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ABŪ TAMMĀM'S CONTRIBUTION TO 'ABBĀSID ĠAZAL POETRY

When Abū Tammām is mentioned, three things come to mind: the collection of the *Ḥamāsa*, the *badī'*-style and the *madīḥ*-poems, because it was this genre to which Abū Tammām devoted most of his verses. Therefore, western scholars label Abū Tammām as a "neo-classical" poet along with al-Buḥturī and al-Mutanabbī because, unlike Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām did not contribute to the "modern" genres, such as, e.g., wine and love poetry.

While this is quite true in the case of wine poetry, it is not true at all in the case of the *ḡazal* genre. Of course, the number of lines of Abū Tammām's *ḡazal* poems is much smaller than the number of lines devoted to *madīḥ* poems. But this is simply due to the fact that *ḡazal* poems are much shorter than *madīḥ* poems. If we take the number of poems, the proportion of *madīḥ* to *ḡazal* turns out to be rather surprising: the *dīwān*¹ contains 132 *ḡazal* poems compared to 175 *madīḥ* poems, so the difference is not so great. In fact, as far as we know, there is no poet between Abū Nuwās and Ḥālid al-Kātib who has left behind a comparable amount of *ḡazal* verse. This comparatively high number of *ḡazal* verse in the *dīwān* of Abū Tammām corresponds to the importance this poet is given in the later anthologies of love poetry. Let us take as an example the first part of the *Kitāb az-Zahra* of Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣfahānī.² In this book, the most often quoted poets are al-Buḥturī and Abū Tammām. But we have to take into account that Abū Tammām treated the theme "love" in two different genres: first, in the *nasīb* of his *madīḥ* poems, and second, in his *ḡazal* poems. It is therefore not surprising that a great part of the Abū Tammām quotations stems from his *nasīb*, not from his *ḡazal*, but this is much more the case with al-Buḥturī, who did not contribute so much to the *ḡazal*. While the al-Buḥturī quotations are taken almost exclusively from the *nasīb*- and *madīḥ*-sections of his panegyrical odes, more than one third of the Abū Tammām quotations are taken from his *ḡazal*, all in all 18 passages. Now compare this number to the quotations from Abū Nuwās (13), al-'Abbās b. al-Aḥnaf (11), Muslim b. al-Walid and Baššār (12 each), and you get the impression that Abū Tammām was in fact regarded as one of the most important *ḡazal* poets. This impression is very well corroborated by other anthologies as e.g. the section about love poetry in the *Nihāyat al-'Adab* of an-Nuwayrī and others.

¹ *Dīwān 'Abī Tammām, bi-šarḥ al-Ḥaṭīb at-Tibrizī*. Ed. Muḥammad 'Abduh 'Azzām. 4 vols. Cairo 1957-65. The *ḡazal* section comprises poems nos. 210-341 in vol. 4 (pp. 147-295).

² Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣfahānī: *Kitāb az-Zahra*. The first half. Ed. A.R. Nykl. Chicago 1932.

As there can be no doubt about the general importance of Abū Tammām's love poetry, we have to ask a more important question: Is Abū Tammām's contribution to love poetry only of quantitative importance, or does he contribute more essentially to the development of the genre? This question is not so easy to answer, because our knowledge about post-Abū Nuwāsian Arabic love poetry is extremely poor.

The first thing we will do in order to answer this question is to try to work out a classification of different subgenres of *ġazal* poetry. The most promising way to get there is to start with formal, i.e. linguistic, criteria. Having done this, by applying semantic criteria in a second step we can establish five categories of love poems.

In the first step, we will sort the poems according to the *dramatis personae*. The main difference here is whether the poet speaks *to* somebody or *about* somebody or something. If he speaks *to* somebody, the poem will be focused on the second person. If he speaks *about* somebody or something, we can again distinguish two cases: If he speaks about himself (or better: the "lyrical I"), the poem is focused on the first person. If he speaks about somebody else (namely about his beloved) or about events etc., the poem will be focused on the third person. So, our first criterion of classification will be if a poem is focused on the first, second, or third person. This is not only a universal criterion by which every act of speech can be classified, but also turns out to be a fruitful classification of *ġazal* poems, because the structuring of a poem as focused on the first, second, or third person involves a number of consequences with respect to content, so that this in turn facilitates a further classification on semantic lines.

We will start with poems where there is an addressee in the second person. This addressee is, of course, the beloved. The lover usually presents himself in the first person singular, very rarely in the third person, speaking about himself e.g. as "a slave, he who feels this and that." A typical example is *dīwān* no. 333:

- 1 *riqqa lahū 'in kunta mawlāhū*
wa-rḥam fa-qad 'ašmatta 'a'dāhū
- 2 *waylun lahū 'in dāma hādā bihī*
min ḥuraqin tuqliqu 'aḥšāhū
- 3 *yā ḡuṣna bānin nā'imin qadduhū*
fawqa naqan yahtazzu 'a'lāhū
- 4 *mana'ta 'aynayya laḍīda l-karā*
'aḥsin kamā ḥassanaka l-lāhū

- 1 Have compassion for him, if you are his patron, and show mercy to him, because you have already made his enemies feel malicious joy.
- 2 Woe to him, if this state lasts in him, because of the burnings that trouble his viscera!

- 3 Oh twig of a moringa tree of tender growth, upon a sandhill, (oh twig,) of which the upper part sways,
- 4 you deprived my eyes of pleasant slumber—so do good to me just as God made you good.

In this poem, the lover introduces himself in the third person (lines 1 and 2) but refers to himself in the first person in line 4. The beloved is addressed by means of the imperative and the second person singular. The poem contains most of the themes which are characteristic of Arabic *ġazal* poetry. The beauty of the beloved is mentioned in line 3 by the conventional picture of the moringa tree swaying upon a sandhill. This beautiful person is loved by the lyrical I, who becomes in consequence of this love the slave of his beloved, who in turn is now his master, *mawlā*. But he is a tyrannical master, who shows no mercy with his slave, which simply means that he does not reply to his love. Therefore the lover has to suffer. In other poems he weeps blood and tears and becomes emaciated; here he feels a burning in his intestines and suffers sleeplessness. The people who put obstructions in the lover's way (enemies, slanderers, guardians) are also present in this poem (line 1).

These are in fact the main themes of the Arabic *ġazal* in general. Only the motive of separation is absent here, and this is one of the main differences between second person focused poems and those focused on the first person and, of course, the kind of love relation depicted in the *nasīb* of the *qaṣīda*. In the second person poems, the beloved is not unattainable in principle. He is simply not, or not yet, willing. But the lover hopes that this will change, and this is exactly the situation depicted in this group of poems. What the situation reveals is that the lover is *courting* the beloved. So we will call this group "courting poems."

The courting is not always overt and explicit. Some, or perhaps even the majority, of these poems simply depict the beauty of the beloved and/or the sufferings of the lover caused by the reluctance of the beloved. But the overall situation remains the same.

There are very few *ġazal* poems by Abū Tammām, where the poet addresses somebody, which cannot be labelled as courting poems. For example, there are two poems where the poet informs his ex-beloved that he has found consolation in a new love (nos. 211, 243). We will call this category "message poems."

As equally important as the courting poems are poems which are focused on the third person. Here the beloved is mentioned in the third person. The lover is either completely absent or speaks about himself in the first person, but the main focus is not on the lyrical I, but on the things he is reporting. We can call these poems "report poems." Taking a closer look at the

content, we can discern two types of report poems: the first type, which I shall call "description," is focused on the person of the beloved. It depicts his beauty and his character and the effect this has on the lover. Sometimes even the hope of *wiṣāl* is mentioned, which lends this kind of report poems a certain resemblance to the courting poems. A relatively prominent role is further given to the disturbers of the love, the *šāmitūn*, *ruqabā'*, *'a'ādī*, etc. An example from the *dīwān* of Abū Tammām is no. 233:

- 1 *qamarun tabassama 'an ġumānin nābitī*
fa-ḡaliltu 'armuquhū bi-'ayni l-bāhitī
- 2 *mā zāla yaqṣuru kullu ḡusnin dūnahū*
hattā tafāwata 'an ṣifāti n-nā'itī
- 3 *saḡada l-ḡamālu li-waḡhihī lammā ra'ā*
dahaša l-'uqūli li-ḡusnihī l-mutaḡawitī
- 4 *'innī la-'arḡū 'an 'anāla wiṣālahū*
bi-l-'atfi minhu wa-raḡma 'anfi š-šāmitī

- 1 A moon who smiles from between sprouting pearls: I kept looking at him with the eye of one perplexed.
- 2 Every beauty was always outstripped by him, so that he far surpassed the attributes of anyone who wanted to describe him.
- 3 Beauty prostrated itself before his face when it saw the perplexity of the minds brought on by his outstanding beauty.
- 4 In fact, I hope that I will obtain union with him and meet with affection from him, despite the disdain of the malicious.

The report poems of the second group do not discuss the permanent traits of the beloved or the current state of a love affair, but depict one particular event. I shall call them "event report" poems. This group plays only a minor role in Abū Tammām's *dīwān*. His event report poems treat such themes as the pleasures of a night of love (no. 247), the effects of a fever that befell the beloved (no. 250), the consolation the poet found in a new love (no. 292), a flirtation scene (no. 322), a *ḡayāl* from the beloved (no. 312), the "love-apple" (no. 337),³ etc. In poem no. 254, Abū Tammām depicts a bathing scene:

- 1 *yā samiyya n-nabiyyi fī sūrati l-ḡin-*
-ni wa-yā tāniya l-'azīzi bi-Miṣrī
- 2 *tarakat laylatu š-Ṣarāti bi-qalbī*
ḡamra šawqin 'aḡarra min kulli ḡamrī
- 3 *bāšara l-mā'a fa-hwa fī riqqati š-šan-*
-'ati ka-l-mā'i ḡayra 'an laysa yaḡrī
- 4 *ḡamaša l-mā'u ḡildahū r-raṡba hattā*
ḡiltuhū lābisan ḡilālata ḡamrī⁴

³ On this motive cf. E. Wagner: *Abū Nuwās. Eine Studie zur arabischen Literatur der frühen 'Abbasidenzeit*. Wiesbaden 1965, p. 326 f.

⁴ The first line of the poem is mentioned in M. b. Yahyā aṣ-Ṣūlī: *'Aḡbār 'Abī Tammām*.

- 1 O namesake of the prophet in the *Sūrat al-Ġinn*, O you second only to the mighty one in Egypt:⁵
- 2 The night at the channel aṣ-Ṣarāt has left in my heart embers of desire hotter than any embers.
- 3 The water touched his skin, and he was himself, in the delicateness of his physique, like water, although he did not flow.
- 4 The water made smooth his moist skin, so that I believed that he wore a robe of embers.

In the last category, poems which are focused on the first person, the poet talks about his personal feelings, depicts his griefs and sorrows, his weeping and his sufferings caused by the turning away of or the separation from the beloved. In this context, the beloved may be mentioned (in the third person), but he is mentioned only *en passant* as the cause of the poet's suffering. Some of these poems contain general reflections about the nature of love, separation etc. Poems where there is no beloved who is attainable bear a strong resemblance to the *nasīb* of *qaṣīdas*. We will call these poems "love-complaint" or simply "complaint poems." Among them is one of the most famous and most popular poems of Abū Tammām (no. 303):

- 1 *al-baynu ġarra'anī naqī'a l-ħanzalī*
wa-l-baynu 'aṭkalanī wa-'in lam 'aṭkalī
- 2 *mā ħasratī 'an kidtu 'aqdī 'innamā*
ħasarātu naḡsī 'annanī lam 'af'alī
- 3 *naqqil fu'ādaka ħaytu šī'ta mina l-hawā*
mā l-ħubbu 'illā li-l-ħabībī l-'awwalī
- 4 *kam manzilin fī l-'arḡi ya'lafuhū l-fatā*
wa-ħanīnuhū 'abadan li-'awwalī manzilī

- 1 Separation had made me swallow the juice of colocynths, and separation has made me bereft of a son though I did not lose a son.
- 2 My grief is not because I was on the verge of dying—no, the grief of my soul is because I did not do it.
- 3 Turn your heart in love wherever you want to, there is no love save for one's first love.
- 4 No matter how many abodes on earth a man may become acquainted with—his yearning is always for his first abode.

Now, what is special about Abū Tammām? One can still hear the view that Arabic poetry is conservative and conventional and displays hardly any

Ed. Ḥalīl M. 'Asākir et al. Beirut n.d., p. 165. In Ibn 'Abdrabbih: *al-'Iqd al-Farīd* (Ed. A. Amin et al., Beirut 1991, VI 184) the fourth line is attributed to Mānī al-Muwaswis in the course of a story concerning him and Abū Tammām which, however, does not fit the rest of the poem.

⁵ This line mentions the name of the beloved, namely 'Abdallāh, in an enigmatic form (cf. also poem no. 235, line 1). The reference is to Q 72/19: *lammā qāma 'Abdullāhi yad'ūhu*.—The "mighty one in Egypt" is Yūsuf who is called 'azīz several times in *Sūrat Yūsuf*. Yūsuf represents the ideal of male beauty (cf. again poem no. 235, line 2).

development. So we can read in Blachère's *ġazal*-article in the *EI* that in the time of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī "the only developments to be found (in love poetry, T.B.) are confined in fact to the *nasīb*s prefacing *kašīdas*."⁶ What I want to say is that exactly the opposite is true.

As is reported in the *'Aḥbār 'Abī Tammām*, Abū Tammām considered Abū Nuwās as his predecessor.⁷ However, even if Abū Tammām's own statement had not been transmitted, we could easily discover this relationship. Abū Tammām's *ġazal* is in every respect a continuation of the *ġazal* of Abū Nuwās, and there are some poems of Abū Tammām which are nothing but a reformulation of poems of Abū Nuwās.⁸ Further, Abū Nuwās was only 40 years older than Abū Tammām, and there was obviously at that time no *ġazal* poet of greater importance. However, Abū Tammām did not simply continue to do what Abū Nuwās did, but in fact brought about a number of changes, by which he adapted the genre to the new tastes of his time, thus contributing to the development of the 'Abbāsīd *ġazal*. This can be shown by some statistical examinations.

One of the most striking differences between both poets concerns the length of their love poems.⁹

number of lines	number of poems	
	Abū Nuwās	Abū Tammām
2-3	30 (13%)	19 (14%)
4	60 (25%)	73 (55%)
5-6	74 (31%)	34 (26%)
7-8	37 (15%)	6 (5%)
9-36	39 (16%)	—
average length:	6,4 lines	4,3 lines

The proportion of two and three liners and again that of five and six liners is nearly identical for both poets. But whereas a length of seven or eight

⁶ R. Blachère: Art. *Ġazal* in *EI*², II, 1032 b.

⁷ Cf. aṣ-Ṣūlī: *'Aḥbār 'Abī Tammām*, p. 173.

⁸ Cf. e.g. poem no. 235 and *Der Dīwān des Abū Nuwās. Teil IV*. Ed. G. Schoeler. Wiesbaden 1982, p. 163 (poem no. 25).

⁹ In order to minimize the portion of non original poems in the *dīwān* of Abū Nuwās, only those pieces have been taken into account which are transmitted in both the recensions of Ḥamza and aṣ-Ṣūlī. On the problem of authenticity in the case of Abū Nuwās, cf. G. Schoeler: Ein echtes und ein untergeschobenes Liebesgedicht im *Dīwān* des Abū Nuwās. In: *Kaškūl. Festschrift zum 25. Jahrestag der Wiederbegründung des Instituts für Orientalistik an der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen*. Ed. by E. Wagner and K. Röhrborn. Wiesbaden 1989, S. 125-140.

lines was quite normal for Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām's poems exceeded six lines only very rarely. Above all, Abū Tammām did not compose a *ġazal* poem which exceeds eight lines, whereas Abū Nuwās composed quite a number of love poems which are at times as long as 36 lines. However, the most striking fact is Abū Tammām's concentration on poems of exactly four lines. More than half of his *ġazal* poems measure exactly four lines, so that the four liner, already common yet not outstandingly represented in Abū Nuwās, starts to become a distinct formal type of *ġazal* poem with Abū Tammām.

The differences do not only concern the length of the poems, but also their structure. If we consider only the four liners, we see that Abū Nuwās tends to build with two blocks, each comprising two lines. Often, these two blocks are semantically only loosely connected, if at all. In some of his four liners, there is no discernable structure whatsoever. The four lines are relatively independent and do not show any clear pattern of construction.

Abū Tammām also uses the 2 + 2 structure, which is the predominant form in the four liners of Abū Nuwās, but succeeds in transforming this rather monotonous structure into a pattern which reveals a clear development. We can see this in three of our sample poems, e.g. in no. 303: the poem is divided into two sections, each comprising two lines. The first section tells us about the poet's grief, the second gives a general, impersonal moral. So far the poem seems to be in accordance with the simple 2 + 2 structure known from Abū Nuwās. But the structure here is more subtle. Whereas in the second section (lines 3-4) there is no semantic caesura, the first section is again divided into two parts: the first line gives the reason for the poet's grief (the *bayn*) and what it has done to him, the second line talks more generally about the poet's feelings. Thus we get a 1 + 1 + 2 structure. But again, the pattern is a second time applied to this first section. Whereas line 2 consists of a single sentence and a single idea, line 1 is again binarily divided: two effects of the *bayn* are mentioned, each confined to one hemistich, each hemistich starting with the word *bayn*. So the structure of the poem is not simply 2 + 2, but in fact 1/2 + 1/2 + 1 + 2, and so expresses a continually rising development and a well constructed climax. The same structure is applied in our sample poems no. 333 and 254. In total, more than half of Abū Tammām's 2 + 2 poems show this sophisticated structure which is virtually unknown to Abū Nuwās.

Of course, this structure is especially efficient in poems with *taṣrīʿ* (no. 254 being one of the rare exceptions), but here again we notice a great difference between our two poets: only 50% of the four liners of Abū Nuwās start with a line with double rhyme, whereas 70% of Abū Tammām's four liners do so.

Another important way of constructing a four line poem can be seen in

no. 233. Here, the opening line gives a pregnant resumé of the main theme, which is then expressed in more detail in lines 2-3. One can often compare this relation between line 1 on the one hand and lines 2-3 on the other to the musical structure of exposition and development. Line 4 is then consequently the recapitulation, which refers back to the opening theme. This is by chance not the case in our sample poem, but even here the structure, which one may call the "frame-structure," is clearly discernable: the opening and closing lines form a kind of "frame," into which the two middle lines are embedded. About one third of all *ġazal* four liners of Abū Tammām follow this structure, which is comparatively rarely encountered in the *dīwān* of Abū Nuwās, where it often seems to come about purely accidentally.

So we can see that the love poems of Abū Tammām are much more carefully structured and elaborated on more cautiously than those of Abū Nuwās. A thematical development is related to this formal development. Taking again the four line poems, we now look to the following figure:

	Abū Nuwās	Abū Tammām
description	20%	21%
event report	27%	19%
courting	27%	36%
message	16%	5%
complaint	11%	19%

While the percentage of "description poems" is nearly the same for both authors, the genres "event report" and "message" play a considerably smaller role in the *ġazal* of Abū Tammām, whereas the "courting poem" and the "complaint" are much more important. Now, the two genres "event report" and "message" are the most private, the most individual and of least interest to the general public. This is confirmed by the striking fact that only 50% of Abū Tammām's "report poems" start with a line with *taṣrīʿ*, whereas more than 80% of his "courting" and "complaint poems" do. The two genres "event report" and "message," taken together, comprise 43% of Abū Nuwās's *ġazal* four liners, that is, nearly half of them, whereas in the *dīwān* of Abū Tammām they represent only 24%, that is, less than a fourth.

This statistical analysis is corroborated by a careful reading of the poems themselves. Abū Tammām's *ġazal* is more serious, more carefully constructed, less witty and light-minded than that of Abū Nuwās, and it is never frivolous. Abū Tammām's *ġazal* is also not entirely pessimistic in tone, and he knows how to describe the hopes and pleasures of love. But, nevertheless, for Abū Tammām love is a serious thing, which deserves serious, sophisticated poems.

In the generations following Abū Tammām, love poetry was far from becoming uniform. The example of Abū Nuwās as well as of others were followed, and new patterns emerged. Among those who helped shape the models was Abū Tammām. This can be shown by a glance at the poetry of Ḥālid al-Kātib, whose *dīwān* has recently been published and commented on by Albert Arazi.¹⁰ Ḥālid was approximately contemporary with Abū Tammām, yet died more than thirty years later. Though some influence of Ḥālid on Abū Tammām cannot altogether be ruled out, the reverse seems far more probable. In fact, the *ġazal* poems of the three poets Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām and Ḥālid form a continuous line: all the developments that one can discern between Abū Nuwās and Abū Tammām are continued by Ḥālid. This starts with the percentage of the *mudakkarāt*, about 60% with Abū Nuwās, which reaches 90% with Abū Tammām and 100% with Ḥālid. The percentage of four liners increases from 25% with Abū Nuwās, over 55% with Abū Tammām to nearly 100% with Ḥālid. Ḥālid's tone is more serious yet than that of Abū Tammām. Ḥālid completely ceased giving narratives. His main genres were the "courting" and the "complaint" poem, and, besides that, there are no witty *ġazal* poems at all in his *dīwān*. Ḥālid is, as far as we can see, an extreme poet. But his extremism is in all probability based on the achievements of Abū Tammām, who in this way may be regarded as the "missing link" between Abū Nuwās and Ḥālid.

Of course, the Arabs did not cease to compose witty and frivolous poems, because people have always liked and still like to have fun. Nor was the line of development from Abū Nuwās via Abū Tammām to Ḥālid the only one. But Abū Tammām enabled and enforced one branch of Arabic love poetry, which used to be called "courtly," but which should rather be called "devotional," to be realized in an unprecedented pure form by Ḥālid. This had tremendous consequences for all Arabic—and of course Persian—*ġazal* poetry. There is every reason to believe that Abū Tammām played a crucial, not yet fully appreciated role in this development.

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¹⁰ Albert Arazi: *Amour divin et amour profane dans l'Islam médiéval. A travers le Dīwān de Khālid Al-Kātib*. Paris 1990.