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## THE BEGINNINGS OF THEORETICAL LITERARY REFLECTION AMONG THE ARABS\*

The origins of Arabic theoretical and literary thought remains strictly connected with the history of Arabic and Arabic-Islamic culture. Until the beginning of the 7th century, i.e. to the birth of Islam, the Arab world lived in isolation and the Arabic culture was connected with the nomadic lifestyle of the Bedouins. This isolation was made all the greater as the Arab Peninsula was cut off from the rest of the world and this, in turn, was the reason why so little was known about this culture. The literature of this period, called pre-Islamic or the literature of the Jāhiliyya period as the Arabs themselves call it, was oral only. It was not written down until the first centuries of Islam (8th—9th c.) which was a few hundred years after it came into being. Such a late registration of the literature was probably the reason why philologists were prone to making many "falsifications", unifying it linguistically, interfering in the composition of the works, ascribing works to writers which they may have never written, or they may even have created works which they later ascribed to old-Arab writers.

Also not much is known about Arab studies on literature in the pre-Islamic period. There is no doubt, however, that literature—poetry and rhymed prose—the two basic literary genres, played a basic role in shaping the spiritual culture of the Bedouins. Poets were often associated with sorcerers because the gift of being able to use poetic language was acknowledged as something supernatural. Thus it is hardly surprising that the Koran highly disapproves of poets as they

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are the cause of great competition for the Prophet, Muhammad. Poetry, nonetheless, was highly appreciated and the Koran prohibitions did not survive its development.<sup>1</sup> It was the Bedouins themselves who decided about the value of old-Arab poetry. Poetic competitions took place in the famous old-Arab market-places ('Uqāḍ-Ḍu al- Mağāz, Al-Marbid) and the best works (qaṣīdas) were specially singled out.

The appearance of the Koran has left a permanent mark on the ways and criteria of literary appreciation. Unlike Arabic culture, there appears a literary and linguistic model of the Koranic text in Islamic culture that takes the place of the recipients' subjective appreciation. Thanks to the Koran, there appeared a model which allowed for a relatively objective appreciation of a literary work's value. Until this came about, however, the process of shaping the whole notion of the theory of literature lasted for nearly two centuries since the beginning of Islam (7th and 8th c.). Language was dealt with first.

The most controversial caliph of early Islam—'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661), Prophet Muḥammad's son-in-law, is acknowledged as the founder of the Arabic studies on language. Arab philologists and historians, in numerous versions differing only in minute details, relate the anecdote about how Caliph 'Alī summoned the qāḍī (judge), of Al-Basra-Abū al-Aswad ad-Du'alī, and told him to write a basic grammar of the Arabic language. Everything is drawn up in categories of an administrative order: "A word is a verb, noun and a particle", said 'Alī, "do it that way!"<sup>2</sup>, defining the 'way' with the Arabic word 'nahw' meaning 'grammar' from then onwards.

This anecdote, being undoubtedly the result of the Arab philologists' fantasy, points to the connection between the beginnings of philological studies and politics, or more specifically, between philological studies and Islam. The authority of the studies resulted not so much from their inner values as from the attitude of outstanding politicians of Islam. The order, coming from such a great authority as 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, to see to the matters of language decide about the position given to this branch of knowledge.

This anecdote also points to other, and maybe more important, reasons for the development of philological studies. The humanistic culture of the Islamic world, which also included theological culture, was connected with interest in language in the same way as in Greece

<sup>1</sup> The Koran, Sura XXVI, Ayas 224—227: And the poets—the perverse follow them; hast thou not seen how they wander in every valley and how they say that which they do not? Save those that believe, and do righteous deeds, and remember God oft, and help themselves after being wronged. (Arberry).

<sup>2</sup> This anecdote appears in a number of sources on the history of Arabic linguistic thinking, cf.: Al-Anbārī, *Nuḥḍat al-alibbā' fī tabaqāt al-udabā'* (ed. A. Amer), Stockholm 1962, p. 4.



although this was due to quite different reasons. There were two decisive factors concerning the direction taken by Islamic humanities. The first of these was linguistic necessity of working on the text of the Koran, and then commenting on it. It was a far from easy text not only from the point of view of its complex contents but primarily due to the complicated language structure. It was incomprehensible to many Muslims. This was due to the language situation of the Islamic and Arab world. Thus, the second factor responsible for the development of Islamic humanities lay in this language situation. On one hand, there existed (and still exists) a discrepancy in the Arab world between the literary Arabic language and the spoken languages, while on the other hand, the Arabs transferred their language onto vast areas of the Islamic empire. That is why the classical literary language, including the language of the Koran, had to be popularized both among the Arabs and the non-Arabs who made up the majority of people living in the Islamic world.

The fault of the anecdotal accounts about the beginnings of the studies on language, and later on literature, is that they effectively hide the actual conditions in which these theoretical considerations came into being. In later centuries, this camouflage facilitated the Arab historians and theoreticians of literature to give their own interpretations; it permitted them to let their imagination run away with them, which resulted in the origins of these studies becoming more and more vague. This is what happened with theoretical and literary reflection, the reconstruction of which must, to a large extent, rely on conjecture.

How is it possible then to reconstruct this beginning by using the two above mentioned factors: the Koranic and the sociolinguistic? The first one: the linguistic necessity of working on the Koran appears soon after Prophet Muḥammad's death. The text of the Koran was already established under the third caliph, 'Uṣmān, who died in 644. The basis for the text were scattered notes on shells, bark, palm leaves and stones. These records were made by chance listeners of the Prophet as God's Messenger himself was illiterate. The actual ordering of those texts took place in a very mechanical way. The first to be collected were the sūras, texts on the different visions, and then they were put in order according to the number of verses—from the longest to the shortest. The text, arranged in this way and called 'Uṣmān's Koran, turned out to be unclear, full of repetitions and incomprehensible words. It was extremely difficult to follow without a philological commentary.

It turned out that a knowledge of the language—of the literary language—was absolutely essential in order to understand it. Studies on the language of the Koran began the source of which, apart from the Koran itself, was the speech and the literary work of the Bedouins.<sup>4</sup> Bedouin poetry was acknowledged as the treasury of Arabic culture.

The saying: 'alaykum bi-aš'ār al-ġāhiliyya fa-inna fihā tafsīr kitābikum (You must become acquainted with the old-Arabic poetry as it contains the interpretation of your Book (i.e. the Koran)) is ascribed to Caliph 'Umar (d. 634) while the founder of the Koran exegesis, Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687), stated that poetry was a collection of the language spoken by the Arabs (aš-ši'r dīwān al-'Arab).

The beginning of the first practical studies on Arab literature started with those linguistic and literary circumstances. Riwāya—drawing from the sources of the Arabic language—was the basic task of the philologists. Riwāya primarily involved collecting old-Arab poetry, writing it down, collecting it in anthologies, classifying according to subject-matter and finally, interpreting it. To a large extent, interpreting was connected with typically linguistic reflection as it concerned the explanation of strange (ġarīb) and rare (nādīra) words, which later often served the exegesis of the Koranic text. The above mentioned Ibn 'Abbās used quotations from old-Arabic poetry in explaining unknown Koranic words. Al-Ḥalīl Ibn Aḥmad, a great 8th century philologist, arranged the first general (not monothematic) dictionary of the classical Arabic language entitled *Kitāb al-'ayn* (*Book of the Letter 'Ayn*). The arrangement of this dictionary was extremely unusual. The basis for the ordering of the entries were the roots (usually consisting of three consonants) arranged not according to the alphabet but according to the place of their articulation. This Al-Ḥalīl Ibn Aḥmad was a codifier of Arabic prosody and is considered to be the first who selected 16 basic types of metres in Arabic poetry. All the later studies only developed Al-Ḥalīl's system.

Researchers of the Koran and of poetry took on one more function. They became propagators of the literary norm of the Arabic language. In this way, one and the same people conducted philological studies that consisted of literary criticism, normative grammar and the bases of the history of pre-Islamic literature.

One of the earliest works that has survived on the linguistic interpretation of the Koran is Abū 'Ubayda's (d. 824/5) "grammar" book entitled *Mağāz al-Qur'ān* (*Stylistic Figures of the Koran*).<sup>3</sup> This work consists of the first considerations on stylistics in Arabic literature with all the basic material coming from the Koran only. The term 'mağāz', in later centuries meaning the metaphorical use of the expression, here has a much more general meaning as it defines every type of stylistic figure. Among other things, Abū 'Ubayda defines the metaphor, simile and metonymy with this one term.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The book was published by F. Sezgin in (—) 1954 under the title *Mağāz al-Qur'ān, Maktabat al-Hānī*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Z. Sallām, *Aṭar al-Qur'ān fī taṭawwur an-naqd al-qur'ānī*, 2nd ed., Cairo 1961, p. 42—43.



Abū 'Ubayda's interests went much further than just the poetics of the Koran. He was a representative of the so-called Basran school of linguistics which compiled a great grammar of the Arabic language at the end of the 8th century. It was hardly surprising then that Abū 'Ubayda was concerned with linguistic studies; he compiled dictionaries on different subjects (his *Kitāb al-ḥayl* (*Book on Horses' Names*) has survived), Abū 'Ubayda also arranged a treatise on the arguments of two poets from the Umayyad period (7th—8th c). *Nagū'iq Ḡarīr wa-āl-Farazdaq* (*The Arguments of Ḡarīr and Al-Farazdaq*), in which he presented not only tales on the lives of both poets but also his opinion of their poetic output.

Al-Aṣma'ī, who died in 825, was another philologist similar to Abū 'Ubayda. He was also concerned with lexicography and the theory of literature. He wrote a small treatise called *Fuḥūlāt aš-šu'arā'* (*Outstanding Poets*) in which he defined the criteria of poetic art and made a classification of old-Arab poets. Furthermore, Al-Aṣma'ī arranged a collection of 72 of the best fragments of old-Arabic poetry carrying his name: *Al-Aṣma'iyyāt*. He also wrote a number of lexicographical treatises, which have not survived, but which have often been quoted by later philologists and lexicographers.

Al-Aṣma'ī's research style was continued by his followers: Ibn Salām al-Ġumaḥī, author of the extensive *Kitāb aš-ši'r was-aš-šu'arā'* (*Book of Poetry and Poets*). Both Al-Aṣma'ī and Al-Ġumaḥī established criteria of good poetry, acknowledging not so much its value but its background (the poets should be Bedouins) as well as the positive opinion of many scholars. They also introduced principles of dividing old-Arab and Moslem poetry into periods, introducing the notion of generation (*ṭabaqa*), obligatory later not only in the history of literature but in all biographical works.

During the first two centuries of Islam (7th and 8th) the subject of philological studies was solely pre-Islamic poetry and the Koran in connection with linguistic studies. That is why Al-Ġumaḥī paid a great deal of attention to the problems of language and the history of Arabic linguistics in his *Kitāb fuḥūlāt aš-šu'arā'*. The problems of contemporary literary criticism, on the other hand, took second place and were often treated in connection with their relation to old-Arab tradition. This was obviously due to the very nature of this poetry that was a development of pre-Islamic patterns.

It is a surprising fact that the beginnings of Arabic reflection on language and literature show independence of external influences, especially Greek and Indian. In philosophy and the sciences, for example, the Arabs eagerly took over the achievements of their predecessors, transforming and developing them for the needs of their own culture. As can be seen on the basis of later theoretical and literary works, every

attempt at departing from the norms that came into being within Islam ended in failure. This is probably due to the fact that studies on the language and literature are included in the shari'a studies, attached to research on the Koran connecting them thus with the religion of Islam. Other studies called 'ajamī, i.e. those borrowed from the 'Ajams (foreigners) did not carry this mark of holiness and this was probably why they were subjected to other laws than the shari'a studies.

Despite these reservations, certain elements borrowed from the Greeks and Hindus appear in the studies on language. The division of parts of speech comes from Aristotelian logic; the classification of sounds and the description of their articulation is clearly influenced by Indian theories. Some elements of Greek theory may also be included in the concepts of literary language although it is known that neither Aristotle's 'Poetics' nor 'Rhetorics' were translated into Arabic. When the two works were finally translated, they were quickly forgotten.<sup>5</sup>

The linguistic theory in theoretical and literary studies concentrated on the social aspect of how the language functioned. A concept of the literary language was created which, by researchers, was called a pure language: al-luġa al-faṣīḥa or al-luġa al-fuṣḥā. The model of this language, that was impossible to imitate, was the Koran beside which there appeared the language of old-Arab poetry, also treated as something perfect. The pure Arabic language was deprived of lahn, that incorrectness so typical of the speech of townfolk separated from Bedouin folklore.

In a literary utterance concern was not only for correctness in language, i.e. faṣāḥa, but also for clarity. Clarity of the literary language becomes the basic theoretical and literary notion. It is defined by the term bayān. For this term to have religious sanction, it is given a good Koran origin. The Koran verse is as follows: ar-raḥmān 'allama al-Qur' āna, ḥalaqa al-insāna, 'allamahu al-bayāna ("Compassionate /God/ taught /people/ the Koran, created man and taught him to express himself clearly").<sup>6</sup> Just as in the case of creating a grammar, the need here to make the studies sacred turned out to be essential.

The earliest definitions of bayān come from the end of the 8th century, from the period when the codification of Arabic grammar principles takes place and when work is increased on collecting pre-Islamic poetry. All sources draw our attention to the role played by the Barmakī viziers in creating Arabic philosophy. On behalf of caliph Hārūn ar-Raṣīd, this family, coming from the Buddhists, cared for outstanding

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle's *Poetics* was translated first by Yūnus Ibn Mattā (9th c.), the *Rhetoric* was translated in an abridged version by Ibn Sina, and only Averroes translated its complete text with commentaries.

<sup>6</sup> The Koran, Sura LV, Ayas 1-4.



scholars, creating conditions for them to work. Sībawayhi, the creator of Arabic grammar, was, among others, connected with them. One of the earliest created definitions of bayān is ascribed to vizier Ġa'far al-Barmakī:

Bayān means that the word is fully equivalent to thought, portraying univocally the intentions (of the person speaking) so that it is not necessary to speculate over it (to understand its meaning). Bayān is deprived of artificiality, is spontaneous, simple and comprehensible without explanation.<sup>7</sup>

In other more general definitions, called "aphoristic" by von Grunebaum, bayān is defined as an interpreter (tarǧumān) of thoughts, of hidden thoughts, feelings. Bayān and faṣāḥa—correctness in language—connected with the former, were not only features of literary (poetic) works but also of oratorical art, especially in the first centuries of Islam. Oratorical art was highly appreciated in the culture of developing Islam when the ability to convince more often than not was a decisive factor in the successful expansion of Islam. Oratorical art itself expanded in old-Arab society where it was the domain of the ḥanīfs—of sorcerers and fortune-tellers.

In the times of Islam, oratorical art quickly becomes institutionalized; it was probably in the 8th century that oratorical schools started to appear. Al-Ġāḥiḍ speaks about one of them in his *Kitāb al-bayān wa-āt-tabyīn*. Some caliphs ('Alī), army officers (Ziyād, Al-Ḥaġġāġ Ibn Yūsuf), theologians (Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī) were among the outstanding speakers.

Moslem rhetoric was more widely understood from the very beginning than classical Hellenic rhetoric. The element of convincing passed into the background, and maybe even into oblivion, as the form of the language was of essential importance and resulted in balāġa—rhetoric, eloquence—finally turning into poetics.

In the works of later philologists, bayān, on the other hand, changes its name into 'ilm al-bayān, meaning narrowly understood poetics, and is part of balāġa—the study of stylistic figures. Al-Ġāḥiḍ, the author of the already mentioned *Kitāb al-bayān wa-āt-tabyīn* (*Book of Clear Eloquence and Explanation*) made the first step towards starting research on bayān. Al-Ġāḥiḍ's definition develops the previous attempts at defining bayān:

Meaning originates in people's hearts, forms in their minds, is placed in their souls, is connected with their imagination, is born from thought. However, it remains shrouded, concealed, distant and unclear; it exists passively.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. G. von Grunebaum's article Bayān in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.). The definition is quoted after Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Al-'Iqd al-farīd*, vol. 1, p. 165.

It comes alive only when it is used. Bayān is the interpreter of meaning. Thanks to it, the mind (of other people) learns about content, what is hidden is revealed, what is invisible becomes visible, what is distant becomes close, what is disorderly becomes orderly.<sup>8</sup>

It is possible to distinguish three types of bayān in Al-Ġāḥiḍ's theory<sup>9</sup>:

—bayān generally meaning the expression of one's thoughts (with the help of the spoken word, writing, counting on one's fingers<sup>10</sup>, gesture, attitude (arrangement));

—expressing one's thoughts in the form of a linguistic text;

—a beautiful and clear style.

The structure of Al-Ġāḥiḍ's work is specific. It belongs to popular-scientific literature sometimes called didactic entertainment. The characteristic feature of Al-Ġāḥiḍ's work, like in all other works of this type, is variety and the differences in topics. In *Kitāb al-bayān wa-āt-tabyīn*, the theoretical subject-matter is not systematized, thoughts are not presented in succession as there are digressions, poetic quotations, anecdotes. In other words, it is a type of work from which it is difficult to unearth systematized knowledge. Al-Ġāḥiḍ is not an exception here as every work of this type was written in this manner.

In the following centuries of theoretical and literary research, bayān was used practically only in the third meaning of beautiful style and as such turned out to be close to the notion of Arabic rhetoric understood as oratory and eloquence. The root b-l-ġ, which is connected with the Arabic name for rhetoric (balāġa), carries the notion of achieving one's goal, of getting somewhere.

In the 9th century, Al-Mubarrad, a linguist and a theoretician of culture (adab), and practically a contemporary of Al-Ġāḥiḍ, worked out his own version of balāġa. In a short treatise that was actually a letter to a friend, he gave his own definition of rhetoric, basing it on examples from poetry:

The essence of rhetoric is concerned with statements (qawl—spoken words) that are given meaning; appropriate words are chosen and then are arranged beautifully so that one word is connected with another—even if it differs in form—so that it makes what is distant close, avoids talkativeness.<sup>11</sup>

Thus it is typical *ars bene dicendi* although it primarily refers to literary creativity. Al-Mubarrad goes on to state that balāġa concerns

<sup>8</sup> K. Skarżyńska-Bocheńska, *Poglądy al-Ġāḥiḍa na retorykę i stylistykę*, Warszawa 1969 (unpublished doctoral dissertation), p. 16. The definition is quoted after *Kitāb al-bayān wa-āt-tabyīn*, vol. 1, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32 and foll.

<sup>10</sup> Fingers and their parts served for abacus in the Middle East.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Mubarrad, *Al-Balāġa*, ed. Ramadān 'Abd at-Tawwāb, Al-Qāhira 1965, p. 59.



both prose and poetry: *istawā hādā fī ʾāl-kalām al-mantūr wa-ʾāl-kalām al-maršūf* [It is (i.e. *balāga*) identical in the scattered word (prose) and in the ordered word (poetry)].<sup>12</sup> Much can be found in common here with Greek rhetoric. There is a common principle of choosing the right words (*ḥusn an-naḍm* or *iḥtiyār al-kalām*) and their appropriate arrangement (*muqārana*). Diogenes' main idea concerning rhetoric is the proper combination of words: syntaxis due to which an utterance is beautiful and pleasant. It also seems that the notion of *maʿānī* in Arabic rhetoric is close to the Aristotelian *topos*. Those, however, are problems that require more detailed comparative studies.

*Badīʿ* is another notion that was connected with the newly forming poetics of the 9th century. *Badīʿ* means originality, freshness. It was a concept that originated from the new trend in literary research. It was during this period that theoreticians and historians of literature began taking an interest in the poetry that started appearing at that time. They decided to define its specific features, differentiating it from pre-Islamic poetry and from the poetry of the Umayyad period (7th / 8th c.). Attempts at analyzing this new phenomenon in Arabic poetry appeared in the works of three outstanding 9th century scholars: Al-Ġāhiz, Ibn Qutayba and Al-Mubarrad. Ibn Qutayba devotes a long introduction to describing this new poetry in *Kitāb aš-šiʿr wa-āš-šuʿ arāʿ*. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, the poet prince (who was even a caliph for one day) was the first to try to systematize the notions connected with the new phenomenon in Arabic poetry. His *Kitāb al-badīʿ* is the first systematic, though fragmentary, Arabic work on poetics. Of course, this does not mean that we have a clearly composed work with divisions, causing no doubts whatsoever, and with extremely well formulated definitions. Arab philologists just did not construct their works in this way and even if there were some that kept to this pattern, they were quickly forgotten. It is absolutely essential here to mention the appearance of the first works on poetics. It seems that the popularity of poetry (and oratory) at the rulers' courts played a basic role here. A "court" institution appraising literary works probably came into being first, and it was only later that interest was shown in their theory. It was quite a specific institution that was centred around the ruler or some other high official. At meal-times, they would gather together in the company of poets, criticising and praising the recited works. This was how the first institutions of criticism, which later changed into literary works, came into being.

Ibn al-Muʿtazz does not go back to earlier notions such as *bayān* or *balāga*. He starts his work with the description of *badīʿ* which, for him, is "a metaphor that has never been known before" (*istiʿārat al-kalima li-šayʿ lam yuʿraf*—a direct translation would be: 'borrowing a word for

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60

something unknown').<sup>13</sup> In his further considerations, Ibn al-Mu'tazz names the stylistic figures of speech, pointing to the differences in their use: in the Koran, in old-Arabic poetry as well as in new poetry. Ibn al-Mu'tazz differentiates five such figures of speech: isti'āra (metaphor), taǧnīs (paranomasia), muṭābaqa (antithesis), repetition, maǧhab kalāmī (dialectic method). This classification is the conclusion to al-Ġāhīd's earlier suggestions. He introduced the term *badi'* in the meaning of a general theory of tropes and stylistic figures of speech defined in the 9th century. This work, however, is still incomplete and in it there mainly lacks connections with the other notions of bayān and balāġa that are fundamental to poetics.

In the 10th century, Qudāma Ibn Ġa'far, who was one generation younger than Ibn al-Mu'tazz, tries to codify the still scattered knowledge, having completely different methodological premises in mind than Ibn al-Mu'tazz. In the work *Naqd aš-šī'r* (*Criticism of Poetry*) he suggests a new poetics that is wholly systematized and based on a different terminology, although it continues to be related to its predecessors. Qudāma gained a very good education. Among other subjects, he learnt philosophy and logic which had a great influence on his academic work. In his *Criticism* he distinguishes the following that are the subject of poetics: metre, rhyme, vocabulary, topics and criteria of estimation. The book is divided into three parts: the first discusses the theoretical problems of poetics, the second is devoted to the criteria distinguishing good poetry and the third bad poetry. Qudāma's work is the first Arabic lecture on poetics in which the influence of Aristotle can be clearly felt. Qudāma does not hold his predecessors in very high esteem; he does not even mention Ibn al-Mu'tazz although from the analysis of the text in *Criticism*, it seems that he definitely knew *Kitāb al-badi'*. Although Qudāma Ibn Ġa'far's criticism of poetry is a work that is methodologically faultless and he makes many innovations in Arabic poetics (the notion of a literary genre (ǧins), among others, pays a great deal of attention to the problem of delimiting notions, etc.), it was not accepted by later writers and was actually forgotten. The reasons for this can be found in the fact that Qudāma's book was different and the attempt to hellenize Arabic poetry did not quite succeed. The patterns established by Al-Ġāhīd and Ibn al-Mu'tazz were obligatory. Even the book *Naqd an-naṭr* (*Criticism of Prose*), initially also ascribed to Qudāma, went in the direction of developing the idea of bayān. The one manuscript of *Criticism of Prose* was in the Escorial Library for many years before it was established in the forties that its true title is *Kitāb al-burhān fī wuǧūh al-bayān* (*Book of Proof on the Subject of Different*

<sup>13</sup> Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Kitāb al-badi'*, [in:] I. Kračkovski, *Sobraniye sočineniy*, Moskva 1960, vol. 6, p. 180.



*Kinds of Bayān*) and its author is Ishāq Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn Sulaymān Ibn Wahb, a contemporary of Qudāma but generally unknown.<sup>14</sup> *Kitāb al-burhān* combines the two tendencies in poetics: the aim for order resulting from Hellenic patterns with respect for Al-Ġāḥiḍ's and Ibn al-Mu'tazz's theoretical considerations. In actual fact, it is a commentary to Al-Ġāḥiḍ's *Kitāb al-bayān wa-ātabyīn* with an additional new classification of ideas included. Ibn Wahb distinguishes four types of bayān:

- bayān in itself
- bayān resulting from thought
- bayān in an oral utterance
- bayān in writing

In his interpretation, Ibn Wahb does not only benefit from Aristotle's poetics and rhetoric but also from his logic. The different types of bayān are discussed in great detail and Ibn Wahb's lecture very often turns out to be quite complicated due to his use of notions from the sphere of logic and philosophy. It is hardly surprising then that this work did not influence the later development of Arabic poetics.

On the other hand, the way set out by Al-Ġāḥiḍ and Ibn al-Mu'tazz becomes more and more popular. It is mainly because their theory proves to be true in practice and is applied in the first works devoted to research on poetry. A trend in research based on comparing the work of different poets starts developing in the 10th century. These studies are called *wasāṭa* (mediation) or *muwāzana* (comparison). Al-Āmidī, who died in 981, wrote a book entitled *Al-Muwāzana bayn Abī Tammām wa-āl-Buḥturī* (*Comparison between Abu Tammām and Al-Buḥturī*) in which he compares the work of the two famous neo-classical poets from the 9th century. In his analysis, he uses the terminology of Al-Ġāḥiḍ and Ibn al-Mu'tazz and this lets him compare the two types of poetry, represented by both neo-classical poets, in quite a detailed manner. At more-or-less the same time, there appeared another book of this type written by 'Alī Ibn 'Abd al-Azīz al-Ġurġānī entitled *Al-Wasāta bayn al-Mutanabbī wa-ḥuṣūmihi* (*Seeking Mediation between Al-Mutanabbī and His Opponents*) in which the application of classical theories to concrete material leads to the appearance of new notions (eg. *as-sahl al-mumtani'*—an extremely important term in Persian poetics).

These practical considerations turned out to be a sufficient basis for the theoretical establishment of traditional poetics. Abū āl-Hilāl al-'Askarī does this at the beginning of the 11th century in his book *Kitāb aṣ-ṣinā'atayn: al-kitāba wa-āṣ-ṣi'r* (*Book of Two Arts: Writing and Poetry*). In the introduction Al-'Askarī says:

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sawqī Dayf, *Al-Balāġa. Taṭawwur wa-tārīh*, Al-Qāhira 1965, pp. 78—81. *Al-Burhān fī wuġūh al-bayān* was published in 1969 in Cairo by Ḥifnī Muḥammad Šaraf.

After knowledge about God, whose grace is manifold, studies on rhetoric and the correct use of language are the most deserving spheres of learning as thanks to them, one discovers the perfection of the Great God's Book.<sup>15</sup>

The most important notion for Al-'Askarī becomes rhetoric (*balāḡa*) understood as poetics, as can be guessed from the contents of his work, for it includes the principles of estimating poetic works and stylistic figures of speech. It is "an explanation of the meaning and making the word beautiful" (*iḍāḥ al-ma'nā wa taḥsīn al-lafḍ*).<sup>16</sup> Making the word beautiful is the subject of *badi'* to which Al-'Askarī devotes a whole chapter on stylistic figures of speech (chapter IX). Al-'Askarī refers to the ideas and terminology of Al-Ġāḥiḍ in his considerations.

Al-'Askarī's studies, devoted to the language of the Koran and its literary meaning, played an important role in establishing the basics of poetics. The subject of those works was *i'ḡāz*—the uniqueness and the impossibility of imitating the Koran. The first work of this type was a short treatise by Ar-Rummānī entitled *An-Nukat fī i'ḡāz al-Qur'ān* (*Most Important Points Concerning the Wonderful Nature of the Koran*), in which he shows that the perfect type of rhetoric language is the language of the Koran, and then goes on to describe the stylistic figures of speech used in the Koranic text. Some years later, Al-Bāqillānī writes a treatise *I'ḡāz al-Qur'ān*, where he states that it is much more important to study the uniqueness of the Koran than anything else concerning language. The wonderful nature of the Koran primarily concerns its rhetoric and that is why studying the positive aspects of Koranic rhetoric may serve as a pattern for the estimation of very type of literary work. The rest of Al-Bāqillānī's work is a study of the Koran with the help of earlier works on poetics.

Poetics preserved in this way has unlimited possibilities of development. Its usefulness has been confirmed once again by the application of its results for studying the Koran. The end of those initial studies on literature and the beginning of finally summing them up is the poetics of Ibn Rašīq: *Kitāb al-'umda fī šinā'at aš-ši'r* (*Book on the Basic of Poetic art*). Ibn Rašīq primarily refers to Al-Ġāḥiḍ and to Ibn al-Mu'tazz whom he often quotes in large fragments (eg. in the chapter on *maḍhab kalāmī*). That is why *badi'* is now devoted to stylistic figures of speech and tropes while *bayān* slowly disappears from poetics altogether.

For 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Ġurġānī (d. 1078) the study of rhetoric is understood from a completely different point of view. Al-Ġurġānī tries to

<sup>15</sup> Abū āl-Hilāl al-Askarī, *Kitāb aš-šinā'atayan*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Baġāwī and Muḥammad Abū āl-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Al-Qāhira (n.d.), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.



define how the perfect language of literature functions from the point of view of the connection between the content and form. In order to achieve this Al-Ġurġānī builds a theory of "meanings" (ma'ānī) explaining the basic principles of rhetoric and stylistics. He defines rhetoric with the traditional term *balāġa*, using in interchangeably with *faṣāḥa*, and sometimes with *bayān*.

The theory of meanings is of special importance for the post-classical period of the development in the Arabic theory of literature. It will repeat itself in a continuously developing form in all the later works. Al-Ġurġānī does not bother to give the definitions of those meanings, believing them to be generally known: "Know that the aim of what I have written", said Al-Ġurġānī,

and the basis of what I have arranged concerns the definition of meanings, describing the differences and similarities between them, and the ways of combining and dividing them. I classify their genres and their types, pointing out what is detailed and what is general in them...

In his description, however, Al-Ġurġānī makes use of the important notion *naḍm*, i.e. arrangement, that seems to come from *mu'tazilite* philosophical theories. In the works of Al-Ġurġānī, *naḍm* has primarily a linguistic meaning. The notion of meaning (ma'nā) is not connected with one word but results from an arrangement (*naḍm*) of words:

Know that *faṣāḥa* does not appear in single words, but originates in speech through their specific combination. *Naḍm* is ruled by syntactic relations: *Naḍm* is the fraternization of grammar meanings within the utterance in accordance with the goals for which the utterance is formulated.

The general theory of meanings, divided into basic and additional ones, is the subject of studies on expression, i.e. rhetoric (*balāġa*, *bayān*). In this way, Al-Ġurġānī reverts back, in his own theory, to the starting point of Arabic theoretical and literary reflection: to the interest in the linguistic structure of the utterance. This time, however, it is not an utterance treated normatively, but philosophically. Al-Ġurġānī and his followers try to discover the structure of a linguistic utterance, often using logical terminology which is an important element of later Arabic grammatical theory.

Studies on literature in the following centuries only strengthened Al-Ġurġānī's theory. The theory of meanings, which he proposed and which actually came (at least terminologically) from what was created by Al-Ġāḥiḍ and later by Ibn al-Mu'tazz, became the basis for analyzing stylistic tropes. Az-Zamahṣārī (d. 1143) applies Al-Ġurġānī's theory of meaning in his analysis of the "wonderful nature" of the Koran in his

commentary to the Koran entitled *Al-Kaššāf* (*Book that Discovers*).<sup>17</sup> At the same time, As-Zamahšarī prepares the way for introducing studies on rhetoric that would be divided into the theory of meaning, expression (*bayān*), and beautifying the text with "ornaments" (*badi'*). This division is supported by As-Sakkākī (1226?) although one has to admit that his classifying criteria are not always sufficiently clear. This is how he defines those three divisions:

—meanings (*ma'ānī*) that adapt themselves to the specific structure of the utterance from the point of view of pronouncement, and also to what is advisable in it in order to protect it from mistakes connected with adapting the utterance to what one wants to say in a given situation;

—expression (*bayān*) is the knowledge about formulating meanings in various ways for the sake of clarity in order to avoid mistakes while adapting utterances to what one wants to say;

—"ornaments" (*muḥsināt*, and later *badi'*) are various ways of beautifying the utterance.

Those definitions, expressed in a rather complex manner, can be understood as differences between the structure of a correct utterance, the relations between the utterances and their content, as well as the ways literary utterances are formulated. Thus, the subject of the *ma'ānī* theory is primarily the syntactic structure of a correct utterance, eg. the place of the predicate in a sentence, something that may be classified under problems of the actual division of sentences, ways of joining sentences, as well as such problems as the lengthiness and conciseness of an utterance.

*Bayān*, on the other hand, concerns the basic tropes: similes (*tašbīh*), metaphors (*mağāz*) and metonymies (*kināya*). Finally, "ornaments" are divided by As-Sakkākī into those that concern meanings and those which concern form. In the first part, As-Sakkākī distinguishes, for example, praise expressed in the form of disapproval, while *paronomasia* (*tağnīs*) is included in the second one.<sup>18</sup>

All the later Arabic studies pay special attention to details, and they also are the subject of deeper thought on the part of the writers of the different poetic works. It is here that the linguistic aspect of the utterance acquires greater meaning. This was the result of the function played by classical language in Arabic society. The language was practically dead as nobody used it in speech, while in writing, the literary language

<sup>17</sup> The classical sources mention also *I'ğāz al-Qur'ān fī naḍmihi wa-ta'līfihī* by Muḥammad Ibn Yazīd al-Wāsitī but most probably it is lost, cf. Muḥammad Zağīl Sallām, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>18</sup> Aḥmad Maṭlūb, *Al-Balāḡa 'inda As-Sakkākī*, Bağdād 1964, pp. 117—139.



differed more and more from the old classical and Koran language. Pure language and grammar interpretations seem to be as necessary as they were a few centuries earlier, and due to this, studies on literature lead, first of all, to analyzing the language.

Translated by A. Korzeniowska

## POCZĄTKI REFLEKSJI TEORETYCZNO LITERACKIEJ U ARABÓW

### STRESZCZENIE

U podstaw rozważań nad literaturą u Arabów leżą koncepcje języka literackiego ('arabiyya fuṣḥā). Podstawowym problemem funkcjonowania całej cywilizacji arabsko-muzułmańskiej od jej narodzin było ustalenie normy języka literackiego. Wybrano język Koranu jako idealny wzór literackiej arabszczyzny. Przyczyniło się to do powstania studiów językoznawczych i literaturoznawczych nad tekstem koranicznym i do narodzin teorii mağāz (figur stylistycznych). Szczególnie popularna stała się teoria nienasładowalności i cudowności Koranu (i'ğāz al-Qur'ān) ustalająca kierunki opracowywania normy języka literackiego i poetyckiego. Powiązanie normy literackiej z objawieniem boskim (Koranem) zadecydowało o wysokiej pozycji nauk o języku literackim wśród innych nauk.

Wyniki badań nad tekstem koranicznym stosowano do tekstów „świeckich”, przede wszystkim zaś do poezji staroarabskiej, którą uznano za wzór doskonałego języka literackiego, ustępujący jedynie Koranowi. Zapewne studia nad poezją staroarabską w jakiejś mierze zadecydowały również o ustaleniu ostatecznej wersji tekstu koranicznego.

Te praktyczne badania i studia nad ustaleniem normy językowej prowadzą do powstania teorii pięknego języka literackiego—bayān (jasnego wypowiedziania się) i balāġa (celnego wyrażania myśli). Te dwa pojęcia uzupełnione koncepcją badī'u, a więc oryginalnego, niezwykłego języka legły u podstaw poetyki arabskiej. Kształtowanie się podstawowych pojęć tej poetyki przypada na wiek IX (Al-Ġāhīd, Ibn Qutayba, Al-Mubarrad, Ibn al-Mu'tazz).

W następnych wiekach następują istotne przeformułowania tej teorii wynikające zarówno z własnych studiów arabskich (krytyka Al-Ġāhīda, nowe koncepcje Qudāmy Ibn Ġāfara) jak i zapożyczenia koncepcji greckiej. W odróżnieniu jednak od innych nauk (filozofia, nauki ścisłe) poetyka w małym stopniu uległa wpływowi greckim. Dalszy rozwój poetyki następuje w kierunku rozwoju i przeformułowywania pierwszych koncepcji języka—bayānu, balāġi i badī'u.