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Eastern Luminaries Disclosed to Western Eyes

A Critical Evaluation of the Translations of the *Muʿallaqāt* into English and French (1782–2000)

Chapter one
The *Mu'allaqāt*

The first collection of the *Mu'allaqāt*

It is generally accepted that *Jāhilī*[1] poetry, including the *Mu'allaqāt*, was first composed orally, and it used to be memorised and then recited by *rāwīs*, meaning reciters (A. Jones, 1996: pp.12 ff.). Some poets used to recite their poetry by themselves; and some of the *rāwīs* used to be poets on their own (Blachère, 1980: p.99). Some *rāwīs* even interfered in the poems they transmitted and introduced some changes to them (Hamori, 1974: p.4). The *rāwīs*' task consisted of not only transmitting the poetry, but also commenting on, and explaining it (Lyall, 1917–1918: pp.372–3).

Writing of this poetry did not start before the end of the first century after 'the Flight' (Lyall, 1986: p.xxxv). For Krenkow, it is thanks to some grammarians and their pupils that *Jāhilī* poetry was transcribed, and thus preserved from perishing (1922: p.262). When a need was felt for the final writing of this poetry, a large portion of it had already been lost, and what remained was stained, on the level of register and dialect, with the *rāwīs*' intentional or non-intentional amendments (Lyall, 1986: p.xxxvii), which opened the gate for doubts about the authenticity of this poetry[2] (Lichtenstadter, 1976: p.10; Basset, 1880: pp.58 ff.), and, in response, for deep studies about its oral nature (Sperl and Shackle, 1996: p.7).

Ḥammād al-Rāwiya is reported by many scholars, both Eastern and Western, to be the first collector and editor of the *Mu'allaqāt*. The most influential works in this respect are *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu'arā'* by Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī, and *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā'id al-Tis'* by al-Naḥḥās

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1   This term stands for the pre-Islamic era in Arabia.
2   Ṭāha Ḥusayn (1926) and Margoliouth (1925).

(Alwan, 1971: p.263). Although the former refers to Ḥammād as the first collector of Arabic poetry in general (Kister, 1969: p.28), the latter talks more specifically about him as the first collector of the *Muʿallaqāt* (Robson, 1936: p.84). His view was so influential that it was quoted and taken for granted by such *Muʿallaqāt* editors as al-Anbārī.

This was adopted by many Western scholars. Lyall, for instance, claims that to 'Hammād, [...] we owe the first redaction of Imra al-Kais's poems, besides the selection called the seven Muʿallakāt' (1986: p.xl). Arberry concludes his presentation of Ḥammād by noting that: '[t]his was the man who first put into circulation the *Muʿallaqāt*, the "Suspended Poems"' (1957: p.21). The same view was also adopted by Brockelmann (1961: p.67).

Ḥammād's reputation as a *rāwī* of genius was largely promoted by *Kitāb al-Aghānī* of al-Aṣfahānī. In the fifth volume of this book,[3] al-Iṣfahānī expands on Ḥammād's supernatural ability to memorise and recite Arabic poetry. However, al-Iṣfahānī does not talk about Ḥammād's merit in collecting the *Muʿallaqāt* per se. In addition, he reflects at the end of his talk about this *rāwī* his awareness that Ḥammād forged a number of verses and attributed them to famous poets. To these arguments, Alwan adds that the *Muʿallaqāt* were known during the Umayyad Dynasty, before Ḥammād emerged on the literary scene (1971: p.264). That Ḥammād was the pioneering collector of the *Muʿallaqāt* is very doubtful, indeed, especially after one reads the last sentence of Ibn al-Nadīm's introductory talk about him: 'no book was directly attributed to Ḥammād; people have however quoted him and edited books after his death' (1971: p.104). Blachère is also reluctant to admit that Ḥammād was the collector of the *Muʿallaqāt* (1980: p.144).

While researching this issue, Kister quotes some arguments from al-Hirmāzī. In the first account, Muʿāwiya ordered transmitters of poetry to select some poems for him to teach his son; they chose twelve poems, including what we refer to as the *Muʿallaqāt* (Kister, 1969: pp.29; 34). In another account, al-Hirmāzī claims that it was 'Abd al-Malik who fixed the number of these poems and collected

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3   No pagination.

them (ibid.: p.30). Another account related in Kister's article is that of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, who speaks about the seven long poems that were best known in the third century of *Hijra* (ibid.: pp.32–4). Kister comes, then, to the conclusion that Ḥammād's only merit is that 'he transmitted the Seven *Jāhilī* Odes derived from the collection of Muʿāwiya and that he discarded the collection of ʿAbd al-Malik' (1969: p.36).

The choice of the poems

One reads in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* that the poems to be hung on the Kaʿba curtains were selected by a jury made up of the literary elite of the time, in the ʿUkāẓ fair, after they were publicly recited. For him, the criteria of selection were not only literary merit, but also a poet's tribal belonging and family lineage (n.d.: p.643). This belief is the most popular one regarding the choice of these poems.

While believing that the *Muʿallaqāt* are 'a collection of masterpieces' (1922b: p.591), Nicholson claims that such ideas as quoted above are all 'incredible' (1953: p.102), despite the fact that they were adopted by eminent scholars. Hence, he quotes Hengstenberg's arguments that the judges who decided the supremacy of the poems are not known, nor are those who appointed them (1953: p.102). Likewise, Nouryeh refers to such a claim as a 'myth' that was 'a piece of attractive fiction based neither on truth nor on history, and is kept alive by the literary interest of the story' (1993: p.27). He adds that 'people heard it then, struck by its decorative tinsel, believed it' (1993: pp.27–8).

Some critics pertain that there are many *Jāhilī* poems that may vie with the *Muʿallaqāt* and even exceed them in aesthetic craft. Amongst these, one may name Tuetey (1985: p.13) and also al-Nuwayhī (n.d.), who intentionally illustrates his arguments by poems other than the *Muʿallaqāt* to prove that the pre-Islamic repertoire is much richer than can be squeezed into seven canonical poems. In

contrast with these, Abu-Deeb concludes his structuralist analysis of the *Mu'allaqāt* by claiming that the choice of these poems could never have been a random choice (1986: p.261). Indeed, he argues that these poems form:

> a single structure which embodies the *central vision* in the culture of man, his universe, and the ultimate questions facing him. The questions and the structure of reality remain the same but each *Mu'allaqa* offers its own individual answers to these questions and its conception of the forces which can mediate between the fundamental oppositions permeating this structure, and the forces which are capable of resolving the contradictions inherent in it (1976: p.67).

For instance, Abu-Deeb argues that Labīd's *Mu'allaqa*[4] presents a collective vision of life in Arabia, whereas that of Imru' al-Qays embodies an individualistic one (1986: p.201). Likewise, 'Antara's and Ṭarafa's *Mu'allaqāt* stand at opposing poles, although they share the same concern (1986: p.261). Zuhayr's *Mu'allaqa* stands at the centre of the seven, for it embodies the wise man's vision, which stands at the centre of the opposing insights in the frame of the *Mu'allaqāt* structure (1986: p.201).

The *Mu'allaqāt* anthologies and their commentaries in the East[5]

Uncertainty about the text of the *Mu'allaqāt* extends to uncertainty regarding their number. Ibn Khaldūn, for instance, claims that the number of the *Mu'allaqāt* is nine (n.d.: p.257), but he does not expand on their poets or poems, nor does he give the source of this information. The first book that gave a concrete edition of the *Mu'allaqāt* is *Jamharat Ash'ār al-'Arab*. In this book, al-Qurashī edits seven *Mu'allaqāt* and, being aware of the controversy raised around the poets of this compilation, he quotes his source, al-Mufaḍḍal:

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4   Cf. Appendix 2 below for details about the lives of these poets and their poems.
5   This section is drafted by relying almost exclusively on Sezgin's book (1975).

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These are the poets of the *Seven Long Poems* that the Arabs refer to as *al-Sumūt*; those who might pretend that among the seven there is a poem which belongs to another poet, cannot be but mistaken, and in contradiction with the conventionalised attitudes adopted by learned men (1890: p.105).

Al-Anbārī's edition and commentary of the *Mu'allaqāt* comes, chronologically, second. Al-Naḥḥās' work is, chronologically, the third important edition of the *Mu'allaqāt*. The fact that this scholar refers to nine poems in the title of his book raised many controversies, and a number of subsequent editors and commentators adopted the belief that the *Mu'allaqāt* are nine. However, he meant to edit the seven *Mu'allaqāt*, plus two other famous poems. As he closes with Ibn Kulthūm's *Mu'allaqa*, he affirms that:

> this is the last of the long famous poems, as I have seen linguists usually tend to believe, such as Abū al-Hassan Ibn Kaysān.[6] Thus, there is no way for us to object and say that there are other poems which are better than these [...] We have noticed that there are those who claim that the *qaṣīda* of al-A'shaā [...] and that of al-Nābigha [...] are among those *qaṣīdas* and we have demonstrated that this may by no means be possible (Quoted in 'Abd al-Salām, 1965: pp.6–7).

Al-Naḥḥās' edition was succeeded by many other editions and commentaries, al-Zawzanī's and al-Tibrīzī's being the most famous amongst these. Al-Tibrīzī explains in the title of his book that he means by 'ten *qaṣīdas*' the seven *Mu'allaqāt*, al-A'shā's *qaṣīda*, that of al-Nābigha and that of 'Abīd Ibn al-Abras' (1894).

6   Ibn Kaysān's redaction was not published before 2001. Its editor is Muḥammad Ḥusayn Āl Yāsīn.

Published editions in the West

The Eastern editions were followed by a considerable number of Western editions and commentaries. The first of these is Reiske's edition of the *Muʿallaqa* of Ṭarafa in Germany (1742). Other attempts to edit individual *Muʿallaqāt* succeeded this. However, the first complete Western edition dates back to 1820, its producer being the French scholar Caussin de Perceval (Arberry, 1957: p.24; Hanna, 1966: p.309).[7] In 1850, the first complete German edition was published by Arnold, and entitled *Septem Moʿallakat*. Lyall's edition of al-Tibrīzī's commentary (1894) marks the first complete English edition of the *Muʿallaqāt* in Arabic script. In this context, it is worth pointing out that the first attempt in England was made by William Jones, who published with his translation of the *Muʿallaqāt* a transliteration of the whole text of the *Muʿallaqāt* (1782). Thus, Lyall's merit lies in his being the first English scholar who published an edition and commentary of the *Muʿallaqāt* in Arabic script.

The meaning of the word *Muʿallaqāt*

This issue also provoked a great debate and controversy amongst scholars. The most common view adheres to the popular belief presented in page 15 above, concerning the choice of the poems: these are called *Muʿallaqāt* because they used to be hung on the Kaʿba curtains. Thus, their name derives from the verb *ʿallaqa*, meaning to suspend. Al-Naḥḥās is believed to be the first scholar that gave such an explanation (Beeston, 1983b: p.111; Robson, 1922: p.84).[8] Some scholars, both Eastern and Western, ancient as well as modern,

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7   This is the father of Armand Pierre Caussin de Perceval, the translator dealt with in this thesis. Cf. footnote 11, p.47 below.

8   Contrarily, Basset (1880: p.77) claims that it is Suyūṭī who first gave this explanation.

adopted this explanation (Blachère, 1980: p.145). Ibn 'Abd Rabbih says that these poems that used to be glorified in this way were indeed written by using golden water, hence the appellation 'Golden Poems' or '*Mudhahhabāt*' (1987: p.269).[9] Such translators as William Jones (1970: pp.427–8), Carlyle (1796: p.2) and Caussin de Perceval (1847: p.297) adopt this explanation. Contrarily, Alan Jones dismisses it as a 'folk etymology giving birth to an entirely fictitious though highly popular myth' (1996: p.20). As for Blachère, he explains it as a 'contresens' (1980: p.146).

Believing that Ḥammād was the collector and first editor of the *Mu'allaqāt*, Robson, and Arberry after him, argue that this word may be traced back to the *Qur'ān*, *Sūra* 4, verse 128. This verse talks about the position of a woman who is neither liked by her husband nor divorced from him, and so is left, metaphorically speaking, hanging, or '*mu'allaqa*'. While Robson shows a strong tendency to adopt this view (1936: p.86), Arberry is rather reluctant to do so. He argues that the only rationale behind such an interpretation would be that the poems in question were cut from their respective poets' diwans, and thus were 'half-divorced from their authors' works and kept apart in a separate collection' (1957: p.23).

Trying to find a more practical meaning for the word '*Mu'allaqāt*', Ahlwardt explains that in each of these poems, 'the individual verse or sequence of verses "depended" on its predecessor' (Hanna, 1966: p.307). Alan Jones refers to the first Eastern edition of the *Mu'allaqāt* in order to come to an understanding of this word. His point of view is that the 'sections of the *Jamhara* for the most part have fancy names such as *al-mujamharāt* "the assembled," *al-muntaqayāt* "the choice," etc. [...] On this basis it seems fair enough to understand *al-mu'allaqāt* as "the precious"' (1996: p.20). Lyall already made a similar interpretation by claiming that 'this name is most likely derived from the word *'ilḳ*, meaning "a precious thing, or a thing held in high estimation," either because one hangs on tenaciously to it, or because it is "hung up" in a place of honour, or in a

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9   Noeldeke refutes these beliefs by claiming that all the literature that is available about pre-Islamic life in its diversity does not contain any hints about such a custom (Beeston, 1983b: p.111).

conspicuous place, in a treasury or storehouse' (1986: p.xliv). Similarly, Basset suggests that the word '*Mu'allaqāt*' may justly be translated into 'les colliers' (1880: p.81). While attributing Basset's interpretation to Noeldeke, Blachère expresses his feeling that this is the most 'acceptable' one (1980: p.145), as the *Mu'allaqāt* are also referred to as *al-Sumūṭ*.

Alfred von Kremer believes that the root of the word '*Mu'allaqāt*' is the verb '*'allaqa*', meaning that after being recited and transmitted orally, these poems were written down (Arberry, 1957: p.22). While relying on a similar morphological interpretation, Hanna explains the term by the fact that the verb '*'allaqa*' means to comment. Thus, for him, 'the word *Mu'allaqāt* [...] might have arisen from the poets' fundamental role as commentators or interpretors' on the social life of their tribes (*sic*, 1966: p.309).

Bearing in mind the fact that the word '*Mu'allaqāt*' has been bestowed upon the poetry it now refers to long after their composition and selection, it might be more logical to explain this morphological root on the ground that the language used by the *Mu'allaqāt* poets is so rich and condensed, that commentaries and explanations (*ta'līqāt*) have always been needed to accompany their text.

The language used in the *Mu'allaqāt*

Disagreement has been characteristic of most of the debates related to the kind of language used in *Jāhilī* poetry, i.e., whether this language was dialectal or standard. Like 'Uthmān (1967: pp.122 ff.) and Bateson (1970: pp.27–8), Vollers claims that this language is not the language used in everyday communication, and that it was considered as a kind of elevated diction, similar to Homeric Greek in the Western tradition (Beeston, 1983a: p.6). Alan Jones refers to this as a sign of 'diglossia' and he affirms that it is 'a basic feature of early classical Arabic' (1996: p.11). Reflecting awareness of Vollers' and many Arab grammarians' arguments, Blachère comes to the resolution that this

language is in fact a 'koïné' (1980: p.79) that came from a mysterious origin (1964: p.365). This koïné, Blachère adds, 'se superpose aux dialectes locaux; elle semble les "continuer"; elle est en somme affectée à des usages nobles, à l'expression artistique de certains modes de la pensée' (1980: pp.79–80).[10]

Zwettler adheres to these arguments while testifying to the oral nature of *Jāhilī* poetry:

> [T]he language of an oral poetry could exhibit a wide range of anomalous features – such as archaic usages of various kinds and from various periods, intermixture of dialectal or even foreign elements, coexistence of parallel and equivalent grammatical forms, morphemic and syntactic peculiarities absent from the spoken vernaculars, and others [...] That these formulaic elements might be of the most varied chronological, geographical, and even linguistic provenance mattered not at all, so long as they satisfactorily filled out the metric line of the poem and adequately contributed to the success of the on-going performance (1978: p.170).

For Zwettler, it is this difference in the degree of the language formality that made the difference between a poet and his tribesmen, and later between the language of the *Qur'ān* and everyday language: 'nowhere can this synthetic property be confidently presumed to have been heard as a regular feature of casual speech either of town-dwellers *or* of Bedouins' (1978: p.171).

Contrarily, al-Ṭa''ān[11] argues that in pre-Islamic Arabia, the tribes used to speak different dialects. He starts his research by investigating the origin of Arabic and he traces it back to the large Semitic family, Acadian being the closest member to Arabic. While expanding on the relationship between Old Arabic, Standard Arabic and the dialects, al-Ṭa''ān comes to the following conclusion:

10 Rabin (1951: p.3) and Gibb (1963: p.10) already advocated this view.
11 Versteegh (2001) and al-Ṭayyib (1983) adopt this view, too. It is also worth noting here that in their attempt to demonstrate the fact that pre-Islamic poetry was composed in a colloquial language, these scholars end up by the conclusion that the bulk of *Jāhilī* poetry is rather authentic and not forged as Ḥusayn (1926) and Margoliouth (1925) claim.

> The fact that tribes in the *Jāhiliyya* spoke dialects is an undeniable truth, that used to be dictated by the rules of dialects formation, which apply to all languages. We can clearly find traces of these dialects in *Jāhilī* literature. These dialects were not, though, developed in completely isolated milieus, which would have led in this case to the creation of independent languages. They, in fact, interacted with each other, while Old Arabic was like a recipient into which linguistic influences were poured [...] and which used to enrich and get enriched by the different dialects that sprang out of it. This phenomenon marked the birth of Standard Arabic, the language of *Jāhilī* literature (1978: p.235).

It follows, then, that *Jāhilī* literature reached us in a multitude of dialects (1978: pp.235–39). Al-Ṭa''ān explains, after quoting an important bulk of *Jāhilī* verses, that this poetry underwent a linguistic refinement before reaching us. Indeed, he claims that a poet used to compose his poem first in the dialect of his own tribe, which was very close to the other dialects and to the literary language (1978: p.241). If this poem found its way into popular assemblies, *rāwīs* would recite it. These might belong to different tribes and thus they might recite the poem in their own dialects. This could also be done by the poet himself, who might decide to convert his poem into the literary register that was expanding, in order to give it universality. This practice developed into the perception of the literary language as 'a high variety' of language, and the colloquial language as 'a low variety' (Versteegh, 2001: p.41).

Petrǎček, too, believes that Arabic poetry underwent a three-step development process.[12] The first of these, for him, is what he terms as 'volkstümliche Poesie of the postulated "preliminary period."' The second step is 'a poetry cultivated by professional bard-poets and orally transmitted by professionals (*rāwīs*)'. The final step, for Petrǎček, is that characterised by the creation of 'artistic (künstlerische) poetry' (quoted in Zwettler, 1976: p.202).

For Petrǎček, *Jāhilī* poetry belongs to the second stage of the development of Arabic poetry. He argues that what is peculiar of this poetry is the poets' individual style, rather than the poetic dialect or

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12   The difference between Petrǎček's and al-Ṭa''ān's approaches is that while the former deals with the linguistic development of Arabic poetry as a whole, the latter focuses on the dialectal development of a specific poem.

register that they used in their compositions (Zwettler, 1976: pp.207–8). Bloch shares this argument with Petráček, and he adds that pre-Islamic poetry was composed in the colloquial vernacular of the time, and not in any special kind of sophisticated poetic register or distinguished linguistic style (Zwettler, 1976: p.208). He claims that the few morphological or syntactic oddities that might be traced in some *Jāhilī* lines should be attributed to the confines of meter and rhyme schemes. This is the same explanation given by al-Ṭaʿʿān, who states that despite their voyage through the third developmental stage, some *Jāhilī* lines still bear traces of tribal dialects (1978: pp.241 ff.).

Versteegh follows this same line of thought, by arguing that it is the dialects used in *Jāhilī* poetry which determined the language of the Qurʾān, and both of these works decided the established rules of standard Arabic (2001: p.39). Likewise, he claims that in pre-Islamic Arabia, 'Bedouin more or less spoke the same language as that of their poems' (2001: p.50). The argument one might extract from these views is that *Jāhilī* poetry, including the *Muʿallaqāt*, was composed according to the poets' dialects, and not by following the rules of a standard language. While arguing that the language of modern poetry has to be close to everyday language, Nuwayhī points out that *Jāhilī* poetry in general might seem to the modern reader as an outdated poetry, while in reality it used a language and a syntax that used to be the common medium of communication at the time of its composition (1964: pp.41–2).

Some *Muʿallaqāt* translators were conscious of this fact. For instance, Arberry affirms that the *Muʿallaqāt* were composed in a colloquial idiomatic language, and so their translation should be done into an equivalent degree of colloquialism and idiomatic usage (1957: p.60). Carlyle already drew his reader's attention to the fact that 'during the flourishing periods of Arabian literature [...] bombast style was almost unknown, and [...] the best writers, both of poetry and prose, expressed themselves in a language as chaste and simple as that of Prior or of Addison' (1796: p.iii). In the course of the comparison he draws between the *Jāhilī* Arabian poet and the European pastoral poet, Carlyle claims that while the latter composed his poetry in a refined dialect that is different from his, the former 'described only the scenes which were before his eyes, and the language of his herdsmen

and camel-drivers was the genuine language used by them, by himself and by his readers; he was under no necessity of polishing away any rustic inelegancies' (1796: p.viii).

Compared to modern standard Arabic or some Western languages, the language used in *Jāhilī* poetry is considered a highly condensed medium. This is, indeed, 'minimalist in form', that is, 'what in Shakespeare would be a soliloquy is in Arabic a line or even a hemistich' (A. Jones, 1996: p.3).[13] Likewise, Tuetey explains the impossibility 'to render this poetry in a form that is reasonably self-explanatory to the English reader while retaining the economy and compactness typical of pre-Islamic poetry' (1985: p.8). For Nkharma, this poetry 'almost always has a multi-level parallelism: in sound, morphology, syntax and choice of lexis, but most importantly in semantic structures' (1979: p.52). Clearly, such features do not simplify the task of translating this poetry.

The oral nature of *Jāhilī* poetry

Krenkow refutes the oral nature of *Jāhilī* poetry by claiming that writing existed in Arabia in the pagan days, and so there was no need for *rāwīs* recitations or for leaving out this bulk unwritten for such a long time (1922: pp.264–5). He explains the fact that there is more than one version for the same line in a poem by stating that Arabic script in the old times used to be bare of dots, which opened the gate for more than one reading for the same word in many instances (1922: pp.266–7).

Contrarily, Zwettler refers, in his attempt to testify the oral nature of pre-Islamic poetry, to its idiosyncratic structural characteristics. While Bateson takes some reserves in applying Parry and Lord's

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13   Gibb (1963: p.9) and Polk (1974: p.vii) also deal with the difficulty of translating Arabic poetry because of its condensed language.

theory of oral poetry on the pre-Islamic bulk (1970: pp.34–5),[14] Zwettler[15] rather manages to work out Parry and Lord's triple test on the *Jāhilī*[16] repertoire. The first aspect of this test is the presence of 'formulaic techniques' (1978: p.41). This is tested in Imru' al-Qays's *Mu'allaqa*, and its presence is empirically proved (1978: Appendix A). The second component of the test is the rare occurrence of enjambment. Zwettler notes that it is characteristic of this poetry that verses are 'well-conceived, well-executed, self-contained, end-stopped' (1978: p.65).[17] Enjambment used to be taken as a sign of low quality in *Jāhilī* poetry (ibid.).[18] The third, and last, component of Parry and Lord's triple test is the existence of recurrent themes for the sake of quick composition (Zwettler, 1978: p.77). The conclusion Zwettler comes out with is that *Jāhilī* poetry 'manifests, to an unmistakable degree, the essential characteristics of oral verse – formulaic diction, avoidance of necessary enjambement, and well-established themes and motivs' (*sic*, 1978: p.84).

For Jacobi, 'the polythematic ode' (1996: p.21) acquired its multi-layered structure throughout phases in history. She explains that initially, *nasīb*[19] and *raḥīl*[20] were composed in independent short poems. Progressively, poets by the end of the *Jāhiliyya* started linking together sequences of different themes in the same lengthening ode (1996: pp.24–5).[21] Zwettler claims that '[s]uch thematically unified

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14 Schoeler (1981) also disapproves the idea of applying Parry and Lord's theory to study the formulaic nature of early Arabic poetry.

15 Monroe (1972) and Zwettler (1978) present the same arguments and conclusions. The choice of Zwettler here is due to the fact that he shows awareness of his predecessor's work, and comments on some of its aspects.

16 Throughout his book, Zwettler deals with *Jāhilī* poetry in general. He considers the *Mu'allaqāt* as 'representative of the "classical" style' (1978: p.71).

17 Contrarily, Jayyusi notes that in al-Ḥārith's *Mu'allaqa*, 65 verses out of 85 are run-on lines (1996: p.14).

18 Strangely, in the course of quoting Lord, Bateson considers the presence of enjambment as basic to testify for the oral nature of a poetic tradition (1970: p.35).

19 'Opening section of the *qaṣīda* which evokes the painful memory of a past love' (Sperl, 1989: p.216).

20 'The journey theme in the *qaṣīda*' (Sperl, 1989: p.216).

21 Jacobi also advocates the oral composition of pre-Islamic poetry (1996: p.26).

passages [...] would have been sometimes composed at different occasions and perhaps subsequently joined together to form the larger ode' (1978: p.81). He explains that the reason behind such a practice lies not in the fact that the poets 'were bound by a set of arbitrary conventions that dictated the form and scope of their productions', but rather 'because it was through re-creating these traditional themes and reawakening them in the minds of their hearers that their poems achieved success at all' (1978: pp.78–9).[22]

Versification

It is characteristic of a classical Arabic poem to be based on two formal elements: metre and rhyme (Khawam, 1967: p.18). The rhythmic structure of the first verse of a poem is to be followed all over the succeeding ones with no change tolerated (Beeston, 1983: p.16). Blachère notes that contrary to a wide spread belief in the West that this poetry is purely quantitative, it is rather stress-based as well as quantitative (1964: p.360). This is because the feet of a verse are made up of long and short alternating syllables (ibid.). Also, each verse is 'bipartite' (Scheindlin, 1974), i.e., composed of double hemistichs. 'The rhythmical pattern of the first of these is repeated in the second, with the proviso that the last two or three syllables of the second half-line usually exhibit some minor modification of the pattern occurring at the end of the first half-line' (el Tayib, 1983: p.16).

For al-Nuwayhī, what is important in this poetry is not the consistency of the overall meter only; the rhythm produced by each linguistic unit and the musicality produced by individual morphemes through the way they are linked to each other to make up words is equally important (n.d.: p.40). Lines in different poems might have the same meter, but their musicality differs according to the way letters and words are organised within each of them. This flexibility is

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22   Cf. also Gibb (1963: pp.21–2).

largely due to the derivative morphology of Arabic. Consequently, poets using this language 'play upon the system like an organ to bring forth their many-faceted verses' (Polk, 1974: p.xxiii).

In addition to meter and rhythm, the unity of the rhyme scheme (monorhyme) is equally important to account for the quality of a poem. A good poem is expected to bear a perfect rhyme scheme, while both hemistichs of the first verse often rhyme in a manner which sounds like the English internal rhyme (el Tayib, 1983: p.17; Lyall, 1986: p.xlv).[23] Moreover, 'one only occasionally sees the same rhyme-word used twice in a single poem, at least not in the same sense or not without several verses intervening' (Zwettler, 1978: p.70).

Khawam advocates that monorhyme 'contribue à conserver un caractère incantatoire à la poésie arabe. Il répond à une attente à l'oreille, marque la fin d'une période rythmique, comme la baguette d'un chef d'orchestre invisible' (1967: p.18). Strangely, Cachia perceives this device in Arabic poetry as both a handicap that hinders the production of epics in Arabic, and a way to sway the poet's attention to meaning and feelings (1970: p.4). For him, 'rhyme must always carry with it a risk of weakening the sense where the rhyme word is a forced addition to and not an integral part of the line, an especial and obvious danger in the case of monorhyme' (1970: p.7).

This scholar explains this phenomenon in Arabic poetry as a refuge that the Arabs resorted to in order to ensure a kind of continuity in their poetry, the lines of which stand completely independent from each other, and thus need a device to unite them: monorhyme, for Cachia, 'combines either as a prompter or as a post hoc with the end-stopped line to produce a form of poetic pointillisme, the lines glittering, in the favourite Arab simile, "as pearls on a string"' (1970: p.6). Cachia builds this argument on Wright's statement that '[e]ach verse of a poem ought to be independent in construction and sense. That two or more verses should be so connected with one another is regarded as a fault' (1970: p.5).

Rhyme was quite functional in pre-Islamic poetry, as it enabled the poets to avoid enjambment by helping close 'the verse unit' (Jayyusi, 1996: p.12). Enjambment is, indeed, considered as a sign of

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23   Abu-Deeb challenges this theory (1976: p.40).

low quality in poetic composition. At the same time that 'a sentence may run on for many lines, with a multitude of parallel subordinate clauses, it should be possible to cut it off at any rhyme word, leaving a complete sentence' (Bateson, 1970: p.32). It is probable that enjambment was avoided by the *Jāhilī* poets because their poetry was oral, and so they needed to show verse boundaries to their listeners.[24] Enjambment destroys the listener's awareness of line boundaries.[25] Scheindlin explains this by stating that 'the effect of the Arabic verse depends upon the feeling of resolution which is produced when the poem's rhyme syllable coincides with the conclusion of its metrical pattern' (1974: p.92).

Such linguistic as well as prosodic aspects gave birth to a highly qualified poetry:

> Par sa structure, cette koiné dispose de schèmes dont la quantité syllabique et l'accentuation coïncident avec les éléments prosodiques du vers. De cette harmonie déroulent des effets d'une intensité d'autant plus sensibles qu'ils sont à la fois l'apanage de l'idiome lui-même et de l'art qu'ont su forger des générations de poètes (Blachère, 1964: pp.367–68).

Being different as it is from the Western tradition, it is not surprising, thus, to find out that this poetry was controversially received in the West. The aim of the next section is to partially unveil the way *Jāhilī* poetry was received, and to pave the way for the introduction of the translators and translations, as translation is keenly related to reception.

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24   The same explanation may apply to the caesura that separates both hemistichs of a verse.
25   The fact that English poetry tolerates enjambment (cf. blank verse) helped the creation of stanzas in it (Leech, 1984: p.125).

Reception in the West of the *Mu'allaqāt* and of pre-Islamic poetry in general

The recurrence of some specific themes in *Jāhilī* poetry is one of the major aspects that drew Western resentment towards it. For instance, while Gabrieli claims that the style in *Jāhilī* poetry is 'clearly crystallized in fixed modulations common to all, which make it almost impossible to distinguish individual personalities or groups of schools by style' (1962: p.84), Grünebaum notes that:

> the poet was not expected to follow his natural and untutored genius; rather he was required before starting on his career to become steeped in the inherited lore of his craft, to identify himself with its traditional aspirations, and to obtain mastery of the techniques of his art as they had been transmitted from generation to generation (1955: p.101).

Having failed to love this poetry, Krenkow observes that 'the description of the desert and its animals and terrors may have a certain charm at first, but when the same descriptions recur in endless poems expressed in the same manner, only with different words, the monotony becomes nauseous' (1987: p.796). Like Krenkow, Lichtenstadter remarks that the structure of *Jāhilī* poetry is 'sometimes cumbersome' (1976: p.8). For her, one 'may justly wonder whether, under these circumstances and with these restrictions, the *Jāhiliyyah* produced any poet of individuality, or indeed, genius' (1976: p.25). This same view is adopted by Loya, who claims that the 'Arab poets adhered [...] to the *qaṣīda* form with its specific, determined themes, its rigid metrical schemes and its inflexible symmetrical mold' (1974: p.203). He adds that '[t]here was [...] no absolute necessity for meaningful content as long as the form was artful' (1974: pp.203–4).

Taking the *Mu'allaqāt* as a case study, Gibb refutes such claims as stated above, and he notes that '[n]o two of them are alike' (1963: p.22). In the same course, Miquel explains that '[c]e n'étaient pas les thèmes qui faisaient son originalité, mais la façon de les dire, si nouvelle à chaque fois, et si fine, si ingénieuse, que le discours s'en trouvait renouvelé' (1992: p.13). Likewise, Alan Jones concludes his

talk about the beauties of animal descriptions in *Jāhilī* poetry by noting that if 'we fail to appreciate that, the failure lies with us, not with the poetry' (1996: pp.3–4).

The archaic register used in this poetry is another aspect that generated hostility towards it. Noeldeke, for instance, wonders 'whether the aesthetic pleasure provided by the study of [this poetry] is worth the great pains required even to approach an understanding of the same' (quoted in Gabrieli, 1962: p.83). He adds that 'the more he studied the Semites, the more he loved the Greeks' (ibid.). For Noeldeke, the study of *Jāhilī* poetry is interesting only in so far as presents a complete idea about the linguistic structure of Arabic (Lichtenstadter, 1941: p.429).

Though he asserts that 'the poetry of the Pagan Arabs is most truly their history', Lyall does not discard, like Noeldeke, its philological qualities (1986: p.xviii). Lyall rather pertains that pre-Islamic poetry expresses 'the artistic life of the race' (1912: p.133). To support this claim, he expands upon one aspect, which is quite recurrent in this poetry, i.e., *raḥīl*. Lyall says in this context that this would find room in other lands in painting, but in Arabian poetry, it brings 'before us the scene with a strength and sudden vividness which can be matched in few other literatures' (1912: p.136). After quoting and commenting on a number of extracts from the pre-Islamic bulk, Lyall concludes that that is what one might term as a 'true pictorial art of the finest kind' (1912: p.150). Furthermore, 'it was precisely for their literary qualities that [the *Jāhilī* Arabs'] work was admired, and [...] poets were ranked in the order of merit' (ibid.). Lyall adds that 'in the times of the classical poetry, the decision dealt with artistic merit, just as it did at Rome in the days of Augustus, or does among ourselves at the present time' (1912: p.152). While hinting at such prejudiced ideas as quoted above, Lyall notes that thanks to advances in Oriental studies, '[w]e possess the poetry and can test it for ourselves' (ibid.).

Back to Grünebaum, one notices that this scholar evaluates *Jāhilī* poetry by means of the Western yardstick. For instance, part of his criticism is based on the fact that '[n]ature elements are introduced as the stereotyped background of [...] an emotional situation' (1945: p.138). Also, Grünebaum sees it a deficiency in *Jāhilī* poetry that

'[n]o turn of phrase, no epithet, testify to a personalized perception of the outward world' (1945: p.139). Grünebaum notes that even when the *Jāhilī* poet deals with 'man, horse, or relationship', he characterises them 'as a specimen rather than an individual' (1952: p.331). As she adheres to such a view as Grünebaum's Loya seeks exemplification in the fact that all *Jāhilī* poets express their grief for the departure of their beloveds, but none, not even the rebellious ones, ever expressed any intention to leave their tribes to join the beloveds (1974: p.207).

Grünebaum advocates that it is because of this fusion into social life and complete submission to conventions that 'the deeper problems do not find, consciously or unconsciously, any expression in Arabic poetry', and that 'even the choice of animals which may be mentioned in a poem is restricted' (Lichtenstadter, 1941: p.341). This point of view is also supported by Noeldeke,[26] who explains that 'certain animals well known to the Arabs (e.g., the panther, the jerboa, and the hare) are seldom mentioned and scarcely ever described, apparently for no reason except that they were not included in the conventional repertory' (Nicholson, 1953: p.78). Grünebaum also criticises the Arab poets for standardising the characteristics of these animals: 'it is true that some horses have long, and others short, tails; but this trivial fact does not entitle the poet to praise a horse with a short tail' (1955: p.102). In his analysis of this phenomenon, Berque explains that although 'sincerity of conduct […] allegedly gives romantic-style poetry its strength', it has never been a condition for the success of this poetry (1978: p.125). What mattered most was 'truthfulness in sensation, sound, and image' (ibid.).

Grünebaum is criticised by his reviewer, Lichtenstadter, who asserts that although *Jāhilī* poetry is different from European poetry or might even sound strange to its taste, 'we have to be very careful not to look upon its strangeness to our world as a demerit' (1941: p.433).

26　Bateson notes that Noeldeke was so scornful of the detailed descriptions of the camel in Ṭarafa's *Muʿallaqa*, that he refrained from translating it (1970: p.26). Similarly, the anonymous translator of 1822 refrained from translating the part of this *Muʿallaqa* that describes the camel as s/he finds it 'long and tiresome' (p.335).

According to this scholar, this repertoire should not be perceived with Western eyes because in this case, it would be evaluated with the standards that are usually used for Western poetry. The difference is that whereas Western poetry is composed in general for art sake, Arabic poetry is rather composed for some practical purposes (Lichtenstadter, 1976: p.21). Additionally, while in Western poetry the poet stands as an individual, the bard in Arabic poetry presents himself as part of a tribe if not as its spokesman and representative image (Lichtenstadter, 1976: pp.21–2). This scholar adds that although *Jāhilī* poets used to compose verses within very narrow structural constraints, these enabled them to compete and try to come out with 'exquisite original poetry' (1976: p.22).

Carlyle already adopted a similar point of view: 'The writer who had obtained celebrity in the court of Bagdad [...] would have smiled [...] at the prosaic poetry of his European contemporaries, the Bards and Troubadours, and at the poetic prose of his own countrymen, the present Orientals' (1796: p.iii). Being conscious of this phenomenon, Bateson explains that 'it is only the great distance between our culture and theirs which has made it difficult for European scholars to appreciate them' (1970: p.26). Blachère shows a deep consciousness of this issue, too, for he says that in general it is not enough to master the linguistic tools of a language or its prosodic qualities to appreciate its poetry. This matter needs, according to him, 'une réceptivité esthétique qui peut faire défaut à l'esprit le plus ouvert et le plus lucide' (1958: p.5). In his opposition to the French Romantics' hostility of Arabic poetry, Blachère points out that the difference is that while the latter show themselves as sources of light and prophet-like individuals, the Arab poet very simply exposed himself to his audience as a human being with his possible qualities and vices (1958: p.7). In the same course, Lefèvre highlights the fact that the '[s]patial setting familiar to the old Islamic poets, which is by no means familiar to the Western reader, presents [a] formidable obstacle to the reception of the qasidah in the West' (1992b: p.83).

Such a negative reception of pre-Islamic poetry has its opposite in the high opinion given by many Western scholars and translators to this literature. The quantity of the translations produced for the *Mu'allaqāt* and the pseudo-oriental style developed out of some of

them[27] illustrate this. It is assigned to the next chapter to present the translators of the *Mu'allaqāt*, and the kind of reception with which they manipulated this text. Advantage shall be taken of all opportunities to identify the appeal these translators found in the *Mu'allaqāt*.

27   Cf. p.45 below.