣīda he often refers to its unsuitability to large corpuses of poetry. Nonetheless his attempt to apply Ḥāzim’s approach proves that it suffers from the same problem. His second article was intended to fulfil a promise made in the first article to provide a new approach to the division of Arabic poetry; however, this was not forthcoming. His suggested method for analysing the poem demonstrates that it is suitable for small groups of poems but not large corpuses, despite being shorter and less complex than previous methods and approaches he has studied. Ali Hussein, ‘An Analytical Division of the Old Arabic Poem: A Suggestion for a New Method of Dividing and Analyzing the Old Arabic Poem with Application to a Text by Ḥassān ibn Thābit’, Journal of Arabic Literature, 36 (2005), pp. 74-102 (p.74,83,84).
(gnomic poetry) and lahw (pleasure)

Ibn Rashīq refers to “four pillars (arkān) of poetry” namely “madḥ (encomium), hijāʾ (invective), nasīb (erotic) and rithāʾ (elegy)

However, as Meisami notes, “the most common classification divides poetry into praise or blame (madḥ, hijāʾ) and marshalls sub-genres under these headings”. Ibn Jaʿfar divides poetry into what he calls the “most important purposes”, categorising these as invective, panegyric, description, simile (tashbīh), amatory (nasīb) and elegy.

Ḥāzim al-Qarṭājannī finds fault with all the previous divisions and argues that poetry has only two aghrāḍ: to achieve benefits (istijlāb al-manāfiʿ) or to eliminate evils (istidfāʿ al-maḍārr).

He uses the word path (ṭarīq) “as synonymous with the term gharāḍ” and asserts that “every poet has a goal he desires to achieve when composing his poetry” and thus uses these paths (of which Ḥāzim identifies over thirty-five) to achieve it.

Ḥāzim refers to the sub-themes within the polythematic poem as ‘destinies’ (jihāt, plural of jiha). However, he does not state that the motifs (maʿānī) within the sub-theme (jiha), which he calls ‘aphorisms’ (fuṣūl plural of faṣl), are parts of the jihāt. Nonetheless, according to Hussein, careful analysis of Ḥāzim’s application of his theory suggests that he regarded fuṣūl as parts of jihāt.

1.4.3.3 Solving the Problem

After this lengthy discussion and consideration of the methods used in previous studies, it seems that the most fruitful method found in the analysis of the themes of poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ is to consider the end purpose (gharaḍ) of each poem, which conventionally is articulated in the last part of the polythematic poem. This approach agrees with the methodology of this study, which takes into account all the relevant textual and contextual evidence before conducting the analysis, including any clues which could help us discover the poet’s intention. The anecdotes and historical data found in literary and historical sources will also be considered.

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160 Meisami, Genre, pp. 243-244.
161 Ibid.
163 Hussein, Classical and Modern Approaches, p.300.
164 Ibid., p.303.
165 Ibid., p.302.
166 Ibid., p.306. Ḥāzim’s theory can be summarised as follows: a poem has a purpose (gharaḍ / ṭarīq) which is either: to achieve the benefit of the poet or eliminate the evil that might harm him. In a poem of polythematic nature every destiny / theme (jiha) contains several aphorisms / motifs (fuṣūl).
It is important to clarify that this method of analysis has been rigorously conducted to identify the major themes in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ.\footnote{The results of examining the themes of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s poetry are presented in Table 4.1 in Chapter Four, p.115.} The textual corpus under consideration consists of five\footnote{The fifth collection is the poetry I found attributed to Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī in some literary sources, but mainly in al-Aghānī.} immense collections of poetry comprising thousands of verses, and a number of different ways of dealing with this material were tried, all of them requiring a greater or lesser degree of organisation and prioritisation of the material. Given that a full and detailed analysis of every single poem was clearly not feasible, decisions needed to be made about what to include and exclude.

The approach adopted was to base the selection of poems or verses on the significance they held in relation to a particular theme in the work of an individual poet or of the group as a whole. Alternative methods of selection such as randomly choosing a poem or two illustrating every theme in the work of each poet might have been regarded as purely subjective or lacking academic rigour.

An examination of raw data to determine the number of poems composed on each theme provided a suitable point of departure for the interpretive analysis which was required to determine any trends in composition which were shared by two or more of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. When the presence of a significant theme or trend has been identified by this method, the issue of interpreting the nature of its poetic treatment becomes crucial, for the analyst must decide whether it should be classified as conventional or unconventional, imitative or innovative, natural or crafted. At this stage, scrutiny of previous studies concerning individual poets or literary schools, where available, becomes a fundamental reference point and forms the basis of this critical judgement.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has conducted three initial investigations with regard to: the medieval statements concerning the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, and their interpretation by modern scholars; the historical context in which both the medieval critics and the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ lived and worked; and the previous studies relevant to the subject of this study, evaluating their achievements and shortcomings and explaining in which ways this study will make use of them.
Firstly, the examination of the statements regarding the sāqat al-shuʿarāʼ showed that there were disagreements amongst both medieval and modern critics regarding the initial idea behind the creation of this group and the interpretation of the implications of the term. It was found that the group was created by the philologist al-ʿAṣmaʿī, whose selection was criticised by some later literary critics, such as al-Jurjānī, who regarded this implicit promotion of cultural conservatism as a dismissal of the achievements of muhdath poets. Nonetheless not all medieval critics were against the creation of this group; some continued to quote al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s statements, although none of them provided an interpretation of them.

The modern scholars who quote the term or discuss it provide a brief and impressionistic interpretation but none of them base their explanation on a comprehensive study of the poets and their poetry. Their views, in summary, can be divided into two groups: the first interpret the term as a testimony on the part of al-ʿAṣmaʿī that the poetry of this group is suitable to be quoted in philological discussions as exemplifying correct and authentic usage of the Arabic language; the second group interpret it as a term which combines philological and literary criteria, thus allowing judgement of both the language of the poets and their poetic style.

The second investigation concerned the context in which both al-ʿAṣmaʿī and the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ lived and worked. The late Umayyad and early Abbasid era was a period of transitions not only in political terms but also socially: from Bedouin to city life-style; culturally: from the dominance of Arabic to the dominance of Persian; and poetically: from the ancient to the modern style of composition. All these transitions were interwoven, being affected by and resulting from each other. A significant result of these transitions was that the Arabists became convinced that the Arabic identity of the state and its people was under threat, and in an effort to maintain Arabic identity and culture many counter-measures were taken in philological and critical judgements of poetic language and style, one of them being the idea of sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ.

The third part of this chapter consisted of a survey of the literature, an assessment of the usefulness and shortcomings of previous studies and an explanation of how my study will make use of them. It was shown that the previous studies which mention the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ neither explain its significance, nor attempt to study the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ as a group in order to discern any patterns of similarity in their themes, motifs or poetic styles. Other studies which deal with the era or the poets are engaged with more
general concerns and thus have varying degrees of relevance to the term and the poetry, but they do not figure as the main subject of interest in any of them.

Several issues arise from the assessment of the previous studies which will affect my approach to the selection and analysis of the data from the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarā’. I argue that the most suitable approach is to consider the purposes of the poems. After establishing that a certain theme is dominant, motifs from these dominant themes will be analysed to assess the kind and extent of the imitation and innovation practised by the poets and thus to situate their poetic achievement within the contexts of the era they lived in. The overall aims of the analysis of themes and motifs are: firstly, to give an informed explanation of the implications of the term sāqat al-shuʿarā’ as it was understood by those who created the group under this name; secondly, to consider the poetic value of the works of the sāqat al-shuʿarā’ with reference to the standards of modern criticism, regardless of whether these agree with the views of the classical critics.
Chapter Two: Bedouin Influence on Early Philologists and Critical Practices

“Grammar-making acquires symbolic meanings arising out of a web of politically anchored phenomena that include group identity and solidarity, ethnic superiority and the imperative of defending the group and its culture against external and internal threats”.
(Yasir Suleiman, Ideology, Grammar-Making and the Standardization of Arabic, p.27)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will demonstrate that the origins of the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ lie in an era when critical practice itself was still inchoate. It will discuss early critical production and its influence on later critics, distinguishing between the treatment of poetry as a treasury of quotations for linguists and its being regarded as a subject of critical analysis and evaluation from an artistic and literary point of view. This difference is important because statements made by early critics are often misunderstood, since their context is not explicitly stated.

As early critics were mainly philologists, we will also endeavour to illustrate how philological activity was closely linked to poetry and in particular to Bedouin poets by tracing the historical origins and development of philological criticism. In addition, philologically oriented critical concepts that emerged in the second and third hijrī centuries will be compared and contrasted with non-philological ones. This analysis will shed light on the criteria employed to evaluate poetry within the school of philological criticism and will also explore the extent to which analysis of this kind is useful in assessing the validity of these criteria.

Finally, by means of a detailed examination of poetry compilations and collections and other critical works authored in the second and third hijrī centuries, the general features of philological criticism will be identified and evaluated.

2.2 The Origins of Philological Criticism

Interpreting the Qurʾan led to the investigation of Arabic rhetoric conducted by exploring the speech and verbal arts of the Arabs. This method was practised by early scholars of the post-Prophetic era, and “the greatest name in early exegesis is that of a cousin of the
Prophet, ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbās (d.68/688), in whose name reports were handed down at Mecca, Basra and Kufa” by his students.\textsuperscript{169}

It was via this religiously and linguistically oriented route that poetry claimed the attention of the early scholars. According to Burton, for these scholars, the “chief instrument available […] had been the accumulated corpus of early and pre-Islamic poetry, to the collection, edition and analysis of which they were motivated by its recognized utility for the exegesis”.\textsuperscript{170}

Interpreting and explaining the Qur’an also led to the investigation and analysis of the Arabic language in order to explain any obscurity. According to Roger Allen, “the increasingly wide-scale movement of intellectual exploration and cultural transformation” which resulted in the appearance of the methodically written books of the early philologists “can be traced back to the revelation of the Qur’an to Muhammad”. At this stage of intellectual development, philologists had “to collect and examine the largest extant archive of the language, the tradition of poetry that had been handed down from poet to bard (rāwī) for centuries”.\textsuperscript{171}

Moreover, according to Khalidi, “when the evidence is carefully weighed, little doubt remains that a substantial corpus of written Hadith existed by at least as early as the first half of the first century A.H., while the stage of classified works was in all likelihood reached by the first half of the second century”.\textsuperscript{172}

Early scholars benefited from the intellectual activity of the school of hadith, to the extent that, some studies suggest, early books of criticism made use of the methods of hadith scholars. However, it is important to limit the discussion here to the knowledge of poetry and matters associated with it such as the transmission of poetry, the collection of poems of individuals or tribes, and employing poetry in lexical or philological studies.

Accordingly, philologists were the first scholars to engage with poetry (and for some time philologists were the only ones to do so), originally in the context of the study and interpretation of the Qur’an. However, according to Ouyang, the tradition they founded of studying poetry for non-critical purposes and entirely for the sake of learning and developing linguistic sciences was “both a blessing and a curse. Although poetry was recorded as a matter of necessity, it was forced to assume a supporting role in the

\textsuperscript{169} Burton, p.43.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., p.45.
\textsuperscript{171} Allen, Arabic Literary Heritage, p.363.
\textsuperscript{172} Khalidi, p.20.
The hierarchical order of Arabic sciences. Poetry was not studied for its own sake or its artistic achievements, but for the sake of learning grammar and lexicography.\textsuperscript{173}

The tradition of quoting poetry with a view to explaining ambiguous words was extended by later scholars, leading to the production of books of gharīb found in the Qurʾan and hadith. Interestingly, a large number of the philologists of Kufa and Basra were also scholars specialising in the various modes of recitation (qirāʾāt) such as Abū ’Amr ibn al-’Alā`, and some of them, such as Abū ’Ubayda specialised in gharīb.

Philologists and linguists in Iraq, according to Lichtenstadter, formed two rival groups of scholars in Basra and Kufa. The former was started earlier by the efforts of its notable scholars Abū al-Aswad al-Du`alî, al-Aṣma`ī and Abū ’Ubayda and “upheld stricter standards with regard to grammatical and philological purity and were regarded as more reliable as historians and transmitters of ancient lore”.\textsuperscript{174} The Kufan School was formed by authorities such as Ibn Durayd, Sībawayh and al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, the founder of the Arabic prosodic system. The School’s most distinguished scholar was al-Muṣṭafāḏal al-Ḍabbī (d.168 A.H. 784 C.E.), the compiler of the earliest anthology, called (after him) al-Muṣṭafāḏalīyyāt. The two cities were destinations for poets where, like the scholars, ordinary people had an opportunity to listen to the poetry of naqāʾid by Jarīr and al-Farazdaq in the famous Mirbad market of Basra and the equally celebrated Kunāsa market in Kufa.\textsuperscript{175}

Heinrichs’ search for a literary theory in classical Arabic materials required him to survey the context within which this theory evolved; he points out some of the potential aspects or areas of research for literary theory in the philological works:

There are, first of all, the endeavours of the philologists, the collectors and commentators of ancient poetry, which developed naturally out of their intimate acquaintance with the object of their study and which are, more particularly, the outcome of an attempt to systemize the literary critique of the aphoristic kind which was dominant up to the A.H. third century.\textsuperscript{176}

Thus, literary criticism in the classical Arabic tradition had its roots in philology, and in order to achieve a better understanding of how poetry was evaluated and critiqued in the philological environment of the second and third hijrī centuries it is necessary to refer to the earliest documented philological activities. Although one cannot claim that these were

\textsuperscript{173} Ouyang, p.62.
\textsuperscript{176} Heinrichs, \textit{Literary Theory}, p.30.
the first efforts ever in Arabic literature, we can safely assume that they were among the first documented efforts currently known.

Moreover, written transmissions of poetry (marwiyyāt), first carried out by philologists and collectors of the Arabic language, also constituted a fertile environment for some of the early critical commentaries. Although it is impossible to distinguish between the two activities in their early stages, by the end of the second and early third hijrī centuries they had become independent fields.\(^{177}\)

According to Muhammad al-Ḥabbās:

الزمن الذي بدأ فيه اللغويون يخرجون إلى البادية ويشافون فصحاء الأعراب ويأخذون عنهم اللغة مباشرة [...] بدأ من سنة 90 للهجرة، وكان ذلك على يد أبي اللغويين العرب أبي عمر بن العلاء البصري اللغوي النحوي

The time when philologists started to go to the desert to meet Bedouins and write down their language […] began in 90 A.H. [708 C.E.] with the father of Arab philologists, the Basran grammarian and philologist Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā’.\(^{178}\)

The philologists principally sought to collect what they viewed as the still pure Arabic language, uncontaminated by the linguistic errors which had spread amongst city dwellers due to the mixing and interaction of Arabs with other nations following the expansion of the Islamic empire. With this aim in mind, the philologists went to particular places in the desert to collect the language of certain tribes. Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā’ documented what he found in a book he called 'Arabiyya, which has not survived.\(^{179}\) However, many other works seem to have adopted Abū 'Amr’s fieldwork methods until as late as the fourth hijrī century.\(^{180}\)

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177 Beattrica Gruendler, ‘Pre-Modern Arabic Philologists: Poetry’s Friends or Foes?’ in Geschichte der Germanistik: Mitteilungen, ed. by Christoph König and Marcel Lepper (Göttingen: Niedersachs Wallstein, 2011), pp. 6-21 (p.7).


179 Although the book did not survive, its existence can be inferred from medieval references to it, for instance this statement in Ţabaqāt al-Nahwīyīn wa-l-Lughawīyīn:


Ibn Nawfal said: “I heard my father saying to Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā’: ‘Tell me about [the book] you have authored, which you entitled 'Arabiyya; does it include all the Arab speech?’ Abū 'Amr said: ‘No’. So, my father then asked: ‘So what do you do when they [the Arabs] disagree with you, especially since they are the authority?’ Abū 'Amr responded: ‘I write down the opinion of the majority, and refer to what I disagree with as lughāt (dialects)’."


180 In Ibn al-Nadīm’s al-Fihrist, there are more than nine books entitled al-Lughāt authored by several philologists including: Sībawayh (d.180 A.H. 796 C.E.), Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb (d.183 A.H. 799 C.E.), Abū 'Amr al-Shaybānī (d.206 A.H. 821 C.E.), Abū 'Ubayda (d.209 A.H. 824 C.E.), Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (d.215 A.H. 830 C.E.), al-Ąṣma’ī (d.216 A.H. 831 C.E.), Thā’ lab (d.291 A.H. 903 C.E.) and Ibn Durayd (d.321 A.H. 933...
One of Abū 'Amr’s immediate students and imitators was al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, the author of the first Arabic lexicon, Kitāb al-'Ayn. In the introduction to the book al-Khalīl outlines his methodology, objectives and plan:

هذا ما ألفه الخليل بن أحمد البصري رحمة الله عليه من حروف: أ، ب، ت، ث، مع ما تكلمت به (العرب) فكان مدار
كلامهم وألفاظهم فلا يخرج منها شيء. أراد أن تعرف به العرب في أشعارها وأمثالها ومخاطباتها.

This is what al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad al-Baṣrī, may Allah have mercy on him, has written about the letters: ʿalif, bāʾ, tā, thā, along with what was uttered (by the Arabs) which created the whole of their speech and words inclusively. He [al-Khalīl] wishes that Arabs will become known [by this book], their poetry, proverbs, and sermons.

It is clear that al-Khalīl proposes to collect the whole of the Arabic language, drawing on what he finds to support his philological opinions, be it a verse of poetry or a proverb. In spite of his unrealistic ambition he managed to produce a book which is both colossal and well-organised. Although poetry collection was not his principal intention he nonetheless gathered a substantial number of verses in his lexicon.

Al-Khalīl’s al-'Ayn is just one example of many books which contain poetry as data which is supplementary to the main subject of the text. However, following this period of collecting Arabic language material, the collection of poetry became popular, although the system and methodology adopted by collectors varied over the course of time. It was initiated by certain poetry transmitters (ruwāt) who declaimed poetry relating to a particular poet or poets, or a specific tribe. The task of the transmitters was to memorise poetry by their chosen poet and recite it to an audience. This practice dated from pre-Islamic times but by the end of the first hijrī century it had changed from oral to written transmission.

According to al-Zahrānī, the critical debates in which the ruwāt engaged were concerned with three issues: the poets’ environment (place and time), their life style (Bedouin or city dweller) and their poetic talent (naturalness or craftsmanship). Although these evaluation criteria provided some general guidance for the ruwāt there are countless examples which show that these were not strictly implemented, suggesting that they may have been implicit but not regarded as binding at the time.


This apparent self-reference could be attributed to the fact that some of his students annotated or copied the book, according to the editor. Al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad al-Farāhīdī, Kitāb al-'Ayn: Murattaban 'alā- Ḥurūf al-Mu'jam, ed. by ʿAbdul-Ḥamīd Hindāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), vol. 1, p. 32.

Ibid., p.34

2.3 Philologists and Bedouinity

It is important to clarify what we mean by the influence of Bedouinity on the critical practices discussed in this chapter. During the process of codifying the Arabic language and the creation of its grammar, the philologists advocated the study of Bedouin language as the ‘pure’, ‘uncorrupted’ and ‘authentic’ ḳArabiyya to be used in the process of standardisation of the Arabic language. They “recovered from Bedouin informants linguistic specimens of the high language variant, preserved them in editions, and extracted from these grammatical rules, which they integrated into a system”.¹⁸⁴

However, the codification and standardisation of Arabic served more than one purpose. According to Suleiman,

Grammar-making is not just about describing and codifying the language; it further aims to establish an extra-linguistic connection between the language and its speakers by revealing their wisdom as a people. These twin objectives of grammar-making in Arabic, the linguistic and extra-linguistic, are consistent with standardization theory.¹⁸⁵

Since the socio-political circumstances at the time were charged with ideologies and shuʿūbī inter-ethnic conflicts, the ideology of the superiority of the Arabic language and people was developed. Suleiman asserts that “the quest for uniformity, correctness, purity and identity in standardization as an ideology are […] at the heart of grammar-making in the Arabic linguistic tradition, providing it with its socio-political and moral and ethical underpinnings”.¹⁸⁶

Since the critical treatment of poetry was conducted firstly by philologists, the superiority of the Arabic language was also extended to the literary traditions; according to Gruendler, the philologists’ mission has an ‘ideological dimension’:

In the energetic incorporation by the young Islamic empire of prior cultures, through the translation of Greek science and Iranian statecraft, the one item upheld as native and unsurpassable was the Arabic literary heritage. More than any other factor the Arabic language embodied the self-image of Arabic-Islamic civilization.¹⁸⁷

The superior Arabic language, of which the Arabists boasted, came from the Qurʾan, “the verbatim address by God via the Prophet Muḥammad to his community in their own

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¹⁸⁴ Gruendler, Pre-Modern Philologists, p.6.
¹⁸⁵ Suleiman, Ideology, p. 17.
¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 5.
¹⁸⁷ Gruendler, p. 6.
language, to wit ‘clear Arabic speech’", but along with the ‘divine’ there was “(Pagan) Arabic poetry”¹⁸⁸ and the pure and uncorrupted Bedouin language.

2.3.1 Poets and Philologists: Allies or Foes?

Gibb suggests that “the Arab poet and the Arabic philologist were close and natural allies in the perpetual struggle which had to be waged against the degeneration of the noble Arab tongue”.¹⁸⁹ There are some anecdotes which support this suggestion. For example, the philologist Yūnus b. Ḥabīb, according to ʿAzzāwī, frequently appealed to Ruʿba to support his opinion with a verse; this seems to have annoyed Ruʿba, who at some point after being asked to compose evidence for the philologist responded:

حتم تسألني عن هذه الأباطيل وأزخرفها لك؟

How long will you ask me about these falsehoods, and [how long will] I make them for you?¹⁹⁰

This example highlights the existence of an alliance serving the interest of the philologist in his quest for poetic evidence, which makes the Bedouin poet an authority. On the other hand, there are some anecdotes which suggest that in some cases the opposite was true. For example, al-Khalīl b. Ahmad al-Farāhīdī explicitly declares:

إنما أنتم معه الشعراء تبع لي، وأنا سُك ان السفينة، إن فرضتكم ورضيت قولكم نفقتم، وإلا كسدتم.

Oh poets! You are inferior to me and I am the ship’s captain, and without my praise and recommendations your poetry will not be noticed or appreciated.¹⁹¹

Here authority is in the hands of the philologist, who can promote the poet or demote him, but if we consider this issue from the poets’ perspective we find a different picture. Al-Farazdaq seems to have thought that the philologist’s task was merely to record what he produced and not to tell him how to compose or which topics to choose. This is confirmed by an anecdote which appears in al-Shıʾr wa-l-Shuʿarāʾ. When al-Farazdaq was asked by the philologist Abū ʾIshāq al-Ḥaḍramī why he had composed a verse in a particular way al-Farazdaq angrily retorted: “My job is to compose and your job is to quote!”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 6-7.
¹⁸⁹ Gibb, p.587.
¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.62.
¹⁹² Ibn Qutayba, vol.1, p.89. Ibn Sallām cites three occasions when the philologist Abū ʾIshāq al-Ḥaḍramī annoyed al-Farazdaq by drawing attention to his mistakes, with the result that the poet satirised and threatened him. Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb states that Abū ʿAmr was more amiable and tolerant with Arabs, whereas Ibn Abī ʾIshāq and Īṣā b. ʿUmar spoke ill of them. Al-Jumaḥī, vol.1, pp.16-17.
On the other hand, poets were expected to travel to the desert to study the ‘authentic’ ʿArabiyya; even the rebellious Abū Nuwās spent a year living in the desert to acquire the purity of Bedouin language. Even so, the philologists insisted that the Bedouinity of a poet depended on his origin. In al-Aghānī, it is reported that Abū ʿUbayda and al-ʿAṣmaʾī did not believe al-Kumayt and al-Ṭīrimāḥ had a genuine knowledge of gharīb. Al-ʿAṣmaʾī commented about al-Kumayt:

هذا جرماني من أهل الموصل، ولا أخذ بلغته.

This is a Nabataean of al-Mawṣil and I do not count on his language.

Al-ʿAjjāj states that al-Kumayt and al-Ṭīrimāḥ would consult him about the usage of some unusual word; soon afterwards, this would be included in their poetry. However, because they were not Bedouins and had not personally encountered the things they were describing at first hand, the results were condemned as ugly and artificial.

Thus it seems that there is no evidence of a single, normative type of relationship between poets and philologists at this time, however, it seems that most pre-Islamic poetry and all Bedouin poetry were regarded as the only ‘authentic’ source of ‘pure Arabic’, and that the Bedouins as individuals and the Bedouin culture were seen as points of reference firstly in linguistic discussions, then as providing good examples of poetry and, later, as representatives of the Arabic culture and norms during the shuʿūbī attacks, as we will see in the coming chapters. But now our discussion will focus on the process of selection from the Arabic poetic heritage conducted by the philologists.

2.3.1 Early Stages of Compiling Anthologies: Preserving the Past

Since many of these early anthologies were compiled by philologists, the task of determining their preferences in poetry is further complicated by having to identify the reasons for the philologist’s admiration for a poet’s work: was the inclusion of a poem in an anthology based on its linguistic features and vocabulary or due to its artistic merits? An assessment of the content of some of the best-known anthologies will be conducted in order to trace the development of what might be called the criteria of philological criticism and how this is reflected in the poetry selected.

According to Shākir and Hārūn:

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193 Al-ʿAzzāwī, p.39.
195 Ibid. vol.2, p.63.
المفضليات أقدم مجموعة صنعت في اختيار الشعر العربي، فإن الرواة قبلها يصنعون أشعار القبائل، يضمنون أشات
شعر المنتمن إلى قبيلة واحدة ويجعلون كلا منها كتابا.

Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt is the earliest compilation of selected Arabic poetry, and before that the transmitters made books from the poetry of certain tribes composed by the poets of that tribe.  

In terms of how the collected poems were selected and what criteria were employed for selection, al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt is perhaps not the best example to choose because, as its author, al-Mufaḍḍal al-Dabbi, states that the initial selection of the poems was not his idea; according to Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī it was Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAbdullah who selected seventy poems when he was hiding from al-Manṣūr and took refuge in al-Mufaḍḍal’s house in Basra. Al-Mufaḍḍal either added another ten poems or all the remaining poems to produce a total of one hundred and twenty-eight poems only when he was later asked by al-Manṣūr to teach his heir, al-Mahdī, some of the best examples of Arabic poetry.  

However, the fact that al-Mufaḍḍal chose to keep the poems selected by Ibrāhīm and taught them at the highest level of education at that time confirms his belief in their high status and suitability, even though he himself did not select most of them. Moreover, that the highest authority in the Abbasid state felt the need to commission such a selection to be taught to his heir is very interesting and could be interpreted as an indication that al-Manṣūr did not want his son to grow up ignorant of some of the best examples of Arabic poetry. But it could also indicate the extent of Persian influence on the Arabs in the Abbasid era from the head of state to his subjects in the streets, all of whom, it seems, needed to be taught about their own cultural heritage.  

In terms of the content of al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt, its compiler did not make any comments regarding criteria for inclusion and there is no obvious systematic order covering the poems selected or the sixty-six poets whose work is represented in the anthology. Moreover, the number of poems selected for each poet is inconsistent; while some poets have up to four of their works reproduced, others merit only a single poem or even just a

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198 The editors of al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt suggest that al-Mufaḍḍal added just ten poems to Ibrāhīm’s original selection; it was al-ʿAṣmaṭ who later added the remaining 48 poems to the original 80. Over time, successive generations of annotators combined al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt and al-ʿAṣmaṭiyāt into a single work without distinguishing who selected which poem. Nonetheless, all the poems selected are examples of the pre-Islamic style of qaṣīda and almost all the poets are pre-Islamic. Al-Dabbi, pp. 6, 9-10, 13-14.  
199 Ibid., p.10.
short segment of their poetry. Furthermore, although almost half of the poets (some twenty-seven in total) have two of their poems included in the selection, no attempt is made to group these poems by author, suggesting that no obvious order has been imposed by the compiler/s.

However, this is perhaps only to be expected since *al-Mufaţḍaliyyāt* was the first work of its kind in Arabic literature. It provides a useful departure point for tracing the development of the poetic anthology in classical Arabic literature and examining the variation of approach in the internal organisation and sub-division of those collections which appeared after *al-Mufaţḍaliyyāt*.

*Al-Âsma’iyyāt* is al-Âsma’â’s expanded version of *al-Mufaţḍaliyyāt* and contains all the poems selected by Ibrâhîm and al-Mufaţḍal together with other poems he had selected himself. As stated previously, combined collections of this kind make it impossible to determine the individual contributions of the various compilers. Therefore, it can be argued that all these compilers agreed that the selected poems were representative examples of good Arabic poetry but without specifying the basis for this selection or their particular criteria for judging poetry. Fortunately, however, al-Âsma’â’s criteria of selection were somewhat clearer in his book *Fuţūlat al-Shu’arâ’*.

Before analysing *al-fuţūla* it should be stated that there is nothing to indicate that the works in either *al-Mufaţdaliyyāt* or *al-Âsma’iyyāt* were selected for philological purposes despite the fact that their compilers were well known as philologists of the Kufan and Basran schools respectively. That said, both these works reflect their compilers’ view of what should be recognised as great poetry, as is clearly shown by the large number of jāhilī poets included; works by early Islamic and Umayyad poets are in the minority. Moreover,

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200 Abû ʿUbayda, a contemporary of al-Mufaţḍal and al-Âsma’â, authored a book entitled *Kitâb al-Dībāj* (the Book of Silk Brocade) which contains classes of Arab poets, horsemen, generous men, traitors, etc. In the introduction he explains:  

كان العرب الكفاريون لا يعدون من الشيء إلا ثلاثة ثم يكفون ولا يزيدون عليها شيئا، وإن لحق شيء بعد الثلاثة التي عدوا قبل ذلك لم يعدهم.  

The Arabs of ʿUkâz did not count more than three of anything before stopping, and did not add anything beyond that [to the three]. And if anything the like of what they had counted before came after that, they did not count it.

Abû ʿUbayda includes only three major poets from any given era and then only gives short examples of their poetry except at the end of the book, where he includes famous Arab pairs like ‘the jaws of the Arabs’. It is interesting to note that neither al-Mufaţḍal nor al-Âsma’â followed Abû ʿUbayda’s self-imposed numeric restriction, nor did later philologists. For instance Ibn Sallâm in his *Tabaqât Fuţūl al-Shu’arâ’* considers four poets in each category. One is tempted to ask therefore whether this was an authentic Arab tradition or was merely invented by Abû ʿUbayda. Since there appears to be nothing to prove his claim, investigation of this topic with respect to Arab literary criticism may prove to be of future interest to researchers. Abû ʿUbayda Maʿmar ibn al-Muthannâ al-Taymî, *Kitâb al-Dībāj*, ed. by ‘Abdullah Sulaymân al-Jarbû and ‘Abdul-Rahmân ibn Sulaymân al-ʿUthaymîn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khânjî, 1991), p.4.
only one poem by a member of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* is cited: al-Ḥakam al-Khuṭrī’s panegyric to Ibn Bilāl.\(^{201}\)

Ḥusayn notes that in their anthologies al-Mufaḍḍal and al-ʿĀṣmaʿī avoided quotations from poets who were known for polishing and refining their compositions, such as ‘the slaves of poetry’ (*ʿabīd al-shiʿr*), for example Zuhayr and al-Ḥuṭay’a. They also avoided quoting poets known for their *badīʿ* style such as Bashshār and Ibn Harma. The reason for this, according to Ḥusayn is that they were interested in poetry which they considered natural (*maṭbūʿ*), not over-crafted or mannerist (*mutakallaf aw- maṣnū*).\(^{202}\) Ḥusayn’s remark is useful since it corresponds to statements by al-ʿĀṣmaʿī on the type of poetry he admires. In this context, it is useful to consider al-ʿĀṣmaʿī’s understanding of what constitutes good poetry by reviewing statements he made which are scattered across different literary sources. In a statement attributed to him al-ʿĀṣmaʿī defines poetry thus:

\[
\text{الشعر ما قل لفظة، وسهل، ونق معناها وطفي، والذى إذا سمعت نفسك أنك تتأله، فإذا حاولته وجدته بعيداً، وما عدا ذلك فهو كلأ منظوم.}
\]

Poetry is that which combines minimal wording with a straightforward, specific and pleasant meaning, which you think you can perceive on hearing it, but when you attempt to grasp [this meaning] you find it unfathomable. Any [poetry that does not fit this description] is merely a rhymed utterance (*kalām manẓūm*).\(^{203}\)

In this definition al-ʿĀṣmaʿī is clearly very concerned with meaning and how this is conveyed in poetry, a feature which occurs frequently in his criticism.\(^{204}\) Moreover, it seems that poetry as an artistic composition is being distinguished from ‘didactic poetry’ (*naẓm*) which can be called poetry only because it has metre and rhyme. It is interesting that this distinction is made at an early stage in Arabic criticism.

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\(^{201}\) Another poet named Abū al- Faḍal al-Kinānī is quoted twice in *al-ʿĀṣmaʿīyyāt* and the editors of the book state that he is unknown to them. ‘Abdul-Malik ibn Qurayb al-ʿĀṣmaʿī, *al-ʿĀṣmaʿīyyāt*, ed. by Ahmad Shākir and ‘Abdul-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1955), p.77. One of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* about whom no information could be found, is named al-Ṭufayl al-Kinānī, and this leads us to suggest that he and this poet, Abū al- Faḍal al-Kinānī, may be one and the same person. It is possible that either Abū al- Faḍal was used as his agnomen (*kunya*) or that his name was mis-read or incorrectly written due to the similarities between al-Ṭufayl (Tufayl) and al- Faḍal (Faḍal). However, without further evidence, this remains merely a possibility.


\(^{204}\) Earlier we referred briefly to the statement concerning the ranking of the poets within the group of *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*; and al-ʿĀṣmaʿī chooses Ibn Harma as the first among them, justifying his choice by quoting a verse in which the poet depicts his own generosity:

\[
\text{I never let the newly born camels enjoy their mothers and I only buy camels which I soon slaughter.}
\]

Al-ʿĀṣmaʿī swears that no one, no matter how generous he is in reality, could describe generosity better than this verse does. Al-Īsfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vol.5, p.170. Whilst there is an element of exaggeration in al-ʿĀṣmaʿī’s statement, it does indicate his admiration of Ibn Harma and his verse.
It is also noteworthy that whilst some poets, such as Abū Tammām, were advocates of sophisticated poetry and mannerism, when it came to conveying meanings al-Aṣmaʾī preferred a straightforwardness which masks a more subtle or complex idea. He suggests that this kind of composition inspires the audience to believe that they could compose something similar although in reality they cannot.

Other statements made by al-Aṣmaʾī strengthen the suggestion that he did not like mannerism and elaborately crafted poetry. Ibn Jinnī states that:

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\text{كان الأصمعي يعيب الحطينة ويتعقبه،} \quad \text{فقيل له} \quad \text{فقال:} \quad \text{وجدت شعره كله جيدا،} \quad \text{فقلت على أنه كان يصنعه. وليس هكذا الشاعر المطبوع:} \quad \text{إذن الشاعر المطبوع الذي يرمي بالكلام على عواهنه: جيده على ردينه.}
\]

Al-Aṣmaʾī used to examine [the poetry of] al-Ḥuṭay’a and criticise him. When he was asked about this he replied: I found that his poetry is always good and that proved to me the craftsmanship of his poetry, which is different from that of the poet who has a gift enabling him to improvise his poetry and mix its good and bad elements.\(^\text{205}\)

In *al-ʿUmda* Ibn Rashīq states that al-Aṣmaʾī criticised Zuhayr and al-Nābiqha and called them ‘the slaves of poetry’ because they were obsessed with honing and polishing their compositions.\(^\text{206}\) All these statements indicate that al-Aṣmaʾī’s interest in highly crafted poetry was minimal; he preferred naturalness in composition and spontaneity. This dichotomy initiated by al-Aṣmaʾī would become a central debate in Arabic criticism that would continue for a long time after his death.

Thus, we can say of al-Aṣmaʾī’s preferred style of poetry that it conveys meaning using few words, it has a simple construction which inspires admiration and imitation; and it displays both strengths and weaknesses, indicating that it is spontaneous and not elaborately crafted.

More of al-Aṣmaʾī’s criteria of poetic excellence can be deduced from his notion of ‘championship’ (*al-fuḥūla*). The book entitled *Fuḥūlat al-Shuʿarāʾ* written by al-Aṣmaʾī’s pupil Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, documenting his master’s thoughts and observations. It contains some useful insights detailing how a poet can achieve excellence and the qualities required in order to be classified as a champion (*faḥl*) poet.

The contemporary editors of al-Aṣmaʾī’s work assert that although he did not specify the criteria relating to ‘championship’ they can be deduced as consisting of the following: “a combination of excellence in construction, ingenuity in meaning and abundance in

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\(^{206}\) Al-Qayrawānī, vol.1, p.133.
poetry”.

Combining this with his preference for old poetry over modern, it is possible to reconstruct al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s understanding of what constituted good poetry and great poets, which can be confirmed by our case study group of poets, the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ.

A third anthology, Jamharat Ashʿār al-ʿArab by Abū Zayd al-Qurashī, also seems to have been influenced by al-ʿAṣmaʿīyyāt and al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt and was probably compiled towards the end of the second hijrī century. This work is relatively large compared to al-ʿAṣmaʿīyyāt and al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt and consists of eight chapters: an introduction followed by seven chapters containing poems by mainly pre-Islamic poets with a small number of early Islamic and Umayyad poets.

As in the previous cases, the author’s criteria for selecting poetry are ambiguous as he merely states that he will choose the best of the best from each poet he cites, accompanied by some biographical data. Moreover his division of the book is rather confusing; he creates seven categories, each containing seven poems which, according to Abū Zayd, were regarded by al-Mufaḍḍal as the best of Arabic poetry. However, he does not identify al-Mufaḍḍal’s preferred poems or verses, and certainly most of the poets he selects were not chosen by al-Mufaḍḍal and do not feature in al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt.

One chapter is thematically labelled and is devoted to the best elegies. In addition, the last chapter is devoted to seven Umayyad poets and in this case, a chronological element has been employed to produce this category. Other categories seem rather abstruse; there is no indication of the significant differences between them and little consideration seems to have been applied to their titles, which include golden poems (al-mudhahhabāt), and selected works (al-muntakhabāt).

2.3.2 The Stage of Informed Selection: From Philology to Aesthetics

Other types of anthologists were more tolerant towards the muḥdath Abbasid poets who emerged shortly after al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s death. They compiled anthologies in which the poetry was mostly selected according to the motifs employed. These were known as ‘ikhtiyārāt al-maʿānī and were better organised in terms of categories. Abū Tammām’s al-Ḥamāsa

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207 Al-ʿAṣmaʿī, Fuḥūla, p.5, and Alqarni, p.42.
208 Although the editor states that Abū Zayd al-Qurashī died in the fourth century, this seems inaccurate because Abū Zayd himself states in the book that he spoke with al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, and we know that al-Mufaḍḍal died in 178 or even before that. Abū Zayd Muḥammad ibn Abī al-Khaṭṭāb al-Qurashī, Jamharat Ashʿār al-ʿArab, ed. by ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajawī (Alexandria: Nahdat Miṣr, 1981), pp. 8,11,97.
209 Ibid., p.11.
210 Ibid., p.99.
211 Ibid., pp.98-99.
212 Al-Ḍabbī, p.10.
and Ibn Qutayba’s *al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā‘* are good examples of this type of anthology; the latter in particular provides some useful insights and critical observations regarding what constitutes good poetry, worthy of being collected and preserved.

As Klein-Franke notes, *al-Hamāsa* is Abū Tammām’s sole surviving anthology.\(^{213}\) The work is divided into ten sections, with the opening – and longest – section focusing on *al-hamāsa* (bravery). Amīn and Hārūn point out that the book takes its title from this section.\(^{214}\)

Abū Tammām is also renowned for his unconventional poetic style, *al-badī‘*, although this had been established earlier in a more moderate form by Bashshār ibn Burd and Ibn Harma.\(^{215}\) It is interesting, therefore, to examine whether he was influenced in his selection of poetry by his own poetic style and the critical responses to it. The nature of Abū Tammām’s work in compiling *al-Hamāsa* is best captured by al-Marzūqī in his *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Hamāsa*, in which he observes:

> وهذا الرجل لم يعد من الشعراء إلى المشهرين دون الأغفال، ولا من الشعر إلى المتفرد في الأفواه المجيب لكل داع، بل اعترض في دواوين الشعراء جاهليهم ومخضرمهم، وإسلامهم ومولدهم، واختطف منها الأرواح دون الأشباح، واختفتر الثمار دون الأكمام، وجمع ما يوافق نظمه ويخالفه، لأن ضروب الاختيار لم تخف عليه، وطرق الاستحسان لم تستر عنه؛ حتى إنك تراه ينتهي إلى البيت الجيد فيه فلطة تشبهه، فيجبر نقيضته من عنده، ويبذل الكلمة بأختها في نقده، وهذا يبين أن ارجع إلى دواوينهم فقابل ما في اختياره بها.

This man [Abū Tammām] did not just include [in his collection] the famous and leave out the lesser known, nor did he choose poetry which is frequently recited and easy to recall. He conducted an exhaustive search of the poets’ *dīwāns* from all eras: pre-Islamic, Islamic\(^{216}\) and contemporary. He picked poems with soul and discarded those without it, he harvested fruits and discarded their peels. He chose from that which was compatible and incompatible with his own poetic style as he was well aware of types of selections to the extent that if he finds an ugly word in a good verse he changes it for a better alternative in his criticism. This [modification] can be clearly verified by comparing their [the poets whose poetry was chosen] *dīwāns* to his selection.\(^{217}\)

The most striking aspect of *al-Hamāsa* is Abū Tammām’s use of excellence in conveying certain motifs and sentiments as his criterion for selecting the best examples of Arabic poetry. Thus, unlike previous collections such as *al-Muṣafāṭalīyyāt*, the extracts


\(^{215}\) Klein-Franke, p.25.

\(^{216}\) ‘Islamic’ poetry is vague here but it seems to mean both early Islamic and Umayyad but not Abbasid.

representing each motif consist of short fragments of verse conveying a single idea or motif, not long segments or whole poems. Moreover, Lyons observes that in his selection,

[Abū Tammām] is not concerned with the development of a concept but with the immediacy of the effect of poetry. He is referring to the ability of the craftsman poet to cut through obscurity in order to fulfil his purpose, and the purpose of poetry [...] is directly connected to an insistence on its power.\(^{218}\)

Moreover, he does not differentiate between ancient and modern poets, whereas in previous collections there had been a clear bias in favour of the ancient poets. In addition, Abū Tammām shows a fair degree of tolerance towards poetry whose poetic style he might have disliked personally. This can perhaps be read indirectly as the poet’s response to the critical opposition which his own poetry provoked. Thus it could be interpreted as a call for a tolerant and open-minded approach towards the diversity of poetic styles and patterns of composition. It is also possible, however, that his position had been weakened by the fierce criticism he received, so that he felt he had no choice but to include content that was incompatible with his personal poetic style.

One problematic element of this work, a practice also found in early collections and philological works, is Abū Tammām’s ‘correction’ of the ‘defects’ in verses by other poets. Some writers\(^{219}\) have defended Abū Tammām’s alterations, which obviously affected the authenticity of the originals, by arguing that he was highly regarded by philologists as a poet and a scholar of poetry.

Several Ḥamāsa books seem to have been inspired by Abū Tammām’s work, including one by al-Buḥṭurī, the poet’s student and, later, competitor. As he states in his conclusion, al-Buḥṭurī was motivated to compile his own Ḥamāsa as a challenge to Abū Tammām’s work.\(^{220}\) Although al-Buḥṭurī’s book consists of no fewer than 174 chapters it does not provide any useful theoretical framework or explanation of the selection criteria, simply resorting to the obvious device of grouping motifs together in each chapter.

However, purposes other than the critical evaluation of poets and poetry were also served by these anthologies, and included moral and cultural aims. According to Montgomery “al-Ḥamāsah of Abū Tammām, and similar anthologies, [...] attest to an antiquarian interest in


\(^{219}\) In their introduction to *Sharḥ Dīwān al-Ḥamāsa*, Hārūn and Amin trivialise this conduct, viewing the modification of others’ work as harmless. Al-Marzūqī, vol.1, pp.9-10. However, by today’s standards this conduct would be seen as unacceptable/unethical since the transmitter of poetry should not in any way alter the original, and if any defects are noted, these may be referred to in a separate note.

the Jāhiliyyah among the Abbasid reading public” and also indicate “the Abbasid elite’s attempts to shape their chivalrous ideals after the code and conduct of the pre-Islamic heroes, a phenomenon mocked by the Shuʿābiyyah”.

Another kind of anthology which emerged after al-Asmaʾiyyāt and al-Muḥaḍdaliyyāt is exemplified by al-Shīʾr wa al-Shuʿārāʾ. Like the other works of this type, its first section is introductory in nature, detailing the author’s plan of the book, his classification of good and bad poetry, and a discussion of the defects of poetry, particularly in inflection (iʿrāb), and of the works of early or pioneer poets. The second and by far the longer section is a list of over two hundred poets with a brief introduction to each including an example or examples of his work, accompanied by Ibn Qutayba’s evaluation of the poet and his poetry.

Ibn Qutayba provides a theoretical framework for his book and states in his introduction that he has chosen poetry which reflects his personal opinion. He divides poetry into four types: (1) poetry with significant meaning and expression; (2) poetry with significant meaning but poorly expressed; (3) poetry with an ordinary meaning which is extremely well expressed, and (4) poetry with insignificant meaning which is also poorly expressed. He then adds that there are other general reasons for admiring, memorising, and choosing poetry, explaining:

Poetry might be memorised for reasons other than quality of expression and meaning. It may be memorised and selected for many other reasons including well-chosen simile […] or dexterity of rhyme. [Poetry] might also be memorised and selected because its composer did not compose anything other than that [poem or verse] or because there is so little of his poetry […]. It might also be chosen because its meaning is unusual […] or due to the nobility of its composer.

Ibn Qutayba’s work can be considered of significance for a number of reasons. Firstly, he was one of the earliest scholars to defend the right of later poets to be quoted and admired, a view which ran counter to the mainstream of critical opinion in his time, which was mainly philological in nature. In the introduction to his work he even criticises some of the most notable lughawiyūn such as Abū ‘Amr b. al-ʿAlāʾ, stating:

223 Ibid., pp.84-86.
In my selection I did not follow the path of those who select or admire [the poetry selected] because someone else has done this [before them]. And I did not unduly respect early [poetry] just because of its precedence, nor do I despise the later [poetry] because of its modernity. Rather I rightly give each group what they deserve. I have observed, however, that some of our scholars prefer absurd poetry and include this in their selections just because its author is ancient, and they reject the good poetry which was composed in their own times. Allah never limited poetry, knowledge and eloquence to certain times or people, He ensured that all this was shared and divided between all of His servants in every age. Allah also made what has now become old modern in its own lifetime [...]. Jarīr, al-Farazdaq and al-Akhtal were once regarded as muhdathūn [modernists]. Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā’ once said: “This muhdath has increased and enhanced to the extent that I considered transmitting it.”

The second reason for the importance of this book lies in Ibn Qutayba’s classification of poetry based on the significance of the meaning of the verses and their form of expression. He identified four types of poetry according to the quality of their expressions and meanings, and despite its apparent simplicity the dichotomy of expression versus meaning continued to occupy literary discussions in classical Arabic literature for centuries.

A third element which distinguishes Ibn Qutayba’s work is the critical analysis he applied to the evaluation of poetry which had been conducted by those critics and philologists who had preceded him, taking issue particularly with their criteria for selecting poetry. Many examples in al-Shī’r wa-l-Shuʿarā’ indicate Ibn Qutayba’s independent thinking regarding the evaluation of the poetry he selected, an unconventional practice which some of the most eminent scholars before him never dared to adopt. For example, Ibn Qutayba criticises al-‘Aṣma’ī’s fulsome admiration of al-Muraqqish’s verses:

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224 Ibid., p.62-63.

225 For instance, al-‘Aṣma’ī was one of those who paid more attention to expression and structure than to meaning, believing this to be less important, and obvious. According to him: “Meanings are in plain view and understood by Arabs and non-Arabs, Bedouins and city dwellers. But the importance lies in establishing the metre, selecting the right expression, and facilitating pronunciation, and in avoiding inflexibility and dry language, as well as relying on natural flow and excellence in construction, for the reason that poetry is a craft, a type of tapestry, and a kind of depiction or imagery”. Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr ibn Bahr al-‘Aṣma’, al-Hayawān, ed. by ‘Abdul-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairol: Sharikat wa-Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlādīh, 1965), vol. 3, pp. 131-132.
Have the dwellings become deaf, since if they were alive they would speak? Youth, never surrender to afflictions, and so never envy your brother if it is said: he governs.

I am surprised by al-Aṣma’ī’s inclusion of this in his selections. Although its rhythm is incorrect, its rhyme is poor and its expression is not well chosen or pleasant. In fact I could not find any aspect of it attractive, except for the verse in which he says:

“The smell is musk and the faces are golden coins and the palm-sides are ‘anam [red berries].”  

However, the poetry of three of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ (Ibn Harma, Ru’ba and Ibn Mayyāda) was included in al-Shi’r wa al-Shu’arā’, and Ibn Qutayba describes Ibn Harma as a sāqat poet. Ibn Qutayba provides brief information about each of these poets and includes extracts from their poetry with the exception of Ru’ba, in connection with whom he quotes several instances in which he was criticised for making poetic mistakes such as sariqāt (poetic plagiarism). Surprisingly, he also mentions several linguistic and lexical defects appearing in the work of Ibn Harma and Ibn Mayyāda. This is interesting as it was believed that Ru’ba and the rest of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ used perfect Arabic. However,

226 Ibn Qutayba, pp.72-73. In a similar comment about al-Aṣma’ī and other scholars, al-Jāḥiẓ remarks:

I sought knowledge of poetry with al-Aṣma’ī but I found that he masters only its unusual words (gharīb), so I tried al-Akhfash but I found that he masters only its inflection (i’rāb); then I turned to Abū ʿUbayda but I also found that he masters only what relates to history and genealogy. I only found what I wanted with the literary writers such as al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb. Al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Bayān, vol.1, p.76. However, this statement should be considered with another statement in which he elaborates more on this point, after listing the specific interest of each party in poetry he states:

I have – after long examination – realised that all of them [the philologists] never pay attention to anything except for carefully selected expressions and meanings, sweet words with easy pronunciations, elegant formulas, natural endowment and fine arrangement (sabk) [of expressions]. See: ibid., vol.4, p.24. Accordingly, al-Jāḥiẓ does not seem to be suggesting that they cannot master poetry which is outside their own interest; rather he is explaining their perspectives, which are motivated by the nature of the specific field of study for which they employ poetry in their discussions.
this may suggest that the authenticity of their language was vouched for by grammarians rather than by philologists and lexicographers.

It seems that Ibn Qutayba was not prepared to give unconditional support to muḥdath poetry and poets and, somewhat surprisingly, he states that old poetic traditions must not be modified. For example, after listing the sections of the classical qasīda which would normally follow on from the introductory nasīb, namely the description of the journey and the mount finishing with the description of the patron’s palace and the praise section, Ibn Qutayba states:

Later poets must not deviate from the doctrine of the earlier poets in these sections. They should not stop by and weep over an inhabited dwelling since their predecessors stopped by ruined dwellings. They also should not describe travelling on a donkey or a mule since the ancients travelled on camels. They should not pass by fresh running water since the ancients passed by turbid water. They also should not walk to their patrons through daffodils, myrtle and roses because the ancients used to walk through wormwood, basil and pulicaria.

One possible explanation for Ibn Qutayba’s somewhat ambivalent attitude toward change and modern views of muḥdath poetry is that he perhaps wanted the traditions of panegyrical poems, in particular,227 to be maintained, especially for poets who would serve in courts since the poetic traditions he was referring to are those of the panegyrical poem. However, it also demonstrates that even the more open-minded scholars in the third hijrī century were not prepared to tolerate what they saw as excessive change in the poetic traditions of classical Arabic literature.

Ibn Qutayba’s second book, Kitāb al-Maʿānī al-Kabīr fī Abyāt al-Maʿānī, exemplifies the poetic anthologies based on motifs and organised by motifs or topics. These anthologies include contributions from the later muḥdath poets together with pre-Islamic and Islamic verse. However, this work provides little, if any, critical discussion, its prime concern being to bring together a vast amount of poetry, collected in three volumes and organised into seven chapters with dozens of sub-headings within each chapter. The chapters focus on various aspects of poetry relating to horses; lions; food and hospitality; insects;

227 Van Gelder, Beyond the Line, p.44.
warnings; and warfare, whilst the seventh chapter includes gambling, descriptions of poets and poetry, elegies, and virtues.

Another book of poetry selections based on motifs is *al-Ashbāh wa-l-Nazāʾir* by al-Khālidiyyān.\(^{228}\) This book is noteworthy for its promotion of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry in an attempt to appeal to those who preferred *muḥdath* poets and poetry. Its foreword is dedicated to a noble of that time who, as the book’s introduction suggests, was a great admirer of *muḥdath* poetry. With this in mind, the authors of the collection sought to convince him that what he admired in *muḥdath* poetry had originated in Islamic and pre-Islamic poetry, although it is clear that the authors also admire the innovations of *muḥdath* poetry.\(^{229}\)

This book brings an innovatory addition to the poetry compilation genre by giving credit to those pioneers who invented certain motifs or expressions. On the other hand it also highlights those poets who appropriated the achievements of their predecessors. In short, the collection tries to maintain a balance between old and new by admiring the achievements and inventions of the early poets as well as pointing out the beauty of later poetry whilst not forgetting to include examples of less well-known but talented poets.\(^{230}\)

Later philologists produced more systematically organised books which have clear criteria, Ibn Sallām al-Jumāḥī’s *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shuʿarāʾ* being a good example of this type. The book divides poets into ten categories or classes (*ṭabaqāt*), each containing four poets from the same era who are judged by Ibn Sallām to be at approximately the same level of poetic excellence. The criteria on which he bases his selections are: the quality of the poetry; the quantity of poems produced; the multiplicity of the motifs employed by the poet and the themes upon which he composed; and the poet’s tribal affiliation.\(^{231}\)

Gamal argues that Ibn Sallām “did not intend to rank poets”,\(^{232}\) but simply aimed to group them according to their similarities, which means that there is no difference implied in quality between, for example, the 10th *ṭabaqā* and the 35th. However, whether Ibn Sallām aimed to rank the poets or simply to group them, the work as a whole indicates the extent to which poetry was analysed and measured during that stage in Arabic literary criticism.

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\(^{228}\) Al-Khālidiyyān refers to the two brothers Muḥammad ibn Ḥāshim al-Khālidī and Saʿīd ibn Ḥāshim al-Khālidī.


\(^{230}\) Ibid., p.2-3.

\(^{231}\) Gamal, pp.200-201.

\(^{232}\) Ibid., p.200.
2.4 Between Linguistic Evidence and Poetic Preference

Analysis of many of the early poetic compilations composed by both philologists and literary writers suggests that some sort of distinction was maintained by these compilers between a poet’s style and his linguistic authenticity. The linguistic correctness of a poet was discussed by philologists, whilst comments on syntax were made only within specific contexts. However, there was a period when philologists were in charge of both compiling poetry collections and documenting pure Arabic, leading to a blurring of the distinction between the two elements.

Al-Iskandarī asserts that the distinction between quoting poetry for linguistic purposes and for rhetorical ones was actively present in the mind and work of early scholars in Arabic literature. In his discussion of muwallad poetry he states:

ويريدون بالموئدين من تعلموا العربية بالصناعة، [...] ولا يستشهد بكلامهم في لغة ولا نحو، ويستشهد به في البلاغة،
لأن البلاغة ترجع إلى الذوق العام أو الخاص، وهو متكامل عند بلغاء كل زمان.

They mean by Muwalladīn those who acquired Arabic through learning. Their speech cannot be quoted in philology or syntax but it can be quoted in rhetoric because rhetoric is related to either popular or specialist taste and can be acquired by rhetoricians in every period.233

Moreover, al-Ḥabbās clearly asserts that there was also a clear differentiation drawn between linguistic and rhetorical faṣāḥa; linguistically, it means purity of language and in rhetoric it means purity of style or eloquence. He justifies this claim by referring to several pieces of evidence. Firstly, early philologists travelled into the desert because they sought to collect the language from people who had never been in contact with the world outside their tribe, meaning that their language had remained pure and uncorrupted by linguistic errors (lahn). Al-Ḥabbās claims that this isolation of the desert Bedouins is the reason given for quoting all desert-dwellers, even if they were only children or illiterate, whilst at the same time refusing to quote highly educated individuals because they lived in cities.234

The second piece of evidence becomes obvious, according to al-Ḥabbās, when examining the different requirements of both rhetorical faṣāḥa and linguistic faṣāḥa. For instance, from the rhetorical perspective the familiarity and commonness of a word was an advantage in poetry as long as it suited its context; by contrast, the philologists preferred

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234 Al-Ḥabbās, p.1030.
the much-sought-after, highly unusual words rarely spoken in a desert context, even if they were atypical or did not comply with morphological standards.\textsuperscript{235}

Thirdly, philologists tended to differentiate between people who originated from the same tribe. Those who were living in the desert were quoted while those in urban environments were not, even those who had lived in the pre-Islamic era. Al-Ḥabbās gives the example of the Quraysh tribe: tribal members who lived in the desert were quoted, whilst city-dwellers were not, even though it was held that the language of the tribe had been spoken in its purest form in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, irrespective of the speaker’s place of residence.\textsuperscript{236}

Al-Ḥabbās’s claim is also supported by Sanni, who states that ‘laḥn’, which originally denoted linguistic errors, was also used to describe prosodic and rhetorical defects.\textsuperscript{237}

Therefore, it seems fair to suggest that in terms of early terminologies medieval Arabic sources did not have distinguishable jargon for every field or speciality and thus it is the task of today’s researchers to interpret them within their contexts and, more importantly, to bear in mind the possibility of cross-disciplinary terminologies.

To elaborate further on this point, it seems that philologists of the second and third hijrī centuries applied two different policies in their writings on matters related to poetry, depending on their purpose for writing. The first concerned their philological writings, in which they applied restrictive linguistic rules, particularly when they were quoting poetry for the documentation of pure Arabic language. However, when they were aesthetically evaluating the work of poets who could not be quoted to provide evidence of pure Arabic in philological studies, their policy regarding linguistic usage was more flexible.

Somewhat confusingly, philologists employed the same or similar terminologies in both these types of writing. I do not wish to claim that this was always their practice but it would be useful here to investigate some examples further in an attempt to clarify this point.

It seems appropriate to begin by referring back to the process of collecting the Arabic language which started at the end of the first hijrī century. According to al-Ḥabbās:

\begin{quote}
الفصاحة اللغوية: وهي التي نجدها عند النحاة واللغويين، وتعني عندهم عدم اختلاط صاحب هذه الفصاحة بغيره من الأمم التي تتكلم لغة غير لغته... ولنما بحث اللغويون والنحاة عن هذه الفصاحة في أواخر القرن الأول الهجري لم يجدوها متوفرة إلا في الأعراب الذين لم يختلطوا بغيرهم من الأمم، وللذا حددوا رقعة هذه الفصاحة زمناً ومكاناً.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., pp.1030-1031.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., pp.1036.
For philologists and grammarians, linguistic *faṣāḥa* implies that a person who has this quality must have never mixed with other nations who do not speak the same language. When scholars searched for this quality at the end of the first *hijrī* century they found that it still existed among Bedouin people who had never mixed with other nations. Thus the philologists and grammarians set limitations regarding the times and geographical locations where this *faṣāḥa* existed.\(^{238}\)

Muhammad Jabal notes that, in theory, several limitations were imposed by philologists who used quotations from poetry as evidence in their discussions. Limitations included using citations from certain tribes only, in certain geographical locations and chronological periods.\(^{239}\) Jabal cites several examples of tribes whose Arabic was quoted including Quryash, Sa’d ibn Bakr, Jushum ibn Bakr, Naṣar ibn Mu‘awiya, Thaqīf, Qays, “Tamīm, Asad, then Hudhayl, and some Kināna, and some of Ṭay’ […] and [apart from those] nothing was quoted from any other tribe”.\(^{240}\)

Regarding acceptable geographical locations, Jabal quotes al-Fārābī:

> وبالجملة فإنه لم يؤخذ عن حضري قط، ولا عن سكان البراري ممن كان يسكن أطراف بلادهم المجاورة لسائر الأمم الذين حولهم، [...] ولا من حاضرة الحجاز لأن الذين نظروا اللغة صادفون هم حين ابتدعوا ينظرون لغة العرب قد خالفوا غيرهم وفسدت ألسنتهم.

On the whole, neither city dwellers were quoted nor inhabitants of the wilderness who were close to other nations […] not even the people of urban Ḥijāz, because by the time language transmitters had begun collecting the Arabic language they had already mixed with others [people from outside Ḥijāz] and their language had become corrupted.\(^{241}\)

The last theoretical limitation mentioned by Jabal is in the realm of time, and according to him:

> هذا النطاق الزمني راجع إلى تقسيم الشعراء إلى طبقات: جاهليين ومحضرمين وإسلاميين ومولدين، وقصر الاحتجاج على شعراء الطبقات الأولى الثلاث بحث يقتضي عصره بوفاة آخر شعراء الطبقات الثالثة.

This chronological limitation was caused by the division of poets into categories: pre-Islamic, *mukhaḍramān* [poets whose lives straddled both pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras], [early] Islamic, and *muwalladān* [poets who were born around the end of the second *hijrī* century in cities or around the fourth *hijrī* century in deserts].\(^{242}\)

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\(^{238}\) Al-Ḥabbās, p.1035.


\(^{240}\) Ibid., p.76.


\(^{242}\) This is my translation of al-Iskandarī’s definition of *muwallad*; see: Al-Iskandarī, p.202.
Quotations were permissible only from the first three categories, which ended when the last poet in the third category died.\(^{243}\)

Jabal then discusses some examples of ways in which some philologists breached their own restrictions, attributing this behaviour either to their personal extremism and intolerance, or to the vague nature of the limitations. In reference to the lack of tolerance displayed by philologists, Jabal mentions the case of Abū ‘Amr b. ‘Alā’, who would not quote Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, referring to both of them as muḥdath despite the fact that they lived in the first hijrī century.\(^{244}\) Regarding the lack of precision evident in conforming to these limitations, Jabal mentions many examples of philologists quoting poets from outside the tribes or geographical areas regarded as the domain of faṣāḥa.\(^{245}\)

Ironically, in respect of the chronological boundaries, which limited the period from which poetry could legitimately be quoted (as evidence of authentic Arabic usage in philological discussions known as ihtijāj) to the era up to the middle of the second hijrī century, we find that Jabal, despite admitting the serious consequences which resulted from this restriction (namely that any subsequent development in Arabic was considered illegitimate) shows inconsistency, as he unaccountably does not use the timeframe he quotes earlier in his book.\(^{246}\) Nevertheless, analysis of some of Jabal’s examples of breaching chronological restrictions demonstrates that the contexts within which these quotations are found are mostly rhetorical. More importantly, it also reveals that a distinction was still being made by scholars when quoting for philological or rhetorical purposes.

Thus, Jabal refers to al-Asma’ī’s statement in which he calls Bashshār the khātam al-shī’r (seal of poetry) and admits that he would not favour any poet over Bashshār if he had lived at an earlier time. Jabal also refers to al-Jāḥiz’s testimony to Bashshār’s talent and ṭāb’ (natural endowment) in composing poetry. Jabal even mentions three of the most restrictive philologists, namely Abū ‘Amr,\(^{247}\) Abū Zayd and Abū ‘Ubayda, all of whom praised Bashshār’s poetry.\(^{248}\)

\(243\) Jabal, p.78.
\(244\) Ibid., p.102.
\(245\) Ibid., p.105.
\(246\) Jabal cites al-Iskandari’s statement in the context of agreeing with the view that muwallad poetry can be quoted in rhetorical but not in philological discussions, referring to the text, which is quoted in full from the original. (See: chapter 2, section 2.4, p.78), and: Jabal, p.84.
\(247\) Jabal referred to Abū ‘Amr as admiring Bashshār and cites an anecdote in al-Aghānī; however, it was not Abū ‘Amr who expressed this admiration, but his son Khalaf. It is worth quoting at length:

الأصمعي قال: كنت لشيء خلف بن أبي عمرو بن العلاء وخلفا الأحمير يأتين بشارا ويلسان عليه بغية التعليم ثم يقولان: يا أبا معاذ، مالختتحدث؟ فيبشرها ويبشدهما ويشتغلا ويشتغلا عنهم متواضعين له حتى يأتي وقت الظهر ثم ينصراه عنهم، فأتياه يوما فقالا له: ماهذ القصيدة
In addition, al-Iṣfahānī makes it clear that the philologists’ appreciation was for Bashshār’s style of poetry and his skilful composition:

كان الأصمعي يعجب بشعر بشار كثرة فنونه وسعة تصرفه، ويقول: كان مطعوًا لا يتلف طبعه شيئا متعدرا لا كمن يقول البيت ويحككه أياما.

Al-Aṣmaʿī was an admirer of Bashshār’s poetry because of the abundance of his artistic methods and richness of choices and al-Aṣmaʿī often says: “He had a natural gift for poetry which made poetic composition an easy matter for him, unlike some others who would compose a verse and spend days polishing it”.  

All these statements suggest that while the philologists admired Bashshār’s poetic talent or style, this admiration was insufficient for al-Aṣmaʿī to include Bashshār in the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ which we may attribute to the politics of the era, Bashshār’s ideological stance (shuʿūbiyya) or his poetic style being seen as different from that of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. Jabal did in fact discover two examples in which Bashshār’s poetry is quoted in connection with syntax, but he regards these as unjustifiable exceptions, including the case in which Sībawayh quotes him to avoid his satire.

Similarly, analysis of criticism directed at the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ indicates that the distinction between the rhetorical and the philological use of quotations was also applied to the poets in this group. Firstly, both Ibn Harma and Ibn Mayyāda were inhabitants of the outskirts of Medina, and we have already discussed the practice of not quoting dwellers in cities as sources of correct philology and syntax. Nevertheless their poetry was quoted in both linguistic and rhetorical discussions, which suggests that these restrictions were not always followed by all linguists; or that al-Ḥabbās’s and Jabal’s comments regarding those restrictions were not accurate, at least in the case of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ; or that the case of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ was exceptional.

Secondly, in Ibn Qutayba’s al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ, we find that al-Aṣmaʿī cites a number of defects in Ruʿba’s poetry; five of these errors relate to morphology and four to lexis. A

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, ‘I witnessed Khalaf ibn Abū ʿAmr and Khalaf al-Aḥmar going to Bashshār, greeting him most respectfully and then asking him: “Oh Abū Muʿadh, what was your latest [poem]?” So, he told them about it and recited it for them, and they questioned him and humbly sat to write till midday, then they left. One day they came and asked him: ‘What about that poem you composed about Salm b. Qutayba?’ Bashshār replied: ‘That was the one you heard’. Then they asked: ‘We were told that you overloaded it with gharib’. So, he replied: ‘Yes, I heard that Salm claims to know about gharib so I wanted to bring him things he has never known’.

248 Jabal, p.111.
250 Jabal, p.114.
further two errors relate to sariqāt (poetic plagiarism) and to his failure to manage smooth transitions between the themes or sections of a poem (husn al-takhalluş). So, if al-Aṣmaʿī’s intention was to categorise the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ as one group in order to claim they were the last poets whose language was uncorrupted, as Ḥannā Ḥaddād suggests, then why would he place Ruʿba among them knowing that his language contained these philological errors? It is obvious therefore that Ruʿba does not fit Ḥaddād’s interpretation of the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ to mean that they are the last poets whose language can be trusted and quoted. As stated previously, this implies that the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ relates to a description of their style and is not just testimony to the purity of their language.

Thirdly, it is also clear that Ḥumāra b. Ṭaqī, who spent some periods of his life in Baghdad and died in the third hijrī century was not included in al-Aṣmaʿī’s original selection of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ; rather, Ḥumāra was added later to the group due to the similarity between his style and theirs. More importantly however, like Ruʿba, Ḥumāra’s language was not perfect and contained many errors for which he was criticised. According to al-ʿAzzāwī, the philologist Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, a student of al-Aṣmaʿī, viewed Ḥumāra ibn Ṭaqī’s language as untrustworthy, identifying many morphological errors in his poetry,251 which also suggests that the scholars who succeeded al-Aṣmaʿī and included Ḥumāra in the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ group were concerned with the poets’ style rather than their language.

2.5 Conclusion

This investigation of early critical activities, which were practised mainly by philologists in the eighth century C.E., aimed to extract clues that might help us understand the implications of the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ since al-Aṣmaʿī did not leave us any, and it is assumed that he did not explain his intentions to his contemporaries. Such an explanation might not have been necessary, as they all shared the same environment and were influenced by the same circumstances.

Having investigated the critical activities conducted in al-Aṣmaʿī’s lifetime, it seems reasonable to ask the question: is it possible to find any systematic criteria or even the foundations of a literary theory in this philological criticism? One must approach this issue cautiously, carefully contextualising any statement regarding this question. Although it would be wrong to claim that all philologists who dealt with poetry in the second and third hijrī centuries applied discernible criteria or had a specific literary theory in mind concerning the nature of good or bad poetry, it is still possible to find evidence which can

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251 Al-ʿAzzāwī, p.65.
go some way towards reconstructing the kind of critical principles or criteria which were employed during that period. This in turn will help to recreate the critical milieu within which the poetry of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* was analysed and their group identified.

One immediately obvious feature of philological criticism is that it pays more attention to the poets’ shortcomings than to their achievements. The mistakes which philologists highlight are largely of a linguistic nature and few of their comments relate to aesthetic or stylistic defects. This is understandable since originally their prime concern was the poets’ language and only later did they move on to compiling poetry collections and categorising poets.

The second striking feature of philological criticism is the partiality which it displays in its treatment of poetry together with the impressionistic and sometimes wholly subjective nature of its critical evaluations. Relevant examples of these defects can be found in the absolute favouring of old poetry over modern and contemporary, before making any attempt at a fair comparison of poetic compositions from those eras. There is evidence that this intolerant attitude improved over time but never to the extent of regarding the poetic talents of ancient and modern poets as comparable.

The third feature which characterises philological criticism is that it was influenced by the socio-political circumstances of the eighth century C.E. and ideology played an important role in determining some of its criteria and, in turn, informed the outcomes of that criticism. We have seen manifestations of this ideology in the reliance on the Bedouins, claiming the superiority of the *irār* language to that of urban speakers, and disdaining to quote some poets because of their ethnicity, religious doctrine or political stance.

Finally, despite the fact that philological critics in the second and third *hijrī* centuries, whose work has been analysed in this chapter, did not produce a comprehensive literary theory or even clearly discernible criteria and guidelines for the evaluation of poetry, it has still proved possible to identify some of their preferences in poetry. These suggest that when a poet’s work is seen to comply with the following requirements it would have been regarded as good poetry from the perspective of philological criticism.

The first of these requirements clearly shows the influence of the Bedouins, which relates to *fasāḥa*; meaning that at the linguistic level a poet’s work should precisely and absolutely conform to all the rules governing Arabic grammar, syntax, morphology and lexicon. In theory, any linguistic defects, even minor errors, were unacceptable, although in reality it is possible to find many exceptions to this rule. The second requirement relates to style and
entails following the philologists’ preferences regarding poetic composition, for example, including vocabulary used by Bedouin and unusual words.

The third requirement is that the poetry should indicate that the poet has a natural poetic talent (maṭbūʿ) and according to al-Aṣmaʿī this is indicated by fluctuations in the level of quality in a poet’s work; perfect work has been overly crafted. Other requirements were implied indirectly by some philologists, such as the use of a broad range of motifs and both quality and quantity of poetic composition. However, the categorisation of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ is not sufficiently justified by these requirements, which merely cover some basic elements related to the poets or their poetry and say almost nothing about the poetics or the cultural value of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, which the next four chapters will consider.

In summary, this chapter has shown that the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ emerged in the environment of philological criticism in the second and early third hijrī centuries which held the Bedouins, their language and their poetry in high regard. This was also a period when criticism was still in its infancy and a combination of philological and non-philological standards were applied when dealing with poetry.

It has also been demonstrated that the misunderstanding of the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ which some later writers displayed was a result of their not recognising the manifold commitments of philologists, who were tasked with both collecting and preserving the Arabic language whilst also evaluating poetry and categorising poets. The chapter has also explored the sometimes fraught relationship which existed between poets and critics and has highlighted its effects on criticism and poetry.

The second part of the chapter surveyed a number of critical productions authored in the same era by both philologists and non-philologist critics and writers. This analysis revealed the extent to which these works employed systematisation and used criteria for the purposes of critical comparison. In addition, the discussion illustrated the trends and developments in authorship within philological criticism and particularly in the production of poetic compilations and the critical criteria employed in that era. Finally the chapter summarised the criteria and features which represent the preferences of philological criticism with regard to the evaluation of the quality of poetry.
Chapter Three: Rajaz Poetry; Issues of the Genre and its Place in the Poetry of the Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ

“God loves that which is lofty and dislikes that which is lowly. Rajaz is really a low sort of poetry: You, people, have fallen short so you have been given short measures.”

Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī

3.1 Introduction

Rajaz was perpetually caught in the crossfire between those who regarded it as a ‘low’ and artless type of poetry and those who considered it to be the highest form of poetry. Of great interest, for the purposes of this current discussion, is the fact that al-ʿAṣmaʾī numbered Ruʾba ibn al-ʿAjjāj, a poet who only wrote rajaz, among the members of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. This chapter will explore the reasons for al-ʿAṣmaʾī’s decision to include Ruʾba within this grouping, considering whether he was simply deluded by the sheer quantity of unusual words in the poet’s work or whether this inclusion can indeed be justified.

Definitions of rajaz and its general standing within Arabic literature and, more specifically, within the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ will be considered along with the nature of rajaz, examining how it was received by medieval Arab critics and how the rujjāz reacted to the praise or criticism they were given. Then the rajaz of Ruʾba and the other poets in the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ group will be investigated through a detailed analysis of a selection of rajaz poetry composed by Ruʾba and Ibn Mayyāda, shedding light on the nature of this genre, its stylistic features, its poetic or aesthetic significance, and the similarities in the approach taken by the members of this grouping in their rajaz compositions.

3.2 Towards a Definition of Rajaz

According to al-Ṣiḥāḥ dictionary, the term ‘rajaz’ literally refers to a trembling or twitching in camels, which is “an illness which infects some camels in their back legs, making them shake noticeably when they stand up”. A camel suffering from this defect is referred to as arjaz (for male) or rajzāʾ (for female). The borrowing of critical and literary terms from animal terminology was a common practice in classical Arabic literary tradition. Thus it appears that the term rajaz was applied to this type of poetry due to a

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254 Ibid.
255 For example the words faḥl and fuḥūla, commonly used to describe poetic excellence in medieval Arabic criticism, were borrowed from animal terminology, originally referring to a fertile bull camel. Moreover, the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ itself may also have its origins in animal terminology since sāqat has two meanings:
perceived similarity between the camel’s trembling and shaking, and the fact that consecutive tones in the rhythm of this metre alternate between motion and stillness. The metre is built from mustaf’ilun /0/0/0\textsuperscript{256} which is repeated either six or four times with three feet in each hemistich or two as follows:

\[
\text{mustaf’ilun - mustaf’ilun - mustaf’ilun} \quad \text{mustaf’ilun - mustaf’ilun - mustaf’ilun}
\]
\[
/0/0/0 - /0/0/0 - /0/0/0 \quad /0/0/0 - /0/0/0 - /0/0/0 \textsuperscript{257}
\]

Controversy surrounded rajaz in many medieval Arabic critical discussions as it was “excluded from the qaṣīda canon (referred to as qarūd poetry) by medieval Muslim literati”\textsuperscript{258} whilst others declared rajaz not to be a form of poetry at all. Perhaps the most prominent among the latter was al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad al-Farāhīdī (d.173 A.H. / 789 C.E.), the founder of Arabic prosody. Despite the fact that he “treated rajaz as an ’arūd meter no different from other meters”,\textsuperscript{259} it was reported that he did not regard rajaz as poetry due to the brevity of its verse, which was shorter than that of qarūd or qaṣīd,\textsuperscript{260} only half or two thirds as long as that of other poetic verse forms.\textsuperscript{261}

Al-Khalīl has a rather weak justification for his argument, claiming that if rajaz was poetry then the Prophet Muhammad would not have composed a verse of it. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have composed two lines of rajaz on two different occasions, the first while building the mosque in Medina:

\begin{quote}
أناّ النبيّّ لا كَذِبَتْ \\
أناّ ابنٌ عبدِ المطلب
\end{quote}

I am the Prophet, no lying, I am the descendant of ’Abdul-Muṭṭalib

And the second when his toe was injured in a battle:

\begin{quote}
هلّ أنتِّ إلَّا إصْبِحُ دِمْيت \\
وفي سبيلِ اللهِ ما مَلْقِت
\end{quote}

the rearguard of an army, or the last camels in a caravan. This practice of coining words for critical concepts which were used by the early medieval Arabic literati merits further investigation, as it may shed light on the extent to which they were innovative in their creation of critical terminology and precise in its usage.\textsuperscript{256} Here the sign: / represents the consonant letters and the sign: 0 represents the vowels.

\textsuperscript{256} Frolov, pp.242-243.
\textsuperscript{258} Frolov, p.242.
\textsuperscript{259} Frolov, p.242.
\textsuperscript{260} Detailed discussion of the meaning of qarūd and qaṣīd will follow shortly, but it is worth mentioning that the written form of rajaz in medieval sources is rather confusing, because each hemistich containing three feet of mustaf’ilun is rhymed and grammatically independent from the previous and the following hemistich. However, it is still written as two hemistichs in one line making them appear like a single verse composed of two hemistichs. Logically, it seems that it should be written as one hemistich in each line. For more elaboration on the written format of rajaz and its historical development, see Frolov’s study of rajaz, which examines several hypotheses on the evolution of rajaz. However, in the absence of concrete historical evidence, Frolov himself suggests that these hypotheses “should be treated with reserve”. Ibid., p.241.

You are nothing but a toe injured for the sake of God.  

Al-Khalīl draws on the Qur’anic verse: “And We did not give Prophet Muhammad knowledge of poetry, nor is it befitting for him. It is not but a message and a clear Qur’an”.  

Al-Khalīl understood the verse to imply that the Prophet Muhammad was, by divine will, incapable of composing poetry. However, this seems to be a misinterpretation of what might be intended by this verse. The verse seems to deny that the Qur’an is poetry or that the Prophet Muhammad is a poet, thus it suggests that what God revealed to him is not poetry; God did not teach Muhammad poetry simply because it was not befitting for him; becoming a prophet is the ultimate honour.

This interpretation is plainly stated by al-Zamakhsharī (d.538 A.H. /1143 C.E); he argues that the verse was revealed as a response to someone who claimed that the Qur’an is poetry and the Prophet Muhammad is a poet. Thus the purpose of this verse is to insist that the Qur’an is not, and cannot be, poetry:

Poetry is an utterance composed with a rhythm and a rhyme to convey a meaning. So where is the rhythm? And where is the rhyme? And where are the poetic meanings which the poets formulate? And how different is its structure from theirs! There is no relation between the Qur’an and poetry if you investigate.

Al-Zamakhsharī then discusses al-Khalīl’s suggestion that the Prophet cannot compose poetry; he sees the Prophet’s two lines of rajaz as normal utterances which could be said by any eloquent Arab who might not be a poet but would speak in this way intuitively without even realising that his speech rhymed or had a rhythm. In addition to al-

264 Here ‘befit’ is used to translate ‘yanbaghī’, which has other denotations in the context of negation (i.e. in Arabic mā- or lā- yanbaghī). It could imply ‘he should not do’ or ‘he cannot do’ (because of an external force preventing him from doing so). Thus the first is an instruction making a suggestion not to do something, while the second is a factual confirmation of the impossibility of doing something. In my opinion, the Qur’anic verse does not provide any indication about which interpretation is more likely to have been intended. Indeed, linguistically, it can mean both. However, the fact that the Prophet Muhammad was not known as a poet or to have composed poems, whether long or short makes the first interpretation of the verse more likely though it does not completely rule out the second. Therefore, it seems better to seek a contextual rather than a textual interpretation, i.e. since it is known that Arab tradition in pre-Islamic times held poets in high esteem, and since Prophecy gains much greater respect in society than poetry, the verse could imply the following interpretation: Prophecy is the very highest honour, and thus it would not be befitting for the Prophet Muhammad, after being blessed with the gift of Prophecy, to look for any other (less significant) honour. That is why mā- yanbaghī should be translated as “not befitting”. Therefore, al-Khalīl’s interpretation: ‘he will never be able to compose it’ seems incorrect.
Zamakhsharī’s interpretation, which seems convincing, it can be argued that uttering one or two lines of rhymed speech does not make someone a poet, since this title cannot be attached to anyone unless he composes many poems, and in order to become known as a poet in the classical Arabic era those poems needed to be good.

There were a handful of medieval literati and critics who regarded rajaz as a type of poetry, although they were not in agreement regarding whether rajaz was as good as qaṣīd or qarīḍ, or enjoyed a higher or lesser status. But before discussing their viewpoints it is important to clarify what is meant by qaṣīd and qarīḍ and the differences between them since these two concepts are important to an understanding of rajaz.

### 3.3 Rajaz: Between Qaṣīd and Qarīḍ

James A. Bellamy observes the different treatment rajaz received by both classical and modern scholars and suggests that

> Verses composed in rajaz are further distinguished from those in other meters by the lack of a caesura dividing the verse into equal halves. Thus one can legitimately speak of rajaz-poetry as a separate genre, but not of kāmil-poetry, or ṭawīl-poetry, etc., which are lumped together as šī‘r, qarīḍ, or qaṣīd.\(^\text{266}\)

However, it is worth examining in which ways rajaz was considered different by classical critics. Qaṣīd comes from the root ‘to intend’ (qaṣada). Thus Ibn Jinnī (d.392 A.H. / 1002 C.E.) suggests that the reason for naming poetry qaṣīd was because critics took into consideration the poet’s intention to compose utterances into long poems, these being preferred to short segments (whether from rajaz or ramal). It is also stated that the verse should be completed (tāmm) and possess all the standard number of feet in each hemistich.\(^\text{267}\) Moreover, the minimum number of verses should be three in order for it to be qaṣīd.\(^\text{268}\)

As for qarīḍ, this is used in a more generalised sense to mean all poetry, without providing any specifications. The profession of composing poetry is qarḍ al-shi‘r and the composed poetry is qarīḍ. Therefore, it follows that qarīḍ is the main category, which can be subdivided into two types of poetry, qaṣīd and rajaz, and the differences between these are both quantitative and qualitative. However, it should be noted that the two types are not

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\(^{268}\) Ibid.
completely distinct from each other but rather overlap in certain cases. For example, the long rajaz poem (urjūza) which has six feet of mustaf’ilun in each verse is regarded as a qaṣīda (singular of qaṣīd) according to al-Jawhari. 269

However, perhaps one of the key differences between rajaz and qaṣīd is to be found in their historical usage, as the two types were composed on different occasions and were received differently. Historically rajaz was composed on informal occasions such as during construction work, digging, herding and travelling on camels, or on the battlefield, whereas qaṣīd was reserved for more formal events. 270 Thus there appears to be a connection between the two terms ‘composing rajaz’ (irtijāz) and ‘improvisation’ (irtijāl).

This claim is supported by Badawi’s suggestion that some of the classical primary qaṣīdas “tended to be simple and straightforward” and were “composed in the rajaz metre and have an air of improvisation about them”. 271 More importantly, in the medieval sources there are many statements indicating that improvised poetry was often in the form of rajaz. 272 Moreover, in the context of improvisation Ibn Jinnī notes the talents of Ru’ba and his father al-ʿAjjāj for creating Arabic neologisms:

إن الأعرابي إذا قويت وصفحته وسممت طبيعته تصرف وارتجل ما لم يسبقه أحد قبله، فقد حكي عن رؤبة وأبيه: أنهما

كانتا يرتكجان ألفاظا لم يسمعاها ولا سبقها إليها.

When the Bedouin’s eloquence is strengthened and his nature is ennobled he begins to derive and improvise that which has never existed before him. It was narrated that Ru’ba and his father used to improvise words which they had never heard being spoken before. 273

In this statement ‘improvise’ (yartajilān) is used to describe the invention of new words, but the fact that this statement concerns two of the most famous rajaz composers, Ru’ba

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270 Frolov translated Ibn Rashīq’s comments on the development of rajaz and the shift from primitive genre to formality; many aspects of his text will be analysed throughout this chapter:

Abū ʿUbaydā said: ‘A poet used to compose two or three bayts of rajaz, or something close to it, while fighting or boasting or scolding, until al-ʿAjjāj, who was the first in it, made it long like Qaṣīd and included a love theme (nasīb) in it. He mentioned encampments and made riders stop at them, he described what had been related to them, crying over lost youth and describing beautiful girls, just as poets used to do in Qaṣīd. He became among composers of rajaz like Imruʾul-qays among poets’. Another scholar said: The first to make rajaz long was al-Aghlab al- ʿIlī, and he is an early poet. Al-Jumāhī and others asserted that he was the first to compose rajaz, but I do not consider this true, because the poet lived at the time of the Prophet, and we see that rajaz is more ancient than that.

See: Frolov, pp. 244-245.
272 For example, in al-Aghānī it is reported that when ʿAmr ibn Kulthūm saw his enemies on the battlefield he improvised two verses of rajaz. Al-İşfahānî, vol. 11, p.38.
and his father al-ʿAjjāj, indicates how close the two words (irtajala and irtajaza) are, not only in form but also conceptually.

The idea that some rajaz poems may have been improvised without the opportunity for due consideration or preparation makes it more likely that they would contain errors of a linguistic or aesthetic nature, decreasing their poetic value accordingly. This helps to explain the harsh criticism which rajaz and its composers received, as will be discussed shortly.

Ulmann gives another ‘excuse’ for the rajaz composers making some linguistic mistakes; he “establishes the thesis that the unusual constraints imposed by the shortness of the verse and the consequent need to find more rhymed words forced the rajaz-poet to stretch to its limits the Arabic system of word formation and to depart radically from the generally accepted rules of syntax”.275 The next section, however, considers those medieval critics who gave credit to this poetic form and its composers, suggesting that rajaz was a superior type of qarūd.

3.3.1 Medieval Literati’s Evaluation of Rajaz and Qaṣīd

Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī distinguishes between rajaz composers and other poets in his book Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl as-Shuʿarāʾ, referring to the former as what he calls the Ninth Class. He identifies four rajaz composers, namely Abū al-Najm al-ʾĪjlī, al-Aghlab al-ʾĪjlī, al-ʿAjjāj and his son Ruʾba,276 and does not include any qaṣīd composers in this grouping. However, this cannot be taken as concrete evidence that al-Jumaḥī saw rajaz as a different type of poetry, as his method of classification consisted of grouping together poets that, in his opinion, were at the same level of excellence or shared similar interests in a certain poetic theme or motif.

Similarly al-Jāḥiẓ made no clear distinction or comparison between rajaz and qaṣīd, commenting that: “There are among poets those who excel in qarūd who are unable to compose anything in the form of rajaz [...] and there are some other poets who can compose qarūd, rajaz and sermons”.277 In this statement there is nothing to suggest that a value judgement has been made or that al-Jāḥiẓ favoured one type of poetry over another.

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274 Reference was made previously to the many mistakes made by Ruʾba, mainly in morphology and vocabulary (See Chapter 2, section 2.4, pp. 82-83).
275 Bellamy, p. 805.
277 Al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Bayān, vol. 4, p. 84.
Later, Ibn Rashīq (d.456 A.H./1046 C.E) adopted al-Akhfash’s view on the classification of qarīd, qaṣīd and rajaz, with minor modifications. He focuses on the principal intention of the poet/composer, stating that any long ‘urjūza’ is a ‘qaṣīda’ provided that it takes the form of having six feet in each verse or four feet in each verse. According to him, therefore, every long rajaz poem with either six or four feet is a qaṣīda.

Al-Āṣmaʿī made no distinction between rajaz and qaṣīd, at least in his formulation of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ group, in which he included both the rajaz composer, Ru’ba, and qaṣīd composers. It seems that al-Āṣmaʿī was well acquainted with rajaz as another source suggests that he claims to have memorised a vast amount of arājīz, as many as 12,000 ‘urjūza’.

There is no way to verify his claim, but as he was praised in different contexts for his expert knowledge of poetry and his activities in transmitting this, it seems safe to assume that he knew a great deal of poetry including rajaz.

It is possible that al-Āṣmaʿī was influenced in his critical choices to a certain extent by the rajaz poems he himself had memorised. However one cannot ignore the significance of rajaz to philologists and dictionary compilers in al-Āṣmaʿī’s time and later, especially the work of Ru’ba, as the dictionaries overflow with quotations from this source. Lisān al-ʿArab alone contains over 1000 quotations from Ru’ba’s rajaz. More light will be shed on this topic later in this chapter.

278 Al-Akhfash states that:
القصيد من الشعر هو الطويل والبسيط والكامل والمديد والوافر التأم والوجز التأم والخفيف التأم، وهو كل ما تعالى به الركبان، قال: ولم نسمعهم يغون بالخفيف.

Qaṣīd [meters or rhythms] in poetry are: tawīl (faʿālūn mafāʿīlūn x 4), basīṭ tāmm (mustafʿīlūn faʿālūn x 4), madīd tāmm (fāʿīlūn fāʿīlūn x 2), ṭawīlūn tāmm (mufāʿalūn mufāʿalūn x 2), rajaz tāmm (mustafʿīlūn x 6) and khaṣīf tāmm (fāʿīlūn mustafʿīlūn x 2). With all of those [rhythms] travellers used to sing.

See: Ibn Manẓūr, vol.5, p.3643. This notion is concerned with the length of the verses and whether they are suitable for singing, thus al-Akhfash included what was composed in the metre of rajaz within qaṣīd provided that the rajaz verse contains the full six feet of mustafʿīlūn.

279 Al-Qayrawānī, vol. 1, pp. 181-82.


281 A thesis devoted to studying quotations from his poetry in the dictionary of Lisān al-ʿArab makes the suggestion that Ru’ba was not only well known for his improvised neologisms but was also endlessly inventive in making morphological changes to words, something which none of his contemporaries did. See: Hayfāʾ al-Sharīf, ‘Shawāhid Ru’ba fī Lisān al-ʿArab; Dirāsa Dilāliyya’, (unpublished master’s thesis: Hebron University, Hebron, 2009), pp. 337-338.
3.4 The Status of *Rajaz* and its Composers in Medieval Literary Sources

The appreciation of *rajaż* or *qasīd* for their linguistic value is largely irrelevant to the concerns of modern criticism, except for the assessment of the historical development of critical thought, but for classical critics and philologists it seems to have been a highly important issue. Interestingly, the philologist Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb (d.182 A.H. / 789 C.E), states that the most talented poets are *al-rujjāz*, specifically naming al-ʿAjjāj and his son Ruʿba. He justifies this by stating that poetry is a form of expression and the best expression has the highest poetic quality. Then he gives an example from al-ʿAjjāj’s poetry; a poem of some 200 verses which are intentionally rhymed so they can be read throughout in two different ways grammatically—as either *mawqūfa* (neutral/consonant) or *manṣūba* (in the accusative).282

However, his placing special emphasis on syntax as a criterion of excellence might be seen as evidence of bias, given his close association with Ruʿba. Moreover, as Bellamy notes, “anomalous features of the language of *rajaż*-verse” caused by the “the exigencies of rhyme and meter necessitates some rethinking of the methods employed by philologians. It is not methodologically sound to cite anomalous forms employed as poetic licenses as evidence for the true state of the language”.283

Other philologists had more moderately balanced views on *rajaż* and its composers, and can be considered more reliable. One of these, Abū ʿUbayda, praised *rujjāz* for outperforming *qasīd* poets:

> Poets tended to prevail until Abū al-Najm composed: “*al-ḥamd li-llāh al-Wahūb al-Mujzīlī*” (Praise be to Allah, the Bestower generously) and until al-ʿAjjāj composed: “*qad jabar al-dīn al-Ilāh fa-jubīr*” (Religion was complemented by God so it is complete), and until Ruʿba composed: “*wa-qātim al-aʾmāq khāwī al-mukhtaraq*” (A dusty, vast and empty desert) then they [the *rajaż* composers] outweighed them [the *qasīd* poets].284

This statement shows the difference made by these three individuals in changing perceptions of *rajaż* in their time. It should be noted that, in addition to al-Aghlab al-ʿIjlī, these three *rujjāz* are considered the most prominent in many literary sources, being those who brought *rajaż* to its highest level of excellence in the Umayyad age. Before that, *rajaż*

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283 Bellamy, p. 805.
284 Al-Ḥisfāhānī, *al-Aghānī*, vol. 10, p. 120.
was seen as inferior to *qašīd*, as demonstrated by an incident which occurred between Abū al-Najm and 'Abdul-Malik ibn Marwān. 'Abdul-Malik challenged Abū al-Najm by claiming that he could not compose *qašīd*, and when Abū al-Najm retorted “Yes I can”, 'Abdul-Malik responded: “Well, then say something to describe this slave-girl.” Abū al-Najm composed: “ʿaliq al-hawā bi-ḥabāʾ il al-Shaʾ thāʾ iʾ” (Passion is entangled in the traps of al-Shaʾthāʾ). 'Abdul-Malik was impressed by the poem and gave him the girl as a gift.285

Other versions286 of the same story suggest that some poets at the same event had doubted Abū al-Najm’s ability to compose *qašīd*, amongst them the famous Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq, who is reported to have once said: “Sometimes I think of composing *rajaz* but I choose not to do so, rising above that level”.287 In this statement, al-Farazdaq seems to suggest that he would not find it difficult to compose *rajaz* and therefore prefers to challenge himself by working instead on something which is hard to do.

The philosopher-poet Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarī took a similar view; he dismissed the aesthetic value of *rajaz* and even attacked its composers regarding the philological value of their poems and accused them of coining unusual words whose meaning they themselves did not know. However, al-Maʿarī as a poet approached poetry in a very complex way, composing, for example, a whole *dīwān* in which he restricted himself, especially in the rhyme, with many constraints not compulsory in Arabic prosody.288

As a critic, he expressed his thoughts concerning *rajaz* and its composers at some length,289 making many striking statements which deserve analysis and discussion. The first of these is his categorisation of *rajaz* as a low and artless type of poetry, an opinion which he justifies with several arguments. The first of these concerns the fact that the *ruijāz* were particularly proud of being quoted by philologists. Al-Maʿarī does not see any special

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289 See the relevant passage regarding his view on *rajaz* and its composers in the translation of Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarī’s *The Epistle of Forgiveness*, vol.1, pp. 319-323.
importance in this, noting that philologists were documenting the language as spoken by Bedouins and quoted everyone including uneducated children and women:

Ru’ba answers: “But surely your leader, in the past, whose views were accepted as normative, used to quote my verses as evidence, making me a kind of authority!” The Sheikh, quick at repartee, says, “Being quoted is nothing to boast about. For we find that they also quoted any sluttish slave girl who brings brushwood […] And how often grammarians quoted any tiny tot who knows of letters not a jot? Or any person of the female gender in need of a man to defend her?”

Secondly, according to al-Ma’arrī, rujjāz kept returning to descriptions of camels, a major theme in rajaz poetry which al-Ma’arrī regarded as a shortcoming of the form. However, although it is true that they composed many poems on this theme, these were often of excellent quality; evidently the urjūza by which Abū al-Najm was seen to outrun qaṣīd composers was in fact a description of a camel. Moreover, bearing in mind the background of the rujjāz, who were mainly desert-dwelling Bedouins, it is not surprising that they should be influenced by their immediate surroundings and use these repeatedly in their compositions.

Thirdly, the choice of obtrusive sounds such as ẓāʾ and ghayn for the rhyming scheme tends to produce rather odd and mediocre rhymes, creating verse endings which produce a rather harsh, even jarring, sound in the ears of the listeners. Moreover, al-Ma’arrī notes the absence of sweet-sounding and pleasant expressions, memorable proverbs and wise sayings in rajaz:

Ru’ba appears on the scene. The Sheikh says to him, “Abū l-Hajjāf! You were rather fond of unpleasant rhyme letters. You composed poetry on gh on t, on ẓ, and other intractable consonants! And you have produced not even a single memorable saying nor a single sweet expression.”

There is perhaps some justification for al-Ma’arrī’s first point, that poetry has no poetic or aesthetic value if it is used only as an inventory or chronicle loaded with strange words, some coined by the rujjāz themselves. It could, of course, also be argued that if those words had not been included in poetry, and passed on during the era of oral transmission, they would never have survived until the era of written documentation of the Arabic language. This may justify the educational and philological significance of rajaz but not its poetic and aesthetic merit, which is what al-Ma’arrī is concerned with in this context.

290 Ibid., p.321.
291 Ibid.
However, al-Ma’arrī seems to have exaggerated slightly when he claims that Ru’ba’s *rajaz* does not contain any pleasant-sounding expressions or memorable proverbs. The fact that Ru’ba was a well-established poet in the courts of various caliphs and notables suggests that they must have admired his poetry, otherwise he would not have been allowed to enjoy such a privilege. Moreover, one should bear in mind that al-Ma’arrī was himself a poet with unusual views and abilities which most of his contemporaries could not match or agree with, such as his *luzūmiyyāt*.

Furthermore, in Ru’ba’s *rajaz* we do find some proverbs and nuggets of wisdom, for example his hemistich about grey hair, to mention just one:

والشيبّ داء ما له من عسل

Grey hair is a stain which cannot be washed out.\(^{292}\)

Al-Ma’arrī draws attention to Ru’ba’s unusual habit of composing poems with odd rhymes made by ‘intractable consonants’ such as *ẓ* and *gh*. The poem al-Ma’arrī refers to is a panegyric which uses *gh* in its rhyming scheme and he seems to have thought it an inappropriate rhyme, given the theme and context of the poem. It is difficult for contemporary critics to judge its appropriateness because the addressee is unknown; he may have been an expert in *gharīb* and so the poem would have been ideally suited to him. Given the lack of evidence regarding this poem and its addressee it is difficult to make a meaningful critical judgement in this case. Moreover, there might have been good reason for the poet to choose an unusual rhyme letter, for example to suit an unusual situation or topic, and thus this would be a point in favour of the poet and not against him.

To continue with the theme of ‘intractable consonants’; investigation has failed to reveal any poem in Ru’ba’s *rajaz* which uses *ẓ* as its rhyming sound. There are several feasible explanations for this. Possibly al-Ma’arrī meant *ṭ*\(^{293}\) and this letter was somehow misread or misprinted later on as *ẓ* and a dot was added, which is a quite common erratum in Arabic books. Then again, it may simply have been an exaggerated claim made by al-Ma’arrī, or perhaps the poem was composed but did not survive and therefore cannot be found in Ru’ba’s *diwān*. Nevertheless it is worth mentioning that liking or disliking certain sounds can be considered very much a matter of individual taste; a sound might seem too contrived or coarse to some addressees whilst other listeners might view an unusual or harsh-sounding rhyme as a sign of a poet’s strength and ability to manipulate the language.

\(^{292}\) Nawāṣira, vol.1, p.103.
\(^{293}\) Poem (32) in Ru’ba’s *diwān* is rhymed with *ṭ*, see: Ru’ba, *Diwān*, vol. 1 pp.534-54.
It may have been Ru’ba’s intention to vaunt his poetic expertise in playing with the language by making compositions which deliberately included some obtrusive sounds (al-hurūf al-nāfira). As mentioned above, only one poem which uses ghayn was found and this poem does not constitute decisive evidence of Ru’ba’s excellence in composing rajaz. He tends to compose very long arājīz if the rhyme is a common or easy one. For instance, he wrote a poem of 241 lines rhyming with bāʾ, another of 239 lines with rāʾ and a panegyric of a staggering 399 lines using mīm; in the case of ghayn he only manages to write a single poem of just over 60 lines.

The length of a poem cannot be determined purely by the poet’s breadth of linguistic knowledge but can also be affected by other factors which may force the work to be shorter, such as the circumstances concerning the occasion on which the poem is delivered, for example a panegyric addressed to a patron. However, analysis of Ru’ba’s poem with the ghayn rhyme suggests that he was struggling to fill out the lines and the poem as a whole. For instance he uses polyptoton (jinās al-ishtiqāq) profusely where this does not add any rhetorical value to the poem’s meaning or structure, as in: khalṭun ka- khalṭi al-kādhibi (lying like the lying of a liar), zayghi al-zuyyaghī (delinquency of delinquents) and nāshighun fī al-nushaghī (to weep with those who wept).294

In other cases he repeatedly uses words consisting of two repeated syllables at the end of the word such as: muthaghthaghī (someone who speaks with difficulty), mutaghtaghī (someone who speaks in a low voice), al-mumaghmaghī (demented), yushaghshaghī (sipping a little water) and al-tasaghsughī (penetration). Here even a poet like Ru’ba who was accustomed to inventing new words seems to be reaching his limits.

Al-Ma’arrī also mentioned that Ru’ba was fond of describing camels but not horses or hunting dogs.295 There seems to be some justification for this opinion since Ru’ba appeared unable to do justice to the portrayal of horses and admitted that he did not know about horses in the same detail as camels. According to al- ’Iqd al-Farīd:

Ru’ba also erred while describing the legs of a horse: ‘They plunge separately and fall in together’, and when Ru’ba recited it to Muslim ibn Qutayba he responded:

294 Ibid., vol.2, pp.592,93,95,97.
295 Al-Ma’arrī, Epistle, p.321.
‘You erred in this, Abū al-Ḥajjāf, for you made it shackled’. Ruʾba said: ‘Bring me near a camel’s tail [I’ll describe it better]’. 296

Ruʾba admits he knows little about horses, but may be implying that he knows camels better than any other poet. As we might expect, camels and the desert environment occupied a good part of Ruʾba’s rajaz as in one of his three longest poems where over 170 lines are devoted to the desert. In fact, apart from panegyrics and fakhr (poems of self-praise) concerning himself and his tribe, descriptions of the desert and its wildlife are the only themes found in his dīwān. This is not surprising, as he spent long years in the desert herding his father’s camels. 297 But where his expertise was limited he did not do well; he was clearly no judge of horses.

As if the criticism al-Maʾarrī launched against rajaz in his imaginary journey to Paradise were not enough, he makes his opinion very clear in another book:

Poetry is one form of expression; if we can say so, then poetry is a [genre/type] and rajaz is a sub-type of it. I say this so you do not think that rajaz is not poetry […] but I cannot deny that rajaz is inferior to qaṣīd; but they [both] belong to the one type [poetry]”. 298

The views of Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb and Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʾarrī in comparing qaṣīd and rajaz seem irreconcilable, as the former regarded rajaz as the highest level of poetic creation whilst the latter considered it to be artless and ‘low’ poetry. However they are not the only medieval literati and critics who expressed opinions on the status of rajaz; more of these are considered in the following section.

3.5 Poets and their Assessments of Rajaz

It is interesting to consider rajaz from the perspective of its composers to determine how they assessed the poetic form in which they expressed themselves. Al-Aghlab al-ʿIjlī, (d.21 A.H. /642 C.E.) was one of the first rujjāz of those who came to prominence in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era to make a distinction between rajaz and qaṣīd, without favouring one form over the other. Apparently, when a patron asked him to recite some of his poetry, he replied:

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296 Ibn ʿAbd-Rabbih, vol.1, pp. 149-150.
You have asked for easy and accessible [poetry]; do you want a rajaz or a qaṣīd?299

In this verse hayyinan (easy) could be interpreted as describing the request and implying that the task he had been asked to perform was a simple one, but it may also be interpreted as the poet’s boast that he found composing both types of poetry equally easy.

The later composers of rajaz were, to a certain extent, aware of the shortcomings of the metre of rajaz as a short verse. In an argument which took place between the Umayyad poet Jarīr and al-ʿAjjāj, the core of Jarīr’s criticism of al-ʿAjjāj was that the fragments of rajaz which al-ʿAjjāj composed could not compete with the eloquence of his own long qaṣīd. Al-ʿAjjāj did not defend his composition, but instead apologised to Jarīr and stated that he would do anything to avoid confrontation with him.300 Al-ʿAjjāj seems to have overcome the brevity of the verse in rajaz metre by lengthening the poem itself, imitating the model of the classical qaṣīda and using it on formal occasions such as panegyrics in courts.

On the other hand, some of the poets who usually composed qaṣīd regarded the ability to compose rajaz as an additional talent. Bashshār ibn Burd claimed to be able to compose rajaz even better than 'Uqba, his father Ruʿba and his grandfather al-ʿAjjāj, apparently having been angered by 'Uqba’s claim that he, Bashshār, could not compose rajaz. He therefore composed an urjūza which begins:

يَا أَطْلَبُ الْحَيَّ يَا ذَاتِ الصَّمْدِ
بَاللَّهِ أَخْبَرْنِي كَيْفَ كَتَبْتُ بَعْدَي

O, traces of the dwelling of Dhāt al-Ṣamad, by God tell me what happened to you after I left.

When he finished reciting this poem he turned to 'Uqba and said: ‘I swear to God that you, your father or grandfather could never say anything like that’.301

We mentioned in the previous chapter the anecdote narrated by al-ʿAṣmaʾī that scholars used to sit humbly in front of Bashshār and ask him about his latest poem,302 notably one which Bashshār filled with unusual words only because someone had boasted that his knowledge of gharīb was better than Bashshār’s. Bashshār’s dīwān contains fifteen rajaz poems which include some unusual words, but none of these seems as difficult as those to be found in the rajaz of Ruʿba or his father al-ʿAjjāj.

302 See: Chapter 2, section 2.4, pp. 81-82.
Other sources indicate that the occurrence of *gharīb* in the poetry of poets who were not themselves experts or who had gained this knowledge by learning from books rather than living among the Bedouins was not viewed positively by philologists, such as the case of al-Kumayt and al-Ṭīrimāḥ, as we explained in Chapter Two. Thus, if these statements are considered together with the fact that the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* were Bedouins who used *gharīb* in their poetry, having genuine first-hand knowledge of those words and their correct usage, in addition to being of Arab descent, the criteria which al-ʿAṣmaʿī had in mind regarding the composition of the group becomes clearer.

### 3.6 The Rise of Rajaz

The difficult nature of *rajaz* may reflect the hardship of desert life and its harsh environment, and the unusual vocabulary that occurs in *rajaz* more than in *qaṣīd* may have resulted from a sense of fitting association between a hard life and hard words. Not surprisingly, some philologists termed such vocabulary ‘wild’ (*wahshī*). This makes *rajaz* more suitable to a desert rather than an urban environment. Nonetheless, as the Arab population shifted from Bedouin traditions to an urban lifestyle *rajaz* composers began to use this genre to address topics that had been exclusive to *qaṣīd*. The following statements show that *rajaz* was gradually being recognised as being similar to *qaṣīd* even before the time of al-ʿAṣmaʿī. This statement in *al-ʿUmda* shows that from the first hijrī century (seventh C.E.) *rajaz* became very similar in terms of length, content and form to *qaṣīd*:

أول من طول الرجز وجعله كالتقسيد الأغلب العجلي شيئاً سيراً، وكان على عهد النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، ثم آتي العجاج بعد فاقتن فيه، فالأغلب العجلي والعجاج في الرجز كامرأة القبس ومهلهل في القصيد.

The first to lengthen *rajaz* and to make it like *qaṣīd* to some extent was al-ʿAghlab al-ʿIjlī and that was at the time of the Prophet, then al-ʿAjjāj came after that and artistically fashioned it, thus al-ʿIjlī and al-ʿAjjāj in *rajaz* are like Imruʿ al-Qays and Muhalhil in *qaṣīd*.

This recognition that al-ʿIjlī and al-ʿAjjāj were pioneers among the early Islamic poets indicates that the two *rujjāz* managed to distinguish themselves and become a force for innovation in the composition of *rajaz*. Moreover, they brought *rajaz* a step closer to *qaṣīd* as it was no longer seen as simply an easy vehicle for improvising a couple of verses in time of war or for everyday matters. It began to be used in the composition of panegyric poems following the style of the classical Arabic ode, making use of all the themes and motifs which had only been used in *qaṣīd* poetry before al-ʿAjjāj:

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303 See Chapter 2, section 2.3.1, p.65.
304 Al-Qayrawānī, vol.1, p.189.
In the pre-Islamic era a man would compose two or three verses of rajaz in war and suchlike until [the time of] al-ʿAjjāj, when he opened its doors and made it like poetry [qaṣīd], describing dwellings and their people, deserts and their wilderness, camels and ruins. In early Islamic times he was likened to Imr al-Qays.305

So, clearly this step made some rajaz composers more appreciated, not only in courts but also among philologists and critics. This raises the question whether it was possible for rajaz composers to be seen as better than qaṣīd composers. It would appear that this was the case in some instances, as reflected in this statement about the philologist Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb, narrated by al-ʿAṣmaʿī:

Al-ʿAṣmaʿī said: “Yūnus was asked: ‘Who is the most poetic among people?’ He replied: ‘al-ʿAjjāj and Ruʿba’. So he was questioned: ‘In poetic terms they [al-ʿAjjāj and Ruʿba] are better than the composers of qaṣīd because poetry is an expression and the best of it is the most poetic’.”306

The fact that this statement was narrated by al-ʿAṣmaʿī suggests that he may have agreed with Yūnus’s opinion about the superiority of al-ʿAjjāj and Ruʿba. More support for Yūnus’s argument comes from Abū ʿUbayda, who points out that rajaz composers surpassed those of the qaṣīd and mentions Ruʿba, his father al-ʿAjjāj, Abū al-Najm and al-Aghlab al-Ijlī.307

However, some form of distinction was maintained between qaṣīd and rajaz up until the late medieval era, a differentiation which is evident in al-ʿUmda in the fifth hijrī (eleventh C.E.) century:

Therajazقلمايقصد؛فإنجمعهماكاننهايةنحوأبيالنجم؛فإنهكانيقصد،وأماغيلانفإنهكانراجزاًثمصارإلىالتقصيد،وستعلذذلكفقال:رأيتنيلاقعمنهذينالأوائلينعلىشيء،يعنيالعجاجوروبية،وكانجبري والفزردقيرجزان،وكذلكعمربنلجأكانراجزاًمقصدا،ومثلهحميدالرقط،والأعماني أيضا،وهنافرحزةالفزردق.وليسيسجعالرجزعلىالمقصدمثبتةالقصيدعلىالرجز،لانترىأنكلمقصدم يستطيع أن يبرجزوانهذهصعبعليهبعضالصعوبة،وليسكلرجزيسجععلىمقصد.

307 Ibid. vol.10, p.120.
A rajaz composer rarely composes ḍāṣīḍ, but if he can do both he becomes outstanding like Abū al-Najm, as he [also] composed ḍāṣīḍ. Ghaylān [Dhū al-Rumma] was a rajaz composer, then he moved to ḍāṣīḍ, and when he was asked about that he said: “I realised that I cannot achieve anything with these two men”, meaning al-ʾAjjāj and his son Ruʿba. Jarīr and al-Farazdaq used to compose rajaz, as did ʿUmar ibn Lajaʿ, who composed both rajaz and ḍāṣīḍ like Ḥumayd al-Arqāt and al-ʿUmānī, but al-Farazdaq was the least among them. It is not as hard for a ḍāṣīḍ composer to compose rajaz as it would be for a rajaz composer who would like to compose ḍāṣīḍ. Do you not see that a ḍāṣīḍ composer is able to compose a rajaz although with some difficulty, but not every rajaz composer can compose ḍāṣīḍ?\footnote{308 Al-Qayrawānī, vol.1. pp.185-186.}

3.6.1 Rajaz: Easy, Artless and Low-brow, or Difficult to Compose?

The perception of rajaz as an easy vehicle of poetry\footnote{309 In some sources it was described as “the donkey of poetry” in reference to its ease and frequent use. See: Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfīʿī, Tārīkh Ādāb al-ʿArab (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1974), vol.3, p.28, and: Frolov, p.245.} or a medium by which most branches of Islamic knowledge were preserved in didactic verses or poems may have contributed to the reception of rajaz as a low-brow, artless form of poetry. In fact, referring to these didactic verses as ‘poetry’ is merely metaphorical as the sole similarity between the two can be found in terms of rhythm and rhyme. Examples of these didactic verses abound in almost every subject in Arabic and Islamic sciences, for example Ibn Mālik’s ‘one thousand verses’ (Alfiyya) on syntax.

Since the purpose of didactic verse is purely educational, it was composed in a form which makes it easy to memorise, unlike the artistic rajaz\footnote{310 Here I am borrowing the term ‘artistic rajaz’, which is used by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila. See: Al-Faḍl ibn Qudāmah Abū al-Najm al-ʾIjlī, Dīwān of Abū ʿn-Naḡm, ed. by Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 1993), p.8.} which was composed in many cases to show off the poet’s knowledge of unusual words, with the result that the vocabulary was often very obscure. It cannot be assumed that all artistic rajaz was similarly difficult but this statement is still true of the work of Ruʿba. However, poetry is not only about wording and in order to judge a poem one should consider its many aspects including themes, motifs, ideas, expressions, meaning, imagery, rhythm, rhyme and the overall discourse and message the poet wants to convey. Thus, Ruʿba’s rajaz must be viewed in its context to fully appreciate its significance and to analyse the impact he had on the generation of rajaz composers who followed him. For example, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila briefly mentions that
Abū an-Najm “had a central role in the development of rajaz poetry especially the ṭardīya (hunting poems)”.

According to Abū ’Amr ibn al-ʿAlū; “Poetry [qaṣīd] was sealed by Dhū al-Rumma and rajaz was sealed by Ruʿba”.

With the benefit of hindsight we can see the folly of such a judgement: the assumption that no rajaz poet would ever outrival Ruʿba. Nonetheless it should be seen as an indication of the development of the genre up until the time this opinion was stated, and Ruʿba’s rajaz remains significant as a step in the development of the genre and for his role of inspiring later poets to take rajaz as a medium for composing on a wider selection of themes and motifs.

3.7 Rajaz in the Poetry of the Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ

This section attempts to justify and explain al-Āṣmaʿī’s inclusion of Ruʿba within the group of sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, which consisted of poets who were mainly qaṣīd composers. Certainly, his dīwān contains rajaz only and in the absence of substantial evidence of long qaṣīd poems such as the one attributed to Abū al-Najm, we should assume that Ruʿba was exclusively a rajaz composer.

But it is interesting to consider the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ as composers of rajaz as well as qaṣīd. This may help us to determine whether al-Āṣmaʿī was as interested in the arājīz composed by the other poets of the group as he was in those by Ruʿba. Analysis of their poetry collections reveals a limited presence of rajaz. Ibn Mayyāda has 14 rajaz poems and fragments in a total of just over 100 poems; five of these are relatively long while the rest are considerably shorter. Interestingly, his longest urjūza draws on the themes of fakhr (self-praise) and camel description, to be analysed shortly. His second longest urjūza is also a camel description. Other poets in the group have even fewer rajaz: Ibn Harma has only a single verse while ʿUmāra ibn ‘Aqīl has only five short fragments of rajaz, the longest of which has only five lines.

However, both rajaz and qaṣīd composed by the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ found their way easily into the works of philologists who depended heavily on “the rich arcane lexicon (gharīb) of the Arab Bedouins”. Ibn Harma, for example, clearly generated interest among philologists due to his unusual words and expressions, since he was quoted over 200 times in the philological sources and dictionaries. Ibn Mayyāda was also significant, being

311 Ibid.
313 Gruendler, Pre-Modern Philologists, p.8.
quoted over 100 times, while ʿUmāra ibn ʿAqīl was quoted about 40 times in various philological works.

These figures are not mentioned to provide definitive statistics, but rather to indicate how significant the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ were for philologists; moreover, analysis shows that Ruʿba was of much greater significance than any of the others. He was quoted some 4000 times by philologists and dictionary compilers: over 1000 quotations of his rajaz occurred in Lisān al-ʿArab alone.

This huge number of quotations suggests that most of the words included in Ruʿba’s rajaz were considered to have some importance, raising the issue of whether his awareness of the value the philologists attached to his poetry may have affected the manner in which he composed and chose his words, as seen in the case of Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb mentioned in Chapter Two.\textsuperscript{314} Thus, Ruʿba seems to have been well aware of the value of his rajaz to philologists, but regardless of the authoritative status Ruʿba may have had, he was still subjected to criticism by some philologists and critics such as al-ʿAṣmaʿī and Ibn Qutayba.

Clearly, then, there was an interest in both the rajaz and qaṣīd of the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ for philological and linguistic reasons, with Ruʿba being the most important amongst them for philologists and dictionary compilers. It seems that in principle there was little difference between these two poetic forms in al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s time, some even viewed rajaz as being more significant than the qaṣīd.

However, an analysis of two examples of rajaz poems composed by the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ will shed more light on those common features of the poets’ style of composition. The first poem is one of Ibn Mayyāda’s longest rajaz poems, consisting of some 19 verses, whilst the second is Ruʿba’s slightly longer but still manageable urjūza of 44 hemistichs.

Given the limited space in this chapter, it is not possible to provide examples of all the themes presented in the rajaz poems of the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ; however, these two poems have been chosen because they share thematic similarities and are of a suitable length for detailed analysis.\textsuperscript{315}

Both poems deal with two main themes, starting with fakhr and then shifting to description. This chapter does not discuss panegyric for two reasons: firstly, although

\textsuperscript{314} See (Chapter 2, section 2.3.1, p.64).

\textsuperscript{315} Both poems are reproduced in the original Arabic with English translations in Appendices 1 and 2.
Panegyric is the dominant theme in Ru’ba’s poetry followed by glorification, panegyric will be dealt with in the thematic analysis in the following chapter and secondly, I would argue that as a poetic genre, panegyric reveals less about the poet’s personality than fakhr does. This is particularly true when the focus is on the less formal aspects of the poet’s individuality, given that the panegyric was used for professional purposes.

Both poems open with verses which express the poet’s pride in himself and his charming qualities. In Ibn Mayyāda’s poem there seems to be an omission; since only the first two lines are devoted to praise of himself, there must be some missing verses between the second line and the third as they are recorded in the dīwān. This claim can be supported by further evidence from the poem itself, for the sudden shifting from self-praise into the middle of a type of conditional clause (“until the sun starts to set/ they [the camels] move off”) referring to a different motif and context plainly indicates that there is an omission after the opening two verses:

1. أنا ابن ميّادة لبس الحلال
   I am Ibn Mayyāda wearer of garments
2. أمسر من شر وأحلى من عسل
   Sharper than acid and sweeter than honey
3. حتي إذا الشمس ذننا منها الأصل
   Until the sun started to set
4. ترّوخت كانتا جيش رّحل
   They [the camels] moved off like a departing army

Moreover, even assuming that there might be some linkage between the second line and the third, there is no plural feminine noun in the second line to which the pronoun hā in ka’annahā can relate, as the pronoun refers to a herd of camels, which is not mentioned or even implied there.

In contrast, Ru’ba starts his poem by addressing a woman (the daughter of ‘Amr), which initially suggests that the poem might have a nasīb (traditional introductory section), but then he surprises his readers with a radical departure from tradition. For he warns this woman, who seems to be his second wife, not to insult his daughter, reminding her what he is capable of:

1. يا بنت عمرو لا تسبي بنتي
   Be not insistent with your daughter

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316 See table 4.1 in p.115, although Ibn Harma was found to have glorification as his second major theme, it does not appear in his only surviving rajaz, thus Ibn Mayyāda was chosen instead.
317 Here I follow the collector of the dīwān, who writes each hemistich as an independent verse occupying the whole line.
O daughter of `Amr stop insulting my daughter! You will have done enough good if you do [only] that

Woe betide you if I survive, it will be the same [life] for you! Is it because you see my head becoming [bald] like a pan?\(^{319}\)

Then he rules out any possibility of treating her in an agreeably courteous and cordial manner by reminding her that, like him, she has also physically withered with the years:

You look askance at the grey hair covering my loathsome withered flesh, but my body is like what yours has become\(^{320}\)

Ru’ba then writes a full half of the poem in this self-assertive manner before shifting to a camel description. While Ibn Mayyāda sees his charm as being the result of his elegant garments, his naturally pleasant character and his toughness when needed, Ru’ba recalls the joys of his youth and boasts of his current bravery. Interestingly, Ru’ba uses a tried and tested motif which occurs many times in his own poetry and also in that of some of the other sāqat al-shuʿarā’, for example Ibn Harma, as well as in the poetry of some pre-Islamic and Islamic poets. This motif is the blaming of one’s grey hair, which is a reason the poet has become unattractive to women, who no longer view him as the hero he once was. Perhaps by Ru’ba’s time little innovation was possible in the use of this motif, but what can be interesting is the way it is used by poets to facilitate their recounting of the narrative, as a vehicle for their reminiscences about past times.

Making use of this motif Ru’ba manages to produce some telling comparisons which enhance the narrative and hold the reader’s attention; for instance:

After [my head] was once full of very dark, thick, long hair, covering a strong pate

You look askance at the grey hair covering my loathsome withered flesh, but my body is like what yours has become

I became worn out after my glorious youth, when I was carefree (if you want to know)

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\(^{318}\) Here also I am following the organisation of the compiler of Ru’ba’s dīwān, who places two hemistichs in each line, making them look like one verse with two hemistichs, whereas in fact each hemistich is independent and rhymed, unlike the first hemistich in qaṣīd poetry, which is not rhymed except in the first line of the poem in which some poets choose to rhyme both hemistichs.

\(^{319}\) Nawāṣira, vol.1, p.289.

\(^{320}\) Ibid.
[I did not care about] what rituals to follow on Friday or Saturday. I was lax and unconcerned by the Day of Judgement.\(^{321}\)

His baldness and grey hair, which he goes on to claim signify dignity and calm, are compared to the reckless pleasure-seeking amusement of his youth. He also draws a comparison between keeping his own counsel, which may occasionally be misunderstood, and his previously resolute willingness to loudly resist should the occasion require it, as he was braver than a strong, fearless wild lion. Nonetheless, this motif of singing his own praises is not in itself innovative, but follows the classical pattern found in the traditional Arabic \textit{qaṣīda}.

In both poems, the second section or camel description also proves interesting as it reveals some further traces of imitation. It may well be that the \textit{lāmiyya} of Abū al-Najm al-ʿIjlī, described by Montgomery as containing “magnificent camel description”,\(^ {322}\) inspired both poets in their treatment of camels. In chronological terms, this imitation is possible as Ibn Mayyāda died in 149 A.H. / 766 C.E. and Abū al-Najm in 130 A.H. / 748 C.E. Moreover, Ibn Mayyāda composed his poem using the same rhyming sound, the letter \textit{lām}. Ruʿba is more likely to have been influenced by Abū al-Najm as he had evidently praised this particular poem and its composer, calling it: ‘the mother of rajaz’ (\textit{umm al-rajaz}).\(^ {323}\) Furthermore, all three poems have similar sub-motifs: the description of the camel’s body and the water-drinking scene. However, Abū al-Najm’s poem, which is of a much greater length, reaching some 200 verses, contains many more motifs and ideas.

It may be that these poems by Ibn Mayyāda and Ruʿba are actually the introductory sections of much longer poems since the camel description follows immediately after the opening verses, echoing the traditional \textit{qaṣīda}, although the other motifs which traditionally follow the camel description and detailed description of the journey are missing. Both internal and external evidence seem to support this. Considering the poems in their surviving form, it is clear that there is something missing at the end of each work, as if they had been paused halfway through the description. Ibn Mayyāda’s last verses serve to advise travellers to be careful when crossing an area where there are some mad camels on which the herdsman has installed tight udder covers; the poet surely did not intend to end the narrative at this point. Similarly, the closing verses of Ruʿba’s poem describe the quivering motion of the camel’s lips when it is walking, a detail which does not conform to the traditional ending of a poem of this kind. Usually, the description of the

\(^{321}\) Ibid.

\(^{322}\) Montgomery, \textit{Abū al-Najm}, p. 166.

\(^{323}\) Al-Īṣfahānī, \textit{al-Aghānī}, vol. 10, p.121.
mount and the journey appear before the main theme, which constitutes the final part of the poem.

The external evidence, which is more applicable in Ruʾba’s case, is drawn from his other poems. He tended to compose long poems (as many as 400 verses in some cases) and the majority of his dīwān poems are over 50 verses long. Moreover, the other long poems of both poets have more appropriate endings. For instance, Ibn Mayyāda ends one of his panegyric poems by pleading with God to save his patron and shower continuous rain on him wherever he goes,324 and in one ghazal (love poem) he finishes by stating in an apologetic tone that he has never forgotten his beloved despite her long absence.325 Ruʾba also tends to conclude most of his panegyrics by mentioning a special feature of his patron such as his morality, bravery or generosity, which is designed not only to motivate the patron to reward the poet, but also to provide a smooth and appropriate exit from a long panegyric, unlike the endings of the two poems analysed in this chapter.

Because the verse of rajaz is shorter than that of qaṣīd, Ruʾba had to employ two or three verses to complete one full grammatical sentence; this was regarded by medieval literati as a defect in prosody which they called tadmīn326 (meaning that a verse is dependent for its meaning on the verse which follows it).327 It could be argued that linking the verses together enhances the unity of the poem but since the norm in classical criticism is to leave the verses independent, from that perspective the prosody of Ruʾba’s rajaz would be considered defective.

The level of detail in the camel description suggests that Ruʾba was indeed able to describe this animal better than he could the horse. In some parts of this poem he also describes the desert, which is a major theme in his poetry. In fact, as noted earlier, the poem which won him critical acclaim and proved that rujjāz were able to surpass qaṣīd composers is also a long poem describing the desert and depicting in detail a hunting journey. This poem will be analysed in Chapter Five.

325 Ibid., p. 187.
327 In al-ʿIqd al-Farīd we find this definition of tadmīn:

\[
\text{Tadmīn is when a verse is dependent on its following verse and its meaning cannot be completed without it. The verse is praised when it is independent.}
\]

See: Ibid., p. 223.
Both poets include interesting imagery in their descriptive passages. Ibn Mayyāda likens the departure of the herd of camels to that of an army, implying both their great number and their heavy, lumbering gait:

3- حَتَّى إِذَا التَّمَسَّنَّ ذَنَا مِنْهَا الأُصُل

Until the sun started to set

4- تَرْوَّخَتْ كَأَنَّهَا جَيْشٌ رَّخَل

They [the camels] moved off like a departing army

5- فَأَصْبَحَتْ بَصُنُّبَيْنِ مِنْهَا إِبل

By morning the camels had reached Ṣa'na'bā

The fact that the departure occurs at sunset perhaps serves to intensify the emotions of the scene, enticing readers or listeners into imagining the possible outcomes of this hazardous night journey until the following verse calms their fears by announcing the herd’s safe arrival next morning.

Ruʾba also uses a striking image in his poem; that of the predatory lion to which he likens himself:

10- أَشْجَعُ مِنْ ذَي لِبْدِ بَخْيَت

I am braver than the maned one in the wilderness, breaking strong bones and crushing them

11- وَطَامِحِّ النَّخُوَةُ مَسْتَكْتُ [by] twisting and smashing [the bones] evenly, while it is still full of valour and anger

He portrays a famously powerful predator which engenders fear not only because of what it is capable of doing but also by its appearance. Ruʾba’s mention of his balding head and withered body (verses 2-5) contrasts dramatically with the image of the beast’s thick mane and valorous anger as it breaks, twists and crushes the bones of its prey. The poet refuses to accept the reality of his condition and tries to convince his audience that when the occasion requires he can be braver than the thick-maned lion of his poetic imagination.

In summing up this analysis of two rajaz poems it should be noted that neither poet ever went beyond the classical pattern of camel description, describing the animal’s body parts, movements and behaviour. Also, the imagery they use is classical, occurring frequently in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry. Perhaps the only real innovation in these two poems, together with the rajaz of Ruʾba and the ruijāz of his class is that they lengthened the rajaz and used it for the purposes of the qaṣīd.
3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter the definition of *rajaz*, its concept and development as a poetic form were investigated. Like many other literary and critical terminologies in classical Arabic literature which took their name from pre-existing natural phenomena, *rajaz* originally referred to a physical defect or illness affecting camels. The investigation showed that over the course of time *rajaz* evolved significantly due to its composers, who transformed it from a form which initially consisted of short fragments of verse or couplets improvised on informal occasions to stir the emotions into a medium for formal and court panegyrics by the late Umayyad-early Abbasid period.

The medieval reception of *rajaz* was investigated by considering a broad range of views on its value and status. This showed that usually the praise and admiration for *rajaz* came from within the philological camp. Notably, it was in later Abbasid times that views which questioned the literary merit of *rajaz* started to thrive, with Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī emerging as perhaps the only major figure who voiced strong opposition to *rajaz*. Nonetheless, even he did not go to the extent of totally dismissing *rajaz* as poetry but he certainly regarded it as a low and artless poetic form.

Many medieval philologists and literati recognised four *rajaz* composers as being the ultimate *rujjāz*, whose standard of work led to this form rivalling and sometimes even surpassing *qaṣīd*, namely al-Aghlab al-ʿIlī, Abū al-Najm al-ʿIlī, al-ʿAjjāj, and his son, the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* poet Ruʿba. By lengthening their *rajaz* poems, using *qaṣīda* motifs and composing *rajaz* on *qaṣīda* themes, these four poets secured a place for themselves among the writers who were highly appreciated by the Umayyad and Abbasid literati.

The evolution of *rajaz* over time was explored, and it was emphasised that by the early Abbasid era it was regarded as the equal of *qaṣīd* poetry. Thus when al-ʿAṣmaʾī identified the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* group, *rajaz* was not considered to be a lower type of poetry but was viewed as being as good as or sometimes even better than *qaṣīd*; and so, the type of poetry composed by those poets was not considered to be a criterion for inclusion.

Investigation suggests that the amount of *gharīb* which a poet featured in his work was a factor which influenced selection for inclusion in the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*. However, the exclusive use of *gharīb* was not itself the determining factor for inclusion; ethnically the poet also needed to be a Bedouin, who was able to use *gharīb* in his poetry naturally. This helps to explain why a great non-Arab poet like Bashshār was excluded from the *sāqat al-*
shuʿarāʾ group, regardless of the fact that he had been raised in the desert among the Bedouins of Banū Ṭāqīl.

With regard to the composition of rajaz, it was shown that rujjāz were aware of the shortcomings of this poetic form and tried to overcome them. They realised that the brevity of rajaz verse made it unsuitable for singing and, moreover, made it difficult for the poet to develop complex notions requiring deeper exploration. Their solution, then, was to lengthen the poem, thus providing greater opportunities to convey their meanings. However, they were not able to overcome the need to maintain links between verses, which was viewed as a prosodic defect by medieval literati.

The analysis of two examples of rajaz composed by two of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ revealed some of the stylistic features of their poetry, highlighting its resemblance to the traditional qaṣida in its conformity to the classical patterns and norms of the pre-Islamic poem. Both poems consist of fakhr (self-praise) and wasf (description). The themes and motifs are conventional and there is little evidence of an individual touch, with the possible exception of Ruʾba’s images depicting his youth and old age.

The style of the desert Bedouin poets was clearly reflected in the two poets’ choice of motifs found not only in the poems analysed but in their rajaz as a whole, which supports the hypothesis that being Arab and Bedouin, and thus having the natural knowledge to skilfully employ a considerable amount of gharīb in their poetry were common features among the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ.

Another important issue which emerged is that the study of rajaz poetry, especially that from its golden era, as represented by al-ʿAjjāj and his son Ruʿba, has been seriously neglected. This has resulted in a misunderstanding of related poetic forms including the qaṣida and the long arājīz, which are understandably difficult to analyse due to their use of unusual vocabulary. From its origins in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras, rajaz underwent numerous developments and evolved significantly as a poetic form, a phenomenon which will be explored further in Chapter Five in an attempt to shed light on this largely unknown but fascinating poetry.

In conclusion, this study of rajaz has shown that Ruʿba’s inclusion in the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ group is justifiable since by al-Aṣmaʾī’s time this poetic form was regarded as the equal of qaṣīd. More important is the finding that rajaz as a genre was particularly relevant to Bedouins and better representative of their social norms and the nature of their desert environment. Moreover, analysis of selected samples of rajaz by two of the sāqat al-
shuʿarāʾ has highlighted three of the common features shared by poets in the group: being Bedouin Arabs, possessing a genuine knowledge of gharīb and an ability to use it skilfully in their poetry, and following the conventions of the traditional qaṣīda. In the chapters which follow, thematic and aesthetic analysis of their qaṣīd, which constituted the majority of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ group’s poetic output will reveal more of these common features.
Chapter Four: Panegyric and Satire in the Poetry of the

*Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ*

4.1 Introduction

The major focus of this chapter and the following one is a thematic analysis of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*’s poetry. Since space is limited, this chapter will be devoted to the most prominent themes; the remaining minor themes will be dealt with in Chapter Five. The thematic analysis of the poetry is not intended to be exhaustive; rather it aims to give a thorough insight into some specific aspects. Thus it identifies the poets’ major characteristics by analysing the themes (*aghārād*) which feature in their poems. The analysis also includes a general survey of the motifs (*maʿānī*) which they incorporate into their poetry.

In order to achieve as comprehensive an analysis of these motifs as possible, we will look at both the major and the minor themes which can be identified in the works of both individual poets and the group as a whole. The objective of this mapping of themes, topics and motifs is to determine whether the poets in this group can be described as traditionalists or innovators with regard to their choices of themes and motifs.

The thematic clusters which emerge will be interpreted in the light of the discussions in previous chapters regarding the composition of the group, and the place and significance of the poets in Umayyad and Abbasid literary history. The argument will address the criteria for the inclusion of poets in the group as well as their status in medieval Arabic literary, philological and critical sources.

Where useful, comparisons will be made with themes from poetry composed by their predecessors and successors in order to contextualise the work of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* within the literary environment of the late Umayyad and early Abbasid eras. This contextualisation will serve to enrich our understanding of their patterns of composition.

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328 Ibn Harma, M, p.86.
and assist us to evaluate the extent to which their themes could be described as imitative or innovative. Given the broad scope of the analysis, contextual comparisons will be limited to the work of the most well-known poets or literary schools.

### 4.2 Dominant Themes in the Poetry of the Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ

In my analysis of the themes found in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ my main approach, as I mentioned in Chapter One, will be to consider the aim/purpose (gharaḍ) of the poem which I identified as the main theme of the poem as I found it in the literary source or in the collected dīwān. Without devaluing the other themes of the polythematic poem, I consider that the main purpose of the panegyrical ode is to praise the patron. Therefore the theme of polythematic ode consisting of nasīb, rahīl and madīḥ will be regarded as panegyric if this is the nature of the fragment which has been preserved.

This method makes it easy to determine the gharad (theme/purpose) of the polythematic poems (having seven verses or more). The difficulty is posed by the fragments, especially those consisting of only one or two verses. Thus orphan verses and snatches (two-verse fragments) will not be counted since even if their purpose can be determined, in practical terms they still provide little insight into the style of composition of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ.

Table 4.1 below illustrates the primary and secondary themes in the poetry, based on the number of poems/fragments which each poet composed on a given theme.

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329 See: (Chapter 1, section 1.4.3.3, pp. 54-55).
Table 4.1 Thematic analysis of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*’s poetry

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<th>Panegyric</th>
<th>Satire</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Self-/Tribal Glorification</th>
<th>Elegy</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Ru’ba</td>
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**Key:**

poly: polythematic odes, mono: monothematic poems or fragments

Dark grey: refers to the primary theme in the poetry based on the number of poems/fragments composed on the given theme.

Light grey: refers to the secondary theme in the poetry based on the number of poems/fragments composed on the given theme.
4.2.1 Panegyric

Numerous studies suggest that panegyric was the dominant theme in medieval Arabic poetry. Stetkevych remarks that *madīḥ* was “the preeminent poetic genre of the classical Arabic tradition”, and asserts that one “must get to grips with one fact, or phenomenon above all, the predominance of *madīḥ*”, and that this predominance was undeniable. Sperl notes that “much of the Medieval Arabic poetic corpus consists of poems written in praise of rulers and notables of state”. Drawing on medieval sources, Meisami observes:

Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī introduces the chapter on *madīḥ* in his *Dīwān al-Maʿānī* (the first chapter of the book, as *madīḥ* is foremost among the *aghrāḍ*) with a line by the pre-Islamic poet al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī which, he says, has been called “the most encomiastic [amdaḥ] line uttered by the Arabs”.

Given that there does not appear to be any evidence to the contrary, one would expect to find that panegrics would also feature strongly in the poetry corpus of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*, as is indeed the case.

However, a number of studies have attempted to justify this dominance, exploring the reasons for the importance of this thematic feature in medieval Arabic poetry. Although there is general agreement that poets were motivated, to a greater or a lesser degree, by materialistic considerations, a number of different interpretations of the panegyrical ode have been advanced. According to Stetkevych this poetic form “encodes and transmits an ideology of empire”, whilst Meisami contends that the poets “were not mere propagandists or dilettantes, nor were the poems they composed simply contingent; they produced works of great aesthetic value and poetic sophistication”.

Those interpretations of the panegyric which regard it as “an expression of political identity”, “a part of ritual exchange” and “expressing a transfer of allegiance” or as a

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“portrayal of the sovereign’s authority” do not challenge the basic notion that this poetic form served as a means of making a living from poetry (al-takassub bi-l-shī‘r). This seems to have been the primary reason why many poets composed panegyric in the medieval Arabic tradition, a tradition which continues in the present day in some parts of the Arab world. Other reasons for composing panegyric are mentioned in literary sources of the period; for instance, Ibn Qutayba cites avarice (al-ṭama) as the first of these, followed by longing, drinking, rapture and anger. However, it is argued here that, in the case of the sāqat al-shu‘arā’, material reward seems to have been their principal motive for composing panegyrics, which may explain both the abundance of their patrons and the dominance of this theme in their poetry. This statement seems to hold true despite some references, in the poetry of Ibn Harma in particular, to his discomfort with praising unworthy patrons, and his refraining from going to crowded and dirty water (implying the courts of patrons), as will be shown in the next chapter.

Evidence for this assertion can be found both in historical sources and within their own poetry. Thus Ibn Harma’s verses which appear as the epigraph of this chapter liken his poems to unmarried noble ladies, awaiting one eligible suitor from the many princes seeking to pay court to them. However, according to evidence found in literary sources of the period these verses should not be read as an attempt by Ibn Harma to tout for a new patron, but as an apology to his existing patron, who was the most generous and long-lasting patron he had ever had.

339 In al-Umda, Ibn Rashīq has a chapter entitled ‘Making a Living by Poetry’ (al-Takassub bi-l-Shī‘r), which begins with a hadith concerning the Prophet’s warnings about profligacy and explains that initially Arabs did not make a living from poetry; it was a means of thanking someone for a gift when one could not afford to thank him sufficiently for it. However Ibn Rashīq then appears to contradict himself by mentioning pre-Islamic poets who accepted financial reward for their work such as al-Nābigha, or for whom poetry was a ‘trade or business’ (matjaran) such as al-Aʿshā. Turning to the Islamic poets he describes al-Ḥuṭayya as an ignoble individual who overcharged. Al-Qayrawānī, pp.80,81,83.
341 See his poem ‘You Destroyed the Bonds’ (ṣaramt habā‘īlan), in which he praises ‘Abdul-Wāḥid ibn Sulaymān and apologises to him for turning to other patrons. Ibn Harma, p.85. According to Ibn Harma, ‘Abdul-Wāḥid was “the first [patron] to elevate me for my poetry and then forbid me to praise anyone other than him”. The poet did not break his promise until his patron was replaced by a new governor and then, as he admitted, due to greed (tama’an an- yahaba lī) he transferred his poetic allegiance but found that his new patron failed to reward his services. He sought to return to ‘Abdul-Wāḥid but was rejected, and many notables of Medina had to intercede on his behalf until he was forgiven. He then produced some of his best panegyric verse, both apologetic and laudatory, in thanks to ‘Abdul-Wāḥid for forgiving his disloyalty. Surprisingly, Ibn Harma is reported to have told an ‘Alid patron who employed him after ‘Abdul-Wāḥid: “Everything I said to him was merely a ruse to acquire his money”. See: al-Iṣfahānī, al-
Another example suggests that a poet might be prepared to risk suffering indignity and damaging his self-esteem in order to please his patron or gain a reward. According to one anecdote, once, after delivering his panegyric to al-Sarī, Ibn Harma was asked: “What do you want?” He responded: “I am to be your enslaved slave”. The patron, apparently disapproving of such self-humiliation, said: “No, rather, you are a noble freeman and a cousin”. He then gave him money to repay some debts which the poet owed to various people.342

In order to understand the work of the sāqat al-shu‘arā‘ within the broader context of Arabic poetry, it is vital to examine the role which poetry played in the life of the Arabs and the function which the poets fulfilled in the Arab society of their time. This will indicate whether the sāqat al-shu‘arā‘ resembled the pre-Islamic poets, who seem to have functioned merely as subordinate spokesmen for their tribe. If this was the case, then the possibilities they had for expressing their own persona and individuality were very limited:

Arab poets in Jāhilī tribal society were placed in a very definite socio-political position within the tribe. They bore the crucial task of defending their tribe’s cause and the ideals it held against opposing tribes. In other words, they were responsible for waging what in modern terms would be called ‘psychological warfare’ in order either to placate their tribe’s enemies or enhance their tribe’s prestige.343

The pre-Islamic poets were entirely convinced of their tribe’s righteousness and would conform to its will in all circumstances, having no choice but to follow whatever path the tribe chose. A good example of this is expressed in the words of the jāhilī poet Durayd ibn al-Ṣimma:

وهل أنا إلا من غزية إن غويتي غويت وإن ترشد غزية أرشدت

I am nothing but [one man] among [the tribe] of Ghuzayya. If it loses its way I lose my way and if it becomes wise I become wise.344
Poets were expected to “place their poetic production in subservience”, becoming compliant, almost passive spokesmen who were “conveyors of their tribe’s message rather than their own”. Thus it is not surprising that a poet should devote a good part of every poem to glorifying his tribe. The poem acted as “a re-enactment in recital of the common values of the tribe, with a similar cathartic effect, asserting life impulses and enabling the tribe to face with greater fortitude the threatening and inexorable forces of death in a hostile world”.

In a nomadic society an individual needed the protection of the group he lived with, but as patterns of urban life evolved in the late Umayyad and early Abbasid eras the theme of tribal glorification lost its prominence, especially if the poet was a city dweller. During this period, the function of the poet seems to have developed in a different direction evolving into a distinctive profession, and some poets started to serve in the court of their patron for considerable periods of time. To a large extent, then, glorification of the tribe gave way to praise of the persona of the individual and the eulogies previously devoted to tribal leaders were dedicated to the powerful and wealthy caliphs and ruling classes.

The Abbasid era also saw the development of a type of panegyric poetry which went beyond the conventional role of the work written by a poet for reward. The poetry composed by poets such as Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, for example, had an additional function:

The panegyric does not attempt to portray the character of individual monarchs. Instead, it extols the role of Kingship which an individual assumes [...] The public recitation of panegyric poetry was an act of ritual. This ritual celebrated the vision of political authority of the Abbasid state: a divinely endowed Kingship as the only guarantor of peace and stability for the realm.

When approaching this issue from the perspective of the patron, one must consider the investment made by patrons in their poets and the money they showered upon them, in return for the panegyrics extolling their virtues being disseminated far and wide. This helped to clarify the important propaganda function of these works, regardless of any significant aesthetic achievements the poet may have aimed for or the particular ideological stance he wished to convey.

345 Loya, p.206.
346 Ibid.
347 Badawi, p.7.
348 Sperl, *Islamic Kingship*, p.34.
Moreover, as Meisami highlights, in this period poetry served many purposes, “functioning as political or personal propaganda, as lyrics for songs, as the discourse of sermons, as exemplary or illustrative material in historical treatises and other works, and each of these varied uses affected poetic style”\(^{349}\). Given the difficulties posed by the task of understanding the original intentions of the poets, researchers have often chosen to use poetic works as evidence to support their own particular theories and interpretations concerning the role of poetry in medieval Arab society.

Since there is ample evidence of both the centrality of panegyric within Umayyad and Abbasid poetic traditions, and of its dominant presence in the work of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, the question arises: why not focus entirely on panegyrics, excluding the less prominent themes? Our response is that if one of the intentions of this chapter is to highlight the aesthetic and artistic originality of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s poetry, then the panegyric form alone is not likely to serve this purpose.

When producing panegyric, poets had to follow “a clearly preordained pattern” of composition rather than giving free rein to their creativity,\(^{350}\) as Loya notes: “The classical tradition insisted on a strict choice of themes which were to be presented in a specific manner and sequence”.\(^{351}\) The Abbasid poets thus had to conform to the model of the pre-Islamic panegyric qaṣīda. Even the famously unruly poet Abū Nuwās, who “often rebelled against the qaṣīda form as well as its contents on several occasions”,\(^{352}\) could not resist the lucrative source of income which panegyric represented and willingly composed verses praising certain nobles and caliphs of his time including al-Rashīd and al-Amīn.\(^{353}\)

The sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ were no exception, as they were professional poets making a good living by composing panegyrics. However, every poet, even if he chooses to conform to the conventions, would wish to be distinctive in order to enhance his poetic and artistic reputation and to attract the attention of wealthy patrons to his unique style. Ibn Harma boasts of the quality of his poems and how well received and appreciated they were:

\[
\text{ومَّن لم يُرِدْ مدحي فَإِنَّ قَصَائِدِي نَوَافَقُ عند المشتري الحمَّد بَنَ الْحَارِثِ وَمَن لم يُرِدْ مِدْحِي فَإِنَّ قَصَائِدِي نَوَافَقُ عند الأَكْرُمِينَ سَوَامِ}
\]

\(^{349}\) Meisami, Structure and Meaning, p. xi.
\(^{350}\) Sperl, Islamic Kingship, p.79.
\(^{351}\) Loya, p.203.
\(^{352}\) Ibid., p.204.
As for those who do not want my praise, [I say] my poems sell fast and are always highly regarded by the most generous.

[My poems] sell as fast as the daughters of al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām, among those who buy praise with generosity.

But if a poet was to be considered distinguished he could not merely imitate previous poets in the manner of their praise poems; this would not please the patron, who would have demanded something better, different and new, for why should he reward a plagiarist? Moreover, each poet would have attempted to push the boundaries and restrictions whether religious or conventional in order to compose something extraordinary for his patron.

All of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ composed panegyrics for a range of patrons from the upper echelons of their society during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. It has been suggested that some of Ibn Harma’s panegyrics to the 'Alids indicate his adherence to Shi’i doctrine, mainly because he included three verses proclaiming that he loved the descendants of Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter. However, analysis of his work shows that his patrons came from all sects and political camps, disproving any religious bias. He wrote in praise of the Umayyad caliph, al-Walīd ibn Yazīd, and the governor of Medina, 'Abdul-Wāḥid ibn Sulaymān. Later he composed poetry praising the Abbasid leader Ibrāhīm al-Imām, Abū al-'Abbās al-Saffāḥ, al-Manṣūr, and Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-'Azīz. Moreover, during both eras he praised 'Alid notables living in Medina including Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah and other leaders of the revolt against al-Manṣūr, such as Ibrāhīm ibn 'Abdullah ibn Muṭṭi'.

Other sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ wrote panegyrics in return for financial reward rather than as a means of expressing deeply felt religious or ideological sentiments. Ibn Rashīq claims that Ibn Mayyāda was an honourable man and had a clear sense of his own self-worth, citing as evidence an anecdote about him preferring not to travel to al-Manṣūr to deliver

354 Here the fast-selling daughters may seem like an insult, but I think the implication is that his panegyrics are highly desired just as those girls.
355 Ibn Harma, M, p.223.
356 Discussing this claim, al-Mu’aybid suggests that even if he was Shi’i then he was no longer practising his religion, as he did not praise the Shi’i Imams. In fact, there are several satirical poems written against some 'Alids. Ibid., pp.23-24.
357 He was the judge of Medina appointed by al-Manṣūr. See: Ibn Harma, M, p.54.
358 Ibid., p.239.
in person a poem which he had already finished, maintaining that a little milk from his own camels would be enough for him.359

However, other literary sources as well as his own poetry suggest this may not have been the case. He had already composed and recited panegyrics for al-Manṣūr,360 as well as for the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd ibn Yazīd. Perhaps then the real reason for not travelling might have been his old age at the time of composing this second panegyric361 (he died in the reign of al-Manṣūr). It is also possible that he had felt unappreciated in al-Manṣūr’s court during his first visit.362

Other sāqat al-shuʿarā’ also composed panegyrics and received rewards from many patrons. Ruʿba composed panegyrics for more than fifteen patrons including Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, governors and military leaders. Nawāṣira suggests that the poet could see nothing wrong in asking for money in return for praise and gives an example from his panegyric to al-Saffāh.363 In one of his panegyrics Ruʿba spends some fifty lines of his long poem (398 verses) describing his poverty and asking the caliph to grant him a reward to alleviate his financial hardship.364

ʿUmāra ibn ʿAqīl spent a good part of his life living in Baghdad and composing panegyrics for its notables, progressing from the lesser ranks of the ruling class until he reached al-Maʾmūn. One notable aspect of ʿUmāra’s relationship with his patrons was that after he had benefitted from their patronage, he satirised them, as in the case of ʿAli ibn Hishām, who introduced him to al-Maʾmūn and was the reason for a large payment given to him by the caliph.365

4.2.1.1 Motifs in Panegyrics

Both conventionalism and traditionalism influenced the choice of motifs used in the panegyric, as Sperl observes:

361 Ḥaddād gives the first half of al-Manṣūr’s reign (which lasted 22 years) as the most probable time for Ibn Mayyāda’s death, by which time he was quite old. Ibid., p.28.
362 Al-Aghānī reports that in return for the panegyric he composed al-Walīd ibn Yazīd gave Ibn Mayyāda 100 she-camels, a stallion, a herdsman, a virgin slave-girl and a horse; which prompted him to produce another poem thanking al-Walīd for this generous reward. Al-Īṣfahānī, vol.2, p.198; Ibn Mayyāda, Ḥ, pp. 57-61.
The fact that a great many of the relevant motifs of the Arabic tradition had earlier appeared in pre-Islamic odes does not mean that their persistence in Abbasid times is purely conventional. The changing cultural situation has given them a new meaning which is reflected not in a change of motifs, but of style.\textsuperscript{366}

Thus the patron’s generosity, which was traditionally lauded as a noble quality indicating his adherence to Bedouin values, was presented in later panegyrics as an Islamic quality, indicating his righteousness. However, the core concept of generosity did not undergo a radical semantic shift. Similarly, the concept of bravery, which was originally linked to connotations of attacking or repulsing rival tribes became associated with the concept of religious warfare, and remained a quality worthy of praise in Islamic panegyrics.

The motifs found in the panegyrics composed by the \textit{sāqat al-shu’arā’} can be divided into three categories: virtues, qualities of a good leader and personal matters.

\textbf{Virtues}

According to Sperl:

The moral qualities ascribed to the Caliph in the poems correspond to a standardised set: 'azm, resolution, ṣabr, equanimity, karam, nobility, jūd, generosity, are frequent examples. Most of them had long been part of the poetic tradition, and refer to the heroic virtues celebrated in pre-Islamic poetry.\textsuperscript{367}

Many of the virtues embodied in the panegyrics had Islamic connotations such as righteousness, defending Islam and humiliating infidels.\textsuperscript{368} Other universally recognised human virtues also featured in the verses such as keeping one’s word, helping the needy, performing acts of charity, showing bravery and equanimity on the battlefield, and, most frequently, behaving in a generous manner, which was represented in different forms by means of details. Examples include the patron’s abundant good deeds, maintaining a large court for guests, and providing a welcome for poets and those crowding outside his doors. The patron is often compared to the coming of spring for his people, a comparison which seems to have been emphasised by panegyrist by contrasting this with the aridity of their homelands or sometimes with that of other lands.

\textsuperscript{366} Sperl, \textit{Mannerism}, pp.18-19.
\textsuperscript{367} Sperl, \textit{Islamic Kingship}, p. 20
\textsuperscript{368} For example, in his panegyric to Khālid ibn Yazīd, 'Umāra says:

\begin{quote}

\textit{عز الهدى بك بعد ذاته والكرفر فما به نقص}

The true religion gains respect because of you; disbelief is humiliated and perishes, lifeless.

not ruled by the patron. According to Sperl, in this imagery “the prosperity of the land is only a sign of the prosperity of society under a just King”. 369

Although some discussion will be devoted to the interplay between the sections of the qaṣīda in Chapter Six, it is useful here to give an example of some of the contrasting expressions (muqābalāt) and topics used to strengthen motifs which might otherwise be seen as ordinary, as seen in this example from Ibn Mayyāda’s antitheses:

يرَّداهُّ:ّ يِدٌّ تنهلُّّ بالخيرِّ والثَّيِّ،ّ وأُخْرِى يصيبُ المجرمينْ سعَرُّها،ّ ونارَةً: نَّازُرْ كَلّ منْفَعْ،ّ وأُخْرِى شديدْ بالعادي ضّرِّرُّها.

His hands: one flows with goodness and generosity, the other severely chastises the enemy.
His fire serves two [purposes]: one to guide the needy [to his house] and the flames of the other to burn miscreants. 370

This resembles Ibn Harma’s depiction of al-Manṣūr’s facial expressions and glances around his throne:

كِرَمٌّ لِهِ وَجَهَانٌ لَّدِى الرَّضا،ّ وَأَسِيلٌّ وَجَهَةٌ في الكَرِيبَةٍ بِالسُّلْطَانِ،ّ لَمْ يُعَفَّ إِذَا مَا أَمْكُنتَهُ المَقَاتِلُ،ّ وَلَمْ يُعَفَّ إِذَا كَرُّها فِي هَذَا عَقَابٌ وَنَاتِسْ،ّ

He is generous, having two visages; the first is joyful in certain triumph and the other is fearless in adversity.
He does not pardon without being able to punish, he pardons when he has the power to condemn to death.
He casts glances around his throne, and those glances convey punishment and hope. 371

This antithetical relationship between the two motifs greatly increases the effectiveness of each motif, and the depiction of the patron’s power as twofold would have a doubly powerful impact on the audience.

369 Sperl, Mannerism, p.15.
370 Ibn Mayyāda, H, p.129.
Qualities of a Good Leader

Among the leadership qualities referred to in the panegyrics are justice, resolution and reform with regard to the affairs of the ruled, acting as an exemplary role model for followers, and having legitimacy to rule the Caliphate. The last motif occurs most frequently in Ibn Harma’s panegyrics, since he composed for all the political factions of his time: Umayyads, 'Alids, and Abbasids. In the lines below al-Manṣūr is depicted as having been granted divine support for his rule because of his connection with the Prophet by lineage:

وما الناس أحتُّبوكم بها ولكن أصول الحق إذ نفي الأصول
ثروت محسد لأَسمك وكنتم

It was not the people who bestowed it [the Caliphate] on you, rather [it was] bestowed by [Allah], the true King, the Dignified.
The heritage of Muhammad is yours as you were the true descendant when other descendants were exiled [denied the right to Caliphate].

In other examples an unusual motif occurs in Ibn Harma when he describes al-Manṣūr as a ruler whose extensive personal experience obviates the need for counsellors:

يزرن امرأ لا يصلح القوم أمره ولا ينتقم الأذنين فيما يحاول

They visit one whose affairs are not resolved by others and does not need to consult those around him about his affairs.

Personal Matters

When 'Abdullah ibn Qays al-Ruqayāt praised the Umayyad caliph 'Abdul-Malik ibn Marwān by referring to the sparkling crown on his head and his golden forehead, the Caliph reproached him by saying: “You have praised Muṣ'ab ibn al-Zubayr with this:

إنما مصمع شهاب من الله تجلت عن وجهه الظلماء

Muṣ'ab is nothing other than a meteor [sent] by God; the darkness is dispersed by his countenance.

The reason for the Caliph's anger according to Qudāma ibn Ja'far was that the poet did not praise “his virtues such as righteousness, integrity and so forth, and instead he

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372 Ibn Harma here is supporting the legitimacy of the Abbasids’ claim to the Caliphate. They argued that they were directly related to the Prophet by descent (uṣūl) unlike the 'Alids, whose claim was based on their descent via Abū Ṭālib (the uncle of the Prophet), who pre-deceased Muhammad and was not a Muslim at the time of his death. According to conventions of inheritance, the descendants of the deceased Abū Ṭālib have no inheritance rights as cousins since they were blocked by their living uncles.
374 Ja'far, p.184.
digressed to describe his body and pleasant appearance, which is wrong and shameful. It seems obvious that one should not be praised for trivial qualities one has inherited without effort rather than solid virtues one has achieved, and although in the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s poetry some motifs are used which praise the patron’s appearance, these usually follow the description of his virtues.

Another frequently employed motif of praise in Arabic panegyric generally and in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ in particular is praise of the patron’s lineage. It is used in most cases to highlight his noble origin, which may seem, being unearned, unworthy of praise; nevertheless the poets usually wish to emphasise that the lineage of the patron is famous for its virtues and nobility of character, implying that the patron exemplifies these inherited qualities. Ibn Harma, for instance, in his praise of ‘Abdul-Wāḥid says:

We found that Ghālib were created as a wing, but your father was their covering feather.

Ibn Mayyāda similarly praises one of the ’Alid leaders:

I swear that the swords of the sons of ‘Ali neither recoil nor are they blunt. They are the people who inherited from their father the heritage of Muhammad without theft.

In their references to the lineage of their patrons both poets praise the past glory those ancestors had achieved; thus the patron is no stranger to his current glory and is capable of emulating their deeds. Similarly, praising the height of his house (bayt) is used with two connotations: in a figurative sense, bayt represents his clan or family whilst literally referring to his house or palace. Another common motif is praise of the splendour of the patron’s pageantry, which draws on the conventions of acclaiming his magnificence and grandeur; however, Ibn Mayyāda seems to have gone further by also describing the elegant appearance, handsome face and lean physique of al-Walīd ibn Yazīd. This did not cause offence perhaps because they were viewed in the context of praising his fitness to rule. However, the majority of the motifs in the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s poetry

375 Ibid., p.185.
376 Ibn Harma, M, p.87.
378 See his poem in: Ibid., pp.192-193, especially verses 5-11.
tend to praise the virtues or the leadership qualities of the patron rather than his personal appearance or possessions.

4.2.2 Satire

It is worth recalling here al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s statement to his student Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, elaborating his concept of the faḥl poet, namely that: “He is the one who has a distinctive feature which distinguishes him from others, like the feature of the male camel which distinguishes it from the females”.\footnote{Al-ʿAṣmaʿī, Faḥūla, p.5.} He also hinted that if a poet is defeated in a poetic duel, then he loses the status of faḥl; in other words that of the champion of poets.

He gives an example of poets who used to hold high status but then lost it once they were defeated in a poetic duel (muʿāraḍa); “those ‘defeated poets’ of the tribe of Muḍar (mughallabū muḍar): Ḥumayd, al-Rāʿī and Ibn Muqbil”, were regarded as being amongst the best poets until they were defeated in a duel, al-Rāʿī in particular: “whoever challenged him in satire prevailed”.\footnote{Ibid., p.17.} This elaboration is perhaps the source for the definition of faḥl (or fuḥūl) in Lisān al-ʿArab: “those who defeat their satirists in satire, like Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, and also anyone who defeats their opponent in a poetic duel”.\footnote{Ibn Manẓūr, vol. 5, p.3358. Some poets were not called fuḥūl because they did not master this poetic skill, such as Dhū al-Rumma. See: Jayyusi, p.409; Geert Jan van Gelder, ‘The Abstracted Self in Arabic Poetry’, Journal of Arabic Literature, 14 (1983), pp.22-30 (p.30). In al-Aghānī, al-ʿAṣmaʿī is reported as saying Dhū al-Rumma is among the best poets regarding simile (min aḥsan al-nās tasbihan) but is not generally a great poet (laysa muflīqan). Apparently aware of being excluded by early philologists from al-fuḥūl, Dhū al-Rumma complained to al-Farazdaq, who told him this was justified because of the motifs he used: “You tend to mention only animal dung and ruins”. Al-ʿIṣfahānī, al-Aghānī, vol.18, pp.10,13.}

It seems that satire was still significant when al-ʿAṣmaʿī made his classification of poets. Although he did not explicitly state all those features and qualities which make a good or champion faḥl poet, it is possible to deduce these from the justifications that he gives for classifying a poet as a faḥl or not. Notably, he mentions that Ibn Harma is established (thabt) and eloquent (faṣīḥ), and that “Ṭuṭayl al-Kinānī is like Ibn Harma”.\footnote{Al-ʿAṣmaʿī, Faḥūla, p.16.}

Such statements provide further insights into al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s notion of sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ when coupled with his comment regarding Ibn Harma: “nothing would prevent him from being among al-fuḥūl except that he lived in our time”. Thus the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ
can also be thought of as the group who would come immediately after the category of al-fuhūl.\textsuperscript{383}

As mentioned above, the early interpretation of the fahl poet was someone who defeats his opponent in satire and the poetic duel in describing something.\textsuperscript{384} This type of poetic challenge (like naqāʾiḍ) was conducted in front of a large audience, who listened to two poets competing to show off their lyrical skills and entertaining the spectators, who “would often break out into peals of laughter, especially when they listened to Jarīr’s invective, which was full of mischievous barbs and comical imagery”.\textsuperscript{385}

There are many references in the literary sources confirming the existence of competitions of this kind amongst the sāqat al-shu’arā’. In some cases the poetry was composed in friendly circumstances; in others there was personal rivalry or even fierce hostility between the poets. Al-Īṣfahānī describes one such meeting; Ibn Mayyāda met Ibn Harma and he said: “By God! I used to love meeting you; we have to satirise each other, people have already done that before”. Ibn Harma responded: “What an evil idea!”, thinking that he [Ibn Mayyāda] was serious. Then Ibn Harma said: “By God! Then I am the one who says:

\begin{align*}
\text{وإنيّلملآنُّ} & \text{العنانِّ} \\
\text{فؤُّدَّّ} & \text{رجالٌّ} \\
\text{إِن أَمِّي} & \text{تَقَن عتَّ} \\
\text{وَمُّ} & \text{فودَّّ} \\
\text{شيبٍّ} & \text{يغشيّالرأسَّ} \\
\text{وهيّعقيمُّ} & \text{ألف ّسَؤُّ} \\
\text{مُّ} & \text{عَّ} \\
\text{إِذاّماّوَّ} & \text{نىّيومًّ} \\
\end{align*}

I am held trustworthy by neighbours, and if the enemy’s bird were auspicious I would be their ill omen.
I will keep a tight rein on a speedy horse if a deadly serious day [of war] occurs,
So that men will wish that my mother’s [head] had been wrapped in her grey hair and she had remained sterile.\textsuperscript{386}

So Ibn Mayyāda retorted: “I see you still have your youthful spirit! May your mother mourn for you; you are so malicious! I was joking when I said that”.\textsuperscript{387}

Ibn Mayyāda seems sure that Ibn Harma would defeat him if they competed; this is consistent with al-Āṣma’T’s statement that Ibn Harma was the leading poet of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ group. More importantly, it confirms that the poetic duel was a common

\textsuperscript{383} Ru’ba ibn al-‘Ajjāj was already mentioned in Ṭabaqāt Fuhūl al-Shu’arā’ in the ninth category, which included four rajaz composers. See: al-Juṣmahī, vol.2, p.761. See also Ḥusayn, Naqd A’lām al-Ruwāt, p.483.

\textsuperscript{384} Ibn Manẓūr, vol.5, p.3358.

\textsuperscript{385} Jayyusi, p.410.

\textsuperscript{386} Meaning they will wish that I had not been born.

\textsuperscript{387} Al-Īṣfahānī, al-Aghānī, vol.4, p.259.
practice in Arabic literary tradition, whether as a friendly contest, in a more serious form like the naqā’iḍ, or even as a means of provoking rulers to carry out severe punishment on the rival poet and his tribe; this seems to have been the intention of some satirical verse composed by the sāqat al-shu’arā’.

4.2.2.1 Naqā’iḍ Poetry

Van Gelder asserts that the origin of naqā’iḍ poetry dates back to the pre-Islamic era, beginning as “slanging matches between members of opposing clans or tribes” and culminating in the Umayyad period, “when al-Akḥṭal, al-Farazdaq and Jarīr exchanged their famous series of naqā’iḍ in the course of several decades”. Hussein agrees that the nature of naqā’iḍ was tribal. According to van Gelder, naqā’iḍ later became “personal or sectarian rather than tribal”, but here I would argue that this type of poetry is of its very nature tribal and if it becomes purely personal it is no longer naqā’iḍ. Thus, van Gelder’s claim that this later non-tribal duelling was still naqā’iḍ does not seem to be accurate in relation to the analysis of the sāqat al-shu’arā’’s naqā’iḍ.

Hussein makes a similarly erroneous suggestion. After examining only the naqā’iḍ of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq based on Abū ‘Ubayda’s famous historical source Naqā’iḍ Jarīr wa-l-Farazdaq, he concludes that “one may date the final stage of naqā’iḍ composition to around 105/724, the year in which Hishām b. ʿAbd-al-Malik was appointed as caliph”. It is possible that Hussein was unaware of the continuity of this poetic tradition or was influenced by van Gelder, whom he quotes at the beginning of his article.

Evidence from the poetry of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ suggests that naqā’iḍ did not vanish after Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, nor did it focus on purely personal topics. On the contrary, it continued to flourish as a type of lampoon and may have existed on a similarly large

389 Ibid.
390 He observes that “in the Umayyad era, naqā’iḍ poetry used to be composed during quarrels between different tribal groups. During this preliminary stage in the Umayyad period, the naqā’iḍ was still a continuation of the traditional naqā’iḍ poetry known in the pre-Islamic period”. Ali Ahmad Hussein, 'The Formative Age of Naqā’iḍ Poetry: Abū Ubayda’s Naqā’iḍ Jarīr wa-l-Farazdaq', Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, 34 (2008), pp.499-528 (p.502).
scale. However, much of that poetry was intentionally never recorded, according to al-Iṣfahānī:

**Translation:**

لحكمّالخضريّوابنّميادةّمناقضاتٌّوأراجيزّطوالّطويتّذكرّأكثرهاّوألغيته،ّوذكرتّمنهاّلمعاًّمنّجيدّماّقالاهّلئلاّيخلوّهذاّالكتابّمنّذكرّبعضّماّدارّبينهماّولاّيستوعبّسائرهّفيطول

Ḥakam and Ibn Mayyāda created many ‘contradicting poems, flytings’ and long arājīz, most of which I did not mention and disregarded; I only included a tiny fraction of the best of what they said. This book refers to some of it; however, it cannot include it all as it would be [too] long.

Al-Iṣfahānī’s claim that, in his judgement, the material he quotes is from their best compositions implies that not all their naqā’id were good. This suggestion is supported by another of the author’s anecdotes. Ḥakam and Ibn Mayyāda agreed to participate in a naqā’id contest but some of Ibn Mayyāda’s relatives stopped him, fearing his incompetence would bring shame on their tribe. Al-Iṣfahānī then mentions that Ibn Mayyāda thought he would defeat Ḥakam if he started by reciting some saj’ (rhymed prose) before engaging in naqā’id. However, according to al-Iṣfahānī, this saj’ was “long, weak, clumsy, and useless because it resembles neither composed rajaz nor eloquent speech; even its endings lack consistency in their rhyme”.

Such statements demonstrate that although some motifs in the sāqat al-shuʿarā’’s poetry were innovative, in their naqā’id compositions these tended to be imitative in comparison to the work of earlier established poets, as will be shown shortly. Moreover, their naqā’id retained the element of tribal satire used in earlier poetic competitions. Just as Jarīr had engaged with many poets in satires, Ibn Mayyāda competed with his contemporaries including Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī, ’Ullafa ibn ’Aqīl, Amallas ibn ’Aqīl, Shuqrān (a slave of Kharsha) and ’Iqāl ibn Hāshim but avoided competition with

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393 This is van Gelder’s translation of naqā’id. Van Gelder, Naqā’id, p.578.
395 Ibid., p.190.
397 Ibid., vol.2, p.188.
398 Ibid.
399 According to al-Aġānī, this rivalry between the two was instigated by Caliph al-Walīd ibn Yazīd, who questioned them about each other, favoured Ibn Mayyāda’s response and rewarded him. Ibid., pp.198-202.
400 Ibid., p.201.
Ibn Harma, as mentioned above. He also avoided Şakhr ibn al-Ja’d al-Khuḍrī,\textsuperscript{401} who supported his fellow tribesman, Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī, in lampoons against Ibn Mayyāda.

Similarly, Ṭumārah ibn ʿAqīl, who is mainly remembered for his satire, engaged in \textit{naqāʿī{id} with at least five poets: Abū Janna al-Asadī, Abū al-Rudaynī al-ʿUkalī, Raʾs-I-Kabsh al-Numayrī, Farwa ibn Ḥumayyda al-Asadī and Nāḥīd ibn Thawma al-Kilābī.\textsuperscript{402}

This is not surprising since he was proud to be the grandson of Jarīr, the celebrated Umayyad poet and star of \textit{naqāʿī{id} competitions. There are many references in Ṭumārah’s work to famous works by Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, as seen in his poem to Nāḥīd and the tribe of Banū Kilāb, which includes this verse:

\[
\text{وصدّقّما قول الفرزدق فيكما} \\
\text{وكتّبّما ما كان قال جرير}
\]

And you confirmed what al-Farazdaq said about you and disproved what Jarīr said.\textsuperscript{403}

Given that the tribal dimension and function of \textit{naqāʿī{id} are more attached to Bedouin societies and their bards than to city-dwelling poets, it seems likely that al-Asmaʿī and later critics based their categorisation of the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} on three criteria: the presence of Bedouin motifs and style of composition in their work, engagement in satire, and the adoption of the classical poetic style of Umayyad and pre-Islamic times.

Analysing examples of \textit{naqāʿī{id} composed by the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} and comparing these to poems by Jarīr and al-Farazdaq demonstrates that the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ}’s verses were mostly imitative and conservative, not only in their motifs but also in their style of composition. Van Gelder identifies the following norms of composition and motifs in \textit{naqāʿī{id} poems:

The poems usually come in pairs, employing the same metre and rhyme [...] the poems may be short and monothematic; but many are relatively long and in \textit{qaṣīda} form, with a remarkable combination of themes: amatory, vaunting and invective verses. The ‘rebutting’ or ‘undoing’ (which may have been the original meaning of the verb \textit{naqaḍa}) does not imply a point-by-point refutation of the poem of the one’s opponent. Instead of defending himself against abuse and slander the poet usually prefers a counter-attack. Rich in historical and political allusions, their political significance is second to their function as entertainment.

\textsuperscript{401} Ibn Mayyāda is reported to have said: “I will not be tarnished by the tribe of Banū al-Khuḍr twice”, implying that he had been humiliated in his poetic duel with Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī. Ibid., p.186.

\textsuperscript{402} Al-Muṭayyir, p.363.

\textsuperscript{403} ‘Aqīl, p.52.
which is provided by means of humorous descriptions, grotesque exaggerations and gross obscenities.\textsuperscript{404}

Hussein’s detailed analysis of two \textit{naqāʾiḍ} poems by Jarīr and al-Farazdaq is useful\textsuperscript{405} in this context, showing that the “refuting poet does not deal with the themes and motifs in the same order as they appear in his rival’s \textit{naqīḍa}; rather the order is arbitrary”.\textsuperscript{406} The two poems were usually similar in length and, according to Hussein, if one was considerably longer, this could indicate a later addition using the same metre and rhyme.\textsuperscript{407}

Van Gelder’s suggestion that poets preferred to counter-attack rather than defend themselves against verbal abuse might be justifiable, but refuting the opponent’s point in kind also featured in \textit{naqāʾiḍ}. Thus, although Jarīr occasionally engages in retaliation, he refutes al-Farazdaq’s slanderous insults before launching his counter-attack. The refuting poet was usually expected to “abandon the order of themes and motifs that appear in the counter-\textit{naqīḍa}”.\textsuperscript{408} The themes, mainly self-praise and tribal glorification, provide the framework in which the poet lampoons the rival poet and his parents, family, ancestors, clan, branch of the tribe or the whole tribe, by mocking them and enumerating their defects. As van Gelder observes, the level of obscenity in both poems can be quite gross.

Hussein makes some useful comments regarding the composition and presentation of \textit{naqāʾiḍ} poems by Jarīr and al-Farazdaq. The composition could sometimes consist of three rather than two stages: the first \textit{naqīḍa} was recited, followed by a response

\begin{list}{\textsuperscript{404}}{\leftmargin=0cm}
\item Van Gelder, ‘\textit{Naqāʾiḍ}’, p.578.
\item These poems have the same metre as the \textit{kāmil} and the rhyme letter (\textit{rawiyy}) \textit{lam}: “the vocalization of the rhyme letter differs in both poems”; it seems permissible to change the vocalisation but not the rhyme letter according to Hussein. See: Hussein, \textit{Rise and Decline}, p.311. Thus al-Farazdaq’s poem starts with this verse:

\begin{quote}
إنّالذيّسمكّالسماءّبناّلناّ،
بِئَتَيْ دعائِمَهُ أعزّوأطولُّ
\end{quote}

The one who created the sky has built for us a house whose props are more precious and higher [than the skies].

While Jarīr begins:

\begin{quote}
لمنّالديارّكأنهاّلمّتحللِّ،
بينّالكناسّوبينّطلحّالأعزلِّ؟
\end{quote}

For whom the ruins, which look like they have never been lived in, between the thick and thorny trees?
\end{list}

See: Abū ’Ubayda Ma’mar ibn al-Muthannā al-Taymī, \textit{Kitāb al-Naqāʾiḍ: Naqāʾiḍ Jarīr wa-l-Farazdaq}, ed. by Khalīl ’Imrān al-Maṣūr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyya, 1998), pp.134,154. It is clear that while al-Farazdaq includes neither a \textit{nasīb} nor an \textit{aṭlāl} at the beginning of his poem, Jarīr starts with the \textit{aṭlāl}, as is usual in a \textit{qaṣīda}. Thus, al-Farazdaq’s opening line lacks \textit{tasrīf} (the rhyming of both hemistichs) which may indicate that this was not originally the first line of his \textit{qaṣīda}. It is possible that a \textit{naqīḍa} was allowed to start without \textit{nasīb}, \textit{aṭlāl} or \textit{tasrīf}.

\textsuperscript{406} Hussein, \textit{Rise and Decline}, p.321.
\textsuperscript{407} Ibid., p.322.
\textsuperscript{408} Hussein cannot find a convincing explanation for the change of order in the refuting poem. Ibid., p.323. However, since most of the slanderous insults, if not all of them, are usually refuted by the second poet this issue is of lesser importance.
composed by the other poet, and then there was an opportunity for the first poet to compose an additional part. However it is not known whether the complete naqīḍa was presented to the audience or whether the poet recited only the new section.\footnote{Ibid.}

As for presentation, the poetic duelling would take place in front of an audience. Although there are some poetic references suggesting that after composing his poem, the poet would send it to be recited by his transmitter in front of his opponent and the audience in the marketplace, Hussein is sceptical about this.\footnote{Ibid., p.324.} However, oral recitation before an audience seems to have been the norm regardless of who recited the poems. It was also common for two poets to form an alliance against a rival.\footnote{Hussein explains how Jarīr managed to persuade al-Rā‘ī to support him rather than al-Farazdaq. Ibid., p.326.}

Below, one pair of naqāʿīd poems composed by sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ will be analysed. These represent the work of two rivals, namely Ḥakam al-Khudrī and Ibn Mayyāda.\footnote{Although ‘Umāra ibn ‘Aqīl was found to have satire as his first dominant theme, I chose to analyse two naqāʿīd poems by Ibn Mayyāda and Ḥakam for two reasons: firstly, ‘Umāra exchanged satire with poets who were not from the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, while the naqāʿīd poems of Ibn Mayyāda and Ḥakam presumably reveal more about the characteristics of the group. Secondly, it seems that the most suitable place to discuss Ḥakam as a member of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ and to analyse his poetry is within this context, since most of what we know about him comes from his association with Ibn Mayyāda.} This example will serve to illustrate the imitative nature of naqāʿīd poems by the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. Given their length, both poems are reproduced in full in Appendix 3.

Both are composed in ṭawīl metre and employ the rhyme letter rāʾ using the same vocalisation, rāʾ in the genitive. The poems are polythematic and use the qaṣīda form with the satirical element coming at the end of the composition. As the comparative analysis in Table 4.2 will show, there are few differences in structure. The length of the satirical section in both poems and the motifs they employ are also quite similar: both poets emphasise that they will name only ten defects. This appears to demonstrate that Ibn Mayyāda and Ḥakam consciously intended to illustrate in their composition the original meaning of naqāda (to counter the point made by the opponent).

Regarding the length of the naqāʿīd poems, there is no way to verify whether or not the length of the two original poems was similar to the Umayyad naqāʿīd, since al-Īṣfahānī clearly states that these verses are merely selections from what they have said in these poems.
However, the purpose of countering the slanderous claims of the opponent is clearly present in the *naqā'īd* of the *sāqat al-shu’arā*, although claim and counter-claim are not always presented in the same order, and sometimes the responding poet’s refutation seems to have little relevance to the claim made by the first poet. In the table below is an example of two *naqīda* poems by Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī and Ibn Mayyāda which should best illustrate how they proceeded in their *naqā’īd*.

**Table 4.2 Detailed Comparison of Two Naqā’īd by Ibn Mayyāda and Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī: The sub-themes and motifs.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ḥakam</th>
<th>Ibn Mayyāda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verses 1-2</strong></td>
<td>The description of his mount and journey (<em>raḥīl</em> section) usually follows the <em>nasibīṭalal</em> section, perhaps indicating this was not originally the opening line of the poem. This is also supported by the absence of <em>tasrī‘</em>, a recurrent feature of the first verse in other poems in his <em>dīwān</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A traditional introductory <em>ṭalal</em> (ruins) section, using <em>tasrī‘</em> indicates this was the first line in the original.</td>
<td><strong>Verses 1-2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verses 3-5</strong></td>
<td>He praises his tribe as the best since they control the water spring of Hajm and the surrounding area. Their court, a unique sight for both Bedouin and city dwellers, is shaded by large palace walls. Both branches of ´Uyayna return there, like streams that flow into large deep lakes or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>fakhr</em> self/tribal glorification section of the poem which praises aspects of his tribe: the quantity of his people; their quality as individuals; the size of their domain; their generosity and their glorious victories in the past.</td>
<td><strong>Verses 3-7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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413 For example, while Ḥakam mentions the betrayal of neighbours as his fifth point (verse 10) Ibn Mayyāda responds to this in the eighth point (verse 17).

414 In another *naqīda* by Ibn Mayyāda, quoted in *al-Aghānī*, it is clear that he starts his poem with the *ṭalal* section before moving on to other themes, Al-Iṣfahānī narrates:

> وما قالهّابنّميادةّفيّحكمّقولهّمنّقصيدةّأولهاّّّّّّّبِحِيثُّالتفتّربدُّالجنابِّوعِينُهاّّّّّّّّّّ

> Alas! You greet the ruins (*atlāl*) whose years are lengthened so that the speckled ostriches and antelope would meet over them.

> بِحِيثُّالتفتّربدُّالجنابِّوعِينُهاّّّّّّّّّّ

Among which that Ibn Mayyāda said to Ḥakam was his poem, the first verse of which begins:

> لَا حِيّاَّالأَّلَّمَّا طَالَتّسَينِّهَا حِيْثُّالتفتّرَدَّيِّجَنَّابِّوَعَيْنِّهَا

> "Among which that Ibn Mayyāda said to Ḥakam was his poem, the first verse of which begins:"

See: Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vol.2, p.196. As this example shows, Ibn Mayyāda starts his poem by mentioning the ruins of his beloved’s home as part of the amatory verses and both hemistichs of the first verse of the poem are rhymed (*tasrī‘*).

415 According to *Līsān al-ʿArab* Hajm was a spring of water belonging to the tribe of Banū Fuzāra, said to have been excavated in the time of ʾĀd. Ibn Manẓūr, vol.6, p.4624.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse 6</th>
<th>The start of the satirical section in which he claims he will enumerate only ten defects of the Murra (Ibn Mayyāda’s tribe) although he knows more about their shame.</th>
<th>Verse 8</th>
<th>Mocks Ḥakam’s tribe (Muḥārib) for surpassing others in shame, having more than ten defects. He also states that he will enumerate only ten defects.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verse 7</td>
<td>Their lands are protected by slaves, the worst possible guards one could appoint to defend valuables.</td>
<td>Verse 9</td>
<td>They are miserly and never butcher camels even when this is necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 8</td>
<td>They never possessed a noble horse and they sleep with their wives during menstruation.</td>
<td>Verse 10</td>
<td>They never killed\textsuperscript{416} any charging Arabian horse. Their horse stock only consists of mares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 9</td>
<td>Their dead break wind even when in the grave.</td>
<td>Verse 11</td>
<td>The blows from their swords never cut off heads, only ulcerated foreskins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 10</td>
<td>They are unfaithful to their neighbours and betray them even when they pose no threat.</td>
<td>Verse 12</td>
<td>Their great leaders do not know even the simple task of how to prepare arrows in warfare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 11</td>
<td>They rely on mules [i.e. not horses] in war.</td>
<td>Verse 13</td>
<td>They have an unmentionable defect which if it became known would make them only suitable to serve as slaves in the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 12</td>
<td>Their old men have no virtues or modesty as they sneak out looking to commit adultery even though their backs are bent with age.</td>
<td>Verses 14-15</td>
<td>They have sex with sheep and their old women are so vain they prettify themselves even after death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse 13</td>
<td>They are ill-wishers and hypocrites, always worried that their real feeling might be</td>
<td>Verse 16</td>
<td>If they were to be put in the sea they would pollute it with their dark skins.\textsuperscript{417}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{416} Both poems contain the word ‘\textit{yamsah}’ which has two meanings in relation to horses. The first means ‘to rub the face of the horse’ as used by Ḥakam, who explicitly mentions the word ‘face’, and the second meaning is ‘to kill a horse’, which seems to be intended by Ibn Mayyāda, since the expression ‘the dusty day’ probably refers to war. The second meaning is also found in both the Qur’an and \textit{Lisān al-‘Arab}. See: ibid., vol.6, pp.4197-98.

\textsuperscript{417} This reference to their dark skin is connected to their name, Khuḍr. According to al-Ṣafāḍī, their ancestor, Mālik, was black-skinned. See: Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafāḍī, \textit{Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-
discovered even when they are alone and far from people (or separated from them by sea) thus they always skulk like spiny-tailed lizards.

Verses 17-18

Whoever becomes a neighbour of Muḥārib and Jasr is promised no assistance or glory as he will be as defenceless as a clitoris protected only by two labia.

Verse 19

If one of them wishes to die then his death will be ignoble [not for a good cause] and not worthy of praise.

Verse 20

They suffer from an eye defect [perhaps conjunctivitis] which makes them look ugly and red all the time.

It is evident from the above table that even in the themes before the satirical section, Ibn Mayyāda makes a riposte. In the glorification of his tribe, Ḥakam boasts that they control a vast domain including lands both high (mountainous) and low, whereas Ibn Mayyāda refers to the fact that his tribe controls much of the important land around the waters of Hajm and that they are so powerful that they choose which water to drink from and where to settle to graze their animals.

Other points are countered as follows:

Table 4.3: Countered and non-countered slanders in two naqāʿīḍ poems by Ḥakam and Ibn Mayyāda, listed according to their order in the poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ḥakam</th>
<th>Ibn Mayyāda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Your tribe has many defects but I will enumerate only ten of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Your tribe’s land is guarded by slaves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Your tribe never owned a noble horse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You are unclean in your sexual lives.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your tribe never owned a noble horse as your stock is merely mares (<strong>counters Ḥ slander 2</strong>), and (partly <strong>counters Ḥ slander 6</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Your tribe always break wind, even when dead.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your swords are not used to cut off your enemies’ heads but rather for circumcision (partly <strong>counters Ḥ slander 1</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>You betray your neighbours.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your great leaders are ignorant of warfare (<strong>partly counters Ḥ slander 7</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Your mounts in wars are mules.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have a very gross defect, which, if I mention it, will degrade you to be only servile slaves (<strong>partly counters Ḥ slander 1 and possibly 3</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Your elder men have no virtues and commit adultery with their neighbours.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have sex with sheep (<strong>counters Ḥ slander 3 and 7</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>You are ill-wishers and always worried about being discovered, so you skulk like spiny-tailed lizards.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and your elderly women have no modesty and prettify themselves even after death (<strong>counters Ḥ slander 7</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Your skins are so dark they could contaminate the sea. (<strong>Non-countering point</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>You betray your neighbours (<strong>counters Ḥ slander 5</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Your deaths are ignoble and do not cause praise or pride (very little possibility that it partly <strong>counters Ḥ slander 4</strong> or (<strong>Non-refuting point</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>You look ugly since you have an eye disease (conjunctivitis) which causes them to become red (<strong>Non-countering point</strong>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Points 9 and 10 are not mentioned in <em>al-Aghānī</em>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Points 1, 9 and 12 do not seem to have any correspondence in Ḥakam’s poem. Thus they seem <strong>Non-countering points</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown above slanders delivered by Ḥakam are countered by Ibn Mayyāda’s naqīda, but Ibn Mayyāda mentions more defects, which are non-contradicting points of counter-attack. The order of the contradictions in Ibn Mayyāda’s poem does not follow the order of the slanderous claims in Ḥakam’s. Both poems generally demonstrate the tribal nature of the satire, the point-by point attack/counter-attack style of composition, and the poets’ adherence to the structure of the polythematic qaṣīda.

The motifs of naqāʾīd reflect Bedouin and tribal values; these include defending one’s own honour and that of the tribe, possessing noble horses, and slaughtering camels as a sign of generosity for guests or as an act of kindness in times of famine and thus being neighbourly, righteous and faithful. The elders of Bedouin society were expected to be wise, virtuous and masters of warfare, and forthright and brave in expressing their feelings. All of these Bedouin values were at the core of both glorification of the self and the tribe, and of lampooning the opponent and his tribe. There is evidence that even when an element of urban society is included this is given a Bedouin justification. For example, when Ibn Mayyāda praises his tribe for having a large court shaded by a great palace, it is in the context of describing an extensive space suitable for guests, ownership of which indicates great generosity and the means to entertain any number of guests.

It is perhaps not surprising that naqāʾīd should have flourished in the Umayyad era, considering its entertaining nature and the famous public recitations by Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, “each standing in his corner in al-Mirbad”.

It should be noted, however, that during that time “poetry was not yet the privilege of the ruling classes”, and audiences were still largely of Arab identity. However, in the Abbasid era, when many of the characteristics of Arab identity were being replaced or challenged by other identities, especially Persian, the fact that the naqāʾīd continued to exist raises the question: what kept such a tradition alive, given that it was so attached to Bedouin rather than urban society?

One possible answer is that this poetic form was encouraged by the politics of the era, as the following anecdote shows. Caliph al-Maʾmūn, who was a patron of ṬUmāra ibn ṬAqīl, is reported to have asked him about some of his naqāʾīd with other poets after one of al-Maʾmūn’s courtiers, ṬAli ibn Hishām, had recited a verse mocking ṬUmāra.

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418 Jayyusi, p.410.
419 Ibid., p.409.
When he hesitated to recite some verses due to the nature of the insult, al-Maʿmūn insisted. If a poem attracted him, al-Maʿmūn would ask: “Does this poem have a *naqīḍa*?” He particularly liked the following verse of a poem composed by ʿUmāra satirising Farwa ibn Ḥumayḍa:

ما في السوئيّة أن تجرّ عليهَم وَتَكُونُ يومُ الرُّوَع أَوْلُ صُمَّارٍ

It is not fair that you cause war for your people and then on the day of battle you are the first to flee from it!

Al-Maʿmūn asked about the verses which Farwa composed in retaliation, and seemed to like these too:

وَابن المراغة جاحرٌ من خوفنا
بَاد بِمنزلة النذيل الصَّاغر
يَخُشِّى الرياح بأن تكون طليعةٌ
أَوْ أنَّ تحلِّ به عقوبة قادِر

The son of dust [the donkey: referring to ʿUmāra] is absent, hiding and frightened of us, in a state of humiliation and insignificance,

Fearing even the wind when it blows, thinking it could be a raid or that the punishment of God may fall upon him.

Al-Maʿmūn said to ʿUmāra: “He hurt you” and he responded: “But what I said to him hurt him more,” a reference to the rumour that his verse had caused Farwa’s death; in a battle he had got caught up in a desperate fight, and when he was told to run to safety he refused to do so, because he did not want to make ʿUmāra’s slander come true.

It is possible that the interest shown by the Abbasid political elite was a reason for the continued survival of *naqāʿīd*, together with its value as entertainment due to its “humorous imagery and witty invective”. However, unlike the Umayyad *naqāʿīd*, which was able to “popularize poetry and make it a successful vehicle of entertainment for the public”, the Abbasid *naqāʿīd* was enjoyed by the ruling classes but apparently did not appeal to a mass audience. Moreover, the poets were no longer on the same companionable terms as their predecessors such as Jarīr, who viewed al-Farazdaq as a friendly rival and wrote an elegy for him when he died.

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421 Ibid.
422 Ibid.
423 Jayyusi, p.409.
424 Ibid.
425 Ibid., p.410.
The attitudes of the later poets and their Abbasid audience towards *naqāʿīḍ* seems to have changed from those of the Umayyad era. Unlike Jarīr, who “believed that satire must be funny, and his satires were faithful to his theory, despite their tendency to be foul-mouthed and scabrous”, 426ʿUmāra is reported to have proudly boasted that his poetry had caused the death of two poets, and that most poets who went up against him had been either defeated or killed or subsequently died. 427

The humour of *naqāʿīḍ* perhaps explains why the obscenities which they contained were accepted despite their grossness. However, in the post-Jarīr era attitudes also seem to have changed and rather than accepting the joke and viewing it as a form of entertainment, it was regarded as an insult. It is reported that Ibn Mayyāda’s people were so enraged by Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī’s mocking poems that they complained to the governor, who threatened to punish him. Forced to flee, he died while he was on his way to Syria.

Such changes of attitude may have caused the *naqāʿīḍ*’s popularity to wane but social changes in the Abbasid era also certainly impacted on the artistic preferences of poets and audiences alike. Just as Abū Nuwās revolted against the enforced inclusion of *atlāl*, choosing instead to write about the pleasures of his urban existence such as wine, so poets and audiences looked for motifs with more contemporary relevance and after the era of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*, the *naqāʿīḍ* style and tribal lampooning seem to have had their day.

4.3 Conclusion: Imitation and Innovation in Themes and Motifs

This thematic examination of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*’s poetry has revealed a wide variety of themes in their work, the most important being panegyric and satire. These two themes were concerned not with the poet’s thoughts, feelings and experiences, but with other people, be they patrons, peers or opponents, and thus the focus in this chapter was on how they were represented in the poetry of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*. The aim was to look beyond the raw statistical data which emerged from the initial thematic quantitative examination of poems and fragments presented in table 4.1 concerning thematic division.

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426 Ibid., p.411.
The examination involved contextualising the poetry and the poets within medieval Arabic traditions of artistic creation by examining the relevant literature. After considering these elements, the poetry itself received more detailed attention. Given the limited space for detailed analysis of a large corpus of poetry, a carefully selected sample was chosen for detailed analysis, accompanied by a thorough investigation of the literature. This examination of the poetry revealed some interesting findings.

One of these findings is that initial mapping of a large corpus of literature and poetry can play a crucial part in correcting certain misconceptions about particularly contentious issues in Arabic poetry, for instance the claims regarding the tribal nature of naqā’id. Secondly, working with fragments of poetry that have been gleaned from multiple sources is seldom an easy task. It requires a degree of experimentation, always using due caution; nevertheless, exploring possible links between these fragments sometimes enabled me to put together the small pieces of a puzzle to produce a more accurate picture of what the original poem might have looked like.

As for panegyric, as a theme it cannot be described as either traditional or innovative simply because it has been a constant presence in Arabic poetry since the pre-Islamic era until our own day. What might rightly be described in terms of being traditional or innovative within panegyric are the motifs employed and the creative choices of the poets, which might show a preference for old or new. A mixture of both types of motifs was found in the sāqat al-shu’arāʾ’s poetry but with the old predominating.

Materialistic motives emerged as the most compelling reason why professional poets composed panegrics: it was their way of making a living. Although other reasons were identified they were usually of lesser significance. This was reflected in the secondary literature concerning the relationship between the sāqat al-shu’arāʾ and their patrons. There was further evidence in their poetry and especially in their choice of motifs to be used in their panegrics. These were largely conventional but had certain personal touches, a good example being Ibn Mayyāda’s description of his patron’s appearance.

Satire provided perhaps the clearest representation of al-Aṣma’ī’s notion of the champion poet (faḥl) who defeats his opponents in poetic duels, especially the naqā’id, a competitive type of satire. Analysis seems to suggest that the sāqat al-shu’arāʾ were following in the steps of the fuḥūl poets. The sāqat al-shu’arāʾ amply demonstrated their mastery of satirical skills; Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī and Ibn Mayyāda in particular showed
that they were capable of continuing the tradition of their predecessors Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, the stars of naqā’īd in the Umayyad era.

The detailed analysis of their naqā’īd also indicated that this poetic theme remained tribal at its core, and the claims that naqā’īd vanished after Jarīr and al-Farazdaq or became a form of personal satire were proven inaccurate. Nonetheless, changing social attitudes towards naqā’īd resulted in its being no longer tolerated by the poets’ fellow-tribesmen, and this was perhaps the main reason for its decline with the demise of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ in the Abbasid era.

However, with the exception of a few lines of invective introducing new motifs, the vast majority of the motifs found in satire remained traditional in character, drawing on Bedouin values and norms. The next chapter will reflect on this issue in greater detail. In addition, building on the analysis in the current chapter, Chapter Five will focus on the less dominant themes in the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s poetry and their poetic views of themselves and their surroundings, examining the relationships between the sub-themes, minor themes and motifs and exploring some of the innovative motifs they employed.
Chapter Five: Themes and Motifs of the Self and its Surroundings

I am from Qays and they are the pinnacles, when their armed horsemen ride.

Ibn Mayyāda\textsuperscript{428}

5.1 Introduction

The investigation of themes in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ in this chapter is a continuation of the thematic exploration initiated in Chapter Four. While in the previous Chapter I investigated interpretations of the poets’ views of others, be they patrons, peers or opponents, as expressed in panegyric and satire, in the current chapter the aim is to explore their views of themselves and the world around them. Thus, more attention will be paid to their amatory, self-glorificatory and descriptive poems and fragments.

The argument of this chapter is that to give a balanced view of the poets within their original contexts and in relation to their audience, with whom they shared a common time, place and values, one has to look at the poets’ views of themselves and their society, and their physical and metaphysical surroundings. I would argue that by viewing the poets through their poetic views of themselves, we will move much closer to understanding their struggles and interactions with the everyday life of their times. Due caution, of course, is needed here not to over-interpret the evidence, as these poets do not usually write any kind of historical account; but they do allude to their own personal version of history.

This chapter will demonstrate that the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ harks back to the motifs and ideas of the ancient poets in its very often archaic views of the self, society and nature. The Bedouin views which dominate their poetry in the themes of love, boasting and description are not sophisticated or complicated by engagement in philosophical interpretations of life, although a few poems are concerned, to some extent, with, for example, fate and predestination. These attitudes to poetry, I would argue, were amongst the reasons why their poetry was seen as imitating the ancients and the Bedouin poets by al-ʿAṣmaʾī, even though in some instances they disagreed with the ancients’ views and arrived at different conclusions.

\textsuperscript{428} Ibn Mayyāda, H. p.156.
Medieval critics often tended to treat classical Arabic poetry by putting emphasis on panegyric and satire, regarding these as the archaic poets’ main themes while other themes, (which we might call secondary) were still treated as if they were merely sub-themes of the qaṣīda and assumed to be of lesser importance. The pre-Islamic qaṣīda starts with a romantic introduction (an “elegiac opening” to use Allen’s phrase, or “the theme of loss and yearning” in Stetkevych’s words), which normally includes a description of the encampment and its traces. The poet then moves to the description of his journey, his mount, the desert and, sometimes, a hunting scene; he may include some glorification of his tribe or himself. He then concentrates on the main purpose of the poem, whether panegyric or satire, as described in Chapter One. Attention in this chapter will be concentrated on motifs of the self and its surroundings regardless of their position within the qaṣīda.

I argue that different readings should be offered for the motifs rather than the whole poem, and special attention should be given to the almost invisible ‘micro-views’ of the poets regarding their time, the values of their society, their views of the changing nature of their surroundings and the people they encountered, their poetic view of themselves, and the extent to which their poetry is informative regarding these views. Therefore the investigation of the theme of glorification of the self and one’s tribe is intended here not merely to determine its type but more importantly to shed light on the poets’ portrayal of their persona and how they perceived and expressed themselves and their view of their society.

429 For example, al-Mirzabānī in his al-Muwashshaḥ narrates that Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir was debating the status of Abū Nuwās among poets and the quality of his poetry with Abū ‘Alī al-Ṭāhir, who was contemporary with Abū Nuwās and was highly respected among the scholars of Kufa in his time. Ṭāhir said that he considered Abū Nuwās an excellent poet in all themes of poetry (funūn) illustrating his argument by reciting a couple of verses, but al-Ṭāhir disagreed, arguing that Abū Nuwās was a failed poet since according to him “poetry lies between panegyric and satire and Abū Nuwās could not excel in them, he merely excelled in hunting and wine poems and even the best of them he appropriated” from earlier poets. He then mentioned many examples of verses which Abū Nuwās had appropriated from other poets. See: Yūnus al-Sāmūrāʾī, ‘Ashʿār Abī ʿAlī al-Ṭāhir, Majallat al-Mawrid, 1 (1971), pp.149-179 (pp.149-150), and also: Muḥammad ibn ʿImrān al-Mirzabānī, al-Muwashshah fi- Maʾākhidh al-ʿUlamāʾ al-Šuʿārāʾ, (Cairo: Jamʿiyyat Nashr al-ʿArabiyya, 1929), pp.282-283.


432 A detailed analysis of the hunting scene in pre-Islamic poetry including the similes and motifs employed by the poets is provided by Montgomery. See: Montgomery, The Vagaries, in his discussion of ‘The Bull Oryx’, pp.110-165 and particularly pp.112-115.

433 See especially the study’s discussion of Ibn Qutayba’s lengthy statement regarding the structure of the qaṣīda and his justification for the inclusion and ordering of the sub-themes. (Chapter 1, section 1.4.3.2, p.52).
This approach will also help in assessing the poets’ connection and commitment to their tribe and whether there is tension between their sense of individuality and their tribal affiliation since, as van Gelder has noted, in the Abbasid era poets showed more individualism.\footnote{Van Gelder, \textit{The Abstracted Self}, p.29.} Similarly, by exploring the poets’ amatory and descriptive poems the discussion aims to uncover their views of life, of society, and values and beliefs of the time. This in turn will highlight some of the societal, political, theological and, more importantly, poetic and artistic views of the period and their impact on the poets’ work.

5.2 The Poetic Vision of Love

The primary investigation of both the historical and statistical data reveals that the major contributor of love poems and narratives among the \textit{sāqat al-shu'arā’} is Ibn Mayyāda, who composed many monothematic poems totally devoted to the theme of love poetry. However, it is noteworthy that his style of amatory composition is similar to the chaste type of \textit{ghazal} known as ‘\textit{udhrī}’ (named after the ‘Udhra tribe). The narrative of Ibn Mayyāda’s love story as depicted in the sources, although not as dramatic as those of ‘Urwā or Majnūn, follows the pattern of their stories with variations in the details.\footnote{Mukhtār al-Ghawth and Jokha Alharthi suggest that chaste love and sensual love are artificially separated by critics. The former thoroughly investigates the fiction and reality of this separation of love poetry into two distinct types. He analyses the entire corpus of literature and anecdotes in the books of anthologies (\textit{akhbār}) and poetry attributed to those poets, and Alharthi adopts a similar method to disprove a long-maintained assumption that ‘\textit{udhrī}’ love poetry is distinct from sensual love poetry (\textit{ghazal ḥissī / šarīḥ}) and thus never describes the body of the beloved and is confined to the description of chaste passion and devotion.

Al-Ghawth asserts that ‘\textit{udhrism} was considered “a phenomenon in the literary sources and less than a phenomenon in the \textit{akhbār} books but in reality it was neither true nor a phenomenon”.\footnote{Mukhtār Sīdī al-Ghawth, \textit{al-Ḥaqīqa wa-l-Khayāl fi- al-Ghazal al-‘Udhrī wa-l-Ghazal al-Šarīḥ} (Jeddah: Maktabat Kunūz al-Ma’rifā, 2009), p.335.} Moreover, he states that only three love stories of three poets who
lived in different times and locations could be deemed true as historical facts. These were ʿUrwa ibn Ḥizām, Jamīl and Qays ibn Dhurayḥ.⁴³⁷

Al-Ghawth’s justification of his suggestion is that not every lover poet is crazily enamoured, and if we believe that ʿudhrī poets were truly lovers then they were no different from any normal human being who loves and could also falsify his love.⁴³⁸ He concludes that:

The share of the truth in the akhbār and literary sources concerning the issue of ʿudhrism is more than the share of reality and these writings are unreliable regarding the history of the Ḥijāz. They were merely entertaining narrations written by booksellers during the third and fourth hijrī centuries, who fabricated the relationships between the poets and tried to establish a connection between poetic imagination and the reality. Critics of all times have agreed that literature is a type of imagination which is not concerned with historical facts or built on them, and reality in literature is based on the feelings and imagination of its creator, and where literature contains objective reality then it is a secondary matter.⁴³⁹

Al-Ghawth does concede that there was a shift in the Umayyad period from nasīb to ghazal and many Ḥijāzī poets wrote extensive love poems, something unheard of in the pre-Islamic era. He argues that the real reason for this innovation was the shift of social and political life in the Ḥijāz: its poets, thanks to their considerable wealth, did not need to make a living by praising others and instead were able to turn to new themes and extend the nasīb.⁴⁴⁰

His statements and conclusions seem plausible and are supported by other studies such as that of Jacobi, who elaborates further on the transfer from nasīb to ghazal in the Umayyad era. She notes that poets in the first Islamic century were faced with conflicting internal and external demands; the audience expected a nasīb conforming to their experience of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda, but the poets wanted to “express the aims and emotions of the rising urban class”.⁴⁴¹

Interestingly, al-Ghawth does not mention Ibn Mayyāda amongst the poets he studies. Ibn Mayyāda’s love life seems hardly to amount to a romantic legend featuring a faithful lover, if we interpret his poetry in the light of al-İṣfahānī’s suggestion that

⁴³⁷ Ibid
⁴³⁸ Ibid.
⁴³⁹ Ibid., p.337.
⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.337-339.
frequent occurrences of a woman’s name in a poet’s work constitute concrete evidence that he is a crazily enamoured lover, since Ibn Mayyāda mentions many other women in his poetry. Ten names and sobriquets of other women are mentioned, as Ḥaddād points out; and so we have Suḍā, Mayy, Zaynab, Laylā, Salmā, Ḥusayna, al-Ṣāridiyya, Umm Aws, Umm al-Bukhtūrī and Umm al-Walīd,\footnote{Ibn Mayyāda, H, p.37.} as well as Umm Juḥdur.

Similarly, Alharthi denies the absence of sensuality from ‘udhrī poetry since “the very concept of chasteness involves a conscious denial of physical contact, and this consciousness often implies a strong awareness of physicality”.\footnote{Jokha Mohammed Alharthi, ‘I Have Never Touched Her: The Body in al-Ghazal al-‘Udhrī’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 2011), pp.261-262.} She then provides an aesthetic analysis of the imagery of poetic depiction of different parts of the beloved’s body. And as for the rise of interest in the narratives about ‘udhrī poetry and poets, she suggests that “the spread of libertinism in the Abbasid era helped to create a desire to return to al-ghazal al-‘udhrī, which is considered to be the utter opposite of libertinism”.\footnote{Ibid., p.58.}

Although many reasons could be suggested concerning the popularity of these narratives, in my view they were creative compositions aiming to attract a wider readership, for whom poetic devotion would not be appealing and charming unless the plot was made more complicated. I would argue that, in order to attract more readers the historians or the ‘booksellers’, to use al-Ghawth’s phrase, who narrated the tales of ‘udhrī love poetry in the third and fourth hijrī centuries manipulated the narratives, in some cases going so far as to invent stories for the sake of mentioning a setting for a verse or couple of verses which they then wrote themselves or had prepared earlier.

It is important to bear in mind that these literary sources were written in the Abbasid era; in particular, al-Aghānī was written almost a hundred and fifty years after the Umayyad era, which means that the stories kept changing as they travelled from one narrator to another, each of whom, perhaps unconsciously, added a personal touch to his version of the story. Some of these additions may have resulted from individual interpretations of a clue in the poetry itself. Moreover, in any historical writing, no matter how hard the author tries to be objective and provide an independent account, there will always be an element of subjectivity involved in narrating an event. Different perceptions and interpretations inevitably affect reports of an historical fact.
However, while the reality of each individual poet and all the details of his love story might be difficult to accurately determine, many references and indications in their poetry suggest that “an existing tradition started a fashion for a genre of love literature that proved to be enormously popular”.\textsuperscript{445} It is in this light, in my view, that the love story of Ibn Mayyāda should be treated, since the narrative of the literature itself is unreliable and contradictory. He is depicted in one source as a devout poet driven almost mad by the love and loss of Umm Juḥdur, and yet in the same source he is also found composing poetry about a slave-girl, though unwilling to buy her, so that his love for her will remain uncorrupted.

5.2.1 Passionate Lovers or Pragmatic Poets?

The historical narratives about Ibn Mayyāda’s love affairs do not significantly differ from those about “ʿUrwah b. Ḥizām, and his tragic love story [which] sets the pattern for the numerous love stories of the Umayyad period”,\textsuperscript{446} depicted in literary sources that present a rather unworldly interpretation of love in the form of an idealised love poetry.\textsuperscript{447} As for Ibn Mayyāda, it seems that he used his experience of love to motivate his poetic creativity in his amatory poems. Moreover, he seems to be upholding the view that sincerity in love is best achieved in separation between lovers. Consummation is not to be sought, for “then her love will be corrupted” (idhan yafsud ḥubbuhā), he said, responding to Sayyār ibn Najīḥ, who had asked him why he did not buy a slave-girl whom he loved and mentions in his poetry.\textsuperscript{448} Thus he seems to have viewed his longing for the beloved as a motivation for poetic creativity.

Ibn Mayyāda’s popular poems\textsuperscript{449} to Umm Juḥdur, as al-Īṣfahānī claims, were composed following her departure with her husband to the Levant.\textsuperscript{450} Al-ʿAghānī’s version of the

\textsuperscript{445} Jayyusi, p.421.
\textsuperscript{446} Ibid., p.424.
\textsuperscript{447} Stetkevych, Zephyrs, p.115.
\textsuperscript{448} Al-Īṣfahānī, al-ʿAghānī, vol.2, p.185.
\textsuperscript{449} See for example his poem about her departure; Ibn Mayyāda, pp.132-135.
\textsuperscript{450} Al-Īṣfahānī suggests that Ibn Mayyāda was affected by the love and loss of Umm Juḥdur twice: on her marriage to another man, and on her death. He states that Ibn Mayyāda used to mention Umm Juḥdur in his nasīb; this angered her father, who vowed that she would not marry him, but a man from outside their tribal lands. So she married a man from the Levant who took her away, leaving Ibn Mayyāda heartbroken. See: al-Īṣfahānī, al-ʿAghānī, vol.2, p.178. However, The story seems somewhat dramatised, like many tales concerning the ʿudhrī poets including Majnūn Laylā, who is also mentioned by al-Īṣfahānī; ironically, he states that he is doubtful of the truth of such stories since al-ʾAsmaʾī and al-Jāḥiz had stated that all the anecdotes about Majnūn are fictional and most of the poetry attributed to him is in fact a fabrication by many other poets. Elsewhere, al-Īṣfahānī states that al-ʾAsmaʾī said: Qays ibn Muʿādh, (also known as Qays ibn al-Mulawwiḥ) al-ʿUqaylī, referred to as Majnūn (crazy) was not actually crazy. Ibid., pp.9,12,20,23.
anecdote has many echoes of the tale of ´Urwa ibn Ḥizām’s love of ´Afrā’, and her marriage while he was working in the Levant trying to gather the exorbitant dowry set by her father to deter him from asking for her hand.451 While some doubts surround the anecdote of Ibn Mayyāda’s love, his poetry contains some indications which suggest that he was consciously following the pattern of chaste love poetry composed by the ´udhrī poets. In fact he mentions them by name:

وإنني لأخشى أن ألاقيم من الهوى
كمما كان لافق في العصور التي مضت

I fear that I will suffer because of the passion I feel; and the moans of love when they are released,

Just as ´Uraya [´Urwa] and Jamīl suffered, in past times, because of the remoteness of the place [of the beloved].452

It is clear that Ibn Mayyāda’s references to ´Urwa and Jamīl enhance the connection he wanted to establish between not only his romantic experience and theirs but also his poetic stature and theirs. If the audience could be convinced that Ibn Mayyāda’s love were like the type of idealised love characteristic of ´udhrism then they would think of his poetry as similar and not inferior.

Other instances of his references to ancient poetry can also be found in his poem ‘O our neighbour, misadventures are yet again befalling us’, which is full of intertextuality and references to ancient poetry, indicating an awareness of the poetic tradition and an engagement with it, or even an aim to develop the tradition further. The first line is a modification of Imru’ al-Qays’s verse (note that ‘neighbour’ is female and ‘ʿAsīb’ is a mountain):

أجارتنا إن المزار قريب
وإنني مقيم ما أقام ʿAsīb

O, our neighbour, the visiting-place453 is nearby, and I will stay as long as ʿAsīb.454

Ibn Mayyāda’s first two verses are not a mere modification of Imru’ al-Qays’s first verse. They are:

أجارتنا إن الخطوب تنوب
علينا وبعض الأمنين تصيب

452 Ibn Mayyāda, Ḥ, p.186.
453 It is possible that the poet is alluding to his final resting-place, which his neighbour may visit after his death.
O, neighbour, misadventures are yet again befalling us and may strike some of those [who think they are] safe.

O, neighbour, I am not [to be thought of as] an ill omen in the early morning but I will stay as long as ʿAsīb stands.  

_Bāriḥ_ has a double meaning: one meaning is ‘I am not leaving’ to which he alludes by the wording of the second half: ‘I will stay’. The actual meaning, however, is ‘I am not an ill omen’.  

This reading is supported by what comes after, in the fourth and fifth verses, which are:

جرىٍ بانييات الحبل من أم ُحَمْدِ
نظرت فلم أعتف، وقتها فبيَّ

Stags and birds [ravens], which croak to warn of our separation, have decreed that the bond with Umm Juḥdur will be severed;

I looked and could not foretell, while she had already looked before me and the birds foretold it to her; the clever one [is always] clever.

The poet seems to have drawn on the debate concerning the rule of destiny, an active issue in the Umayyad era, by complaining of his bad luck with his beloved, who believed in the portent. This seems to be the first layer of the poem; however, it seems hardly adequate to say that these verses are simply those of a poet heaving a sigh because his beloved has left him. It rather seems that he wants to mock destiny and his bad luck; while he was unaware of the supernatural power of these signs as indicative of an ill omen, his beloved, whether or not she was more perceptive than him, was aware of the meaning of portents and, ironically, she was right, as the reunion became prohibited (ḥarām), which is, like destiny, a religious concept; and evidently there is an emphasis on religious language and concepts.

I would argue that in this context such expressions cannot be read as simple expressions of thoughts but, rather, are provocative statements engaging with the controversial issues debated at the time. Poets were important cultural figures or, we might even say, the stars of their times, given the high status they enjoyed in Arab society and especially those who were connected to the courts, who would have been the object of public

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455 Ibn Mayyāda, Ḥ, p.69.
456 According to _Lisān al-ʿArab_ the Arabs used to call any bird or stag passing them on the right side _sāniḥ_ and considered it a good omen, while any bird or stag passing on the left was called _bāriḥ_ and considered a bad omen. Ibn Manẓūr, vol.3, p.2113.
457 Ibn Mayyāda, Ḥ, p.69.
attention; people would have asked, what did he say when he praised so-and-so, and what rewards did he get? And so on. Thus, it should not surprise us that a poet would seek wider public recognition, even at the risk of creating social or cultural controversy. In fact *naqāʾid* poetry, as seen in Chapter Four, serves as a good example of Ibn Mayyāda’s determination to engage in public controversy, at least at the tribal level.

It was in this frame of mind that Ibn Mayyāda approached poetry, twisting the old motifs and modifying them either to serve new purposes more relevant to him or perhaps to gain more attention. Thus, if we look again at the traditions of ‘*udhrē* poetry we will find, for example, the common use of the motif of the raven as a bird of ill omen. Typical, as Ibn Qutayba points out, is the case of the ‘*udhrē* poet, Qays ibn Dhurayḥ, the lover of Lubnā; he hated ravens, and so Lubnā vowed that she would kill any raven she could catch. Qays writes:

\[
\text{لا يا غراب الينين، ونجهم بنبي}
\text{فلا طرهت إلا والجناح كسير}
\]

O, raven of separation, woe betide you, tell me what you know about Lubnā, for you are knowledgeable;

For, if you do not tell something of your knowledge, you shall not fly again except with a broken wing.\(^{458}\)

We can discern Ibn Mayyāda’s eagerness to present himself as someone who had absorbed the ancient poetry and was ready to add to it confidently through a creative engagement with the past. This idea about Ibn Mayyāda will not be convincing to us today unless we also know the poem by Imruʾ al-Qays, which he imitated, perhaps in acknowledgement of the continuing influence of the poetic duel (*muʿārada*) featured in his refuting poems.

Imruʾ al-Qays was one of the greatest pre-Islamic poets, perhaps the greatest; and this poem, according to the literary sources, is among the last words uttered by Imruʾ al-Qays as he lay dying near Ankara. The message that Ibn Mayyāda seems to have embodied in this choice is: ‘Here is the last poem of the greatest poet and here I am, taking it to a new horizon using the popular poetic techniques of my own time and for my own narrative of my love tale, but more importantly I will produce a better poem and I will twist the poetic convention which people have been used to hearing for many years’.

\(^{458}\text{Ibn Qutayba, vol.2, p.629.}\)
This vision of absorbing the ancient poetry and attempting to go beyond it was also shared by other poets of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, such as Ibn Harma. Thus, in their treatments of conventional motifs such as the traces (atlāl) and the amatory verses, we can see that although they retained such motifs in some poems, they manipulated them to suit their own view of a particular poem. A good example of this can be found in Ibn Harma’s panegyrics to ‘Abdul-Wāḥid and al-Sarī. Ibn Harma broke his promise to ‘Abdul-Wāḥid ibn Sulaymān in which he vowed to serve him as sole patron. Much later, when the relationship between the two was re-established and ‘Abdul-Wāḥid forgave him for his disloyalty, Ibn Harma starts his first panegyric by apologising; the first verses of the poem’s nasīb are:

You have destroyed the bonds of Salmā’s love for the sake of Hind’s love, yet you will have no rest,  
Because if you stay, you will not meet Hind, and if you leave your heart will not forget,  
As it will spend the day delirious with Laylā, and in the night it will be sleepless till morning.  
O praised ‘Abdul-Wāḥid, I am choking, unable to swallow even water, fearful of your anger.459

We are told that the context of the poem as mentioned in al-Aghānī is that Ibn Harma broke his promise and praised the new governor of Medina, whose name is not mentioned, but we are told that he was from the tribe of al-Ḥārith ibn Ka‘b, and that he replaced ‘Abdul-Wāḥid. Ibn Harma praised him but the governor did not reward him and when ‘Abdul-Wāḥid was reinstated as governor of Medina and learnt that Ibn Harma had broken his promise he barred the poet from entering his court, but after many intercessions he forgave him.460

In the poem Ibn Harma reproaches himself for cutting the bond with Salmā for the sake of Hind. If we read the names of the beloved as symbols, following the suggestion of al-Ḥawwās,461 the name Salmā appears as a symbol of safety or peace (salāma or silm) by

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459 Ibn Harma, M, pp.84-85.  
460 Al-İsfahānî, al-Aghānî, vol.6, p.77.  
which the poet alludes to his peaceful situation under the patronage of 'Abdul-Wāḥid. According to al-Ḥawkāwī, in the suspended poem (muʿallaqa) by the pre-Islamic poet al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥillīzā, Hind is a symbol of “the confederation of the north Arabian tribes in the Khazāza war”, which is irrelevant to Ibn Harma’s poem and time. I would argue that a more pertinent reading of Hind could be as both a symbol, and at the same time, a double meaning. The obvious meaning of Hind is the name of a woman, which is also true of Salmā, but the deeper meaning is wealth, particularly the wealth of an owner of camels since one meaning of the word hind is a herd of camels numbering one hundred. Thus the symbolic meaning would be that the poet left the safety of his loyalty to 'Abdul-Wāḥid in the hope of gaining a new source of wealth by serving another patron, but was disappointed and shamed.

The poet skilfully embodies his own message in the conventional nasīb and makes it unconventional, which is indicative of the flexibility shown by the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ in their engagement with the poetic tradition. This can be seen in Ibn Harma’s transformation of the theme of ‘yearning and loss’ to that of rejoicing and celebration. It is found in the nasīb of a panegyric he composed thanking al-Sarī after being rewarded for an earlier panegyric; the nasīb begins:

Was it in a deserted campsite, its inhabitants already departed, that you stood and the tears poured from your eyes

Wondering foolishly about Salmā, while she was distant, in a far destination; so, how should you question the campsite?

The campsite is deserted, and the poet sheds sorrowful tears, wondering if the traces will answer his questions about Salmā, who is beyond his reach. It is a typical motif depicting the sadness of a poet about to appeal for help and usually referring metaphorically to drought, desertification, and infertility. Now compare these images to those of his longing in the second poem, which he composed after receiving the patron’s bounty:


462 Ibn Manẓūr, vol.6, p.4709.
Is it the dove in the palm-trees of Ibn Haddāj which prompts the yearning of a heart desperate and in pain?
Or is it the one who tells the news that the ten-months-pregnant [rain clouds] have given birth rightly and at full term?
The torrent has cut through the rugged ground and the soft sand from al-Farsh of Malal to al-Aʿārif.
It is as if the earth’s face has put on a uniquely ample garment of embroidered silk.

The traces are replaced by the dove singing in an oasis of palm-trees, and the deserted encampment has completely disappeared and been replaced by rain-soaked fertile land; what was dry and rugged is now decked in flowered silk. These images seem to imply that the patron’s bounty has changed and rewarded everything in the poet’s life, even his perception and practice of the composition of the classical *nasīb*. Here, the poet’s yearning is stirred by neither the raven’s warning of sorrowful separation nor the sight of the abandoned traces of the beloved’s campsite, but rather by either the cooing of the dove or the news of the rain and the spring. The symbolism of the replacement of the raven and the deserted campsite by the dove and rain is significant not only because of the effect these images might have on his patron, who would be pleased by the poet’s gratitude, but also because of the poet’s willingness, or even desire, to depart from the confines of the old much-worn motifs to create new ones, thus paving the way for later poets to modify or abandon the *nasīb*, or even revolt against it, as Abū Nuwās did.

So, if we see Abū Nuwās as an unprecedented rebellious poet who rejected the motif of weeping over the traces and replaced it with wine descriptions (*khamriyyāt*), it is because we have not paid enough attention to the harbingers of change that evolved in the poetry of the *sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ* and in particular the *nasīb* of Ibn Harma and Ibn Mayyāda, who showed clear signs of shifting towards new motifs within the old theme of the *nasīb*. Ibn Mayyāda, for instance, shows himself an innovator in his satirical poems, some of which do not contain a *nasīb* at all, and when they do, it is either a wine description, or one where the slandered is mocked by naming his women, and discrediting their honour.

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463 They might start with a glorification of self or tribe such as in his *naqīda* with al-Hakam al-Khuḍrī no. 47, but in other cases he starts with the satire straight away such as in poem no.79. See: Ibn Mayyāda, H, pp.152,217.
464 As in poems nos.13 and 43. Ibid., pp.90,143.
The *nasīb* was no longer about memories of past love stirred by the sight of a deserted campsite; the new theme of love, as Stetkevych rightly asserts, introduced “an overall quickening of pace and a new kind of subjectivized immediacy which stands in strong contrast to the remoteness of the archetypally objectivizing symbolism of *diyār* and *aṭlāl* evocation”.⁴⁶⁶ Those symbols were recharged with new messages more relevant to the poets and more representative of their poetic visions and purposes.

### 5.2.2 The Protagonist as a Lover and his Beloved

We will now move away from the technicalities of the *nasīb* and *ghazal*, their positions within the *qaṣīda* and the purposes they served, and look at the ideas and motifs about love and the beloved the poets embodied in their protagonists, their conceptions of the ideals of the relationship between lovers, and their view of the world around them. In doing so, we will find many interesting ideas and distinctive personal touches. Ibn Mayyāda sees love as something that cannot be divided between two beloveds; all of it should be devoted to the beloved he never had good luck with and, despite his misfortune, he vows from the bottom of his heart to remain faithful to her.

Love is depicted almost as an act of worship which is to me a constant reminder of Majnūn Laylā’s influence and presence in the unconsciousness of Ibn Mayyāda. The poetry of Majnūn had a “delicate mixture of references to the rites of holy pilgrimage, to the obligatory Muslim prayers, and to the new wholly mythologized religion of love of the mad lover of the desert”.⁴⁶⁷ The protagonist, Ibn Mayyāda, is portrayed as fearful of God; he should not be seen even thinking of leaving her love, for to do so would be to betray not the beloved but God. If he, even once, thought that he should find solace in coming to terms with his loss, it would be a betrayal, so he must remain hopelessly sorrowful yet still determined not to think about moving on like some other ‘traitorous’ lovers had:

وإني لأستحب من الله أن أرى إذا غزفر الخلان أني لها غذرا

I am fearful of God and wish not to be seen, even if some lovers betray, as one intending her betrayal.⁴⁶⁸

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⁴⁶⁵ For example, he mentions Zaynab the daughter of Mālik from the tribe of his opponent in *naqāʿid*, Hakam al-Khuḍrī, in his poem no.45. Ibid., p.145.
⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p.76.
Some harbingers of mystical motifs and concepts are detectable in these passionate verses; these would only fully materialise in the works of subsequent generations of poets who would write of total submission and devotion to the beloved, even if unrequited. But these motifs and concepts are also prompted by a persistent desire to contribute to the new form of love poetry first introduced by ʿUmar ibn Abī Rabīʿa in the province of Ḥijāz. ʿUmar was unique in depicting himself as a protagonist who is the centre of the attention of his beloveds’ women, and sometimes of one beloved, who is accompanied by her confidants. Stetkevych notes that ʿUmar depicts in one of his poems “a lively chit-chat between the poet, his beautiful paramour, and her discreet confidants. Then at the appropriate moment, with the wisdom of good company:

They rose, letting know one of alert wit,
That what they were about to do was for my sake”. 470

Here the poet is the desired one rather than the one who desires. The echo of this motif can be heard in Ibn Mayyāda’s verses:

وَكَواعِـبٍّقَـلّنَّيَـومَّتَّـرِودٍّقَـلْوَّالمُـجِـيد ّوَهُـنَّّكَـالمُـز احِّـيالَيـتَـنـاّفَـيـرِّأَمـرٍّفادِحٍّطَـلَعَـتّعَلَيناّالعيسُّبِالرَم احِّـ

The buxom ones, on a day when they had forgathered said, in a serious way but [wanting to sound] as if they were joking:

We wish, but not because of a terrible matter, that the camels would bring to us al-Rammāḥ. 471

His protagonist al-Rammāḥ (i.e. Ibn Mayyāda himself) is the dream of every attractive girl, just like a ‘white knight’, not only for romance but also in terrible matters; should they occur then he is the one to call upon. It is with this type of self-assertive statement that Ibn Mayyāda presents himself through striking imagery or motifs, sometimes breaching the poetic traditions. Moreover, what is interesting in these statements is that they are inserted in the nasīb; these verses are the first two lines of a panegyric delivered to al-Manṣūr, whereas the norm was that poets would speak about themselves often in the later section devoted to glorification (fakhr) of self or tribe, as will be shown below. This theme was conventionally placed after several sub-themes of the polythematic qaṣīda, following the amatory verses (nasīb) and the description of the

469 Stetkevych, Zephyrs. p.56.
470 Ibid.
journey (raḥīl), and so Ibn Mayyāda’s departure from tradition is an indication of his self-assertion and quest for distinction.

### 5.2.3. The Poet and his Grey Hair

One motif which occurs quite frequently in classical Arabic poetry in general and the poetry of the sāqat al-shu’arāʾ in particular is that of the poet’s grey hair (shayb). It is mentioned conventionally within the nasīb: the poet laments that the loss of his youthful appearance has made him unattractive to young women; but some poets put their personal stamp on this well-worn motif, as Ibn Harma does:

\[
\text{في الشيبِ زَجَرُّ لَهُ لو كان يَنْزِجَرُ}
\]

\[
\text{وَلَفِنتى مُهِّلَةً مِنَ الحَبِّ وَاسْعَةً ما لم يَمِتْ فِي نَواحيِ رَأْسِهِ الشَّعْرُ}
\]

With [the emergence of one’s] grey hair, a rebuke for him, if he could be rebuked; a great deal of scolding, were he not a stone.

For a young man love is a stroll as long as the hair of his head is not yet dead.\(^{472}\)

The motif of the grey hair presents an opportunity to reflect on love affairs and their association with youth. Once one’s hair has turned grey, the chances of being loved sharply decline. The significance in this use of a traditional motif lies in the imagery rather than the idea: the poet’s likening the greying of his hair to death is what gives his verses freshness, while the motif is a hackneyed one in classical poetry. Nonetheless, if we knew more about the context of this fragment it might have been possible to give other interpretations.

Conventionally, however, this motif would occur in the nasīb; Ru’ba does this in his self-glorifying poem which we referred to in Chapter Three. The reference to his grey hair comes after an argument with his beloved, possibly his wife, who has not been treating his daughter kindly. His response is: if I am old and weak now, in my youth I was

\[
\text{أَشْجَعُ مِن ذِي لِبَدٍ يَخْيَثُ}
\]

\[
\text{يَنْفِقُ صَلَّابَاتِ العَظامِ رَفَتُ}
\]

Braver than the maned one in the wilderness, breaking strong bones and crushing them\(^{473}\)

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\(^{472}\) Ibn Harma, M, p.118.  
\(^{473}\) Nawāṣira, vol.1,p.291.
The poet boasts that in his youth he was braver than a lion, but another verse implies that if he was strong and ruthless in the past he is now a wise old man who has used all the past experiences to build up his wisdom:

فآلّأوليّواستقامّسمتي

I then regained control of myself and my character was straightened.

Thus, the overall idea is to emphasise his inner qualities rather than his external appearance. This motif, in turn, praises learning through first-hand experience of life and not through books and verbal education; this is the favoured Bedouin way, of education by trial and error. This is only one example of the many motifs associated with the Bedouin personality that occur in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ; more will be mentioned in the following section.

5.3 The Heroism and Morality of the Poet

It is accepted that poets speak for or about themselves not only in the nasīb as noted by van Gelder, but indeed in any part of the poem and most obviously in the self-glorification. Even if the verses glorify the tribe, the poet would still boast of his affiliation to his tribe and of the lustre he adds to it or it adds to him. As van Gelder remarks, in the Abbasid period poets became “more individualistic”, but for the poets following the archaic style in the Umayyad era, tribal adherence was important, and this is frequently expressed in their poetry.

According to Philip F. Kennedy, “there are two types of fakhr: personal, where the poet distinguishes himself from his peers, within the tribe but more emphatically outside the tribe, where he extols the virtues of his group and sets himself, explicitly or otherwise, against his adversaries and/or those of the tribe”. However, it would be more fruitful if the poetry of boasting or glorification is considered from a perspective which goes beyond this simple division into either the personal or the tribal.

Conventional criticism tends to view the fakhr as a mere sub-theme within the polythematic poem, traditionally placed after the description of the journey (rahīl), and to discuss the motifs occurring in this limited space on the basis of whether they have a

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474 Ibid.
476 Ibid., p.29.
personal or a tribal emphasis. But I would argue that a deeper analysis of many poems will reveal aspects of the poet’s self-assertion and self-definition which are not necessarily conventionally conveyed by means of *I am, me or we*. Indeed any motif by which the poet tries to innovate or defy the conventions, regardless of its place within the poem (whether in its *nasīb*, *raḥīl*, *fakhr* or even panegyric) could be seen as an indirect form of boasting or self-vaulting; thus, the *fakhr* should perhaps be seen as expressing the poet’s assessment of his worth rather than as a genre as Kennedy suggests.478 The poet is not writing to say what others have already said, since there would be no point in repeating someone else’s exact wordings; he is writing for his own time and his own audience, aiming to demonstrate his distinctive characteristics and speaking for himself and his poetic talent and capability. 

If we look from this perspective in our attempt to assess the expression of the self in the poetry of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* we will find many interesting examples of motifs representing much deeper issues than can be discovered in a conventional view of the genre of the ‘traditional’ *fakhr*. Many of these allude to the struggle of the poets in their effort to conform to the mores of their society, which gives rise to some outspoken comments expressing the discomforts they endured. They are expressions of desolation brought about by lack of recognition, whether by the tribe, the society or the hierarchy. A sense of grievance emerges in their poetry, for various reasons, but which is mostly attributable to feelings of inferiority and contempt.

Ibn Harma’s family was denied lineage in the tribe of al-Ḥārith ibn Fihr, from whom the tribe of Quraysh had descended.479 This was not, however, like the case of the ‘brigand poets’ (*ṣaʿālīk*) who “ceased to be tribe members, either by their own choice or by expulsion”.480 Rather, it was because the tribe disapproved of his grandfather, who was from al-Khulj,481 who lived in Medina and were eventually acknowledged as affiliated members of the Quraysh. Ibn Harma did not reproach his tribe to the extent of effectively cutting his ties with them, as this would have meant taking the path of the *ṣaʿālīk*; according to Borg, “instead of boasting over the excellence of his tribe, the

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478 Ibid.p.216.
481 According to *Lisān al-ʿArab* they were a tribe originally descended from the sons of Ṭadhwān, but they became affiliated to the Quraysh in the reign of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. See: Ibn Manẓūr, vol.2, p.1225.
suʿlūk would obviously only express pride in himself, in his endurance in poverty and hunger.\footnote{482}{Borg, p.671.}

Al-Muʿaybid mentions a fragment of four verses in the tawīl metre and rhymed with the letter dal in the accusative. These are amatory verses which could have been the beginning of a longer poem. If we consider Ibn Harma’s other polythematic poems in which he alludes to his main theme in the amatory verses (nasīb), we find many signs in these four verses which suggest that they might have been part of the prologue of a much longer poem from which only these two fragments have survived in scattered literary sources. To put this into perspective, here are the four lines:

أَفَاطُمْ إِنَّ النَّافِئِ يُسْتَيْليُذُو الْهُوَى
وَنَافِئَةُ مَا نَلْتُ مِن غَيْرِ وَدَكْمُ
وَشَخَطَ نَوْنُ إِنَّ لَا وَجَدَتْ لَهَا بَرْدًا
عَلَى كِبْرِ فَذَ كَانَ يَتِيِّدُ بِهَا الْهُوَى

O Fāṭima, estrangement consoles the passionate; your estrangement from me increased my passion for you.
I see what I have acquired from the love of others as a sin, and what I have acquired from your love as a voluntary religious duty and righteousness.
Whenever we meet after separation, arriving late after a slow journey from a remote place, I feel a coolness
On my liver,\footnote{483}{It may imply heart as well.} where love had almost left its scars, though some people think I am unaffected.\footnote{484}{Ibn Harma, M, pp.95-96.}

The first thing to note is that Ibn Harma expresses distress at the separation from his people by alluding to them using the name Fāṭima for the beloved, which is associated linguistically with the weaning of an infant. A possible reading of this name is to understand it symbolically; Ibn Harma seems to have used the symbol of weaning to refer to his people’s repudiation of him and denial of his affiliation to them, just as a mother weakens the bond with her child by denying him her milk.

Ibn Harma is not proud to have won the admiration of any other tribe, indeed he sees it as a sin; but we should note that this seemingly humble statement is also a boast that he is in great demand among other tribes and patrons. His love for his people is rewarded by the sense of fulfilment of a voluntary religious duty (nāfila) and by being righteous; he does not expect material reward, but reward from God for his loyalty to kinship.
The remoteness of the place, the slowness and lateness (laʿy) should be understood figuratively to represent the poet’s painful separation from his beloved tribe, which has not only made him feel alienated from his own people, but has had a strong physical effect which we might call psychosomatic. His overheated liver is cooled by reunion with his people, and escapes scarring.

Ibn Harma wants to send a gentle message of reproof to his tribe:

أحَرِّبِّيْنَّ، وَأْسِلُّكُمُ، يِنْتَجِّيُ نَصْرِي؟

O Ḥāri ibn Fihr, how could you abandon me while another tribe, our enemies, wants to support me?485

He abandons blame to paint a noble self-portrait in these verses:

وَإنَّا وَإِنَّ وَأَصِيبْ بِنَحْمٍ غَيْبَةٍ وَهُوَ لَا يَذْرَى

Even though your hearts wish me ill, I will strive to remain good-hearted towards you,

Since one’s [true] cousin is the one who strengthens him and safeguards his interests in his absence while he is unaware.486

Ibn Harma here is not only self-revealing in pieces of wisdom and educating his audience about morality, he is, more importantly, expressing his heroic morality (murūʾa) and conveying his vision of self-assertion in which he presents himself as a role model. This could be seen as a corrective to the self-abasing praise he produces for his patrons. If we only rely on the historical narratives about him and his constant pursuit of wealthy notables, seeking their monetary rewards, we will be misguided away from the poet’s conviction of his own worth; but when we examine some of his fragments, we find a very different face of Ibn Harma:

إِذَا أَنْتُ لَمْ تَأْخُذْ مِنَ النَّاسِ عَصْمَةٍ ۖ شَرَبْتُ بِطْرُقِ الْمَاءِ حَبِيْبًا وَجِنَّةٍ ۖ وَأَرْكَبْ لِبْسَ الْقَوْهِ وَالْكُثْبِ وَأَسْعَ ۖ إِذَا أَعْجَبْتُ بَعْضٍ الَّذِينَ يُشَارِعُ ۖ وَأَصْرَفْتُ عَنْ بَعْضِ الْمَيَاتِ مَطْيُبِيْنَ

If you do not have sagacity [in your dealing] with people and hold your fingers tightly against your palms,

485 Ibid., p.126.  
486 Ibid.
You will drink any turbid water, wherever you find it, and your rapacity will enslave you.

Thus, I wear tight clothing and have given up wearing clothing which is loose,

And I turn my mount away from some water springs even if some men like them.  

Here the heroism of Ibn Harma could not be more obvious; in his self-esteem and refusal to succumb to greed he presents himself almost as a brigand poet who “express[es] pride in himself, in his endurance in poverty and hunger”. I would argue that resentment against the need to extravagantly praise an unworthy patron is perhaps the first reason why Ibn Harma took this approach to self-expression. A poet lacking funds had little choice but to court the wealthy in order to sustain his life and feed his family; to endure being treated as a servant; and to show gratitude for any reward, no matter how small.

This feeling of dependency on others seems to have rankled with Ibn Harma and perhaps prompted poetic dreams of another reality, of a different situation where the poet could create without having to rely on the springs (the wealthy notables) for livelihood. The doors of those wealthy men were always crowded with poets, beggars, and seekers of various types of business. The turbid water is the courts of those who might be ignorant men lacking any kind of creativity, but greed (or let us be charitable and say need) is what keeps the poets coming again and again. Similarly, 'Umāra ibn 'Aqīl voices his frustration with these overcrowded sources:

\[
\text{ما إن يزالّ بغدادٍ يُّشَّجِّعُنا على البرائّين، أمثال البرائّين،}
\text{غطاههم الله أموالاً ومنزلة.}
\]

Still, in Baghdad we are rivalled by riders of nags who are themselves like nags.

God has given them money and stature with kings, though they have neither intellect nor faith.  

'Umāra could be perceived as someone complaining about the crowdedness of the roads and markets, which seems to have been a real problem at the time of Caliph al-Mu’tashim when he recruited many Turks to swell the ranks of his army and built the

\[487\] In *Lisān al-ʿArab*, the word *mashāriʿ* is defined as the space at the edge of the spring at which animals can drink. See: Ibn Manẓūr, vol.4, p.2239.
\[488\] Ibn Harma, M, p.140.
\[489\] Borg, p.671.
\[490\] 'Aqīl, p.95.
short-lived capital of the Abbaсид state, Samarra. However, another reading of these verses could be that the poet is complaining about the competition at the courts of the wealthy hierarchy to which he alludes with the reference to Baghdad, the Abbasid capital. He also alludes to the competition in the double meaning of the word *yuzāḥim*, which can be used in different contexts with different connotations; it can mean to rival, to compete and to elbow aside. Also, the word *barādhīn* (nags) has many usages, for example to mean riding animals, and also to specifically mean horses that are not of Arabian ancestry. The possibility of the second meaning suggests that ʿUmāra may be referring to the occupants of the courts who had gained high status despite being without morality. It might even be that he was referring to the rival poets whose Arabic would not be pure if they were of non-Arab origins. This reading is dependent on the readings of other verses expressing the discomfort ʿUmāra felt in Baghdad and among the notables at the courts, as will be shown shortly.

Returning to examples of self-expression which seem to have been driven by the feeling of social - not intellectual - inferiority, we will consider the poetry of Ibn Mayyāda and ʿUmāra ibn ʿAqīl, who reveal another aspect of the social order: those who are recognised not for their achievements but for their lineage. The sources state that Ibn Mayyāda was born of a Slavic, Berber or Hispanic mother (Ṣiqlibiyya, Barbariyya or Ishbāniyya); but he boasted of having an Arab father and a Persian mother:

النس غلام میان كسری وطلام
بآكرم من نبطت عليه التمام؟

Is not a boy who [is descended] between Khosrau and Žālim the noblest of those on whom amulets are hung?

Claiming Persian lineage indicates the high status the Persians enjoyed in the Abbasid era at the courts of the caliphs, and even among those who lived far from Baghdad, Persian influence was evident in the poetry of Arab poets. However, there is nothing in these verses to suggest that Ibn Mayyāda was advocating that Persians should be favoured over the Arabs, or that he was engaged in the *shuʿūbiyya* controversy (unlike his contemporary, Bashshār ibn Burd, for instance). Indeed, the opposite seems to have been the case: he and the other *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* saw themselves as representatives of the Arabness and ‘the Bedouin style’ of poetic composition; this is evident in Ibn Mayyāda’s other boasting poems.

But as we have already mentioned, Ibn Mayyāda showed a lack of interest in composing panegyrics later in his life, after having spent his youth assiduously praising the wealthiest of his time including the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd ibn Yazīd. It seems that he was made to feel inferior by the way his society and his peers looked at him, the reason being, as al-Īṣfahānī suggests, not only because his mother was a slave-girl but also because she bore him after an illegitimate relationship with his father Thawbān, who did not acknowledge him as his son until as a youth he began to show signs of a noble nature and a strong body (najīban fadghaman). This social disadvantage was one of the central motifs of the satire directed at him by his opponents. Thus, it should not be surprising that he wrote almost as many satires as the love poems which form the largest portion of his output.

However, the great majority of Ibn Mayyāda’s boasting is usually devoted to the glorification of his tribe, mainly in his satirical poems and naqāʾid. As we established in the previous chapter, the naqāʾid depended on tribalism as an essential component of that poetic tradition, which the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ inherited from the Umayyad poets and did little to improve. Nonetheless, a few examples of personal revelation are found in Ibn Mayyāda’s poetry such as his rajaz poem analysed in Chapter Three; and we find this example in one of his other poems:

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eṣṣاّاِحُحَجْنَانِ اَلْيَّةِ يُّبْنِيَ تَصْنِيَنِ
فَأَبْغُضُ حْبَرَيْنِ فَلاَ تَدْفَنَنِ
وَلَكَنْ ذَعْوَنِيِّ يَا بَنِيَ تَصْنِيَنِ
تَعَلِّجُونِ فِي أَوْطَنَهَا وَنَسْرُوْرُ
```

When I die, O my people, do not bury me, as to me graves are the most hated neighbours.

But, O my sons, let me rather be watched over by foxes patrolling their territories by night, and by eagles.

This is an unusual request: Ibn Mayyāda does not want to be buried like any normal member of his society. He clearly feels himself to be an exceptional individual who has little or nothing in common with his neighbours. He fears confinement in the grave and seems to wish to be free after his death, among the creatures of the wild, as he never was in life.

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495 Ibn Mayyāda, p.127.
It is not uncommon to find examples of self-assertion in other verses by Ibn Mayyāda. Claims to nobility of lineage and nature can be found in these boasts about his tribe and people:

وَإِن يَّمِن قِيس وَقِيسُ هُمُ الدُّنَى
جُيُوشُ أمير المؤمنين آنُي بها
ياً قَبْلَ أَيْنَ الرَّأَّسُ لم أُنْخَرَ
لهذ زادني ظَلْناً يَفْسَمُ آنُي

I am from Qays and they are the pinnacles, when their armed horsemen ride:

[Qays are] the armies of the Prince of Believers, by whom the head of the chief knight will be broken!⁴⁹⁶

My pride in myself is increased because if it is said: Where is the chief? I never hold back.⁴⁹⁷

These verses seem to be the product of Ibn Mayyāda’s unfulfilled desires and dreams of heroism and the supremacy he was never accorded. If the dream of the hungry is a crumb of food and the dream of the homeless is a shelter, then the dream of an oppressed poet who feels that society is treating him contemp-tuously may be to imagine himself as a mighty warrior leading an army of knights in a display of magnificent heroism. This is a vision of glory that belongs to a past age, not to the disappointing realities of the poet’s actual situation.

The motifs of heroism and mortality expressed in the poetry of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ did not depart from the notion of murū’a and the values of Bedouin Arab society, and although they served very different purposes in this poetry they are still attributable to a vision of the life and values of past Arab societies, especially that of the pre-Islamic era.

5.4 The Poets and the Place: City vs. Nature

Historical narratives suggest that ʿUmāra ibn ʿAqīl was a man of pure soul and good morality when he came from the desert to Baghdad, but city life and the bad company he kept affected his religion and morality.⁴⁹⁸ However, I would argue that the life of Baghdad does not seem to have transformed either his Bedouin character or his poetic style. He was not socially comfortable there, but nothing in his surviving poetry suggests that city life had ‘corrupted’ his religion or morality. What is evident in his

⁴⁹⁶ Yuqawwam here could mean ‘will be reformed’ or ‘will be straightened’ although the second is more likely as it suits the context; straightening uneven bone means breaking it.
⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., p.156.
poetry is his dislike of life in Baghdad; his discomfort in the confines of the city is detectable in the following verses:

لمستمطرٌّبالرملِّفيّبيتِّحرَّةٍّ
تخورُّ به الغزلان كُلّ عشيةٍّ
أحبُّه إلينا من قرافير ساحلٍّ
[There is] an exposed place where the tent of a free woman of noble lineage [sits] on a long dune in which thorny plants grow.500

Where the gazelles call every evening to the young stags [attached to their mother] like a bracelet, and [then] leave.

[This] we love far better than great ships on the shore of the Tigris, or a well-bolted palace in Baghdad.501

Technically, the first thing to notice is the odd rhyme of the second verse: the vocalisation is nominative, differing from the rest of the verses, which are in the genitive. This is an obvious ‘defect’ that ʿUmāra would have been criticised for, traditionally known as inconsistent rhyming (iqwāʾ), as ʿĀshūr notes.502 However, if we wish to argue for ʿUmāra, assuming that he intentionally opted for the change from genitive to nominative, we have to consider the entirety of his composite image, which runs throughout the three verses. If ʿUmāra had chosen a rhyme in the genitive, this, to some extent, would have given the impression that this is now a grammatically independent sentence, which is not the case, as the beginning of the third verse forms the second part of the analogy between the tent and the palace in Baghdad, and so perhaps the inconsistent rhyme might have been used to alert the listeners to what should come after it.

Moreover, it is also noticeable that there is intertextuality between ʿUmāra’s verses and a poem by Maysūn bint Bahdal al-Kalbiyya, who was the wife of the first Umayyad caliph, Muʿāwiya. She was of Bedouin origin and moved to the Levant when she married Muʿāwiya. This poem expresses her longing for the desert and its simple life. It begins:

أحبُّه إلينا من قرافير ساحلٍّ

499 In Lisān al-ʿArab, ‘hijān’ as a description of women can be a singular and a plural; as a singular it means a woman of noble lineage, and as plural of hajīna it means hybrid. Ibn Manẓūr, vol. 6, p.4625.
501 ʿĀqīl, p.43.
502 Ibid., p.43.
A tent shaken by the wind is dearer to me than a sublime lofty palace. 503

ʿUmāra seems to be recalling a similar experience, and his imitation was likely composed in a spirit of admiration and approval. The large, well-secured palace and the possession, even the sight, of large ships on the Tigris, are nothing but constant reminders of his much-loved life in the desert, where he is in intimate connection with nature and the gazelles are so close that can hear their calls. The tent is exposed to the elements, but it is in a perfect position to capture such a wonderful view. The inside of the dwelling is not short of beauty either, for the poet is in the company of a woman whom he describes as a free woman of noble origin, (ḥurratin hijānin). This phrase may indicate dislike of its opposite: a slave-girl or one of another race. Such a woman would share his values, which perhaps would not be approved of in the city. It is interesting to compare this image with Ibn Mayyāda’s fraught emotions about his maternal lineage.

If a person hates a place then he will hate everything about it, no matter how lucrative or superficially attractive it might be, and the hatred of it usually brings about the longing for something of a different and perhaps idealised nature. ʿUmāra’s view of Baghdad is such that the only solution is to leave:

تَرَخَّلْ فَمَا بعَدَّ دَارَ إقَامَةٍ
وما عند من أُصْنَحْ بِبَعْدَادَ طَائِلَ

Leave, as Baghdad is not a place to stay in, and whoever stays to the forenoon in Baghdad [will find] no success. 504

Although this verse is attributed to another poet, Abū al-ʿĀliya al-Shāmī, 505 as well as to ʿUmāra, it seems more attributable to ʿUmāra since it reflects his view of Baghdad, which is also expressed in other places in his dīwān such as the verses on the desert dwelling quoted above.

There are other poems quoted by al-ʿĀshūr describing Baghdad but their attribution to ʿUmāra is doubtful. Al-ʿĀshūr includes them in 'Umāra’s dīwān under the heading: “what have been attributed to ʿUmāra and other poets”. 506 The uncertainty of attribution prompts the suggestion that ʿUmāra may have held changing views of Baghdad, all or some of which are presented in his poetry. Several hypotheses, nonetheless, could be provided regarding these uncertain poems, and so it seems appropriate to quote them.

504 ʿAqīl, p.112.
506 ʿAqīl, p.97.
before the discussion. In the following poem, Baghdad is depicted as the city of good food, health, and good fortune:

In Baghdad lifetimes are extended, since its food is healthy, and some lands are healthier than others.

God decreed than no caliph should die in it, since whatever He wills for His creation He decrees.507

In the medieval sources we find these verses in different poems by different poets: in Akhbār al-Quḍāt this poem is attributed to Ahmad ibn Abī Duʿād,508 in Tārīkh Baghdād they are attributed to Abū al-Qāsim al-Warrāq and to ʿUmāra, and the author suggests they are by ʿUmāra.509 There are verses ʿĀshūr quotes as by ʿUmāra describing his enjoyment of Baghdad’s gardens, palaces and rivers in a poem which starts:

مَا بِبَغَدَادِ اَسْئَلُونَ وَمِنْ عَجَابٍ لَّدِينٍ وَلَذِينَ

What has Baghdad contained of pleasant palm branches and wonders of life and religion!510

The poem goes on to describe the city’s rivers, ships, palaces and beautiful ladies. To explain these obvious contradictions, one has either to assume that all of these views are ʿUmāra’s and represent different stages of his life in Baghdad, or to attribute to ʿUmāra only the depictions of the bad Baghdad by comparing these with other poems whose attribution to ʿUmāra is not challenged. If the former is adopted then the conflicting views of Baghdad could reflect the fluctuations of mood he experienced in the city, for he spent a long time in Baghdad; twenty years or more, according to al-ʿĀshūr.511 However, if we accept the latter, these verses should not be attributed to ʿUmāra but rather to the other poets mentioned in the medieval sources.

Moreover, if we look at all the references to Baghdad in the poetry which is only attributed to ʿUmāra we find in them only negative views about the city. In three verses

507 Ibid., p.106.
510 ʿAqīl, p.118.
511 Ibid., pp.13,21.
in mockery of Baghdad ʿUmāra expresses his frustration with its weather and sees it as a place of filth and dirt when wet and barren when dry:

ما أنتِّ يأعُّودُ إلَّا سَلْح
إذا أعَّزَّك مَطرٌ أو نَّفْح
وإن جُفْفَت فَتَرَاب بَرْزُح

Baghdad, you are nothing but shit!

When you are seized by rain or wind,

And when you are dry then [you become] a sand pit.512

Even though there is a sense of improvisation in these verses of rajaz, they still express discomfort, even disgust with the city and how it is affected by different seasons, which never bring any improvement. Moreover, Baghdad is depicted elsewhere as an ominous place, in which his much-favoured patron Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Muṣʿabī, the chief of police during al-Muʿtaṣim’s reign, dies:

وَلَنْ تَثْبِث الأَيَامَ شِيْبًا طَلَبَـهْ
بِبَغْدَاد صَانِدَةِ المَّلَونِ الصَّوَادِينَ

Time will not leave me anything I have sought after but the dark, eternally repeated nights,

Which have taken away the generous Ishāq, along with the victim of death the hunter in Baghdad.513

Although the identity of the other person referred to along with Ishāq is not clear, we can assume that he was someone dear to ʿUmāra. What is significant about these examples is that they were not attributed to anyone other than ʿUmāra and in both cases they mention Baghdad as an unpleasant place to be in, especially the first. Neither contradicts the view of Baghdad presented in the verses contrasting a tent in the desert with the palaces and ships in the city.

ʿUmāra’s negative view of the city of peace (Dār al-Salām) may have had several causes. His Bedouin mind and soul would have favoured the simple life, but there may be other reasons for his sense of estrangement from the society of Baghdad. ʿUmāra was living in Baghdad at the peak of the Golden Age, when knowledge flourished thanks to the courts of caliphs such as al-Maʾmūn, which were thronged with the sophisticated

512 Ibid., p.45.
513 Ibid., p.103.
minds of administrators, scholars, and poets such as Abū Tammām, whose poetry 'Umāra favoured over his own.  

Thus, his hatred of the city and its ignoble people (its ‘nags’) and its palaces may have its roots in 'Umāra’s inability to cope with the demands and expectations of Baghdad’s intellectual elite. It seems to have been small consolation that he was respected as a poet for his Bedouin style and language, something 'Umāra himself did not value as an absolute advantage, as we see in his judgement that Abū Tammām was better than every other poet including himself.

If we are seeking expressions of a poet’s intimate interaction with his surroundings we may perhaps find them at their most accomplished in the presentations of nature composed by Ru’ba ibn al-‘Ajjāj, especially his long descriptive poems of the desert and of animals in his hunting scenes. I would argue that he facilitated the genre of hunting poems for the poets writing after the Umayyad era. According to Stoetzer, “toward the end of the Umayyad period the hunting scene of the polythematic qaṣīda evolved into the well-defined genre of the ṭardiyyāt (hunting poems) with its fixed form, contents and lexicon and, almost exclusively, rajaz metre”. Ru’ba had provided examples of this genre in his long arājīz even before Abū Nuwās, who was seen by Brockelmann as the one who established the poetic tradition for this genre.

A substantial part of his 171-line poem entitled ‘Dark Hollows’ (wa- Qātim al-A’māq), in which he describes the desert and a hunting scene can be said to be an early example of the “free-standing poetic form” of the hunting poem (ṭardiyya). Ru’ba’s poem performs no conventional function, being neither panegyric nor fakhr. It contains a description of the desert, camels and a hunting scene and seems to fall within the characterisation of the Abbasid hunting poem as described by Stetkevych:

Rather than being the foregrounded ‘agent’ of the hunt, the Abbasid hunter abstracts himself almost wholly from his own effective and affective centrality

514 Al-Ṣūfī, pp.59-62.
517 Here I borrow the term used by Jaroslav Stetkevych in his discussion of the pre-Islamic qaṣīda within which the hunting scene occurs: he distinguishes the “raḥīl section” in which “the protagonist is not the hunter but the hunted animal itself” from the third “structural section of the classical qaṣīda, that is, fakhr (self-exaltation) or madḥ (encomium),” in which the focus is on the hunter. See: Jaroslav Stetkevych, The Hunt in Classical Arabic Poetry: From Mukhaḍram "Qaṣīda" to Umayyad "Ṭardiyya", Journal of Arabic Literature, 30 (1999), pp. 107-108.
in the hunt. As the hunter, he seems to purpose invisibility. He becomes not so much the agent in the hunt as the hunt’s observer and describer.\textsuperscript{518}

Although Ru’ba’s hunting scene to some extent depends on an earlier model of hunting motif found within the rahīl (the beloved’s departure) section of the qaṣīda of the pre-Islamic and Umayyad eras, the noticeable difference is that Ru’ba takes the scene a step closer to the independent genre which appeared shortly after him, by expanding the scenes in terms of their detail and taking them out of their usual contextual frame, that is, the rahīl section of the panegyric and the third section, which usually depicts the poet’s heroism.

Looking only at one example of his descriptive poems,\textsuperscript{519} ‘Dark Hollows’ we find that Ru’ba imitates a new development of the classical poem which, as Jaroslav Stetkevych notes, falls “outside of the paradigm of qaṣīdah structure”.\textsuperscript{520} He has taken the conventional sub-theme “the hunt of the animal panels in the rahīl section”,\textsuperscript{521} and made it the main theme, which runs throughout the poem until the end. It is at the same time different from the hunting scene, which is, according to Stetkevych, to be “found in the final fakhr section of the classical qaṣīdah and exhibits an unmitigated delight in the exercise of horsemanship”.\textsuperscript{522}

This poem could be seen as the tale of a journey within which the poet refers to himself at the beginning and then disappears backstage and never speaks for or about himself until the end of the poem. The only reference to the poet and his company is in the sixth hemistich:

\begin{quote}

تَّبُنَّوُا لَنَا أَعْلَاهُمْ بِعَذَّ الْغَرَقِ

Its mountains appear before us after being drowned.\textsuperscript{523}
\end{quote}

And only after more than one hundred hemistichs is there a reference to a human being, the hunter:

\begin{quote}

وَاعْطَمْنَ الرَّأَمِي لَمْا بَيْنَ الْأَهْمِ

And the hunter hid among the hollows.\textsuperscript{524}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{519} Due to the length of the poem (172 lines) only the verses relevant to the points of discussion will be quoted and translated. For the full poem see: Nawâṣira, vol.2, pp. 616-648.

\textsuperscript{520} Stetkevych, \textit{The Hunt}, p. 109.

\textsuperscript{521} Ibid., p. 107.

\textsuperscript{522} Stetkevych, \textit{The Discreet Pleasures}, p. 142.

\textsuperscript{523} Nawâṣira, vol. 2, p.617.
The poem consists of an astonishingly well-constructed series of scenes that include the tiniest of details. It starts with a description of a sandstorm in the desert and ends with the scene in which a wild oryx wonders whether he should take the blame for the killing of four females, which are half of his herd. The scenes meticulously depict a thrilling series of events which leads to the fateful moment of the killing of the prey.

Ru’ba opens the tale with a dark image of the desert at its most frightening, during a storm which transforms the day to night, but despite this he and his company cross it on their camels. He then describes his she-camel, which he likens to an oryx, then describes in detail the herd of oryx and their bull, who mates with his female; going so far as to describe the sperm of the male:

قَدَ أَحْصَنَتْ مَلْلُ ذَغاَبِص الرُّنَق

She bore [his sperm] like little eels in turbid water.525

This virile bull then guards his eight females against the other bulls; his relationship to his herd is both firm and kind. Then Ru’ba describes their grazing during the spring, when they depend on the moist grass without needing to drink water. But after two months the spring season turns dry and is gradually replaced by the heat of the summer, which dries the land, and so they must go in search of water.

Ru’ba then moves to a description of the water. The intensity of the summer heat forces the bull to guide his herd quickly; they race toward the water like horses, and here there is a long passage that makes detailed analogies between the oryx and the horse. In verses that might be called anthropomorphic Ru’ba then describes the emotions of the bull and how he shows his leadership when the herd tires, and the sounds he makes to keep them motivated.

Now the scene shifts to a spot close to the herd’s target: the water spring. But here Ru’ba adds an element of danger and excitement: he describes a concealed hunter. He draws a very detailed scenery: the hunter has been hiding for days in a hollow which is narrow and well covered. While asleep he has a dream about his shrewish wife, who is always annoying him with her constant blaming and her loud and sharp voice:

إِذَا اخْتَسِى مَن لَّوَمَهَا مَرَّ اللَّعَق

Ibid., p.621.
And when he sips from her reproach the taste is bitter.

He squabbles, and she squabbles like a she-wolf,
Sounding like one of the greyhounds [barking].

All of these secondary elements of the image are deliberately added to intensify the scene and emphasise the need for success in this hunt. Ru’ba then describes the bow and the arrows, flashing back to the stages of their preparation for this moment.

The herd arrives at night in a very miserable state; shaking with thirst, they are guided to the water by the sounds of the frogs. Skilfully, the poet keeps changing focus between the hunter and the hunted. The herd starts drinking and the hunter starts praying to God for a successful shot. After a while he fixes an arrow to the string. He manages to kill not only one, but four females. The rest of the herd flees led by their bull who guides them through the night to safety. In the last scene the bull wonders who should take the blame for such a disastrous loss:

إِذَا تَأَلَّى جَلَّمَا بِغُدَّ الغَلْقَ كَذَبَّلَو مُالنَف سِّأَوْ عَن هَاّصَدَق؟

When he slowed [his pace, feeling] forbearance after extreme anger, he tried not to blame himself – but was he being truthful?

A possible reading that could be offered for this rich poem is that it is a kind of meditation on life and death and the role of destiny, as we will consider shortly. But first it is important to note that in Ru’ba’s time the question of destiny and its role in life was the focus of a very lively debate. Ru’ba himself referred to the qadariyyūn, who were a group of theologians, not in itself homogeneous, who represented in one form or another the principle of liberum arbitrium (free will) in the early period of Islam, from about 70/690 to the definitive consolidation of the Mu tazila [q.v.] at the beginning of the 3rd/9th century.

526 Ibid., pp. 638-639.
527 Ibid., p. 648.
Ru’ba’s view of fate disagrees with theirs: they held that there is no pre-destination and that human will determines the conduct of actions. Ru’ba comments

سيعرفون الحق يوم الميْجَاب
ذَعَهُم سَيِّقُون ما عَد الحَسَاب
والأمر يُفضِّي في الشَّناء للخَيَاب

They will know the truth on the Day of Answering.

Leave them; they will face [what] the counters have counted.

The matter is settled by misery for the miserable.⁵³⁰

These rather didactic and blunt statements stand clearly for the mainstream belief that the rule of divine predestination incorporates the part played by the individual will. Nonetheless, they show the poet’s engagement in one of the important debates of his time. What the long poem discussed above makes very clear is that Ru’ba was capable of describing the smallest details of desert life using highly unusual vocabulary, and these descriptions are monuments of his expertise in that life.

His poetic strength is shown in his display of knowledge about the desert, which he understood better than city life with its philosophical debates, just as he stated that he was a better describer of camels than of horses, as we noted in the third chapter. As I argued earlier, al-ʿAṣmaʾī’s Bedouin taste prompted him to include Ru’ba in the sāqat al-shuʿarā, as he could not find the Bedouin spirit truly represented in the poetry of other contemporary poets no matter how hard they tried to sound like Bedouins or how long they had lived in the desert.

5.5 The Meditative Poet

Broadly speaking, we can say that poetry expresses the poet’s interpretation of his different experiences and his various views of people, life and his surroundings. Some poets debate nature and the meaning of life and death and ask philosophical questions concerning fate, the universe and the purpose of human life and death; others do not. The sāqat al-shuʿarā are mostly of the second type. ʿUmāra’s meditations on life and

⁵²⁹ When I say Ru’ba’s view I mean as it is found in this poem; however, since it occurs in a panegyric to the Umayyad leader Maslama ibn ʿAbdul-Malik, it is possible that he was merely reciting the official view of the state regarding this issue; many qadariyyūn were killed by the Umayyad authorities. See: Nawāṣira, vol.1, p.207.
⁵³⁰ Ibid., pp. 213-214.
nature do not penetrate deeply into such questions. His view of the transience of human life is not sophisticated:

I was astonished by my planting the seeds of palm-trees after reaching the age of seventy, or being about to do so.

I had reached the age of a boy realising that the earth was full of people who became like the inhabitants of dwellings who dismantled [their tents] and departed.

We are nothing but either a company which has already departed, or another which will fulfil its wish and then depart.\(^{531}\)

The elderly poet sows the seeds of palm trees although it will be many years before they bear fruit, by which time he will almost certainly be dead; yet still he is willing to be hopeful and positive. ’Umāra could be deliberately questioning the usefulness of a pious act, since there is a relevant hadith of the Prophet that says “if the Final Hour comes while you have a palm-cutting in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it”.\(^{532}\) In that case we can see some justification for al-Iṣfahānī’s suggestion that ’Umāra’s time in Baghdad corrupted his religious beliefs. But this may be going too far; the poet may simply be surprised that he is acting not for his own benefit, but for future generations. It is true, however, that the verses contain no trace of Islam.

His view is that this life is simply a journey with many stations, similar to the journeys of Bedouins throughout the seasons of the year where they would stay in one place as long as it was green but when spring ended they would dismantle their tents and leave. This may add to ’Umāra’s astonishment: he is planting seeds in a place to which he might never return.

The long poem by Ru’ba seems to be a meditation on the role of destiny in the apparent accidents which occur in every aspect of human and natural life. One of the poem’s messages seems to be that no matter how carefully one tries to protect loved ones, destiny will intervene. I would argue that the herd’s journey symbolises the journey

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\(^{531}\) ’Aqīl, p.80.

from the cradle to the grave, the well-prepared hunter is a personification of death, perhaps as an agent of divine will (qadar), perhaps not; in any event the poem’s underlying concern is, I think, the issue of fate and predestination. Thus, at the end of the poem Ru’ba leaves an unanswered question: should the bull take the blame or not?

Although these poets engaged in the debates and discussions of their times, in some cases no fruitful conclusions can be drawn regarding whether or not a poet held a particular view. A good example can be found in a poem by Ibn Harma, whose view of the heavens is presented in a poem on an astrological theme. The subject of astrology was not new in the time of the sāqat al-shu’arā’; it had been a topic for centuries before Islam and would be for centuries after the hijra. Abeer al-Abbasi observes that “despite the significant changes Islam brought to the Arab world, the belief in astrology at court and among the people did not disappear, and indeed the discipline became a vital cultural force in the Abbasid period”. Ibn Harma’s poem begins:

وبناتِّ نَّعَّشُ يستدرنَّ كَّأنَّّها بقراَتّ رُّملِ خلفهنّ جأّر

The [stars of] Ursa Major circle like addaxes followed by their calves. Ibn Harma’s treatment of the topic suggests that he should be classified amongst the poets who, as al-Abbasi notes “were generally not well versed in the principles of the science, but saw that astrology could provide a rich store of ideas and images that could enrich the treatment of genres such as the panegyric, the love lyric and the satire”. His poem seems to be a mere poetic exercise in which he likens the objects of the heavenly realm to terrestrial objects without discussing any astrological ideas or expressing his own view. This was not unusual; al-Abbasi rightly remarks that “the poets’ personal opinion of astrology is not necessarily the prime motivation for them to utilise such material and employ its concepts and techniques in the creation of their art”. The engagement of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ in these debates is superficial when compared to that of some of their contemporaries such as Abū Tammām, who certainly voiced his opinions in a clearer manner. He rejected the interpretations of the astrologers, and in a celebrated panegyric ode to the caliph written in the aftermath of the conquest of

535 Al-Abbasi, p.271.
536 Ibid., p.6.
Amorium he declared his stance “from the very beginning as antagonistic to astrology”.  

Some Islamic notions are also visible in the poetry of the sāqat al-shu’arā’. For instance, ’Umāra interprets having to serve two Persian patrons as a punishment from God for his disobedience:

ما زالَّ عصيائناً لله سلمتنا
حتى دُفِّعنا إلى يحيي ودينار
إلى عُليمينَ لم نقطع ثمارهما
قد طالما سجدا للشمس والنار

Still yet, our disobedience to God kept passing us on [from one patron to another] until we were pushed to Yaḥyā and Dīnār,

To two dim-witted infidels whose foreskins were never cut; and how often they had prostrated to the sun and fire!

Although these verses were attributed to ‘Umāra and Diʿbil al-Khuzāʾī, and both of the collectors of their poetry placed them among the poetry attributed to more than one poet, they seem to me attributable to ‘Umāra for several reasons. Firstly, there are other verses in ‘Umāra’s dīwān satirising Yahyā ibn Aktham. Secondly, there are many similarities between his style of poetry and these verses, and thirdly, similar notions are expressed in his poetry; we have seen his dislike of Baghdad because of the kind of people employed at court. It is useful to remember that Yaḥyā ibn Aktham, whom ‘Umāra satirises in these verses, was a notable judge in the time of al-Maʾmūn and was satirised by many poets, according to Akhbār al-Qudāṭ.

Generally, the poetry of the sāqat al-shu’arā’ contains many references to some of the controversial issues and debates of their time, but their treatment of them is conventional and they do not seem to have been interested in giving personal philosophical interpretations of the universe, life, death and fate. They may have been influenced by some contemporary poets; thus their meditative verses can be seen as indebted to the development of poetic traditions, rather than a breakthrough in poetic creation, as will be shown in the next section.

537 The poem is al-sayf aṣdaq (The Sword is Truer). Ibid., p.151.
538 ‘Aqīl, p.104.
540 ‘Aqīl, p.89.
541 Wakīʿ, p.341.
5.5.1 The Poet as a Reflective Artist

There is nothing novel in saying that poets see themselves as artists but our judgement must be based on the means they use to express this notion. As for the *šaqaṭ al-shuʿarāʾ*, there are some prose statements in which they give general opinions about poetry, and in some cases, about their own poetry. But there are also many instances in their poetry where they consider the nature of good poetry, see it as a verbal art and record their perceptions of their own poetic productions. However, as we have noted in many examples above, it is assumed that any attempt by a poet to compose a verse which employs either an innovative motif or a much-worn one in different contexts can be read as an indirect statement of self-presentation. Whether or not he has succeeded in this is another question.

In *al-Aghānī*, al-Īṣfahānī writes about Ibn Mayyāda under the heading ‘there are many blunders in his poetry’ (*kān kathīr al-saqṭ fī-šīrīh*), and then he narrates the story of someone who criticised Ibn Mayyāda for making so many mistakes, whereupon Ibn Mayyāda responded:

إنما الشّعر كنبلٌّ في جفيرك ترمي به الغرض، فطالعٌّ وواقعٌّ وعاصدٌّ وقاصد

Poetry is nothing but arrows in your quiver; you shoot at the target [and some of them will go] above, below, on [either] side; or [they will] hit home.  

Ibn Mayyāda’s rather apologetic justification for his poetic slips is mild in comparison to his boasts about his poetry and the poetry of his tribe: real poetry is composed by his tribe alone, and anything else is merely amusing and entertaining:

فَجَّرْنا ينابيعُ الجَلَامِ وَحَسَرْهَا ْ وَمَا الشّعرُ إلا شِعرُ قِيسٍ وَخَنْدَفٍ

We dug up the springs of poetry and [discovered] its sea so that its transmitter might swim in it.

[Real] poetry is nothing but that of Qays and Khindaf, and the poetry of [anyone] other than them is mere mannerism and witiness.  

These verses are striking in several ways: the imagery of digging up the springs which implies innovation and the creation of new motifs, ideas and so on. The analogy of water springs, which are the source of life, with poetry may imply the inspiration of other poets, and the ‘sea’ of poetry contains the idea of abundance and inexhaustibility –

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these are part of Ibn Mayyāda’s self-presentation. The idea that Qays and Khindaf are the truest and greatest poets is to be seen in the context of boasting of tribal achievements, but more important is the emphasis placed on the naturalness of their poetry which corresponds to statements by al-Aṣmaʿī, who held that good poetry is natural and unembellished as opposed to mannered and perfected, as we noted earlier. We should remember here that the later critic, al-Jurjānī, criticised al-Aṣmaʿī for creating the class of the sāqat al-shu’ʿarāʾ and at the same time dismissing the poetry of their contemporaries as mere entertainment.  

A similar opinion is given in prose by Ruʿba, for whom the champions or great poets (fuḥūl) are those who excel in the transmission of poetry. This statement is narrated by al-Aṣmaʿī, which again indicates a similarity between the poets’ and the critics’ views of poetry at that time. However, when we reach the time of ʿUmāra ibn ʿAqīl, we find that his view of modern poetry (muḥdath) is different; as we have seen, he considered the muḥdath poetry of Abū Tammām superior to his own work. He described Abū Tammām as “the best poet, based on criteria seldom conceded him, such as good wording, beautiful motifs, consistent intent, and uniform language”. This shift could be seen as the result of the gradual evolution of a pro-mannerism attitude sustained by a change in society’s taste in poetry and driven by admirers of the ‘perfectionist’ approach.

The reflective poetry the sāqat al-shu’ʿarāʾ wrote about their own work mostly praises it as excellent, eloquent and elegant, and this unabashed boasting is usually to be understood in the context of the whole poem. Obviously a poet in panegyric mode would never admit to a patron that the poem was derivative and mediocre. Of course the same could be said about glorification of self or tribe and indeed about satires as well. Nevertheless, in a rare example, whose context could not be determined, we find Ibn Harma reflecting on his own poetry. He emphasises its uniqueness, claiming that (to use contemporary language) there is an ‘Ibn Harma brand’ so distinctive that whenever his poetry is stolen by another poet, it is easily identifiable as being by Ibn Harma:

ما إن أزالُّ أرىّ وسميّ فعرفهُّ في ذُو أخ موسومًا على قُبّل  
وما وسممت فلاصًا ورُغماً رائعة  
حتى أنت رَغِم الأفكار والغفل

544 Al-Jurjānī, al-Wasāṭa, p.52.  
546 Gruendler, Qaṣīda, p.351.  
547 Ibn Jinnī, vol.3,p.282
Yet still I know my brand once I see it in another man’s herd of camels, [for mine are] already branded.

If I ever put a brand on camels before they go to pasture they will return despite their hobbles.\(^{548}\)

The influence of the Bedouin way of life is noticeable in this image, which is a reflection of the poet’s taste, knowledge and understanding of what makes good poetry; his work is highly appreciated by his immediate audience, some of whom may appropriate his ideas. The camel bearing its unique brand by which the poet distinguishes his stolen motifs is a richly symbolic image enhancing the poet’s boast of his poetic skill and creativity. This poem at the same time provides a contribution to the debate on poetic appropriation (\(al\text{-}sariqāt\text{-}al\text{-}shi‘riyya\)), which was yet to become a field of authorship in classical Arabic criticism.

Moreover, it is also possible to sense the poet’s disappointment at the lack of appreciation shown by some elements of his society towards his artistic skills as a poet. He mocks and insults a former patron:

\[
yā\;ābī\;maddh\;mīn\;qūl\;yūḥabīr\;zann\;al\;rājil\;wāna\;qillābihā\;frāq\n\]

O, you rejecter of the panegyric [which is] embellished by a perfectionist, [though even] in the margins of his poetry there is elegance.

You are like a virgin who desires the fondling of men but whose heart is shackled by fear.\(^{549}\)

The centrality of the poet’s artistic ability, not only in its meticulously composed core and structure, but even in its ‘margins’ or secondary motifs is superlatively conveyed in these verses. One should emphasise here the significance of the word ‘embellish’ (\(yuḥabbīr\)), as it is a technical term used by classical critics to describe poets like the pre-Islamic poet Ṭufayl al-Ghanawī (known as \(al\text{-}muhabbīr\)),\(^{550}\) having the sense of a craftsmanship which opposes naturalness of composition. In these lines Ibn Harma expresses his awareness of the value of his poetic compositions and indicates the style of composition he adopts: one distinguished by craftsmanship, embellishment and

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\(^{548}\) Ibn Harma, M, p.185.

\(^{549}\) Ibid., pp.156-157.

\(^{550}\) Ibn Manẓūr, vol.2,p.748. It is also stated in \(al\text{-}Aghānī\) that al-Asma‘î said: ‘Ṭufayl was called \('al\text{-}muhabbīr\)' by people in pre-Islamic times for excelling in the description of horses’. Al-Īṣfahānī, vol.15, p.238.
mannerism. Ibn Harma’s approach to mannerism will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter’s objective has been to discover the views of the sāqat al-shuʿārā’ regarding themselves, their surroundings, their society and the values and beliefs of their time. The overall purpose was to give a balanced assessment of the poets’ views regarding the self as opposed to the people: patrons, peers and opponents (as explored in the previous chapter), and also to determine to what extent the poets show their individuality or find their identity within their tribe. Attention was paid to verses found mostly in their amatory, glorifying and descriptive poetry and, in a few cases, in their panegyric and satirical poems.

Regarding the topic of love it was found that at the level of poetics the sāqat al-shuʿārā’ showed themselves to be connected with the poetic tradition and to have worked from a comprehension of its norms, making it the base from which they tried to take poetic creativity to new horizons by modifying the traditional themes and motifs to suit their own purposes. As for their responses to the values and beliefs of their time, we found that they mostly integrated motifs, like fate and the ill omen, in order to enrich their poetic engagement with traditional motifs found either in the poetry of the ‘udhrī lover or the pre-Islamic poets, and to widen their audience, as we have shown in discussing Ibn Mayyāda’s treatment of those motifs.

The poets’ relationship with society is expressed in motifs glorifying their tribe and stressing their pride in their strong loyalty to their people. Even when the relationship becomes strained, as in the case of Ibn Harma, not all the bonds with the tribe can be severed since this would violate the code of morality and heroism (murū’ā). And when this code excludes outsiders then a noble origin might be invented to match the tribal lineage, as we found in Ibn Mayyāda’s boasting of his Persian connection, in which we can discern the extent of the influence of the Persian presence not only on the Abbasid courts but even within cultural and poetic domains.

The injustice inflicted by the hierarchy and the poets’ discontent with society are present in motifs used by ‘Umāra and Ibn Harma. The hatred of Baghdad and longing for the desert are symbols of longing for the past and the Bedouin values and traditions that ‘Umāra could not find in his new life in Baghdad. The turbid water springs of Ibn
Harma are representative of the individual’s struggle to maintain a dignified life without being dependent on others. The imagery is powerfully used by these poets to convey the unhappy reality they experienced.

The Bedouin taste, a detailed knowledge of the desert and skill in poetic depiction could not be more impressive than in Ru'ba’s description of the desert and the hunt. But when he engages directly in theological debates he retreats to orthodoxy, and just as description of horses was not his forte (as he admitted), perhaps it would have been artistically wise to avoid overt statement about fate and predestination. What he does very well is to choose the right moment to halt and leave the difficult question of fate open at the end of his long poem, rather than try to provide an answer, which is not within his competence.

Moreover, Ru’ba’s hunting poem contained attempts to develop the themes which were later to evolve and coalesce into the form of ṭardiyya. This innovatory step was developed into a genre shortly afterwards by Abū Nuwās and Ibn al-Mu’tazz, but the roots of that development were already evident in the rajaz of their predecessor Ru’ba.

The other sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ are not always successful as poets of reflection but they sometimes manage to employ certain motifs to create an attractive image, as we found in Ibn Harma’s verses on an astrological theme. Their verses inspired by the active debates of their times are neither personally revealing nor theoretically sophisticated. This is also true of their prose views on poetry and its artistic merits; as for the opinions found in their poetry, these are largely ordinary, perhaps the only exception being Ibn Harma’s use of imagery in his poem on poetic appropriation. But it is clear, I think, that none of these poets could be called a philosopher.

To sum up the findings of this chapter: they suggest that the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ achieved their strongest performances when they approached poetry through an engagement with the ancient poetic traditions and Bedouin-like choice of motifs and themes. It seems undeniable that the strong presence of the Bedouin ‘soul’, views and motifs in their poetry is amongst the reasons for al-Ašmaʾī’s appreciation of them and his associating them with simple and traditional poetry and Bedouin poets.

Their responses to their time and its dominant societal values are informative of the pressures felt by the struggling individual at the mercy of arrogant injustice which motivated them to take refuge in the shelter of Bedouin values and traditions. In this
they were no different from al-Âṣma‘î, who saw in the poetry of the sâqat al-shu’arâ’
good examples of how the traditions of Arabic poetry could be maintained, and the
Arabic identity could be preserved, and the new cultures and their influences on Muslim
society could be resisted, from the highest court down to the apparently powerless
individual.
Chapter Six: The Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ and the Badīʿ Style

The first muḥdath poets to bring forth badīʿ were Bashshār ibn Burd and Ibn Harma’. Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to shed light on the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s employment of badīʿ (ornamentation devices) and the extent of their participation in the introduction of these devices, thus helping to form what was to become known as the badīʿ style. The argument of this chapter is that although some of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ made use of the popular badīʿ devices of their time, they should not be seen as mannerist poets who relied totally on meticulous craftsmanship and abandoned naturalness in composition.

In this light I will re-examine some of the existing literature regarding the causes of the emergence of the badīʿ style during the Abbasid era and suggest a different reason for the popularity of this style. Moreover, I will argue that the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ continued to represent Bedouinity and Arabness in times when other cultures, especially the Persian, were exerting a huge influence on many of their contemporary poets, and that the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, to a large extent, managed to hold to the traditional style of composition by taking inspiration from the pre-Islamic and Umayyad poets. The aim is to reconcile the seemingly contradictory views regarding the nature of the style of composition of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ and also to determine whether this style tended to the traditional or the modern (muḥdath).

The discussion will not be concerned with their works from a philological perspective, which we dealt with in Chapter Three; rather it will be focused on their word choice and the poetic and artistic value of their expressions. Thus the vocabulary used by the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ will be investigated to determine whether the individual poets vary in their use of different proportions of familiar and unfamiliar words, and whether their poetic language contains recondite, naturalistic, expressionistic, rhythmic or pictorial expressions.

The chapter aims also to demonstrate the variations among the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ in their employment of badīʿ since these variations were perceived by early critics and commentators. Even within the poetry of an individual poet there are noticeable

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differences in the choices of words, depending on the occasion, the theme and the recipient, but we will also discuss any shared pattern of choice between two or more of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. The aim is thus to describe the poets’ style of composition with regard to the elements of wording and imagery.

Finally, discussion will focus on the most popular devices of bādīʿ in order to address this issue within its original context. Moreover, since Ibn Harma’s use of bādīʿ devices was perceived by some medieval critics differently from the rest of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, most of the discussion will be devoted to him.

6.2 The Phenomenon of Bādīʿ in Abbasid Poetry

Many questions arise when considering the poetic style of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. One question is: what stylistic features did al-ʿAṣmaʿī have in mind when he created the grouping that were, he believed, characteristic of Bedouin poetry and which made those poets distinctive from others? Also, since both al-ʿAṣmaʿī and his chosen poets lived in the era of muḥdath poetry, during which bādīʿ poetry became fashionable, what was al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s stance with regard to the bādīʿ style, especially given that Ibn Harma, according to some medieval critics was amongst the first to establish that style? Finally, does the employment of bādīʿ devices make the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ mannerist poets?

It seems essential, in order to give contextualised answers, to discuss these questions by considering the relevant statements made by medieval critics in chronological order. The earliest of these seems to have been made by al-ʿAṣmaʿī, who used the term bādīʿ poetry, apparently in its literal sense, in a statement concerning him in al-ʿAṣfahānī:

Al-ʿAṣmaʿī was asked who was the better poet, Bashshār or Marwān? He replied, Bashshār. When asked the reason for this, he said it was because Marwān took a road that many others had taken and did not overtake those who had preceded him, and the same is true of his contemporaries. But Bashshār took an untraveled road and excelled in it and was unequalled in it; and he is the greater in versatility and in the genres of poetry and has a greater abundance and broader scope of bādīʿ, whereas Marwān never went beyond the manner followed by the Ancients.552

Al-ʾAṣmaʿī’s usage of the term *badīʿ* in this statement is of the kind described by Heinrichs: “the term *badīʿ* in its earliest history has always been annoyingly vague”, as it is not wholly clear whether al-ʾAṣmaʿī intended to use it in the sense of ‘the novel and refined’ or as a technical term for a distinct poetic style adopted by some of his contemporaries including Bashshār and Ibn Harma.

Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that al-ʾAṣmaʿī intended to use it technically, because according to Heinrichs *badīʿ* became a technical term only after the time of Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d.296 A.H./908 C.E.), who tried to conduct a “comprehensive treatment of the term *badīʿ*”; in his book *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, Ibn al-Muʿtazz presents “an argument which became the basis of a whole book” that “a certain bold metaphor is legitimate because it follows the method of the Arab”. What this statement seems to suggest is that up until the time of Ibn al-Muʿtazz and even later, muḥdath poets and critics were still trying to seek legitimacy by showing that the devices used in the new style were not innovations but rather could be found in the Qur’an, the hadith and the sayings and poetry of the ancient Arabs.

Apparently al-ʾAṣmaʿī recognised the poetic beauty of metaphor but did not call it *istiʿāra* (literally: borrowing; technically: metaphor); rather he called it *amthāl*, which literally means proverbs or examples. Al-ʿAlawī states:

الاستعارة من أشرف صنعة الكلام وأجلها وكان القدماء يسمونها الأمثال: فلان كثير الأمثال.

Metaphor is amongst the most prestigious and greatest [devices] of crafted poetry. The ancient [critics] used to call it *amthāl*, and thus they said: So-and-so has many *amthāl*.

Al-ʿAlawī also gives an example which shows that al-ʾAṣmaʿī recognised metaphor in a statement which was narrated about him that Ṭufayl al-Ghanawī was the first to ‘strip the saddles from the horses of youthfulness’ (*ʿarrā afrās al-ṣibā*). The metaphor likening horses to youthfulness was also used by Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, and both poets extended this metaphor by mentioning that the saddles of the horses were stripped from their backs, conveying the meaning that active youthfulness and all pleasures have come

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554 Ibid.


556 Al-ʿAlawī, p.133.

557 Ibid., p.140.
to an end. Similarly, in *Khizānat al-Adab* there is a discussion about another famous metaphor, the ‘rope of love’ which has attracted the attention of many medieval and modern critics:

قال أبو نصر أحمد بن حاتم: قرأت شعر سويد على الأصمعي، فلما بلغت قصيدته التي أولها:

فَوَضّلَنا الحبلٌ منها ما أشع

بسطت رابعة الحبل لنا فوصلنا الحبل منها ما أشع

فضلها الأصمعي، وقال: كانت العرب تفضّلها وتقدمها، وتعدهم من حكمها، وكانت في الجاهلية تسمى البنتمة، لما اشتملت عليه من الأمثال

Abū Naṣr Aḥmad ibn Ḥātim said: I read the poetry of Suwayd in front of al-ʾAṣmaʾī until I reached his poem which starts with:

Rabīʿa extended the rope [of love] for us, so we remained connected with the rope as long as it was extended.

Al-ʾAṣmaʾī preferred this poem and said: “The Arabs used to favour this poem, count it amongst the best, and regard it as expressing wisdom. In the pre-Islamic era it was called ‘the orphan poem’ because of the amount of metaphors (amthāl) it contained”. 558

However, in the period between al-ʾAṣmaʾī and Ibn al-Muʿtazz we find al-Jāḥiẓ crediting Bashshār and Ibn Harmah with producing the more proper bāḍīʾ (aṣwall bāḍīʾan) amongst muḥdath poets: “there is no one among the moderns better in bāḍīʾ than Bashshār and Ibn Harmah”. 559 Al-Jāḥiẓ uses the term ‘example or proverb’ (mathal) to describe a metaphorical phrase, and the term ‘doctrine’ (madḥhab) to describe the new style when commenting on a verse by al-Ashhab ibn Rumayla about his tribe:

They are the fore-arm of fate, for which it is feared,
And what good is a hand that is not lent weight by a [mighty] fore-arm?

[al-Jāḥiẓ said:] His phrase “they are the fore-arm of fate” is a metaphor (mathal) and this is what the transmitters of poetry call bāḍīʾ. […] Bāḍīʾ is found only among the Arabs, and because of it their language excels all others and exceeds every other tongue. 560

Although al-Jāḥiẓ, as Stetkevych notes, did not give a clear definition of the term bāḍīʾ, he refers to the idea that this use of metaphor was slowly but surely giving rise to a new and distinctive poetic style. Later, when more muḥdath poets had followed in the steps of Bashshār, he states: “al-Rāʾī’s poetry is abundant in bāḍīʾ, Bashshār’s [poetry] is of

560 Translated by Stetkevych. Ibid., pp.3-4.
fine bādī‘, al-ʿAttābī embraces in his poetry the doctrine (madhhab) of Bashshār in bādī‘”.

It might be true that al-Jāḥiẓ in these statements is not using the word bādī‘ as a clearly defined technical term but nor is he using it in a simple sense to mean ‘novel and refined’, especially as in the last clause ‘doctrine’ can also be understood as ‘way’ or ‘style’. Moreover, the example he gives, the metaphor of ‘the fore-arm of fate’ and his reference to it as a mathal (which could also be translated as a proverb or an example in the sense that many later poets had employed it) suggests that al-Jāḥiẓ was aware of the association of bādī‘ with novel uses of metaphor and a striving for effect which was reminiscent of early bādī‘ attempted by muḥdath poets.

When Ibn al-Muʿtazz authored his book Kitāb al-Bādī‘ he “was the first to devote a monograph to this topic”. He argues that the use of bādī‘ devices had not been invented by muḥdath poets and many examples of these devices, although limited in variety, could be found from the pre-Islamic era onwards. He cites examples from what the philologists regarded as authentic and uncorrupted language. Ibn al-Muʿtazz remarks that the bādī‘ style is characteristic; there are “five phenomena under the general category of bādī‘: borrowing-metaphor, paronomasia, antitheses, anticipating the rhyme-word with an echo-word and theological cant”. Interestingly, Ibn al-Muʿtazz does not quote a single verse of Ibn Harma’s poetry but he does quote nine verses of Bashshār’s and over thirty of Abū Tammām’s; however, he quotes two verses by Ru’ba and two by ʿUmāra ibn ʿAqīl.

The critic Ibn Rashīq follows al-Jāḥiẓ in describing Ibn Harma and Bashshār as the first muḥdath poets to bring forth bādī‘ (fataq al-bādī‘), but more importantly he traces the development of this style and the imitation of the earlier muḥdath poets by their successors:

وقالوا: أول من فتق البديع من المحدثين بشار بن برد، وابن هرمة، وهو سافة العرب وأخیر من يشتهده بشعره، ثم أتبعهما مقتدياً بهما كلثوم بن عمر الغنابي، ومنصور العامري، ومسلم بن الوليد، وأبو نواس. واتبع هؤلاء حبيب الطائي، والوليد البجتري، وعبد الله بن المعتز، فانتهى علم البديع والصنعة إليه، وخدم به.

It was reported: the first muḥdath poets to bring forth bādī‘ were Bashshār ibn Burd and Ibn Harma. He [the latter] was the last Bedouin poet (sāqat al-
and the last poet whose poetry is quotable as evidence [in linguistic discussions]. They were taken as guidance and followed by Kulthūm ibn 'Amr al-'Attābī, Manṣūr al-Nimrī, Muslim ibn al-Walîd and Abū Nuwās. Those [in turn] were taken as guidance by Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī [Abū Tammām], al-Walîd al-Buḥtūrī and 'Abdullah ibn al-Mu'azz, in whom [Ibn al-Mu'azz] the knowledge of badī’ and craftsmanship reached its fulfilment and by whom [badī'] was sealed.\(^{566}\)

Describing the evolution of the term until Ibn al-Mu’tazz’s era, Heinrichs notes that the main feature of the badī’ style was usage of the metaphor by giving as an example the famous and frequently discussed ‘claws of death’ (azfār al-maniyya).\(^{567}\) However, his claim that Muslim ibn al-Walîd was referred to in “indigenous literary history” as “the first to have cultivated badī’ poetry and have called it by that name, albeit in conjugation with a similar adjective – al-badī’ wa-al-latīf’, ‘the novel and refined’”\(^{568}\) seems disputable when we consider some medieval critical statements such as that of Ibn Rashīq.

Elsewhere Heinrichs claims that badī’ was used as a synonym of isti‘āra but he admits that he cannot prove this contention “beyond any reasonable doubt” because of “the fragmentary nature” of the evidence. He nonetheless argues that his claim is plausible since the discussions about Abū Tammām’s badī’ and especially the negative criticism focused exclusively on his metaphors.\(^{569}\) However, as we noted earlier, the problematic nature of most of these claims is due to the decision to begin the investigation of badī’ with the third generation of badī’ poets, Abū Tammām and his contemporaries, and to a reliance on Ibn al-Mu’tazz’s book on badī’.

The abovementioned statements by al-Aṣma‘ī, al-Jāḥīz and Ibn Rashīq suggest that Ibn Harma and Bashshār were regarded as the pioneers of badī’, and generally the

\(^{565}\) It seems that the implication of the term ‘arab have proved difficult for many. Van Gelder states that “like muwallad, the word ‘arab is an ambiguous term”. He also thinks that muwallad in the context of philological discussions is a synonym of muḥdath, which means modern and new. See: Geert Jan van Gelder, ‘The Most Natural Poem of the Arabs’: An Addition to the Dīwān of al-Kumayt Ibn Zayd’, Journal of Arabic Literature, 19 (1988), 95-107 (pp.98-99). Thus in my interpretation of the phrase ‘ṣāqat al-‘arab’ to mean the last Bedouin poet I rely on the context of this statement and also on the linguistic usages of the term such as in Lisān al-‘Arab, which states that when a Bedouin is called ‘arabī (an Arab) it makes him happy and when he is called aʿrābī (nomad / desert dweller) it angers him. See: Ibn Manẓūr, vol.4, p. 2864. This is apparently because there is a verse in the Qur’an describing the aʿrāb (nomads / desert dwellers) as follows: “the Bedouins are stronger in disbelief and hypocrisy and more likely not to know the limits of what [laws] Allah has revealed to His Messenger”. Şahîh International Translation of the Holy Qur’an, 9:97, <http://quran.com/9> [accessed 29 March 2014].

\(^{566}\) Al-Qayrawānî, vol.1, p.131.

\(^{567}\) Heinrichs, Badī’, p. 122.

\(^{568}\) Ibid.

\(^{569}\) Heinrichs, Paired Metaphors, p.5.
references appear in a positive context which sees the poets as composers of good *badīʿ*. However, Heinrichs also notes that Muslim ibn al-Walīd is referred to in some medieval sources as the first poet to corrupt poetry with *badīʿ*. Moreover, Ibn Rashīq states that Muslim was considered a follower of Bashshār and Ibn Harma and not a pioneer. He was regarded, together with Abū Nuwās, as belonging to the second generation of *badīʿ* poets, while Abū Tammām and Ibn al-Muʿtazz were regarded as belonging to the third.

The idea that Muslim corrupted poetry with *badīʿ* was not narrated in connection with al-Aṣmaʿī; it was related to Muhammad ibn al-Qāsim Mihrāwāyh (the date of whose death is unknown, but he was a contemporary of al-Iṣfahānī, who often quotes him in *al-Aghānī*). Muhammad states that he heard his father, al-Qāsim (death date unknown), saying:

أولّمنّأفسدّالشعرّمسلمّبنّالوليدّ،ّجاءّبهذاّالذيّسماهّالناسّالبديع

The first to corrupt poetry was Muslim ibn al-Walīd; he brought forth that which people called *badīʿ*.570

Similarly, al-Āmidī in *al-Muwāzana* quotes the same statement about Mihrāwāyh and adds that Abū Tammām admired Muslim’s style and followed him:

فسلكّطريقاًّوعراًّواستكرهّالألفاظّوالمعانيّ،ففسدّشعره

So, he entered a rugged way and constrained the wordings and motifs, thus his poetry became corrupt.571

While to argue in favour of the *badīʿ* of Muslim or Abū Tammām would be beyond the scope of this study, what these statements generally seem to suggest is that the claim that *badīʿ* was a corruption of poetry does not appear in the criticism of early critics such as al-Aṣmaʿī and other contemporaries of the first generation of *badīʿ* poets including Bashshār and Ibn Harma. That claim referred to the second and third generations, when poets seem to have been preoccupied with *badīʿ* devices and strove to achieve them by forcing wordings and motifs, thus embellishing the style at the expense of meaning and expression. This is clear from Ibn al-Muʿtazz’s statement about Abū Tammām, who, he argues, overloaded his poetry with these devices, unlike in ancient times when “a poet used to compose a verse or two of this art in a *qaṣīdah*. Sometimes you could read a number of *qaṣīdaḥs* by one of them without coming across a single

verse of *badīʿ*; this was considered admirable among them when it occurred sparsely”.

### 6.2.1 Why Did *Badīʿ* Become So Popular in the Abbasid Era?

Heinrichs and Stetkevych have offered answers to this question and in responding to them I will argue for a third. Heinrichs, in his *Literary Theory: The Problem of its Efficiency* claims:

> The motive force that brought about the rise of *badīʿ* poetry was the traditionalism of Arabic poetry with regard to its content – a fact that compelled the poets to give exclusive attention to the ‘attire’ of their products (to borrow a commonplace metaphor of the Arabs for ‘form’).

So, he regards *badīʿ* as a reaction to the critics’ stance, which paid more attention to the content of the poem; this drove poets to consciously seek and invent these *badīʿ* figures, but this “gradually evolves as a principle of art rather than a mere instrument of it”.

His suggestion is disputable, resulting as it does from his insistence that *badīʿ* means first and foremost metaphor, as will be explained shortly. Nonetheless, I will take account of his suggestion in my argument.

In contrast to Heinrichs, Stetkevych claims that

> The *badīʿ* style is nothing less than the expression in poetry of the entire scope of the metaphorical and analytical processes that characterized Muʿtazilite speculative theology (*kalām*) and, in a broader sense, the whole cultural and intellectual framework of the era of Muʿtazilite hegemony.

Heinrichs, however, argues that it is impossible to prove “that *badīʿ* was used by any medieval critic with reference to a general style of thought in poetry”. As for Stetkevych’s suggestion of a causal link between *badīʿ* and Muʿtazilite *kalām*, Heinrichs dismisses it as “over-emphasizing and stretching one explanatory principle”. He sees *badīʿ* rather as a milestone on the path towards mannerism in Arabic poetry.

Similarly, Meisami, while recognising some connection between *badīʿ* and Muʿtazilite theology, states “the positing of a direct, causal link between *kalām* and poetry

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572 Ibn al-Muʿtazz, p.1, the translation of this text is by Stetkevych. See: Stetkevych, *Toward a Redefinition*, p. 15.
574 Ibid.
575 Stetkevych, *Toward a Redefinition*, p.5.
576 Heinrichs, *Paired Metaphors*, p.3.
577 Ibid.
oversimplifies what is indeed a complex phenomenon; moreover, the new style did not replace older techniques.”

What I will argue for in the following lines is that we should start our investigation of .badīʿ not with the end of the phenomenon in the poetry of Abū Tammām and the third generation of .badīʿ poets. Rather we should be looking at the harbingers, found in the poetry of early  muḥdath poets who were concerned with embellishment and ornamentation. I will reconsider Heinrichs’s suggestion and argue that there was a causal link between the traditionalist philologists’ attention to the choice and use of words and the poets’ reaction, manifested in their increased usage of .badīʿ devices.

The philologists’ stance resulted in a conscious craving for embellishment and ornamentation by  muḥdath poets, which started at the level of vocabulary and then gradually moved to the deeper layers of the poetic composition: first motifs and later metaphor; the movement did not, as Heinrichs suggests, begin with metaphor. The philologists’ role in concentrating the attention of poets on wordings should not be underestimated. Their pursuit of strange or unusual vocabulary required poets to learn how to incorporate many unusual words in their poetry and when they did not receive recognition for this they moved to the word-related devices of  badīʿ.

Nonetheless, Heinrichs rightly notes that the  badīʿ phenomenon gave rise to “the emergence of ‘phantastic’ poetry […] a phantastic dimension to its subject matter by using comparisons (or imagery in general) that are not simply found in nature and taken by the poet, but artificially constructed and, thus, phantastic”.

It should be understood that I am not implying that poets prior to this era, or even after it, were not using this poetic method. I merely wish to emphasise conscious seeking for such comparisons or imagery which is evident from the sheer quantity found on analysing the poets’ collections.

It is through this attention to the wordings of the poem that  badīʿ emerged, I would argue; it was a development prompted by the philologists’ critical assessments, to which poets responded in an attempt to please the philologists and be recognised as masters of the language. Al-ʾAṣmaʿī, for example, was not only fond of Bedouin and unusual vocabulary; he was also knowledgeable about paronomasia and antithesis, as will be discussed shortly. And even al-Jāḥiẓ famously placed himself among the supporters of

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578 Meisami, Structure and Meaning, p.254.
expression, albeit in a much wider context, when he argued that motifs are known by everyone and the significance of the composition lies in the word choice and imagery.580

6.2.2 The Badīʿ Phenomenon and al-Aṣmaʿī

Evidently al-Aṣmaʿī was not against good, novel and refined poetry; he praised Bashshār, as we have noted. Moreover, his other statements about Bashshār such as calling him “the seal of poets” show that he saw no significant difference between Bashshār and Ibn Harma. The similarities in these statements and particularly their last clauses581 may give rise to a suspicion that they might have been misquoted in al-Aghānī; however, it is possible that al-Aṣmaʿī did make these statements about both poets. But why would al-Aṣmaʿī mention Bashshār’s badīʿ, and acknowledge his inventiveness and yet fail to recognise Ibn Harma’s badīʿ?

I would argue that, firstly, al-Aṣmaʿī’s phrase ‘awsaʿ badīʿan’ (his badīʿ was wider) should be interpreted as a reference to Bashshār’s poetry as refined and elegant in general and not as a technical term, since all the available evidence shows that ‘badīʿ’ was not used as a technical term until many decades after the death of al-Aṣmaʿī. Secondly, al-Aṣmaʿī’s reference to badīʿ in that particular text is passive and is not informative of his acknowledgment, approval or disapproval of what later became a distinctive style.

However, his other justifications of Bashshār’s supremacy over Marwān, such as his introduction of unprecedented innovations, can be seen as al-Aṣmaʿī’s recognition of Bashshār’s style as different from that of the ancient poets and the Bedouin style exemplified among al-Aṣmaʿī’s contemporaries only in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. Thus, it seems that al-Aṣmaʿī regarded Ibn Harma’s poetry as representative of the traditional, Bedouin and conservative style and not that of an innovator.

It is a pity that al-Aṣmaʿī’s al-Ajnās (Paronomasia) has not survived and all we find today are references to that book. Kītab al-Ṣinā’atayn by Abū Hilāl al-Askarī contains this definition:

581 He remarked “if Bashshār had lived earlier I would not have favoured anyone over him”. Al-Iṣfahānī, al-Aghānī, vol.3, p.99; and said about Ibn Harma, “nothing would prevent him from being among al-fuhūl except for the fact that he is close to our time”. Ibid., vol.5, p.170.
Paronomasia is when someone speaks with two homogeneous words; each of them is akin to the other, consisting of the same letters according to al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s book al-Ajnās. Among [the types of paronomasia] is the case when the two words are homogeneous in their pronunciation and derivation of meaning […] Another case is when the two words are composed from the same letters but have different meanings.582

This is a clear indication that al-ʿAṣmaʿī was interested in the discussion of paronomasia. His interest may have been aroused by contemporary poets’ frequent use of this kind of wordplay. Although we cannot be certain about every aspect of al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s views concerning paronomasia based on his own work, it is still possible to rely on Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī’s brief discussion of al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s examples in his al-Ajnās. Al-ʿAskarī quotes an example of the poetry of Zuhayr:

بعزمةِّمأمورٍّمطيعٍّوآمرٍّ
مطاعٍّفلاّيلفَىّلحزمهِمُّمثلُّ

With the determination of (an obedient commissioned one /subject) and a (commissioner /leader) whose order is obeyed, their firmness is matchless.583

Al-ʿAskarī then observes that some men of literature did not always adhere in their examples to their theoretical definitions, and remarks that this is a typical example of al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s misinterpretations of paronomasia to be found in al-Ajnās. Al-ʿAskarī calls them misinterpretations since, for example, in this verse there is no paronomasia between ‘commissioned’ and ‘commissioner’ (maʾmūr and āmir) and there is no paronomasia between ‘obedient’ and ‘obeyed’ (muṭāʿ and muṭīʿ); they are merely an active participle and a passive participle and there would be a paronomasia in this verse only if the two pairs were ‘obedient’ and ‘able to obey’ (muṭīʿ and mustaṭīʿ) and ‘commissioner’ and ‘prince’ (āmir and amīr). Al-ʿAskarī then quotes seven other verses, all of which were mistakenly given as examples of paronomasia, according to him:

ليس في هذه الألفاظ تجنيس؛ وإنما اختفت هذه الكلم للتصريف


583 Ibid. One has to accept that some diminution of the poetic beauty of the original text is inevitable when attempting to convey all the textual detail which sometimes makes the translation sound too literal, but the purpose is to highlight all the parts of the paronomasia.
There is no paronomasia in these words, they merely vary in linguistic derivations.\textsuperscript{584}

It seems that al-ʿAskarī recognises paronomasia when the homogeneous words share the same root\textsuperscript{585} but have different meanings; hence he states that in ‘obedient’ and ‘obeyed’ (\textit{muṭīʿ} and \textit{muṭāʿ}) there is no paronomasia as they are both paronyms coming from the same origin, ‘obedience’ (\textit{al-ṭāʿa}). Although such a discussion may seem pedantic it indicates that early treatments of paronomasia, such as that of al-ʿAṣmaʿī, either did not differentiate between its different types or were not very rigorous.

A later critic, al-Muẓaffar al-ʿAlawī (d.656 A.H. / 1258 C.E), quotes al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s disapproval of some bad examples; these were badly crafted and composed only for the sake of contriving a paronomasia. For example, he states that Ishāq al-Mawṣilī recited the following verses to al-ʿAṣmaʿī:

\begin{quote}
لَحَّائمٍّ حامَّّ حتَّىّلاّحيامَّّ بهّ محلٍّ عنّطريقِّ الماءِّ مطرودِّ
\end{quote}

There is a wanderer who wandered around till he was very tired, yet he is still barred and forbidden from the water stream.

Al-ʿAṣmaʿī said, “Your poetry is not bad, but you [included too many] of these [words] with the letter ḥāʾ; had they all been together even in the Throne Verse [of the Holy Qur’an] they would have blemished it.\textsuperscript{586}

It seems that al-ʿAṣmaʿī disliked paronomasia when the poet was obviously striving for it; he regarded it as over-crafted poetry and a sign of a lack of naturalness in composition. Moreover, when the poet used the hard sound of ḥāʾ in five words in one line, three of them being consecutively uttered, he made things worse since this particular letter is difficult to pronounce.

\textsuperscript{584} Ibid., p.322.
\textsuperscript{585} Interestingly, even some medieval critics were surprised that al-ʿAṣmaʿī knew about paronomasia. Al-ʿAlawī states that there was some disagreement amongst scholars on the definition of antithesis; some defined it as mentioning something and its opposite in one expression, others as two meanings sharing the same pronunciation. He then gives an example of the problematic interpretations of paronomasia and antithesis:

\begin{quote}
ونبئتهمّ يستنصلونّ بكاهلّّّّّّّّّوللؤمّفيهمّكاهلّوسنام
\end{quote}

I was told that they seek help from the tribe, while wickedness [has been instilled] in their withers and hump.

He then states that ‘withers’ and ‘tribe’ which are both represented by one word (kāḥil) do not form an antithesis; this is in fact an instance of paronomasia, and anyone who thinks it is antithesis is in disagreement with al-ʿAṣmaʿī and al-Khalīl. When he was asked if they had known that (paronomasia), he said: “Glory be to God! Was there anyone like them in the knowledge of poetry and distinguishing between the good and bad of it?” Al-ʿAlawī, p.98.

\textsuperscript{586} Ibid. p.51.
The second feature of *badīʿ* found in the literary sources that al-ʿAṣmaʿī discussed is antithesis (muṭābaqa). In *al-ʿUmda* it is stated that al-ʿAṣmaʿī defined antithesis, illustrating his definition by providing a good example of an antithesis in a verse composed by Zuhayr. Interestingly, other verses by Zuhayr prompted al-ʿAṣmaʿī to regard him as a ‘slave of poetry’, as will be discussed shortly. The example of good antithesis, in al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s view, is:

ليثُّبعَثَّرَّيصطادُّالرجالَّإذاّ

A lion [man] at ‘Iththar always hunts men; though the lion [animal] may fail to hunt amongst his peers, his [the man’s success in hunting] is always true.\(^{587}\)

This example suggests that while al-ʿAṣmaʿī tended to regard the inclusion of antitheses as characteristic of over-careful craftsmanship, he recognises this verse as a good example of poetry.

Thus it seems that al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s general preference for ‘naturalness’ does not always lead him to reject over-crafted poetry. This conclusion is supported by a statement by al-ʿAṣmaʿī mentioned in a later medieval source: “the best of poetry is that which gives you its meaning after a struggle”\(^{588}\) (*baʿd muṭāwala*). So, how might meaning in poetry become, in this positive sense, difficult to grasp? Al-ʿAṣmaʿī leaves no clue and so individual poets or critics had to exercise their own judgement. For us today, it seems that the level of poetic complexity endorsed by al-ʿAṣmaʿī would have to be achieved by means of unusual vocabulary, difficult sentence structure or the embodiment of a very minor idea within the motif that is not visible at first glance and re-reading the text becomes essential if one is to discover the hidden meanings.

However, I would argue that, based on what we have discussed so far in al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s criticism, his attention was mostly concentrated on wording: the majority of his statements are related to expressions, and it is useful to remember that he was above all a philologist. Thus the philological approach to poetry had a profound effect on the emergence of certain *badīʿ* features, especially the tendency to use devices which are related to wording and expression such as paronomasia and antithesis.

In the early stages of *badīʿ* the devices mostly used by the poets and discussed by critics such as al-ʿAṣmaʿī were paronomasia and antithesis. Later *muḥdathūn* penetrated more

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deeply into the structure of poetry, and thus the focus moved to innovative metaphors and more complex imagery, the outstanding example being the poetry of Abū Tammām, who belonged to the third generation of bāḍī’ poets, as we noted above. Moreover, the statement describing bāḍī’ as a corruption of poetry was not made by any of the well-known philologists such as al-Āṣmaʾī and Abū Ḥarmāʾ, though they usually preferred ancient poetry; it was narrated about al-Qāsim ibn Mihrawayh, who cannot be associated with the more inflexible philologists.

Therefore, it cannot be stated that al-Āṣmaʾī was dismissive of every feature of bāḍī’; rather the opposite is the case as he authored a book on paronomasia and gave an example of a good antithesis. What he disapproves of is striving for bāḍī’ effect, bad craftsmanship and forcing the wording in order to construct a bāḍī’ device. This attitude is compatible with his general stance of favouring naturalness in poetic composition.

Therefore, our hypothesis about Bashshār’s exclusion from the sāqat al-shuʿarā’ because his poetic style was different from theirs remains valid. Although al-Āṣmaʾī admired Bashshār for his novelty, he saw the poet’s style as different from that of the sāqat al-shuʿarā’; for him Bashshār is an innovator while the sāqat al-shuʿarā’ are good imitators of the ancients and Bedouins. Moreover, the dissimilarity of their styles is probably the reason why al-Āṣmaʾī did not pair Ibn Harma with Bashshār as some medieval critics did later; for al-Āṣmaʾī the only similarity between the two is that both were ineligible to be mentioned as fuḥūl because they lived in al-Āṣmaʾī’s time.

### 6.3 Bāḍī’ in the Poetry of the Sāqat al-Shuʿarā’

We noted earlier at least two statements by medieval critics pairing Ibn Harma with Bashshār as the first muḥdath poets to establish bāḍī’ and excel in it. Some modern studies have taken such statements as a starting point to investigate who had written the best bāḍī’, Bashshār or Ibn Harma. For example, Rajāʾ al-Jawharī claims, after a long discussion of various bāḍī’ devices occurring in Ibn Harma’s poetry, that he should be regarded as the best poet of bāḍī’, surpassing Bashshār and indeed all muḥdath poets.\(^{589}\)

This chapter is not the place to compare the work of these two poets; rather, I will investigate some of the bāḍī’ devices that feature in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarā’ within an assessment of their styles under the categories: Wording and Imagery. I would

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\(^{589}\) Al-Jawharī, pp.320-323.
argue that these categories are the most relevant stylistic features to our exploration of this poetry and that the investigation will take us a step closer to our initial goal of identifying what is imitative and what is innovative in the poetry.

The above discussion of *badīʿ* devices in the era of al-Aṣmaʾī does not necessarily mean that we should consider these devices as they were understood or presented by al-Aṣmaʾī or other medieval critics for two reasons: firstly, because of the vagueness of the individual terminology and the perceived implications of these devices which are in some cases contradictory; and secondly, because the aims here are to engage with the poetics of such devices and to assess their contribution to the poetry of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*, and with stylistic and aesthetic considerations in interpreting the poetry.

### 6.3.1 Wording in the Poetry of the *Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ*

As we have done previously when referring to the context of the poetry, we consider that we should quote some statements about poets from the same era to assess whether they were conscious of the disparity between different levels of complexity and familiarity in their vocabulary. Al-ʿAskarī in his *al-Ṣināʿatayn* narrates an anecdote about Ibn Harma which shows the poet’s attention to detail and his careful selection of vocabulary:

> عن أبيوب ابن عبادة أن رجلًا أنشد ابن هرمة قوله:
> بابها رأى إن دخلت فعلن لها هذا ابن هرمة قائمًا بالباب

It was related on the authority of Ayyūb ibn ʿAbāya that a man recited in front of Ibn Harma his own verse:

> By God, if you entered, say to her: This is Ibn Harma waiting by the door.

Ibn Harma then said: ‘I did not say it like that! Was I begging (*qāʾiman*)?’ So the man said: ‘[Ibn Harma was] sitting’. Ibn Harma said: ‘Was I urinating?’ Then the man asked: ‘What [did you say] then?’ Ibn Harma said: ‘[I said:] standing (*wāqifan*). I just wish that you knew how different these are in their wordings and meanings.’

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590 Al-ʿAskarī, p.68.
Although both words (qāʾim) and (wāqif) imply standing, the former implies standing for a long time and so I translated it as waiting.\(^591\) This passage shows that Ibn Harma was insistent on using precisely the right word for the meaning he wanted to convey. But this choice could also be attributed to his adherence to the poetic convention in the traditional poem which uses the word ‘qifā, qif’ in the amatory context of stopping and shedding tears over the traces of the deserted campsite, as in the famous ode by Imru’ al-Qays: ‘qifā nabki;’ stop and let us weep [over the traces]. Conventionally, poets did not stop by the traces for long: this is understood from the criticism of a verse by the later great Abbasid poet, al-Mutanabbī:

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بلبت بلي الأطلال إن لم أقف بها
وقوف شحيح ضائع في الترب خاتمه
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May I be worn away like the deserted traces if I do not stand over them as a miser stands whose ring is lost in the sand.\(^592\)

Al-Jurjānī in his al-Wasāṭa and Ibn Rashīq in al-ʿUmda state that many have tried to justify al-Mutanabbī’s error by arguing that it was not the usual kind of standing up and is in keeping with the imagery of the verse, but as al-Jurjānī puts it, “he wanted to exaggerate the length of his standing so he exaggerated the shortness of it, since, regardless of how much of a miser he is, or whatever his stinginess is, how long will his standing last?”\(^593\) This is because al-Mutanabbī had chosen the wrong word - ‘wuqūf’.

Another example of Ibn Harma’s keenness to prove his linguistic distinctiveness can be perceived from an anecdote: someone said to him: ‘Quraysh does not voice the letter hamza’, So he said: ‘I will compose a poem whose rhyming letter is hamza, and all of that is correct in the dialect of Quraysh’. He then composed a poem with the rhyming letter hamza which starts:

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إِنْ سَلَيْمَى وَأَلَّهَ يَكْلُوُها
ضَنَتْ بَشِيءٍ مَا كَانَ يُرْزُوْها
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Sulaymā, may God bless her, was niggardly with something that would not have harmed her.\(^594\)

Mukhtār al-Ghawth, who has thoroughly studied the dialect of Quraysh states that the tribe generally voices a light hamza (tusahhiluhā) and does not normally sharply

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\(^{591}\) According to Lisān al-ʿArab: “وَيَجِيِّهُ الْقِيَامَ بِمَعْنَى الْوَقْفِ وَالثَّبَاتِ” “qiyām’ could mean standing up (wuqūf) or standing still (thabāt). Ibn Manṣūr, vol.5, p.3781. This seems to have been the reason why in the context of prayer the words used are ‘qiyām’ and its linguistic derivations because they imply a long standing still and not a mere standing up. Moreover, from this root comes also the words ‘aqāma’, ‘qāmatan’, which mean taking up residence in a place and this obviously would not be for a short period.

\(^{592}\) Al-Jurjānī, al-Wasāṭa, p.390.

\(^{593}\) Ibid.

\(^{594}\) Ibn Harma, M, p.48.
articulate it (lā tuhaqqiqhā). He explains that hamza in the dialect of Quraysh is a degree between voiced (majhūr) and unvoiced (mahmūs); the vocal folds of the larynx do not completely shut when producing the hamza sound, allowing some air to pass through, and thus the hamza takes the vocalisation of its short vowel (a, i, u). 595

Accordingly, Ibn Harma’s statement can be interpreted as an elaboration on this matter: it is true that hamza is not a voiced sound in the Qurayshi dialect, but this is a matter of articulation and is also about producing a soft rather than a sharply cut sound. This does not mean that hamza is replaced by another letter like alif, wāw or yā’. Moreover, what can be read between the lines of this anecdote is the extent of Ibn Harma’s linguistic knowledge and his ability to produce poetry within the maximum limits of the dialect of his tribe, the Quraysh. This reminds us of Ru’ba, who, as we discussed in Chapter Three, was able to write in a language that was not accessible by others and who could improvise words never heard before.

As for craftsmanship, it is worth revisiting some statements about the school of the poets called ‘the slaves of poetry’ (’abīd al-shiʿr). Ibn Qutayba states:

Al-Aṣmaʿī used to say: ‘Zuhayr, al-Ḥuṭay’a and those like them are the slaves of poetry, because they re-emended their poetry and did not go about it in the way of the endowed poets. Zuhayr used to call his long poems annuals’.

Al-Jāḥiẓ quotes the same statement and adds a significant comment:

Like them also was everyone who refined all of his poetry and paused at every single verse of it and reconsidered it so that he could bring all the verses of the poem to the same level of quality. It was said: if only their poetry had not enslaved them and exhausted their efforts until they were regarded as people of mannerism and craftsmanship who sought to compel words and intrusively forced their vocabulary, they would have followed the doctrine of the endowed poets to whom motifs come effortlessly and sequentially; the words come to

them in sequential effusion. The praiseworthy poetry is like that of al-Nābigha al-Ja’dī and Ru’ba.⁵⁹⁶

There are several points here. Firstly, nothing in these statements suggests that the poets in question lack a natural poetic talent and the ability to compose good poetry. Much of the criticism is directed towards their attitude to poetic composition and the long time they devoted to emendation and amelioration; it is not surprising that it took one of them (Zuhayr) a year (ḥawliyyāt) to write a long poem. Secondly, it seems that this perfectionist approach, in which the poet pauses at every single verse to reconsider it and refine it, made them look like mannerist poets; the word ‘takalluf’ here is not an equivalent of ‘craftsmanship’⁵⁹⁷ in which refining adds to the quality of the artefact; it rather implies a negative connotation of straining after effect. It means, according to Lisān al-’Arab, doing something which is not within one’s natural capability or doing something with great difficulty and hardship.⁵⁹⁸

Mansour Ajami refers to an anecdote showing al-ʿAṣmaʾī in a negative light: Ishāq al-Mawṣilī recited a couple of verses from his own poetry and claimed they were composed by a Bedouin, so al-ʿAṣmaʾī admired them. When Ishāq told him that they were his own, al-ʿAṣmaʾī changed his mind and said he considered them over-crafted and unnatural. However, this story should be read in its context; van Gelder suggests:

… even when considering the fact that the anecdote intends to ridicule the critic, it is still possible to think that al-ʿAṣmaʾī was sincere both times. For the lines are, indeed, smooth and easy; at the same time they contain a paradox in a chiastic construction: naturalness and artifice seem to go hand in hand.⁵⁹⁹

From these statements one gets the impression that the critics were eager to find mistakes in the poetry which would make it ‘natural’, and this is a characteristic of philological criticism, as we pointed out in Chapter Two. One can also get the impression of a gate-keeping attitude; the critics try to keep those who are not content with their spontaneous natural talent from entering the arena of poetry. Nevertheless, it seems that the occasional use of badī’ figures was not considered a mannerist or

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perfectionist *takalluf* approach to poetic composition. It was late in the Abbasid era when mannerism was widely taken up by poets, as Heinrichs notes.600

When considering the type of words chosen by the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*, two criteria dominate the investigation: the first is familiarity and accessibility in word choice, so that Bedouin is set against urban vocabulary and the odd is set against the easily understood; the second is the level of poetic interest embodied in their words chosen to construct figures of speech and *badīʿ* devices.

However, to give a comprehensive assessment of the poetic language one would also have to consider the reasons for each poet’s choice of words in every poem, since these choices vary considerably from poem to poem and from poet to poet. It is also possible that the poet’s movement between different levels of accessibility or oddity of his language is dictated by other factors such as the addressee or the occasion of the poem’s delivery; thus his word choice would not necessarily indicate his linguistic capability or mastery of the language.

For instance, if we consider ʿUmāra’s poetic language in his fragments we find a great variety of levels and clusters of poetic language. He sometimes uses vulgar expressions which would have been familiar to the ordinary speakers of Baghdad (and offensive to some) such as “O Baghdad, you are nothing but shit” (*salḥ*). However, in his long (59 lines) panegyrical ode to Khālid ibn Yazīd al-Shaybānī601 he writes in an extraordinary language which includes much unusual and Bedouin vocabulary. This is clear from his choice of the unusual rhyming letter *ḍād*.602 Many of the rhyming words are ambiguous and force the reader to use lexicons to understand their meanings. The poem starts

\[ عصرُ الشبيبة ناصرٌ غصنُ فيهّ ينال اللين والخفضُ \]

The age of youthfulness, radiant and tender, is when laxity and lustiness are acquired.603

If we consider the addressee of ʿUmāra’s panegyric and note that he was considered a great Arab leader amongst the many Persians at the court of al-Maʿmūn, but more

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602 According to Suleiman, in the Abbasid era Arabic was referred to as “the language of *ḍād* (lughat al-*ḍād*), as it was believed that this sound exists only in Arabic, and “because this sound created pronunciation difficulties to non-Arabs, thus acting as a shibboleth or border-guard between Arabs and non-Arabs”. Suleiman, *Ideology*, p.20.

603 ‘Aqīl, p.66.
importantly one of the most famous patrons of Abū Tammām,604 we see the relevance of `Umāra’s word choice. He was addressing a notable at a court that was full of great poets, and so `Umāra had to rely on his best resources: his knowledge of Bedouin vocabularies and his capability to incorporate them naturally within his poetry. Some verses of this poem will be analysed shortly.

The significance of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ for al-ʿAṣmaʿī and other critics is demonstrated by their heavy reliance on their knowledge not only of the language of the desert but of Bedouin life, habits and costumes, which was derived from their encounters with the desert and its people, animals and conditions. Their Bedouin knowledge influenced their word choice and motifs to a great extent and thus even in what is perceived as a shift in poetic practice from traditionalism to badīʿ, the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ remained largely constrained by their Bedouin background, and in their active engagement with what was popular in their time they rarely abandoned their Bedouin words, motifs and imagery, as we shall see.

6.3.2 The Poetics of Paronomasia and its Place in the Poetry of the Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ

Whether the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ knew the term tajnīs (paronomasia) or not, they seem to have known its value for enhancing their poetry. Ibn Rashīq states that:

[In Arabic script]

The ancients did not know this term (laqab), I mean tajnīs [paronomasia]. This is evident from what was narrated about Ruʿba ibn al-ʿAjjāj and his father: that one day Ruʿba said to his father: ‘Poetically, I am better than you’. Al-ʿAjjāj said: ‘How come you are better than me since I am the one who taught you the adjunction of rajaz (ʿatf al-rajaz)?’ Ruʿba said: ‘What is the adjunction of rajaz?’ Al-ʿAjjāj replied: ‘[It is like] O, Ṭāsim, what a protector if protection is sought!’ Ruʿba said: ‘O father, I am a poet, son of a poet, while you are a poet, son of a lexicon’ and thus he prevailed over him. But you see that he called it ‘adjunction’ (ʿaffān) and not paronomasia (tajānūsan).605

While some parts of this statement may not be wholly clear, such as ‘you are a son of a lexicon’, in which Ruʿba might have intended to describe his father’s use of the phrase

604 Ibn Khallikān, vol.6, pp.341-42.
605 Al-Qayrawānī, vol.1, p.331.
‘ʿatf al-rajaz’ as something usually done by lexicographers or that he was just teasing his father for being pedantically proud of his knowledge of technicalities and their names, other parts of this statement are very relevant to our discussion: the poets’ recognition of the significance of paronomasia for poetic composition, and their apparent agreement on the poetic beauty of this particular type of paronomasia. In this example the paronomasia is between the two identical words, ‘ʿĀṣim’; the first is a proper name of a person and the second means ‘protector’.

It could be argued that there is another paronomasia, between ‘protector’ (ʿāṣim) and ‘sought protection’ (iʿtaṣam), as both words are derived from the same linguistic root (ʿaṣama). This type is mentioned by Ibn al-Muʿtazz; here the relationship between the two words is etymological, while the two in the previous type are homonymous in both writing and pronunciation (ʿāṣim) but have different meanings.606

The poetic beauty of paronomasia seems to lie in the similar sounds’ creation of a pleasant euphony in the verse, and perhaps when it is recited it forces the recipient to reconsider the two words which share similar sounds and written form but have different meanings. The medieval critic Abdul-Qahir al-Jurjānī comments on the pleasant effect of some verses by Abū Tammām:

يَمُدُّونَ من أيدٍّ عَواصٍّ عَواصِمٍّ تَصُولُّبأس يافٍّقَوَاضٍّقَواضِبِّ

The extended hands to protect and attack with swords which are fatefuly sharp.607

Al-Jurjānī discusses the effect of paronomasia on the recipient, relating it to the slight shock of surprise; he says that

such collocations are pleasing, because you might imagine, before the last (letter) of the word is received by you – for example the mīm in (ʿawāṣim) or the bāʾ in qawāḍib – that it would be (the same as) the preceding, and was about to come to you once more, and be repeated and reemphasized for you; thus when its completion becomes fixed in your mind, and you hear its end, you abandon your original notion and reject what you imagined previously. This resembles the appearance of benefit after you had despaired of it, the occurrence of profit after you had been cheated of it, so that you see that it is (in fact) the very capital.608

606 Ibn al-Muʿtazz, p.25.
607 Meisami, Structure and Meaning, p.249
608 The translation of this passage is by Meisami. Ibid.
Thus, the poetic value of paronomasia seems to lie in its effect on the recipient; the poet is engaged with his audience, imagining their reaction to his skill. However, we should look at the value of paronomasia from the poets’ point of view.

It may be that the poets rather than the critics or the general audience were the ones who most valued the pleasant effects of paronomasia. According to Sperl and Shackle, the poetic beauty in *badi‘* devices is that they “link the familiar with the unexpected and discover in the fabric of language and literary tradition surprising recesses of esoteric meaning”, and it is likely that poets took pleasure in these links, which brought an element of excitement to their compositions.

Interestingly, the presence of paronomasia is visible in most lines of Ibn Harma’s poem which he composed using the rhyming letter *hamza*. Take for example these three consecutive verses:

\[
\text{لوّتُّ هنيّّ العاشِّقِينَ ما وَعَدَتْ}
\]
\[
\text{فتَمَّ يَعْبُ خَدْنَهَا وَمَنَسُوْها}
\]
\[
\text{وَبَيِّنَتْ فِي صَمِيمِ مَعُتْرَها}
\]

If only she fulfils her promises to the lovers, then the best of the fulfilled promises is the most satisfying.

She grew youthful and modesty grew along with her, so that neither her friend nor her ancestry was disgraced.

She descended from the best of her clan, so her place amongst her people is adorned.

The paronomasias in these verses are based on an etymological relationship where the two parts are derived from the same linguistic root: ‘she promised’ (*waʿadat*) and ‘promises’ (*ʿidāt*); ‘she grew’ (*shabbat*) and ‘it grew’ (*shabb*); ‘descended’ (*bawaʿat*) and ‘place’ (*mubawwa*). However, I would argue that there is little poetic value in these paronomasias except for the antithesis and the image that stands out in the second verse: the girl’s modesty which grew stronger as she grew older. Also, there is the beauty of the vividness created in the mind by the antithetical relationship between honour implied by ‘modesty’ and disgrace.

There is another *badi‘* device used in the first and third lines which is termed by al-Muʿtazz ‘*radd al-aʾjāz ʿlā al-ṣudūr*’, “repetition of a word from the beginning of a

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609 Sperl and Shackle, p.13.
phrase or verse at the end”. Ibn Harma in the beginning (ṣadr) of the first line writes ‘tuhnī’ (fulfils) and at the end (ʿajuz) of the verse writes ‘ahnaʿuhā’ (most satisfying). In the third verse he writes ‘bawwaʾat’ (descended) at the beginning and at the end he writes ‘mubawwʿuhā’ (her place). In both cases there is an etymological relationship.

I suggested in Chapter Three that Ruʾba’s heavy reliance on etymological paronomasia could indicate over-stretching of his vocabulary and the limitations of his unusual words as he would use one linguistic root to create several derivations, but Ibn Harma here does not use the unusual or odd vocabulary typical of Ruʾba. However, it seems that all the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ were, like many of their contemporaries, attracted to this kind of alliteration, which suggests it was a poetic fashion of the time to show off one’s skill in ornamentation and embellishment.

It should be emphasised that the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ were not forcing their badīʿ devices into the verse in a manner which makes the verses look unnatural; the examples of paronomasia in their poetry do not generally indicate that they were straining to create it. According to al-Jurjānī, paronomasia “must be demanded by the meaning”; it is best when “[you make] your meanings flow according to their nature, and allow them to seek their wording for themselves”. The practice of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ usually conforms to this sound advice.

Ibn Harma’s poetry in particular varies in its use of ornamentation and embellishment devices; these tend to occur in poems that seem from their contexts to be experimental, for example the poem with the rhyming letter hamza and the poem thanking al-Sarī when he spent time with him in al-Yamāma after a successfully rewarded journey.

This could indicate that when Ibn Harma uses many badīʿ devices in one poem he is likely to be crafting the poetry rather than letting the composition flow naturally, but interestingly, only a few poems of this type are found in his dīwān; thus most of his work conforms to al-Aṣmaʿī’s preference.

611 Translation of this phrase is by S. Stetkevych. See: Stetkevych, Toward a Redefinition, p.16.
612 See: (Chapter 3, section 3.4, p.97).
613 Translation of this passage is by Meisami, see: Meisami, Structure and Meaning, p. 249.
6.3.3 The Poetics of Antithesis: A Powerful Mirroring of Paradoxes

A well-known proverb in Arabic, ‘bi-ḍiddahā tatamayyaz al-ashyā’ (things are better known by their contraries) seems to be a good starting point for exploring the poetics of antithesis. Ṭibāq and muṭābaqa (both meaning antithesis) are terms used in the medieval sources in reference to the usage of two contrasting words placed close together in the text. Another term, taqsīm (also meaning antithesis), was used when there is more than one pair of antitheses in a single verse; however, the principle is the same.

Modern studies of mannerism in medieval Arabic poetry suggest that the antithetical relationship exists not only between two words or several antithetical pairs scattered in the poem; in the work of some poets the antithetical relationships and juxtapositions can be identified at several levels of the poem from words, images and motifs to themes and constructs. Meisami notes that “muṭābaqa as a mode of thought is an essential component of the relationship between nasīb and madīḥ in the qaṣīda, where the lack represented by the cruel or absent beloved is compensated by the favour of the patron”.

The mode of thought which relies on the antithetical relationship was interesting not only to poets but also to critics and philologists. The notion of addād (words that can mean a thing and its opposite at the same time) is a phenomenon in Arabic and many philologists wrote on this topic including al-Aṣma’ī. However, “not all scholars were favourably disposed towards the addād, in part because the addād theme became a staple argument of the shuʿūbiyya”.

The scholars’ engagement in such discussions reveals the cultural and ideological aspect of this linguistic topic:

The Arabs’ opponents argued that the existence of words denoting both a thing and its opposite indicates mental confusion, not superiority. This argument was

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615 See for example: Meisami, Structure and Meaning, pp. 253-261, and her analysis of an amatory poem by Rūmī based on the notion of antithesis in pp.256-257. A more elaborate analysis of the antithetical relationships within poems is given by Sperl, who states “parallelism between groups of verses - henceforth called sectional parallelism - has been observed also in virtually every poem analysed in the present study”. See: Sperl, Mannerism, p.5.
616 Meisami, Structure and Meaning, p.256.
refuted by various strategies: some authors tried to explain the phenomenon and
to relativise it, while others simply denied its existence or possibility.\textsuperscript{618}

However, from Ibn Rashīq’s statement that al-Aṣmaʿī defined antithesis and gave an
example of the best antithesis by an ancient poet, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, it seems that
the medieval critics only recognised the antithetical relationship at the level of two
words. We should not expect them to analyse poems in full as this was not the norm
in their assessments of poetry. Nonetheless, the importance of such statements is that they
define the extent of critical discussion in al-Aṣmaʿī’s time, and we assume that he
worked within these constraints in his judgements of the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarā’. Moreover, the critics’ limited treatment of antithesis did not necessarily confine the
poets’ usages of it.

We find examples of the antithesis between ideas and motifs in some poems by the
sāqat al-shuʿarā’ but not in all of them. For instance, Ibn Mayyāda’s panegyrical ode to
ʿAbdul-Wāḥid ibn Sulaymān\textsuperscript{619} contains some ‘sectional parallelisms’, to use Sperl’s
term, between the atlāl of the poem and the madīḥ section; in the atlāl he writes:

\begin{quote}
لَعَبِّيتْ بِهَا هُوَجُ الرياح فَأُصِبِحْتُ
\end{quote}

The cyclone ruined them [the traces] so they became deserted, unrecognisable except by [the trace] of a dead fire.

Then, selecting motifs to secure the general antithesis between atlāl and madīḥ the poet
inserts a parenthesis:

\begin{quote}
من كان أخطَّأ الحجاز بعَيْثَ عبد الواحد
\end{quote}

Whoever did not find the spring, it is in the Ḥijāz, which blessed the rain of
ʿAbdul-Wāḥid.

Then in the praise section the poet emphasises the vividness of the antithesis by
elaborating on the image of the rain, which has now become a mighty river, and the
lively Ḥijāz:

\begin{quote}
إن المدينة أصبحت معمورة
بَتُّورَج حلو الشمائل ماجد
كالغيث من عرض الفات تهاقَتْ
سَيَّلَ إليه بصادر أو وارد
\end{quote}

Medina became populous with the arrival of a crowned, virtuous and generous
[man].

\textsuperscript{618} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{619} See poem number 27 in his dīwān in: Ibn Mayyāda, Ḥ, pp.111-113.
Streams [of people] as wide as the Euphrates rushed to him; to and fro [they went].

The beauty of the antithesis here is not merely in the use of two contrasting words; it lies in the idea of the transformation of misery into good fortune and of the deserted, dry and uninhabited place into a populous and prosperous city by virtue of the arrival of this patron.

The suggestion that the antithetical relationship was consciously used as an underlying principle by the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ is supported by the poem Ibn Harma composed for al-Sarī. Unlike the two poems which he composed before receiving his reward, which contain the motifs of the desert campsite and drought contrasted with the motifs of the spring and the rain in the praise section, after receiving his reward he took the sound of the dove in the palm trees, and the rain as the motifs of yearning rather than the sight of the deserted campsite.

ʿUmāra ibn ʿAqīl in his panegyric to Khālid ibn Yazīd seems to have built his poem on antithesis too; here, however, it not only sets drought and desert against spring and rain, but also old age and grey hair against strength and youthfulness. The beginning of the poem alludes to these comparisons:

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ما جذب فاحضرت له الأرض
```

Youthfulness is like the perfect spring [season]; when it bursts into life it turns the earth green;

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لونان مغط ومستض
والشيب كالمخل الجماد له
```

Grey hair is like the lifeless dry land which has two colours: dusty and faded.

ʿUmāra then turns to remembering his youth and describing his present weakness, before praising the youthfulness of his patron. Interestingly, ʿUmāra compares the drought of his own (and others’) situation and the spring and rain of his patron in the same section of praise. He writes:

```
ولأح منها النَّهض والغصن
إذا السسن كحل عن بق
واقترفت للشعرابين بها
وأى السين الأرض خشعة
فهو الربيع لها المريض إذا
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620 This poem and others are discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.2.1, pp.153-154.
621 See poem no.52 in his dīwān. ʿAqīl, pp. 66-72.
The seekers of bounty visit him, confident of quenching their thirst, when they choke on their saliva.

When drought years intensify without even [a trace of] moisture and their bites become very severe,

And when the heat of Sirius intensifies like fire and people [become desperate] so that no one gives charity or lends [anything],

And when the grazer finds the earth barren and desolate of succulent grass or even desert plants,

Then he [Khālid] is the fertile spring for all of them, since the spring was a miser and the thunder gave no rain. 622

The poetic value in these antitheses lies not simply in the contrasted words, but mainly in the intensity and vividness created by the comparison between the desperate need of the people and the spring and the bounty of the patron. The power of the antithetical relationships is greatly dependent on the details of imagery. For instance, ‘no one gives charity or lends’ (ʿazz al-fard wa-l-qardū), which is also a paronomasia, describes how bad the situation is: no one is able to pay the obligatory charity (fard) and no one is lending money either because he does not have it or cannot rely on being repaid. But this also contributes to building the image of the patron, who is the only one who might save the people in such desperate times; he is the spring that fulfils its promise of bounty to the people in contrast to the miserly spring and the unreliable thunder. He will always be there for the people whenever they need him or misadventures strike them. The poet stops short of saying he is like God.

Thus it seems that the poetic function of antitheses goes beyond the mere embellishment of the verse. They create different sets of relations and links between words, motifs and whole sections, and they also play an important role in the imagery of the poem. If we consider certain images and imagine how they would appear without these devices then the proverb ‘things are better known by their contraries’ becomes very relevant. Furthermore, the polarisation of these antithetical relations reflects the poets’ desire to compare and contrast opposing ideas and motifs not only in their poems but also in their everyday life, where ideals and principles often conflicted and dilemmas and paradoxes had to be faced and resolved.

622 Ibid., pp.68-69.
6.4 Imagery in the Poetry of the *Sāqat al-Shuʿarāʾ*

If poetry can be compared to the body then imagery would be the soul, and if the soul is Bedouin then the body will be Bedouin too. In the case of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* this statement sums up almost everything we can say about the imagery in their poetry; almost every image is typically Bedouin. The discussion below will demonstrate with examples the techniques they used to create their images and their tendency to rely on particular devices; for example, to employ similes more than metaphors.

I would argue that the Bedouin images found abundantly in the poetry of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* constitute one of the most distinctive characteristics of their poetic style. It was these images, we assume, that attracted the attention of al-ʿAṣmaʿī, along with other elements such as Bedouin words and odd vocabulary. The *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* seem to have excelled in poetic creation when they followed their natural self and did not fake a *persona*, and when they, as Bedouins, show that they were capable of drawing on their backgrounds and the environments they had grown up in and knew well. This interpretation of ‘naturalness’ sheds light on the concept of ‘ṭabʿ’ (naturalness), which was not clearly defined by medieval critics, and this lack allows another perspective to be presented regarding naturalness of composition.

Bedouin imagery in Abbasid poetry from 945 to 1258 C.E. was thematically studied by Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿĀnī. He concludes that following the traditional conventions of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* was a major factor in the continuing presence of Bedouin imagery in the Abbasid era. Other factors he mentions include the freedom-loving lifestyle of the desert and frustration with city life, and the yearning to escape the paradoxes of the reality of life and thus the seeking of consolation in an imagined or alternative artistic reality.

At the artistic level al-ʿĀnī notes that since the Abbasid poets could not break free of the influence of the ancient model of the poem, they tried to engage positively with the tradition. More importantly, however, he notes that Bedouin poetic images are based in

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623 He states that he did not start from the beginning of the Abbasid era because he assumed that the Bedouin elements in the poetry of the second half of the Abbasid era were a continuation of those of the first. See: Ḍiyāʾ ʿAbdul-Razzāq al-ʿĀnī, *al-Ṣūra al-Badawiyya fī al-Shiʿr al-ʿAbbāsī*, 334 - 656 H. (Amman: Dār Dijla, 2010), p.7.
624 Ibid., p.384.
625 Ibid., p.381.
626 Ibid., p.221.
the senses, and even metaphysical notions such as virtues are quite often associated with physical objects; generosity, for instance is associated with rain, cloud or sea.\textsuperscript{627}

Similarly, Agha states that “the sense of sight, by itself, is indeed a celebrated theme of Arabic poetry; so is its organ, the eye” because it perceives the world and translates it differently than the other human senses. Thus, Agha suggests that

> Arabic poetry of all eras and genres – not only wasf – is a catalogue of the firm relation between the eye and beauty, pain, love, hatred, strength, weakness, etc. Inasmuch as it is the poet’s window on the world, it is also the showcase through which he exposes his inner self to the world.\textsuperscript{628}

However, to comprehend some poetic images, Agha argues, the “visual dimension is necessary but not sufficient” and thus a “partnership of the senses” is vital in order to create a mental image capable of translating the “holistic poetic imagery”.\textsuperscript{629}

Moreover, Agha also observes that in ancient Arabic poetry

> nothing mesmerised the Arab eye to the extent the desert did. Arab poets represented in their spectacular ‘pictorials’ every single aspect of the desert, in all of its ‘moods’, and every single aspect of desert life – terrain, atmospherics, the elements, fauna and flora – colours, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile feelings.\textsuperscript{630}

Most of Agha’s points are supported by evidence from the poetic images of the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ}, which describe the tiniest details of desert life, its animals, moods, and dry and rainy days. Nonetheless, our discussion of the influence of the desert on their creation of poetic imagery will not merely consider its presence or its extent in their poetry; rather it will demonstrate its dominance, even though the poets were living at a time which assailed them with other influences on many fronts; social, cultural, political and intellectual. 'Umāra, for example, spent about twenty years in Baghdad and met nobles, caliphs and renowned poets such as Abū Tammām, and yet this seems to have had little effect on the Bedouin soul of his poetry. And the same can be said about Ru’ba’s life in Basra, the centre of theological debates in his time.

\textsuperscript{627} Ibid., p.382.
\textsuperscript{629} Ibid., p.119.
\textsuperscript{630} Ibid., pp.119-120.
6.4.1 The Use of Descriptive Words as a Method of Creating Imagery

Shoshana Benjamin observes that poetic language often includes a “pictorial expression” which “serves the communicative function of enabling the reader to picture scenes in his or her mind”, but also notes that “word paintings” are “subservient to the visual artistic goal [the poet] seeks to achieve”.\(^{631}\) Pictorial expressions that convey mental images seem to be a typical feature of the poetic language of the sāqat al-shu‘arā’. For example, a verse by Ibn Harma depicts his affection for his beloved:

\[
\text{تعَل قتُهاّوإناءِّ}
\]

I was attached to her since my youthfulness was overflowing the rim.\(^{632}\)

This translation does not convey all elements of the original imagery in which the poet uses metaphor to describe his overflowing youth, for as Agha asserts, “the more poetic a poetic image is, the more of its poeticy it will lose in translation”.\(^{633}\) The Arabic words ināʾ al-shabāb (container of youthfulness), yatfaḥ and ťifāḥā (literally, flood), are parts of metaphor in which the body of the poet is portrayed as a vessel filled with a liquid (youthfulness) which overflows its sides from sheer exuberance.

This is a poetic image that accords with Ibn Harma’s expression ‘yatfaḥ min- jānibayh ťifāḥā’ (is beautiful for its own sake). However, the image is more interesting when the whole of this verse is considered and the image of the overflowing vessel is contrasted with the image at the beginning of the verse: ‘taʿallaqtuhā’ (I was attached). The hearer is convinced of the passionate affection of the poet for his beloved which is conveyed by this unbreakable bond; this emotional attachment is described using a word for the strongest form of love, an almost physical attachment to the beloved.

The ‘overflowing liquid’ of youthfulness could be interpreted as a reference to milking into a vessel until it overflows, but the liquid might be wine, not milk, in which case the attachment to the beloved is being perhaps likened to the attachment to wine, something the poet loved and could not renounce even when he was flogged for drinking it;\(^{634}\) moreover, youthfulness and wine, and indeed love, are all known to be intoxicating. So

\(^{632}\) Ibn Harma, M, p.82.
\(^{633}\) Agha, p.115.
\(^{634}\) Ibn Harma, M, p.35.
both wine and milk are possible; but Ibn Harma makes a more explicit reference to his preference in a verse from another poem:

لا نبتغي لنبن البعير وعندنا ماء الزبيب وناطف المعصار

We do not fancy camel milk while we have the water of grapes [wine] dripping from the press.\(^635\)

This verse may also be read as provocative; here Ibn Harma presents himself as a libertine since there is a hadith reporting that the Prophet Muhammad chose milk over wine in his Night Journey.\(^636\) Interestingly, the poet uses the pronoun ‘we’ rather than ‘I’, which provides another reason for this interpretation if we would read it as ‘we are a nation which prefers wine over milk’.

Another example of Ibn Harma’s images informed by the context is his famous verse, on which both al-‘Asma‘ī and al-Jāḥiẓ admirably commented:

لا أمتغع العوذ الفصال ولا أبتاع إلا قريبة الأجل

I never let the newly born camels enjoy their mothers and I only buy camels which I soon slaughter.\(^637\)

His choice of one word is noteworthy; ‘lā- umti’ (prevent from enjoying) implies mistreatment of the animals by today’s standards, but Ibn Harma presents it as virtuous generosity. The emotional dilemma created by this expression implies an antithesis in the choice between generosity and callousness. This Bedouin boasting of generosity shows indifference to the feelings of animals and, should we believe that the poet was so unfeeling, enhances our perception of the cruel nature of some Bedouins. It seems, however, that Ibn Harma is boasting of his willingness to go to great lengths, sacrificing his precious resources to express his generosity towards his guests. Not surprisingly, al-‘Asma‘ī noted the verse’s relevance to Bedouin society and mores, and cites it as a model of generosity that everyone should aim to imitate.

Al-Jāḥiẓ too admired this verse but used it to comment caustically about the poet’s actual behaviour: “who was meaner than Ibn Harma?”,\(^638\) and while praising the use of

\(^{635}\) Ibid.

\(^{636}\) The hadith in full is reported in Șahīḫ al-Bukhārī as: “Allah’s Apostle was presented with two cups, one containing wine and the other milk on the night of his night journey to Jerusalem. He looked at them and took the milk. Gabriel said, “Thanks to Allah Who guided you to the Fiṭra (i.e. Islam); if you had taken the wine, your followers would have gone astray”. See: Șahīḫ al-Bukhārī, vol. 6, Book 60, Number 232, <http://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_6_60.php> [accessed 15 May 2014].

\(^{637}\) Ibn Harma, M, p.183.
this motif in Ibn Harma’s poetry, he asks “who slaughtered [imaginary] camels which have never been created more than Ibn Harma?”.

The imagery in such verses has an additional cultural significance that can only be appreciated in its contextual setting, which goes beyond the realities or otherwise of Ibn Harma’s life and behaviour. This context is an aspect of the shu‘ābī attack on the Arabs, in this case by undermining the Arabs’ virtue of generosity by accusing them of not only eating bad food but also giving it to their guests; this is mentioned by al-Jāḥiẓ (and Ibn Qutayba. Ibn Harma defended Arab generosity in many images such as the welcoming fire and the friendly dog which guides the guest to the poet’s home at night.

6.4.2 The Poetics of the Simile: Identifying Unseen Links

Critical discussions of imagery in the time of the first generation of badīʿ poets, the contemporaries of al-ʿAṣmaʿī, seem to have paid most attention to simile and to how the best simile could be created. In a statement regarding simile, al-ʿAṣmaʿī is reported to have expressed his view on the best similes, of which the best examples obviously had to be pre-Islamic:

قَالَ أبُو عَمْرُو بِنِّ الْعَلَاءِ وَقَالَ الْأَصْمِعِيّ أَحْسَنّ الْتَشْبِيْهّ مَا كَانَ فِيْهِ تَشْبِيْهٍ فِيْ تَشْبِيْهٍ،ّ كَقُولُ اَمْرَ الْقِيسّ:

كَانَ قُلُوبُ الْطَّيْرَ رَطْبًا وَبَيْسًا، لَّدِى وَكْرِهَا الْعَنَّابُ وَالْحُشْفُ البَالِيّ

Abū ‘Amr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ and al-ʿAṣmaʿī said: The best simile is that which includes two similes; whereby two [objects] are likened to two objects, as in Imruʾ al-Qays’ verse:

639 I counted four instances in which Ibn Harma mentions how often he slaughters camels; for example

لا غمِي مِدَّ في الحَيَاةِ لِهَا إِلَّا دِرَاكَ الْقُرُوِّ وَلَا أَيْلِ

كَم نَقَةٌ لِي وَجَاثُ مَنْحَرَهَا بِمَسْتَهِلِ الشُّؤْبَ أو جُمِلِ

The lives of my sheep and camels are only extended to the fulfilment of feeding the guests!

How many [are the] she-camels and camels whose throats I cut at the start of the rainy season!

641 Al-Aghānī also mentions some anecdotes about his lavish spending, especially on drink, which could be interpreted as generosity or unwise consumption of his money. Al-Iṣfahānī, vol.4, p.260.
642 See for example his statement in al-Ḥayawān: “shuʿūbīyyūn vilify Arabs by saying they eat ʿilhiz (animal skin cooked in its blood) fathth, diʿāʿ (desert plants) and habīd (desert gourd)”. Al-Jāḥiẓ, vol. 5, p. 442. Interestingly al-Jāḥiẓ in his book about misers, al-Bukhalāʾ, depicts al-ʿAṣmaʿī as someone who is not only mean but advocates meanness. It might be interesting to investigate al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s life and ascertain whether or not he was mean. Al-Jāḥiẓ, pp. 202-206.
643 Ibn Qutayba refutes this claim in a lengthy discussion and justifies eating bad food as a sign of extreme poverty and not a deliberate choice, which would be interpreted as meanness. Ibn Qutayba, Faḍl al-ʿArab, pp.73-77.
The dry and the moist hearts of the birds [the eagle brings to] her nest are like ʿunnāb (red, moist berries) and dried dates.\textsuperscript{644}

Although simile (\textit{tashbīḥ}) is “the comparison of two single terms, differing in other Medieval sources from analogy (\textit{tamthīl}), the comparison of two sets of terms”,\textsuperscript{645} al-Asmaʿī uses \textit{tashbīḥ} when comparing two sets of terms, which indicates the vagueness of the early terminologies and their implications. Nonetheless this statement is interesting because it seems that this particular simile caught the attention of Bashshār, who said that he admired it and kept trying to imitate it until he managed to compose:

\begin{center}
ka'n mīthur anṭīn fawq ru'ūsana wa-asâyifāna lil'īn nīhārī kawākkīn
\end{center}

The drift of dust above our heads and our swords are like night and shooting stars.\textsuperscript{646}

In the poetry of the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} simile was used heavily by Ibn Harma and to a lesser extent by Ruʿba, but the latter too was fond of creating analogies between different objects, especially in his descriptive poems of the desert. The poetry of Ibn Mayyāda and ʿUmāra contains some similes but far fewer than Ibn Harma’s.

It should be mentioned that adherence to the structure of the \textit{qašīda} and its components to some extent required poets to liken traces of their beloved’s deserted campsite, her body scent, her appearance, and their mounts as they cross the desert, to similar objects. The \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} mostly conformed to the traditional \textit{qašīda} and thus many of the images created by the similes in their poetry are related to the traces, desert, animals and their beloveds, peers and patrons. Nonetheless, a few exceptions are noticeable in some similes which seem atypical, especially in the fragments by the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} such as the poem by Ibn Harma likening the stars within the astrological system to earthly objects, as we mentioned previously.

What then was the poetic significance of simile to poets and critics? Did it lie in noticing, or making the listener perceive, a similarity between two objects, and thus the more dissimilar the objects the better the simile, as al-Jurjānī suggests?\textsuperscript{647} If so, then this implies that the best similes are those where the recipient has to work very hard to comprehend just how the subject of the comparison (\textit{mushabbah}) is similar to the object

\textsuperscript{644} Al-ʿAlawī, p.150.
\textsuperscript{646} Al-Qayrawānī, vol.1, p.291.
According to Heinrichs, fantastic images were produced when the object of the simile “was just a figment of imagination”. If, however, the significance of the simile lies in multiple comparisons between sets of terms, then analogy is more poetic than simile, which al-Aṣmaʿī seems to imply in praising the use of multiple similes.

In Arabic rhetoric simile is considered more poetic if some of its elements (the subject, the object, the particle and the aspect of similarity) are suppressed; however, as Heinrichs notes, in medieval Arabic traditions “the suppression of the particle (‘like’ etc.) does not yield a metaphor, as it would do in the western traditions; […] ‘Zayd is a lion’ is still considered a simile, since both the subject and the object are mentioned”, and only when the “object of comparison was mentioned alone” would simile become metaphor based on the similarity (istiʿāra tashbīhiyya) between the omitted subject and the mentioned object.

One should conclude from this that when the subject, particle and object are all present then the simile is of a low rank. Above this type is the simile in which only the subject and object are mentioned. When the subject is suppressed and only the object is mentioned, simile becomes metaphor, which is the highest rank of simile; since metaphor stimulates the mind of the recipient more than simile, it enjoys a higher poetic significance. Perhaps this explains why later badīʿ poets such as Abū Tammām were fond of creating large number of metaphors in their poetry.

When we consider the similes of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ according to the above classification we find that most are from the low rank as they include the subject, the object and the particle. Moreover, the particles ka-, kaʾanna, which mean ‘as’ or ‘like’, are frequently used in building comparisons between the elements of the simile. This does not mean, however, that the poets were not capable of producing wonderful images by means of these similes, such as the following in which Ibn Harma depicts a patron:

كأنَّّ تلالؤَّ المعروف فيه شعاع الشمس في السيف الصقيل

The glitter of (kindness / virtue) in him is like a sunbeam on a burnished sword.

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648 Heinrichs, Rhetorical Figures, p.662.
649 Ibid., p.661.
650 Ibn Harma, M, p.191.
This is an extraordinary comparison that goes beyond simile and analogy between two sets of terms. Firstly, the attribution of the sensory ‘glitter’ to an abstract notion (kindness) is a metaphor based on “an imaginary ascription” as there is no aspect of similarity between kindness and glitter. This ‘glitter’ is then likened to that of a sunbeam on a burnished sword. The choice of ‘sword’ is also interesting because the word symbolises certain attributes of the patron such as sharpness and firmness. Thus, the inclusion of all three elements of the simile: the particle (ka’ anna) the subject and the object in no way reduces the poetic value of this image.

Other interesting points in this image are worthy of mention: the antithesis between kindness and the sword; the pairing of ‘kindness’ and glitter is in itself striking; the ‘sunbeam’ implies both light (wisdom) and warmth (generosity and care for the people) as well as the vital source of all growth and nourishment; the sword is burnished and thus ready for action to protect the people and destroy enemies or oppressors.

The Arabic word ‘maʿrūf’ which we translate as kindness can also mean virtue and just treatment between people and good manners in general. Since neither the patron intended in this image is known to us nor the context of the verse it remains open to many interpretations and readings. If, for example, the patron was a ruler then the sword implies justice and fairness, fighting the enemies of Islam and maintaining social order.

Nonetheless this complex imagery is rare in Ibn Harma’s poetry compared to its occurrence in later badīʿ poetry; a more typical simile is this example:

I praised you in the hope of reward, but I was like one who squeezed the side of a stone.

This image may be original (I have not found it in earlier poetry). The poet naively trusts his patron to provide nourishment, like an udder giving milk, but finds him as dry as a stone. The word choice is also interesting; ‘the stone’ has many negative connotations such as cold, hard, inhuman and miserly. When such qualities are contrasted with the attitude of the poet; admiration, praise and hopefulness, the image has an even sharper and more vivid effect.

6.4.3 The Poetics of Metaphor

Ibn Harma uses an extended metaphor to explain how those who steal his poetry are easily detected. He compares his poetry to his camel herd in a poem that begins:

أَغْذُو تلآذاً مِن الأَشْعَارِ أُصْلِحُها
صلاح ذي الحزم للحاجات والرئيل

I nourish camels653 of poetry, caring for them just as a wise man takes care of his possessions, both the mundane and the refined.654

The poem is a well-structured entity; its images are unified by a metaphor which extends from the first line to the last. Meisami notes that “extended metaphor provide[s] obvious means of unifying poems or parts of poems”.655 Four verses of the poem describe Ibn Harma’s poetry and how he ‘nourishes’ (aghdhū) his poems attentively, shaping them and identifying them by means of ornamentations; thus, whether they are poems of love or praise, they attract the transmitters. The remaining verses are intensifications of elements of this image, beginning with:

لمَّ يُقْرَعَوا أَمْهَاتَ الشَّوَابِ للحِيْل

They rushed to steal them from their pastures, and [did not ask] to have their females, tails already raised, impregnated by [my stallions].656

The poet depicts how these camels / poems, which bear his distinctive brands, are stolen while grazing. One implication of ‘pastures’ (masāriḥ) is that his poems were recited in many places or, possibly, the pastures are his genius which nourishes the camels and cannot be stolen; thus when transferred to the thieves’ pastures the camels are hobbled and cannot roam freely. But the poet’s consolation and revenge is that his brand marks are so distinctive, his poetic style so unique, that whenever the camels are seen people will know where they came from:

وَمَا وَسَمَتْ فِي قَلَاسَانِ وَهِي رَانِعَةُ

Whenever I brand my camels while they are grazing they will always return despite their hobbles.657

653 In Lisān al-ʿArab, talīd could mean money that was produced within one’s ownership, like new-born animals. According to some scholars it is also used to mean every type of inherited wealth, be it money or animals. Ibn Manẓūr, vol.1, p.439.
655 Meisami, Structure and Meaning, p.341.
657 Ibid., p.185.
Thus, upon hearing these distinctive stolen pieces people will always attribute them to Ibn Harma regardless of who recites or claims them as their own. Ibn Harma even alludes to his influence on other poets who try to imitate his style:

ما إن أرائ الارئي وسمي فأعرفه في ذو أخر موسمًا على قيل

I always identify my brand mark when I see it marking the herd of another.658

Lakoff asserts that “metaphor is fundamentally conceptual, not linguistic, in nature” 659 and “is mostly based on correspondences in our experiences, rather than on similarity”, 660 and to understand metaphor we have to understand its mappings which “vary in universality; some seem to be universal, others are widespread, and some seem to be culture-specific”. 661 Lakoff also suggests that metaphorical expressions are extensions of everyday language and experience, 662 and clearly these verses demonstrate the everyday experience of Ibn Harma as both Bedouin poet and owner of camels.

Although people from pastoral cultures will find Ibn Harma’s metaphors very relevant to their own experience (and this supports Lakoff’s point on the universality or culture-specificity of different metaphors), the general reader will understand the reference to the universal expectation that truth will prevail and a thief will be found out and punished – in this case by public ridicule. Thus, this metaphor is appreciated for the links it establishes between conceptual entities and for its demonstration of the poet’s wit and imagination. Nevertheless, such extended metaphors are rare in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, in contrast to the work of later generations of badīʾ poets.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the emergence of badīʾ was prompted by the stance of the traditionalists and philologists who paid particular attention to word choice. This drove poets, including the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, towards ornamentation and embellishment, although we should remember that some badīʾ poets, especially the later generation, were also influenced by theological discussions and debates. The frequent use of badīʾ
devices started with word-related devices such as paronomasia, moved towards thought-related devices such as antitheses and culminated in imaginative metaphors best demonstrated by Abū Tammām.

As for the sāqat al-shuʿarā’, it has been shown how their use of badī’ devices indicates a sensitive response to their time whether at the poetic and artistic levels or at the level of daily lived reality. Poetically, it was shown that their attention was mostly given to the single word and the simple image, though some exceptions were noted in Ibn Harma’s poetry. Their response to reality was seen in the occasional usage of antithetical words, motifs and ideas which were influenced by their need to reconcile the conflicts and paradoxes they faced at different levels but mostly between their Bedouinity and the ‘modernity’ of the Abbasid era.

Their Bedouinity won over modernity in their poetry; this is evident in the nature of their images, which are mostly related to desert life and Bedouin norms and traditions. The simplicity of their images and the fact that most of them are based on the simile and in particular the simile of low rank, and their use of word-related badī’ devices were found to be features of their poetry. This is consistent with our assumption that badī’ started from the more superficial elements of the poem at the level of words, moving to the deeper layer of motifs and ideas; and the same can be said for images, which begin with simple similes, then move toward more abstracted images and imaginative metaphors.

Finally, it can be concluded that the engagement of the sāqat al-shuʿarā’ with badī’ was mostly within what the traditionalist critics regarded as good and elegant poetry which may occasionally employ careful craftsmanship but neither overdoes it nor is overwhelmed by it. With the exception of a very few examples from the poetry of Ibn Harma, the sāqat al-shuʿarā’’s employment of badī’ devices is moderate and does not seem forced, so their style remains largely natural. Thus, considering the overwhelming majority of their poetry it is clear that they were eloquent poets whose language remained uncorrupted, and Bedouins who strove to keep their lives unaffected by the trials and temptations presented by the modernity of the Abbasid era.
Conclusion

The creation of a group of poets called ‘sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ’ proved to be controversial in classical criticism and remains problematic in the writings of modern scholars. Al-ʾAṣmaʿī did not clarify the criteria he used to select the poets deemed suitable to be included in this group, and so we had to look at the whole period in which the critic and the poets lived and worked, aiming to reconstruct the meaning of the term as understood by al-ʾAṣmaʿī and his contemporaries. The analysis of the poetry served as firstly, a test for our hypothetical interpretation of the implications of the term and secondly, as an exploration of the poetry’s themes, motifs, expressions and imagery.

Investigating the historical context showed that the cultural significance of the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ is greater than the artistic value of their poetry. This was not only because their poetry conformed to the classical model but also they and their poetry represented the norms, lifestyle and values of the Bedouin Arabs, which were regarded as endangered in al-ʾAṣmaʿī’s time. He looked for an unassailable source of Arab distinctiveness and found it in the language, form and imagery of pre-Islamic poetry. Those Bedouin poets used their art to boast of their values and left a colossal legacy, which later generations were encouraged to imitate.

It was found that the most suitable approach to an understanding of the classical terms whose implications are not well explained by the medieval critics was to thoroughly investigate the contexts in which such terms were produced. Ideological conflicts and attempts to establish cultural dominance often led to subjective prejudice, and biased attitudes often featured in the critical judgements produced in those contexts. This posed an obstacle that I tried to overcome by paying close attention to the backgrounds which informed the work of both the critics and poets.

Another obstacle faced during the investigation was that not all the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿārāʾ has survived, and the greater part of what remains exists in fragmentary form. This problem required a carefully designed method of examination and interpretation which usually relied on the context in order to extract as much understanding of the poetic references as possible. Nonetheless, where whole poems were available we assessed them using internal evidence to determine the poets’ purpose in each poem, while making use of external evidence to achieve a deeper understanding.
We started the investigation by examining the environment in which al-Aṣmaʿī lived and worked. The relationships between poets and critics were examined to determine whether they shared the same views regarding the importance of preserving the Arabic language or the norms and values of Bedouin society, or were working to achieve their own goals and purposes. It was found that although al-Aṣmaʿī states that he met all of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, there is no indication in either their poetry or the historical sources that they were aware of being labelled sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. Nonetheless, there was a common interest, shared by the poets and the critic, in preserving Bedouin values and norms. Other critics were interested in maintaining good relations with the poets in order to employ their poetry in their philological discussions.

Reflecting this determination to preserve and encourage the influence of the past on the present, the term sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ is a production of a milieu which boasted of the glories of the past and advocated imitating them. The dogma that the classical language of the Bedouins is the only correct form of Arabic was consciously or unconsciously extended to cover poetic style and imagery; thus innovation was seen as deviation from the authentic tradition, and even scholars such as Ibn Qutayba who claimed to judge the excellence of a poet regardless of the time he lived in were soon driven to instructing poets in the rules governing permissible innovations.

This attitude toward change can be attributed to the cultural pressure of the era, especially the conflict between Arabists and anti-Arabs in the early Abbasid era. This also helps to explain why the ideology of the superiority of the Arabic language was soon applied to the Arabs themselves, and the basic notion of ‘purity of language’, the elimination of errors, became in due course ‘purity of style’ since ‘a shaky tent is much better than a lofty palace’. Although the early critics’ discussions tended to make such arguments implicitly and were sometimes ambiguous or misleading, careful examination of the literary and non-literary texts of that time reveal certain underlying assumptions.

For instance, the early anthologies, which often lack reference to the compiler’s criteria of selection or judgement of poets and poetry, can be better appreciated if we consider the motives behind their creation. Their contents are also rich in cultural references to Arab values and chivalry; these are perhaps more indicative than the prologues written by their compilers. Anthologies began as selections of poems seen by their compilers as key texts that no caliph or his heir should be ignorant of, or that celebrated virtues such
as courage and promoted chivalric ideals, but evolved to become more artistically oriented, with better organisation and clearer methods and criteria of selection.

Socio-political circumstances informed criticism in the early Abbasid era and strongly influenced its various dimensions; ideological motivations, competing scholars and contests for cultural dominance played an important role in the creation of the term *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ*. If we are to adequately comprehend this term and realise its implications and significance we should investigate it within its original context.

This research found that the term was first used by al-ʾAṣmaʿī, who was more interested in the cultural value of the poetry than its artistic merit. He specifies a handful of poets who were promoters of Bedouin values and whose poetry mostly followed the model of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*. The poets were all Arabs by origin and grew up in a Bedouin environment, and their poetry contains a large amount of unusual vocabulary. Its themes, motifs, expressions and imagery also serve to celebrate and advocate Bedouin views of life and are largely imitative of ancient poetry.

The analysis of this poetry started with *rajaz*, which was the most obvious choice for the Abbasid philologists interested in the poetry of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* and the most difficult part of their poetry for modern studies due to the substantial amount of unusual words it contains. By al-ʾAṣmaʿī’s time *rajaz* was a highly-developed art that had achieved the level of *qaṣīda* poetry. It was composed in the form of the classical *qaṣīda* after having been mainly a vehicle for short improvised entertainments composed in informal situations with little consideration given to its poetic value. Thus, the inclusion of Ruʿba, who was exclusively a composer of *rajaz*, in the group of the *sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ* was justifiable from this perspective. Ruʿba was also eligible in other ways: he was of Bedouin origin, a promoter of Bedouin views of life and cultural values and, more importantly, his poetry was a treasury of great interest to philologists; Ruʿba and his father al-ʿAjjāj were perhaps the most quoted poets in Arabic lexicons.

The low regard in which *rajaz* was held by some medieval poets and critics seems to have been due to its particular nature and its previous history. It was also a reaction to the strong interest the philologists took in its unusual vocabulary. Some poets did not take kindly to the idea that good poetry could be created by someone who merely had the ‘natural’ ability to fill poems with words whose meanings even the poet might not know. Nevertheless, the rise of *rajaz* in late Umayyad and early Abbasid times was
exceptional and contributed to the development of themes which came to be highly popular in the Abbasid era, such as the hunt.

The examination of the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ has revealed the dominance of panegyric and satire, as might be expected from imitative poets in that era. An exploratory analysis was conducted, with some deeper examination of selected poets whose work was considered to be representative of major thematic trends in the panegyrics and satires of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. In these examinations we considered the possible motives the poets themselves may have had to employ such themes and motifs, regardless of whether critics had encouraged them to do so.

The material benefits sought from praising the wealthy was also a major motive, with a few exceptions. When the poet’s relationship with his patron was strong some personal touches were introduced in the motifs, but these were limited. The majority of motifs in the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ’s panegyrics remained conventional, imitating earlier poets in praising the patron’s virtues, noble origins and good deeds. However, deeper readings of some of these motifs reveal half-hidden messages, such as complaints against social injustice and the unfair treatment of the patron’s subjects; these included the poets, who lived precarious lives, always dependent on the bounty of a patron.

The satires of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ were also representative of Bedouin norms: the poet is seen as defending the honour of his tribe as a mounted warrior. In the naqāʿ id we see an Umayyad poetic form being maintained and imitated by the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ. The tribal nature of this form of satire and the motifs employed by the poets have the resonance of pre-Islamic and nomadic norms and values, to the extent that these satires could be easily mistaken for those of pre-Islamic or Umayyad poets. Nonetheless, it was also noticeable that the conventional section, the ‘traces’, in some of the satirical poems was replaced with wine descriptions, which we regarded as antecedents of the scandalous verses of Abū Nuwās.

We also found that the fact that satire featured strongly in the poetry of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ, with some of them taking it as their major theme, would have placed them amongst the champion poets if al-Aṣmaʾī had not specified that they were not eligible because they lived in his own time, which seems an awkward justification. Nevertheless, analysis of their poetry indicates that they represented their patrons, peers and opponents in a mostly imitative and conventional way.
The occasions on which the poets describe their visions of themselves and their time, although limited, are very interesting. The poet’s mission in life and the beliefs and realities of his society are often fascinating for their contrast with the general views prevailing at the time. The sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ have left us some revealing remarks, mostly expressed in a verse or a couple of verses, rarely in complete poems. An exceptional case is Ru`ba’s long poem, which starts by describing the desert and ends questioning fate and predestination.

However, as we have noted, the poetic views of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ concerning themselves and their time were found to be mostly informed and marked by motifs and expressions which represent Bedouin values, norms, preferences and lifestyle. The poets boast of their adherence to the tribe and their role as its defender, always obedient to its commands, while praising Bedouin chivalric virtues, independence and generosity.

More important, perhaps, is that some of these references are often found in contexts of comparison with other lifestyles such as city life in Baghdad, of misadventures and of feelings of injustice. All these references are congruent with al-Aṣmaʾī’s self-imposed mission to support those Arabs who wished to counter the dominance of non-Arabic culture and Persian courtiers. Nostalgia for the ‘simple life’ of the desert and the tent while living at the sophisticated centre of power and wealth in intrigue-ridden Baghdad not only stems from the boredom and frustration of enduring an unwelcoming environment but is also a recalling of a glorious past and the certainties of a time when poets were honoured members of a tribal culture now rendered obsolete by the new social and political realities of a dynastic empire. This nostalgia was surely felt as intensely by al-Aṣmaʾī as by any of his chosen poets.

The style of the sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ mostly conforms to the conventions of the pre-Islamic poem with few attempts to innovate. They were influenced by the philologists’ attention to the choice of words in poetry, which helps explain the strong presence of word-related badīʿ devices. The poets were not equally competent or inventive in their use of these devices and the same can be said about their images. It was found that Ibn Harma was pioneering in both his images and his employment of badīʿ devices.

The study’s analysis of the devices of ornamentation and embellishment suggest that the poets were responding to a changing and increasingly demanding audience and at the same time to the conflicts and paradoxes they encountered under Abbasid rule, as we identified in their use of antitheses. Some of these responses were superficial and were
generally moderate, as shown in their frequent use of simple similes and sensory images.

Finally, the strong presence of Bedouinity in the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ}’s wordings, expressions, motifs and images made them suitable candidates for al-Aṣmaʿī’s mission to revive the Arabic culture, which he saw as declining and threatened by the dominance of Persian culture. He created this group of poets to give a living example to his contemporaries and an assurance that the ancient poetry and Bedouin poets could be imitated in a culturally valid way. Each of the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} represents a feature of this group: Ruʿba provided a treasury of Bedouin and unusual words; Ibn Mayyāda and al-Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī continued an old form very relevant to al-Aṣmaʿī’s vision of the champion poet who defeats his opponents in a poetic duel; and Ibn Harma’s images and motifs were lively expressions of the norms, customs and attitudes of the Bedouins.

**Future Research**

I hope that I have clarified the significance of the term \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} and the poets’ representation of the Bedouin language and imitation of the style of classical poetry. The notion of Bedouinity in the Abbasid era could be further explored in its social, political and artistic dimensions, and researchers might investigate the extent of its influence on classical critics. The case of \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} demonstrates the role of socio-politics in the coining and development of a critical term and shows its relevance to the conflict over cultural dominance and to the ideological stance of the pro- and anti-Arab factions in the Abbasid era. Thus, terms produced by the philologists in this era, such as \textit{fuḥūla} (championship), \textit{faṣāha} (purity) and \textit{khātimat al-shiʿr} (seal of poetry) could be re-examined in the light of this research to show their cultural significance, an angle still not well explored.

This thesis could also be used as a base from which many research projects might be developed. Future studies could look at, for example, the poetry of Ḥakam al-Khuḍrī, which has still to be collected and studied, either as a part of the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} or independently. Moreover, the classical sources could be investigated to explore the lives or poetry of the two poets of the \textit{sāqat al-shuʿarāʾ} who were not included in this study: Makīn al-ʿUdhrī and Ṭufayl al-Kinānī. Furthermore, the \textit{rajaz} of Ruʿba contains very rich material for the study of the development of the genre and the nature and key features of desert poetry.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Ibn Mayyāda’s *Urjūza*

1. أنا ابنِ مَيْيَادَةَ لَيْيَسُ الخَلَلَ
I am Ibn Mayyāda wearer of garments

2. أَمْرُ مَنْ فُرَّ وأَحْلَى مِنْ عَنْضِل
Sharper than acid and sweeter than honey

3. حَتَىِ إِذَاِ الرَشَّامُ نَذَا مِنْهَا الأَصْلِ
Until the sun started to set

4. تَرَوَّحَتْ كَأَنَّها جَيْشٌ رَخَلَ
They [the camels] moved off like a departing army

5. بِالرُجَلَاءِ لَهَا نَوْحُ ثُكَل١
By the morning the camels had reached Ṣa‘nabā٢

6. وَبِالرُّجَلَاءِ لَهَا نَوْحُ ثُكَل٣
And at al-Rujaylā’ they wailed like the bereaved

7. يَتَبَعُّن سَمْنٌ سَبْطٌ جَدُوَّرَفَل٤
They were following the steps of a grand [camel] with a thick, curly coat and a long wide tail

8. كَأَنَّ خَبْيَةٌ ثَلَفَهَا مَنْهَل٥
His spine, where his ribs are joined,

9. مِنْ جَانِبِهِ وَعَلَانَ وَوَعَل٦
From each side looks like the horns of ibexes;

10. ثَلَاثَةٌ أَشْرَفْنَّ فِي طُولِ غَنَّ٦
Three ibexes stood atop a huge solid mountain

11. يَجُرَعُنَّ فِي كَنِّيَّتِهِ مَعَنُّ الْمَعَنِّي٧
They quaff into their fine gullets

12. جَرْعَةً أَدْوَأَيْتُها مَنْيُصْعُدُ يَرْصَل٧
Gulps [of water] which produce sounds when [the water] passes through

13. مِنْ كَنِّيَّةٍ جَوَادَهَا لَهَا جُفَاءٍ هِيْل٨
Into the abdomen of each massive, plump [camel]

14. ظَلَّتْ بِحْوَشْ النْزُوادَانَ تَغْيَشِل٩
They stayed in the pool of al-Baradān, bathing

15. تَشَرِّبُ مَنِيَّ نَهَالٍ وَتَعْمَل٨
And drinking to quench their thirst over and over again

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663 Here I followed the method of the collector of his dīwān in writing this poem; each hemistich is written as an independent verse occupying a whole line.
664 The dots indicate an omission or missing verses.
665 Ṣa‘nabā and al-Rujaylā’ are places in the land of Banū ’Āmir. See: Ibn Mayyāda, D, p.77.
O saddle-bearer, wrap it around the hump and make it comfortable

And beware of the mad camels at Dighnān;⁶⁶⁶

They are strong, fast, their eyes roll and they have flabby chests.

Their herdsman fitted them with tight udder covers which cannot be unfastened.


Appendix 2: Ru‘ba’s Urjūza:

1. يا بنت عمرو لا تسبني بنتي
O daughter of ‘Amr, stop insulting my daughter! You will have done enough
good if you do [only] that
2. وَيَحَكَّ إن أَسْلَمْت فَأَنْتُت أَنْتَ
Woe betide you if I survive, it will be the same [life] for you! Is it because you
see my head becoming [bald] like a pan
3. بِنبل الألقَاء غثَت النَّبَت
After it was once full of very dark, thick, long hair, covering a strong pate?
4. يَحْوَل جُسْمَانِي كَأَنِي نَّحَتَ
You look askance at the grey hair covering my loathsome withered flesh, but my
body is like what yours has become.
5. أَرَّقَان لا أَنْتَ وَأَنْتَت
I became worn out after my glorious youth, when I was carefree (if you want to
know).
6. آَنَفِيْيَاً جَعَلَتْ يَوْمَ الْيَوْمَ الْيَوْمَاً
[I did not care about] what rituals to follow on Friday or Saturday. I was lax and
unconcerned by the Day of Judgement.
7. كَحْيَةِ المَاءِ جَرَى فيَلْقِت
Like a sea serpent hidden within a crevice, I am half-human, half-jinni, as you
described.
8. فَأَثَبَتْ مَا ذُوَّ الفُجُور الْبَحِت
I always used to behave in a way that touched the limits of dissoluteness, but I
then regained control [of myself] and my character was straightened;
9. فَأَنَظَنَّ تَرْتِبْيُي أَخْتَمَي بالْبَثْت
Although see me keeping my own counsel, I might stand [to speak] on the
occasion which requires steadfastness.
10. أَشْجُعُ مَن ذَي لِبْد بَخِيْبَت
I am braver than the maned one in the wilderness, breaking strong bones and
crushing them
11. وَطَّأَتْ النَّخْوَة مَسْكَتْكَتْ
[by] twisting and smashing [the bones] evenly, while it is still full of valour and anger;
12. مَنَطَأْتْ مِن شِيطَانِي المَعْلَيْي
[My enemy’s] arrogant Satan was humbled by my clashing head-on with my
foes, and by my shattering [their skulls],
13. حَتَّى يَرَى الْيَيْنَ كَالْأَرْتَتْ

668 Here also I am following the organisation of the compiler of Ru‘ba’s dīwān, who wrote two hemistichs
in each line, making them look like a verse with two hemistichs, whereas in fact each hemistich is
independent and rhymed, unlike the first hemistich in qaṣīd poetry which is unusually not rhymed except
in the first line of the poem, where some poets choose to rhyme both hemistichs.
To the extent that to him the eloquent man is a stammerer. My honesty and malice defeat his honesty.

In the land of the jinnis on an arduous, hot [day], there are ledges resembling the necks of Persian she-camels;

Evening grows darker, obscuring their sandy browns like increasingly heavy rain,

Affecting the concentration of the skilful, courageous desert guide, though he is usually able to move through the narrowest pass like the eye of a needle,

Leading the lean camels which drink water only after five days; they are like sleek rope. As the daughters [she-camels] of the fleet-footed ḍarhabī [stallion]

Were drawing close to [journey’s] end they entered the shade, dark like tar,

Forced in by the midday heat and dust. They made their way into it from different directions

Like the threads of the spinner, walking with legs a little splayed to stop their joints rubbing together.

So many times they have travelled along even and uneven routes, both with and without a guide.

[Their lips] are set quivering, smoother than tanned leather shoes, by [the movement] of their flat hind legs and the wide-pacing steps of their forelegs.\textsuperscript{669}

\textsuperscript{669} Ruʿba, \textit{Dīwān}, vol. 1 pp. 289-294.
Appendix 3: Two Naqāʾīḍ Poems by Ḥakam and Ibn Mayyāda

An Example of Naqāʾīḍ Poetry by Ḥakam al-Khudrī and Ibn Mayyāda

Al-Iṣfahānī states:

Amongst what Ḥakam said about Ibn Mayyāda was:

1) My companions, break your journey to greet the ruins in al-Jafr and say to them ‘You shall be showered with rain. What a time was yours!’

2) But how can one greet remains when the wind has covered them with its dusty tails?

Among the good [examples of] self-glorification he composed:

3) If the branches of some people have withered, you will find ours covered with green leaves

4) If people bring their heroes I will bring only one champion whose head is equal to the prime of the full moon

5) We have secured lowlands and highlands, horses, spears and the days of honour and pride while you have not.

And amongst his good satire are these verses:

6) Alas! You Murr [shortened version of Murra] have disgraced yourselves everywhere by features numbering more than ten:

7) Amongst them the fact that your honour is protected by slaves and how miserable are those whose sacred possessions are protected by slaves

مما قاله حکم في ابن ميادية قوله:

1 - خليلي عوجا حبيبا الدار بالجفر
بها حرجت تدري أذيالها الكدر

2 - وماذا تجي من رسوم تلاعبت
وقولا لها سقيا لعصرك من عصر

ومن جيد قوله فيها يقتصر:

3 - إذا است عيدان قوم وجدتنا
وعبداننا نغشي على الورق الخضر

4 - إذا الناس جاءوا بالقوم أتيفهم
بقرم يساوي رأسه غرة البدر

5 - لنا الغور والأنجاد والخيل والقنا
عليكم وأيام المكارم والفخر

ومن جيد هجائه قوله:

6 - فيا مر قد أخراك في كل موطن
وينس المحامي العبد عن حوزة الثغر

7 - فمنه أن العبد حامي نماركم
جواد ولم تناو حصانًا على طهر

8 - ومنه أن لم تسحوا وجه سابق
ففسو على دفانه وهو في الفير

9 - ومنه أن المتى يدفن منكم
بريتا فيلق بالخيانة الغدر

10 - ومنه أنهار يسكن وسطكم
وينس المحامي أنت يا ضرفة الجفر

11 - ومنه أن عتم بأرقط كودن
يذهب إلى الجارات محدود الظهر

12 - ومنه أن الشيخ يوجد منكم
وإن هي آمست دونها ساحل البحر

13 - تببت ضباب الضغن تخشي احتراشها

Amongst what Ḥakam said about Ibn Mayyāda was:

1) My companions, break your journey to greet the ruins in al-Jafr and say to them ‘You shall be showered with rain. What a time was yours!’

2) But how can one greet remains when the wind has covered them with its dusty tails?

Among the good [examples of] self-glorification he composed:

3) If the branches of some people have withered, you will find ours covered with green leaves

4) If people bring their heroes I will bring only one champion whose head is equal to the prime of the full moon

5) We have secured lowlands and highlands, horses, spears and the days of honour and pride while you have not.

And amongst his good satire are these verses:

6) Alas! You Murr [shortened version of Murra] have disgraced yourselves everywhere by features numbering more than ten:

7) Amongst them the fact that your honour is protected by slaves and how miserable are those whose sacred possessions are protected by slaves
8) And amongst them the fact that you have never owned a fast noble steed whose face you can rub, and have never slept with a chaste non-menstruating woman
9) And amongst them the fact that when you lay your dead to rest they break wind towards the gravedigger
10) And amongst them the fact that your neighbour lives innocently amongst you but suffers betrayal and treachery
11) And amongst them the fact that you sought protection from a pied mule, and what a miserable protector! You are a kid’s fart!
12) And amongst them the fact that the old man sneaks round to his female neighbours even though his back is bent with age
13) Your hidden malices/ skulking spiny-tailed lizards spend the night fearing that they will be discovered even though they are all alone by the sea coast.

Ibn Mayyāda then responded with a long poem, containing what he says regarding the defects of Muḥārib (Ḥakam’s tribe):

670 The phrase *dībāb al-dīghni* has a double meaning here: ‘hidden lizards’ implies the tribe’s hidden malices.

671 Verses 1-7 were not quoted in *al-Aghānī*, where it is argued that the satirical section in which Ibn Mayyāda refutes Ḥakam’s ten points of slander consist only of verses 8-16. Thus, the addition to Ibn Mayyāda’s poem (verses 1-7) found in his *dīwān* is placed before this passage and separated by dots by the editor of his work. This usually indicates an omission but it could be used simply to indicate a separation between the two sections.
1) I rode a horse like (an evil spirit/jinni) which kicks up whatever it runs through and moves like a snake in the fur of blond camels
2) Towards the best of people, contemplating their water and dwelling place and carrying things which filled my heart.
3) I will say, regardless of enemies, that I found the best people to be the clan of Banū Badr.
4) They have a presence by the waters of Hajm of which I have never seen the like, either among Bedouin or city dwellers.
5) The best court among Maʿadd is theirs, shaded as it is by large palace walls surrounding it.
6) I specifically mean the two branches of ʿUyayna, [who are] like the streams that always run towards the large deep (lake/sea).
7) You are privileged amongst people, choosing which water source to live by and where to graze your animals.

The satirical section starts as:

8) The Muḥārib already excel in shame and their people surpass [others], having more than ten defects:
9) Amongst them the fact that you never slaughtered a camel when butchering was needed
10) And amongst them the fact that you never killed an Arabian horse on a day of dust and war while [you were riding] a mare
11) And amongst them the fact that the blows from your swords never cut off heads, only ulcerated foreskins
12) And amongst them the fact that it is known that the great leaders of Muḥārib do not know how to feather or pare [arrows]
13) And amongst them is the worst shame which - if I were to mention it – [would cause] you to become servant slaves in urban houses
14) And amongst them the fact that your sheep became your wives in spring when the dry trees turn green after the rain
15) And amongst them the fact that the old woman of Muḥārib [still] prettifies herself even beneath her tombstone
16) And amongst them the fact that if some of you were put in the sea, your dark skin would contaminate all of it
17) If a neighbour were to reside amongst the Muḥārib and Jasr then he would be promised neither assistance nor glory
18) As their defence and protection of him will offer as much protection as two labia defending a clitoris
19) When the Yemeni wished to lose his head, he lost it but for a cause which is not worthy of praise or pride
20) The Fazārī and ʿIrāqī have a sign of disease in their eyes which makes them look ugly and red all the time, just like burning embers.

672 This is the last verse mentioned in al-Aghānī. See: al-Iṣfahānī, vol. 2. pp. 195-196. However, in the dīwān four verses are included (verses 17-20). See: Ibn Mayyāda, Ḥ, p.154.
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