CRITIC AND CRAFTSMAN:  
AL-QARTĀJANNĪ AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE POEM

As almost any self-respecting Arab composed verses, few Arab literary critics can be found who did not produce at least some poetry. A fair number of them were poets of some merit, among them Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 908), Ibn Ṭabāṭabā (d. 934), al-qādī al-Jurjānī (d. 1001), Ibn Shuhayd (d. 1034), Ibn Rashīq (d. 1070), Ḥāzim al-Qartājannī (d. 1285) and Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. ca 1350).

Ḥāzim al-Qartājannī is the author of a remarkable work of literary theory. The Minḥāj al-bulagha wa-sirāj al-ulūdābā (‘The Path of the Eloquent and the Lamp of the Educated’), though incompletely preserved, contains an unusually highly developed poetics, inspired by Greek theory through Ibn Sinā’s (d. 1037) commentary on Aristotle’s Poetics. Ibn Sinā, and after him Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), were primarily interested in expounding Aristotle’s views and were, on the whole, unable to apply his theories to Arabic poetry, although Ibn Rushd made a serious effort. Ḥāzim, instead of trying to explain Aristotle with the dubious help of Arabic poetry, follows the opposite course, and the result is unique.


2 Literary theory and criticism are usually inseparable in Arabic literature. But e.g. al-qādī al-Jurjānī was mainly a critic, Ḥāzim largely a theoretician.


4 The writer(s) of the article on Ḥāzim in the Encyclopaedia of Islam designate him a ‘theorist of rhetoric’—perhaps misled by the title of the work or by the rhetorical character of much of the poems it contains.

5 Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1039), the famous physicist and mathematician, is said to have written a Risāla fi sinā'at al-shīr mumtazya min al-yinānī wa-l-ʻarabī (‘On the art of poetry. A treatise mixing Greek and Arabic (sc. theory)’). It has not been preserved.
Central in his theory are the problems of *mimesis*, the relation of poetry to reality, and the ‘aims’ of poetry. These aspects have been studied in two important monographs on Ḥāzim. As is well known, one of the principal differences between Aristotelian and traditional Arabic literary theory lies in the attention given to structures larger than the single line, to the coherence of the poem and its unity. Consequently, it is here that one would expect the *Minḥāj* to surpass other Arabic works on poetics or rhetoric, an expectation that is borne out, at least at a first glance, in terms of space devoted to the subject. In several places, but not too often, Ḥāzim elucidates his views by quoting lines of poetry, often the same examples that are cited over and again in older works on literary theory. Unfortunately, in the chapters on coherence and the structure of the poem he does not go beyond quoting a number of fragments and single lines, and not always where we need them. For a deeper understanding of the relevant passages the obvious thing is to turn to Ḥāzim the poet. At the same time we can judge the applicability of his theory.

2. What is left of Ḥāzim’s poetical output is a *diwān* containing some 3,200 lines, of which the famous *maqṣūra* has 1,006 and a poem on grammar 219. As a poet Ḥāzim does not offer many surprises. His poetry is essentially traditional, the *maqṣūra* being conventional in anything but its length. A typical example is the ode no. 46 in Belkhodja’s edition. In order to avoid what seems to be one of Ḥāzim’s didactical mistakes: not to deal with complete poems by way of illustration, I will quote it in full. It is one of several poems by Ḥāzim written in praise of the Hafsid ruler Abū Zakariyyā, who reigned from 1228 until 1249.

The *qaṣida* is polythematic, *murakkabat al-aghrād* as Ḥāzim expresses it; a type, according to him, ‘more congenial to those with good taste’ than the monothematic type, ‘because of the soul’s fondness of diversification and variation’. The fear of *ennui* as the inevitable

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6 The works of Heinrichs and Schoeler, mentioned in note 1, moreover contain translations of resp. the third chapter of Part Two and the second chapter of Part Four of the *Minḥāj* (Ed. Belkhodja p. 62-129 and 336-353).
7 Most of these are contained in chapters 3 and 4 of Part Three of the *Minḥāj* (p. 287-324).
8 Edited by ‘Uthmān al-Ka‘āık, Beirut, 1964, and by M. H. Belkhodja, Tunis, 1972. The latter edition has been used for this article.
9 *Vid.* the Appendix.
10 *Minḥāj*, p. 303.