

YOURI VOLOKHINE, BRUCE FUDGE
& THOMAS HERZOG (éds)

avec la collaboration de Zina Maleh

BARBE ET BARBUS
SYMBOLIQUES, RITES
ET PRATIQUES DU PORT
DE LA BARBE DANS
LE PROCHE-ORIENT
ANCIEN ET MODERNE



PETER LANG

Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • New York • Oxford • Wien

Information bibliographique publiée par «Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek»
«Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek» répertorie cette publication dans la «Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie»; les données bibliographiques détaillées sont
disponibles sur Internet sous <<http://dnb.d-nb.de>>.

ISSN 2296-8628 • ISBN 978-3-0343-3611-6 (Print)
E-ISBN 978-3-0343-3762-5 (E-PDF) • E-ISBN 978-3-0343-3763-2 (EPUB)
E-ISBN 978-3-0343-3764-9 (MOBI) • DOI 10.3726/b15078

Cette publication a fait l'objet d'une évaluation par les pairs.

© Peter Lang SA
Editions scientifiques internationales
Bern 2019
Tous droits réservés.

Cette publication est protégée dans sa totalité par copyright.
Toute utilisation en dehors des strictes limites de la loi
sur le copyright est interdite et punissable sans le consentement
explicite de la maison d'édition. Ceci s'applique en particulier pour
les reproductions, traductions, microfilms, ainsi que le stockage
et le traitement sous forme électronique.

Printed in Germany

www.peterlang.com

Table des matières

YOURI VOLOKHINE

Introduction.....	7
-------------------	---

I. Mésopotamie. Monstres velus et rites pileux

MARGARET JAKES

Monstres velus, monstres hideux en Mésopotamie	17
--	----

ANNE-CAROLINE RENDU LOISEL

Poils et poilus des rituels dans l'ancienne Mésopotamie.....	37
--	----

II. Egypte. Barbes et postiches chez les dieux et les hommes

RUNE NYORD

The Divine Beard in Ancient Egyptian Religious Texts.....	47
---	----

YOURI VOLOKHINE

Barbe et barbus en Egypte ancienne	59
--	----

III. Un regard vers le monde hittite

ALICE MOUTON

Beard and Hair in Hittite Religious Texts.....	91
--	----

IV. Monde arabo-islamique.

De la barbe du Prophète à la barbe des hommes

BRUCE FUDGE

The Beards of the Ancestors: From the Prophet's Companions to the "Islamic State"	103
---	-----

CHRISTIAN LANGE

Beards of Paradise: Hair in the Muslim Eschaton	119
---	-----

THOMAS BAUER

Ambivalent Beauty: The beard in classical Arabic love poetry.....	131
---	-----

THOMAS HERZOG

Beards and Hair of *Sūfī*-dervishes: A *Skandalon* for Spiritual and Social Order.....143

SILVIA NAEF

La barbe du Prophète : insigne de pouvoir et objet de vénération.....157

PETER DOVÉ

Barbe et barbus dans la littérature syrienne contemporaine :

Junūd Allāh [Soldats de Dieu] de Fawwāz Ḥaddād et *al-Liḥā*

[Les barbes] de Zakariyyā Tāmīr.....169

V. Une incursion dans le monde juif

MISGAV HAR-PELED

« La gloire du visage » : masculinité, féminité et symbolisme de la barbe dans la littérature talmudique.....177

Les auteurs189

Ambivalent Beauty: The beard in classical Arabic love poetry

Abstract: The growth of a beard meant a drastic change in status for every male, especially as far as his role in love relations is concerned. Until the age of eighteen to twenty, boys were expected to fulfill the role of the “beloved.” The growth of a beard demanded their abandonment of the passive role and their entry into the sexual world of the adult male. Reality, however, not always proved to be so easy. A love relation between a youth of eighteen years and an older lover involved a great deal of emotional engagement that could not be so easily given up when the beard of the beloved started to grow. This conflict is reflected in epigrams in which the poet excuses himself for not giving up his love to a youth who has already grown a full beard. In many other poems, however, the growing beard is depicted simply as a feature of beauty. From the beginning of the 9th century onwards, poets composed beard-epigrams by the thousands. Our focus will be an anthology by the Cairene author an-Nawāḥī (1386–1455) comprising about five hundred epigrams of this kind.

Introduction

There are not many poems on beards in European literatures. There are, however, thousands of them in Arabic literature, composed over more than a thousand years between about 800 and 1850. There are even whole books dedicated to epigrams about beards. The most famous of them bears the title *Khal' al-'idhār fī waṣf al-'idhār* “Throwing off all restraint in describing the sprouting beard”. Its author is the Egyptian

poet and anthologist Shams ad-Dīn an-Nawāḥī (c. 788–859/c. 1386–1455).¹ Most examples quoted in the following are taken from this book, though I could have tapped dozens of other sources. The abundance of beard-poems in Arabic deserves an explanation. I will try to give one under the following nine headings.

The Beard as a Marker of Age

In Middle Eastern societies, the beard was the main marker of age for a man. His beard was the text from which other people could read his age. His hair was of much less importance. Most of the time headgear covered it in public anyway. And when a man lost the hair on his head, his beard remained. Hair loss, which causes so much worry to people today, was not a major theme in Arabic literature. The greying of one's beard was.²

The state of being bearded marked the two most important periods of transition in a man's life. The growth of a beard signaled the end of youth and the beginning of adulthood. When the beard became grey or white (the Arabic word *shayb* tends to designate whiteness), it was a signal that old age had begun.

Both processes—the growth of a beard and its turning grey—do not happen suddenly but

1. The work was edited in 2010 on the basis of two manuscripts in which a number of poems are missing. Therefore, I have also referred to the Munich manuscript of the work, which is more complete and often has better readings. I quote in the following way: *Khal' Ed.* for the edition, and *Khal' Ms.* for the manuscript = ms. Munich cod. ar. 598 (see bibliogra-

phy for both). On an-Nawāḥī, see BAUER 2009.

2. There are a number of Arabic literary texts, mostly epigrams, on the greying of the beard, on dyeing it with henna and other beard-related topics. The present article, however, will focus entirely on the beard in love poetry (*ghazal*).

take place over a longer period of transition. Age as measured by the state of one's beard is thus highly ambiguous; a fact that Arabic authors exploited frequently.

The beardless boy or youth is called *amrad* (pl. *murd*). One starts growing a beard at the age of about 14 to 18 with the growth of the moustache. In Arabic, the moustache is called *shārib* "the drinker". The color of the sprouting moustache was perceived as *akhḍar* "green"; *ikhḍarra shāribuhū* "his moustache became green" is the common expression for the first appearance of the moustache. The first growth of the moustache is followed by the sprouting of hair on the cheeks. This is called *'idhār*. Its primary meaning is "cheekpiece (of a horse's bridle)", hence the phrase *khal' al-'idhār* "removing the bridle" means "throwing off all restraint". The word then became a designation for the "cheek" in general, but its use in the sense of the sprouting beard came to predominate. It is the most common word for it in our poems, as shown already by the title of an-Nawājī's book. The normal word for the full-grown beard is *lihya* (pl. *liḥan*, less frequently *luḥan*). The verb *iltahā* is the normal word for "growing a beard".³ Unsurprisingly, there are many other words for beards in Arabic, but it might suffice to mention the word *dhaqaṇ*, which both designates the chin and the hair that grows there.⁴

In one of his strophic poems, Fakhr ad-Dīn Ibn Makānis (745–794/1344–1392) displays his love for women and men of all ages. The verses are, of course, licentious and mock social norms. In doing so, they very vividly portray all stages of aging that can be read from looking at a person's beard. The poet starts by mentioning women, who are not differentiated by their age. Men, on the other hand, are classified according to their beards as beardless boys and those who can grow beards, starting with the tender downy beard of youth that turns into a black beard until grey hairs appear among the black. This stage of

a beard is called *zurzūrī* after the black and white plumage of the starling (*zurzūr*). The final stage is the white beard, here compared to camphor:⁵

إني أهيئ بالنيسا كالحوري والمزرد والمعدر الطير
والأسود اللحية والزُرْزُوري والشيخ رب العارض الكافوري

I passionately love women who resemble the Houris of paradise, and beardless boys and men with tender downy beards,

And also those with black (full-grown) beards, those with starling-colored ones, and old men with cheeks the color of camphor.

The Beard as a Marker of Gender

Since medicine and the biological sciences acquired discursive priority in the fields of sex and gender, the category of biological sex has moved to the foreground. In earlier times, both in the West and in the Middle East, people inhabited gender categories for which biological sex—though of primary importance—was just one variable among others. Most importantly, until recently biological sex was seen as exclusively binary in modern societies. Anything that contradicted the dichotomy of male vs. female was considered defective. The category of gender is more ambiguous. It allows for a number of intermediary phenomena, such as intersex (*khunthā*), effeminates (*mukhannathūn*), eunuchs, hijras, the Afghan *bacha posh* and the Albanian *virgjinesha*, and others. The gender category of 'man' is the focus of all patriarchal gender projections. It is not a binary category, but a continuous line from 'non-man', through several degrees of 'partly man' to 'real man'. Age plays a role. A boy is born with male sex, but he still has to *become* a man. The most important sign of having acquired the status of a 'real' man is growing a full beard.

Acquiring the status of adult male had a number of social consequences. It even had consequences

3. See, with many examples, WKAS II, 2, p. 400, 408–417.

4. Other common words for beards or parts of them are *'uthnūn*, *sabala*, *'anfaqa*, and *musāl*. In a few of

an-Nawājī's epigrams the word *nikrīsh* (Persian *nīk* "beautiful" + *rīsh* "beard") occurs.

5. *Khal'* Ed. 242b = *Khal'* Ms. 35b (part of a *muwashshah*, meter *rajaz*).

for love and sexuality. A fully-grown man was expected to fill the role of active lover. He was the lover, everyone else the beloved. As far as the sexual act is concerned, he was the penetrator, who did not question his male gender role even when he penetrated other males (sinful though this act may be). Being penetrated himself (being a *ma'būn*) would, however, have strongly endangered his position as a 'real' male and moved him further toward the female pole of the gender continuum. Again, the modern binary categories of hetero- vs. homosexuality are not applicable.⁶

Beard, Love and Sexuality

In the domains of love and sexuality, the categories of age and gender are crucial. Gender and age are perhaps the most decisive determinants of how love relations are perceived. In Middle Eastern societies this meant (religious norms notwithstanding) that not only did love relations between men and women accord with gender norms, but that this was also the case of love relations between men and male youths who were not yet considered 'men' in the full gender-sense of the word. As a consequence, homoerotic relations were widely tolerated so long as the gender difference was maintained, and homoerotic poetry came to form a large part of love poetry in Arabic, Persian and other Islamicate languages.⁷ Nevertheless, the bulk of these poems revolve around love relations in which the gender difference is not strictly maintained, which is one reason for the obsession with beards in Arabic love poetry. Even if one assumes an age difference between the lover and the beloved in most cases, quite often the beloved seems to be rather close to the 'real-man' end of the scale.

Given the gender model as exemplified so far, it would mean that a male-male love relationship was acceptable so long as the beloved had not yet grown a mature beard. In turn, the growth of the beloved's beard would necessitate the termination of the love affair. And indeed there are poems *fī dhamm al-'idhār* "against sprouting beards" that point in this direction, such as the following, which exploits the double meaning of *shārib* as "drinker" and as "moustache". The speaker used to drink the beloved's saliva instead of wine (to which saliva is often compared). He considered this drink as permissible, since it does not violate the Islamic prohibition of wine. After the beloved grew a moustache, however, kissing him was no longer unproblematic. Therefore, the "moustache" is what prevented him from drinking the wine-like saliva. Taking into account the secondary meanings of the words, we get the paradoxical expression: "the drinker prohibited the wine".⁸

تَعَوَّضْتُ عَنْ شَرْبِ الْخُمَيَّا بِرَيْقِهِ فَلَمَّا أَلْتَحَى أَصْبَحْتُ مِمَّنْ يُجَانِبُهُ
وَكُنْتُ أَرَى ذَاكَ الشَّرَابَ بَعِينَهُ حَلَالاً إِلَى أَنْ حَرَّمَ الْخَمْرَ شَارِبُهُ

I used to take his saliva as substitute for drinking wine, but after he grew a beard, I joined those who keep their distance.

I had always considered this drink specifically to be permitted until his moustache prohibited [also this kind of] the wine (= until the drinker forbade the wine).

Whereas the restraints caused by the beloved's beard are a common subject of love poetry, we hear much less about those caused by the beard of the lover, the role always adopted by the poet. But they do exist, and again they are determined by the beard. This time, it is the grey beard that ultimately brings about an end to the love affair – any love affair, since older men are not supposed to indulge in love affairs but to be patriarchs of

6. During the last decades, scholars have published a large number of studies on issues of sex and gender. However, scholars of Islamicate histories and literatures are only gradually starting to consider their results. Among the more important studies relevant to this article are the following: ROWSON 1991 (on the *mukhannathūn*); SANDERS 1991 (on the *khunthā*); EL-ROUAYHEB 2005; MASSAD 2007; KLAUDA 2008; BAUER 2011, p. 268–311; GUGLER 2014 (see also

Voss 2014 in the same volume on general issues with references to further relevant studies).

7. See BAUER 2014a (also of relevance is ARVAS 2014 in the same volume, p. 145–163); BAUER 1998; BAUER & NEUWIRTH (2005); NEUWIRTH (*et alii*) (2006).

8. *Khal' Ed.* 245a = *Khal' Ms.* 37a (meter *ṭawīl*). – Text follows *Khal' Ms.*; *Khal' Ed.* reads *ujānibuh* instead of *yujānibuh*.

their family and content with their wives and concubines. In general, many homoerotic love affairs depicted in so many Arabic love poems may be considered juvenile affairs in which the lover is not much older than the beloved. When the phase of *ṣibā*, the folly of youth, is over, love is a danger and a malady. An anonymous poet illustrates a worst-case scenario:⁹

غَيَّرْنَا يَدُ الْمُدُونِ بَعْدَ مَا شَبِثْتُ وَالْتَحَى
فَأَسْتَحَالَ الضُّحَى دُجًى وَأَسْتَحَالَ الدُّجَى ضُحًى

The hand of fate has changed us now that I've turned
grey and he's grown a beard.

Darkness has taken the place of the forenoon and the
forenoon has taken the place of darkness.

Whereas a beard ("darkness") now covers the formerly forenoon-like bright face of the beloved, the dark beard of the lover "is transformed to forenoon" itself. In one case, forenoon is a good thing, darkness a bad one. In the other case, the reverse is true.

Apologies

Verses bemoaning love affairs that have ended as a consequence of the beloved's growing a beard are the rarest of all in love poems about beards. If my impression is correct, they are more common in the early development of homoerotic Arabic love poetry and almost disappear in later periods. From the very beginning, poems that I call 'apologetic beard epigrams' or poems that simply celebrate the beard's beauty are more common by far.¹⁰

The apologetic beard epigram, in which the poet defends his continued love affair with a young man who has already grown a beard, has a history that stretches back to antiquity. In the "Greek Anthology", we find a poem by Straton of Sardis (2nd century CE), in which he apologizes

for persisting in his love of a boy whose beard has already begun to sprout. In Paton's translation:

"Even though the invading down and the delicate auburn curls of thy temples have leapt upon thee, that does not make me shun my beloved, but his beauty is mine, even if there be a beard and hairs."¹¹

In Arabic poems from the early 9th century, the line of argument is similar: Despite the beloved's beard, he is still beautiful and loveable.¹² Very soon, however, argumentation becomes much more sophisticated and the "despite" transforms into a "because of". Now it is precisely the beard that makes the beloved attractive and loveable. The beard is compared to objects that have a positive or neutral connotation such as perfumes like ambergris, *ghāliya* ("galia moschata") and musk (all of them black in color); flowers like violets and myrtle; the night; the spots on the moon; writing and certain letters that are similar in form; ants; embroidery; polo mallets, and so forth.¹³ In combination with images for other traits of beauty, the poet is able to show that the beard is at least a necessary accessory or even an amplifier of beauty. The stylistic device of *ḥusn at-ta'īl* "phantastic etiology" is the perfect instrument for such an argument. For a millennium, thousands of poems like this were composed, mostly in the form of two-line epigrams. Often the first line mentions those who censure or blame the lover for his relationship whereas the second line gives the vindication. Here two examples may suffice.

Abū l-Faraj Ibn Hindū's (d. 420/1029) starting point is the common comparison of a beautiful person with a gazelle (*ghazāl*), under which category—not altogether correct from a strict zoological point of view—the musk deer also falls. The musk 'gazelle' produces musk; the black beard is compared to musk. Hence the argument of the poet: If the beloved is a gazelle, it is only natural for him to produce musk.¹⁴

9. Khal' Ed. 245a = Khal' Ms. 37a (meter *majzū' al-khafīf*).

10. On the sprouting beard in Arabic love poetry (*ghazal*) of the 9th and 10th century, see BAUER 1998.

11. *Greek Anthology*, p. 286–287.

12. An example by Abū Tammām (d. c. 232/845) is quoted in BAUER 1998, p. 271.

13. See the lists in BAUER 1998, p. 263–265, 275.

14. Khal' Ed. 240a = Khal' Ms. 32b (meter *mukhalla' al-basīf*). Note the *jinās* (speech units—mostly words—of equal or similar sound and/or script with different meanings) between *'ibtum* and *ghibtum* in the first line.

عَابُوهُ لَمَّا أَلْتَحَى فَقُلْنَا عَيْبُكُمْ وَغَيْبُكُمْ عَنِ الْجَمَالِ
هَذَا غَزَالٌ وَلَا عَجِيبٌ تَوْلَدُ الْمِسْكُ فِي الْغَزَالِ

They blamed him after he got a beard, but I replied:
In blaming, you lose sight of beauty!

This is a deer (*ghazāl*) so it should come as no surprise that a deer would produce musk.

In an epigram by Ḥusām al-Maḥallī (d. 629/1231–1232) two additional features of the beloved's beauty and their objects of comparison cooperate in order to produce a phantastic etiology. The red blushing cheeks of the beloved resemble embers, and his mole—an omnipresent feature of beauty¹⁵—is likened to ambergris burnt as incense.¹⁶

قِيلَ لِي مَنْ هُوَ بَدَتْ عَيْنُ الشَّعْرِ بِحَدِيدِهِ قُلْتُ مَا ذَاكَ عَارِءُ
جَمْرَةِ الْخَدِّ أَحْرَقَتْ عَذِيرَ الْخَالِ فَمِنْ ذَلِكَ الدُّخَانِ عَذَارَةٌ

They said to me: "Hair encroaches upon the cheeks of the one whom you love." "This is no disgrace for him," said I.

"His beard is the smoke that rose from the ambergris of his mole when it was burnt in the embers of his cheek."

Countermeasures

Given the fact that a less-than-thick beard was considered a young man's adornment, it is hardly surprising that we only very rarely read about young men who try to hide their beard growth. Occasionally authors write about coquettish youths who try to prolong their appeal to men by manipulating their beard. Sources mention either depilation by plucking and using a depilatory paste (*nūra*) or shaving. When Abū Tammām (d. c. 232/845) learnt that his beloved 'Abdallāh had depilated his

skin by plucking and using *nūra* in order to find a new lover, he became enraged and composed a number of cynical poems that give a rare insight into a failed love affair from the early 9th century.¹⁷

Half a millennium later, al-Wadā'ī (d. 716/1316) appears more tolerant. In an apologetic epigram, he justifies his love for a "plucker" by word play. If the word *nātif*, written *n-ā-t-f*, "plucker" is written backwards, it yields *f-t-ā-n* = *fattān* "enchanting, charming, seducing".¹⁸

تَعَشَّقْتُ ظَبِيًّا نَاعَسَ الْطَرَفَ نَاعِمًا إِلَى أَنْ تَبَدَّى الشَّعْرُ
وَالْعَشَقُ الْوَانُ
وَقَالُوا أَفَقَ مِنْ حُبِّهِ فَهُوَ نَاتِفٌ فَقُلْتُ عَكْسُكُمْ إِنَّمَا هُوَ فَتَّانٌ

I fell in love with a tender gazelle with a drowsy glance until the hair (of the beard) appeared – love takes many forms!¹⁹

People said: "Snap out of your love for him! He is a plucker! (*nātif*)" "You've inverted (the word)," I replied. "He is charming (*fattān*)!"

Depilating is not a permanent solution, however. When the beard grows too dense, shaving (*ḥalq*) is the last resort, as we learn from the following anonymous epigram. Its punchline hinges on the homonymy of the word *mūsā*, which can mean both "razor blade" and "Moses".²⁰

مَا زَالَ يَنْتِفِ رِيحَانًا بِعَارِضِهِ حَتَّى أَسْتَطَالَ عَلَيْهِ صَارَ
يَحِلُّهُ
كَأَنَّمَا طَوَرَ سَيْنَا فَوْقَ وَجْهِهِ مَدَى الزَّمَانِ فَمُوسَى لَا يُفَارِقُهُ

He kept on plucking basil from his cheeks until, when it became too abundant, he started to shave it off.

It is as though Mount Sinai rises on his face all the time. Therefore Moses (= the razor) will never leave it.

15. See TALIB 2013.

16. Anonymous in *Khal' Ed.* 230a = *Khal' Ms.* 18b (meter *khafīf*); for the poet Ḥusām b. Ghuzẓī al-Maḥallī see ŠAFADĪ, *al-Wāfī*, vol. 11, p. 349, where the epigram is also quoted.

17. See BAUER 1998, p. 174–184; *nūra* is mentioned on p. 182.

18. Anonymous in *Khal' Ed.* 243a = *Khal' Ms.* 35b (meter *ṭawīl*), attributed to al-Wadā'ī in ŠAFADĪ, *al-Wāfī* vol. 22, p. 202. – The text follows *Khal' Ms.*; *Khal'*

Ed. reads *wa-sh-shawqu* instead of *wa-l-'ishqu* and *fa-qultu* 'kusūhū instead of *fa-qultu* 'akastum.

19. Allusion to a saying attributed to Socrates: *al-'ishqu junūnun wa-huwa alwānun ka-mā anna l-junūna alwānun* "Love is a kind of madness and has many forms just as madness has many forms", see SARRĀJ, *Maṣāri'*, p. 70, and see WKAS II, 3 1861 a.

20. *Khal' Ed.* 244b = *Khal' Ms.* 36b (meter *basīf*). – Variant readings in *Khal' Ms.*: *staḥāla nabātan* instead of *staṭāla* 'alayhi; *maḍā* instead of *madā*; *wa-mūsā* instead of *fa-mūsā*.

Acclaim

The author of *Khal' al-'idhār* was not only an extraordinarily successful anthologist, but also a first-rank poet himself. Therefore, it is high time to turn our attention to one of an-Nawājī's own poems. In the epigram that shall serve as an example, the poet combines two time-honored comparisons (cheek = rose; beard = sweet basil) to form a *murā'āt an-naẓīr* "harmonious choice of images": A fence of basil protects the rose garden. However, the protection is of no avail.²¹

سَبَّحَ وَرَدَ الْخَدَّيْ رِيحَانُهُ صَوْنًا فَأُضْحِثُ مُهْجَتِي فِي أَنْزَعَا
وَقَمْتُ لِلْخَدَّيْ فَقَبَّلْتُهُ فِي الْحَالِ أَلْفًا وَخَرَقْتُ السِّيَابَ

He fenced the rose-garden of his cheek with basil to protect it, and my heart became agitated.

And so I set forth and kissed his cheek a thousand times right away so that I broke through the fence.

In this epigram, there is no apology whatsoever. The sprouting beard is just another feature that increases the beauty of the beloved. Despite what we have seen of the *dhamm al-'idhār* "dispraise of the sprouting beard" theme and attempts to get rid of one's beard, the overwhelming majority of poems about youths and their beards give a positive image of the beloved's beard. The poet may vindicate his love for a youth whose beard is sprouting, or he may simply praise the perfection the beard lends to the beloved's beauty. This is also true for love poems that do not focus on the subject of the beard. If the beard is mentioned in these poems, it is among other features of beauty and charm, but never in a negative tone.

Whereas one gets the impression that the appreciation of the beloved's beard even increases over the centuries, early representatives of Arabic homoerotic love poetry like Abū Tammām already praised the beard. The famous jurist and

author of a book about love (and legendary lover himself) Ibn Dāwūd az-Zāhirī (255–297/868–910) is one of them. In the following epigram, (dark) beard and (white) cheek are combined in the image of "ants on ivory":²²

أَنْظُرْ إِلَى السِّخْرِ يَجْرِي فِي لَوَاحِظِهِ وَأَنْظُرْ إِلَى دَعِجٍ فِي
طَرَفِهِ السَّاجِي
وَأَنْظُرْ إِلَى شَعْرَاتٍ فَوْقَ عَارِضِهِ كَأَنَّهُنَّ نِمَالٌ دَبَّ فِي عَاجٍ

Look at the magic in his glances and at the darkness in his languid eyes!

And look at the hairs upon his cheek: 'tis as if ants creep across ivory.

The author of the next epigram is Jamāl ad-Dīn Ibn Nubāta (686–768/1287–1366), the most highly acclaimed poet of the Mamluk period. The poet introduces a reluctant beloved, who is adorable even when he mistreats his lover. In line two, the punchline, the beard is mentioned as the only feature of beauty without any hint of apology. As often, it is compared with script. *Khaff*, the Arabic word for "script", even became the ordinary Persian word for the downy beard. Ibn Nubāta, however, is not only talking about script in general, but he also can read the text. The beard's script on the beloved's cheek, as it turns out, is nothing but the first part of the monotheistic Islamic creed substituting "beautiful creature" for "God". A daring play on religious images, as this may seem almost blasphemous to many modern readers, but was quite common in Ibn Nubāta's time:²³

غَزَالٌ رَمَلِي تَحْلُوْ جَنَابَيْتُهُ وَغُصْنٌ بَانٍ يَبْعِسُ مَجْنَاهُ
قَدْ كَتَبَ الْحَسَنُ فَوْقَ وَجْنَتِهِ أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا مَلِيْحَ إِلَّا هُوَ

There is a gazelle from the desert sands – a willow twig hard to harvest (*majnā*); if it wrongs you (*janā*), it tastes sweet.

Beauty has written on his cheeks: "I bear witness: There is no beautiful creature but he".

21. *Khal' Ed.* 225a = *Khal' Ms.* 9a (meter *sarī*); see also BAUER 2009, p. 329.

22. Anonymous in *Khal' Ed.* 233b = *Khal' Ms.* 20b (meter *basīf*). This famous epigram is quoted often in the context of the story of Ibn Dāwūd's death in

consequence of love, see for example SARRĀJ, *Maṣāriḥ*, p. 69; attributed to al-Khubzaruzzī (d. c. 327/938) in SARRĀJ-RAFFĀ, *al-Muḥibb*, vol. 1, p. 48. – In the first hemistich, *Khal' Ed.* reads *min* instead of *fī*.

23. *Khal' Ed.* 226b = *Khal' Ms.* 12b (meter *munsariḥ*).

To sum up, it is obvious that in Arabic poetry written between 800 and 1850 CE by far most references to the beard of a beloved are *in praise* of the beard. Poetry can thus confirm the general observation that the ideal beloved in the societies that produced classical Arabic poetry was older than the beloved in antique Greek societies, whose poets never praised their beloved’s beards. Arabic poets mentioning beloveds of the age of fifteen obviously boast of their youthfulness.²⁴ Beard epigrams foster the impression that an age of fifteen was considered the lower end for starting a love affair and that in most cases the age of the younger partner in most love relations was between sixteen and the early twenties. This is corroborated by the fact that the moustache (*shārib*) is the subject of only comparatively few poems, whereas the beard on the cheeks (*‘idhār*), which starts to grow some time later than the moustache, is clearly the focus of Arabic beard epigrams.

Collections

Chapter title	p. in <i>Khal’ Ed.</i> / fol. in <i>Khal’ Ms.</i>	Σ Epigrams in <i>Khal’ Ms.</i>
<i>fī madḥ al-‘idhār</i> “in praise of the sprouting beard”	220–242 / 1b-35b	454
<i>fī madḥ an-nutafā’ wa-l-ḥulaqā’</i> “in praise of those who pluck and shave (their hair)”	242–243 / 35b-36a	11
<i>fī dhamm al-‘idhār wa-mā fī ma’nāhu</i> “in dispraise of the sprouting beards and similar topics”	243–247 / 36a-40a	50

Once established as a feature of beauty, the sprouting beard was not only a standard topic of love poetry; *littérateurs* even started to grant this topic a chapter of its own in anthologies of love poetry (*ghazal*). The 10th-century poet as-Sarī ar-Raffā’ (d. c. 362/972) is the author of an anthology in four parts entitled *al-Muḥibb wa-l-maḥbūb wa-l-mashmūm wa-l-mashrūb* “The lover and the beloved, what can be smelled and what can be drunk”. Part one and two are dedicated to love poetry, part three to flowers and gardens, part four to wine poetry. The third chapter of the first part,

which deals with the features of beauty of lovable persons, bears the headline *fī madḥ al-‘idhār wa-dhammihī* “on praise and dispraise of the sprouting beard”.²⁵ The chapter comprises 26 poems in praise of the beard and nine in its dispraise.

Skipping almost five hundred years, we arrive at an-Nawājī, who not only dedicated a large chapter of his anthology *Marāṭi’ al-ghizlān* “The Gazelles’ Pastures” to the beard topic but was probably the first to treat the subject in a volume of its own, the *Khal’ al-‘idhār*. This book comprises 515 beard epigrams in the Munich manuscript. Whereas in as-Sarī’s chapter 74% of the poems were already in praise of the beard, the share of pro-beard epigrams rises to 88% with an-Nawājī, whereas the proportion of poems about “dispraise of sprouting beards and similar” drops to less than 10%. The following chart gives the titles of the three chapters in an-Nawājī’s book; the pages in the edition of the *Khal’ al-‘idhār* and the folio numbers in the Munich manuscript; and the number of epigrams in the Munich manuscript:

The popularity of the *Khal’* is attested by the comparatively large number of manuscripts preserved.²⁶ Small wonder that a book of such popularity found its emulators. Perhaps the most important is Badr ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Minhājī, who died around 960/1553²⁷ and authored an anthology that bears a title clearly reminiscent of an-Nawājī’s: *Basṭ al-a’dhār ‘an ḥubb al-‘idhār* “Presenting excuses for the love of the beard”. The book is still in manuscript and deserves further study.²⁸

24. See BAUER 1998, p. 170 with n. 63.
25. SARĪ AR-RAFFĀ’, *al-Muḥibb*, vol.1, p. 41–58.
26. See ‘ABD AL-HĀDĪ 2001, p. 78, where eleven manuscripts are mentioned.

27. GAL II 295, S II 406.
28. El Escóreal Ms. árabe 448.

Special Beards

A few poems are notable for describing beards that were considered unusual or developed in an unusual way. The following poem by Zayn ad-Dīn Ibn al-Kharrāṭ (d. 840/1436) deals with a beard that started to grow in a seemingly ordinary way, but after a while stopped growing further. This phenomenon needed a poetic explanation, and the well-known images of the ants of the beard, the grain of the mole and the fire of the cheeks provide him with the necessary ingredients to construct a phantastic etiology:²⁹

وَقَفَتِ الْعِذَارُ بِخَدِّهِ فَكَأَنَّهُ عَن ذَبِّهِ فِي وَجْنَتَيْهِ يُمْنَعُ
نَمْلٌ يُحَاوِلُ نَقْلَ حَبَّةٍ خَالِهِ فَتَمَسَّهُ نَارُ الْخُدُودِ فَيَرْجِعُ

The beard stopped growing on his cheeks as if something had hindered it from creeping forward:

When ants tried to carry away the grain of his mole, the fire of his cheeks stung them and they withdrew.

In the Middle East, a blond beard is no doubt uncommon. The polymath aṣ-Ṣafadī (696–764/1297–1363) composed an epigram on a youth growing a blond beard. The epigram falls into the category of apologetic epigrams. This time, however, it is not the fact of the beloved growing a beard but the blondness of the beard that seems to need some sort of justification:³⁰

وَلَرُبَّ أَشَقَرٍ قَالَ ذَبْتُ عِذَارَهُ يَا عَاشِقِيهِ لَيْسَ شَقْرَتُهُ عَجَبٌ
أَيَكُونُ طَرَسُ الْخَدِّ مِنْ بَاقُوْتِهِ وَيَخْطُ فِيهِ الْخُسْنُ إِلَّا بِالذَّهَبِ

The herbs of the sprouting beard on the cheeks of a blond youth say: Oh you, who love him, his blondness is no wonder.

Isn't the paper of his cheek a ruby? Then how else can beauty write upon it if not in gold?

All poems quoted in this article with the exception of the first belong to the genre of love poetry

(*ghazal*). The first one and the next one we will cite represent the *mujūn* genre that comprises poems in which the poet boasts of violating social, legal or religious norms, indulges in sexual explicitness or ironically reports about embarrassing mishaps.³¹ In confessing one's love for a bearded person, the thickness of the beard is what determines the difference between a *ghazal* and a *mujūn* poem. As long as the beard is not yet fully developed, the poem may count as a *ghazal* poem. Confessing one's love for a densely bearded man and thus one's transgression of social norms, instead, would make it a *mujūn* poem. In the following epigram by Ibn an-Naḥḥās (7th/13th c.), the beloved is not only a man with a densely grown black beard, but grey hairs are already appearing and the beard has reached the *zurzūrī* "starling-like" phase. Notwithstanding its confession of a violation of social norms, the poem echoes exactly the ordinary apologetic beard epigram in its structure and line of argument. It starts with the accusations of the censors, which are rejected in the following line and refuted with an argument based on *murā'āt an-naẓīr*, "harmonious choice of images". If the beard, the white hairs in it and the bright cheek yield something as beautiful as night, stars and morning, there can be nothing blameworthy in it.³²

قَالُوا حَبِيبُكَ قَدْ تَبَدَّى شَيْبُهُ فَلَا مَقْلَبَكَ فِي هَوَاهُ يَهْيِمُ
قَلْبُ أَقْصَرُوا فَلَا أَنْ تَمَّ جَمَالُهُ وَبَدَا سَفَاهُ فَتَيَّ عَلَيْهِ يَلُومُ
الصَّبِيحُ عَارِضُهُ وَنَبْتُ عِذَارِهِ لَيْلٌ وَشَيْبُ الشَّعْرِ فِيهِ نُجُومُ

"Your beloved is starting to turn grey," they said. "How long will you carry on being madly in love with him?"

"Chill out!" I replied, "Only now has his beauty been perfected, and the stupidity of his censor become clear."

"His cheek is a morning, the herbage of his beard a night, its stars are his grey hairs."

29. *Khal' Ed.* 231b = *Khal' Ms.* 20b (meter *kāmil*).

30. *Khal' Ed.* 225b = *Khal' Ms.* 11a (meter *kāmil*).

31. See BAUER 2014b. Epigrams dealing with beards are treated on p. 162 and on p. 175.

32. *Khal' Ed.* 242a = *Khal' Ms.* 34b-35a (meter *kāmil*). The poet is Bahā'addīn Muḥammad ibn Rustam ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī l-Faḍl al-Ḥalabī, known as Ibn

an-Naḥḥās. The only source about him seems to be IBN AL-QĀḌĪ, *Durrat al-hijāl*, p. 3–5. The epigram is quoted on p. 4. The date 684h., which the editor of *Khal'* gives for Ibn an-Naḥḥās's death (n. 392) is the date of an *ijāza*, not the date of his death.

The Ottoman Beard

Whereas our knowledge of Arabic literature of the Ayyubid and Mamluk period (6th to 9th/12th to 15th century) is insufficient, that of the Ottoman period is virtually unstudied. It is obvious, however, that beard poems in the vein of the preceding periods were composed in substantial numbers. Badr ad-Dīn al-Minhājī's anthology of beard epigrams, which dates from the beginning of the Ottoman rule over the Arab lands, has already been mentioned. Two poems from the late Ottoman period may conclude this paper.

The author of the first poem is judge and mufti 'Abdallaṭīf Faṭhallāh, who died in Beirut in 1260/1844. In its three lines, the epigram combines sun, moon, stars and clouds. There is no apology for the beard. Instead, the beard is presented as an indispensable prerequisite to perceive the beauty of the beloved, whose sun-like face would otherwise hinder people from looking at him:³³

روحي فداء عذارٍ خلَّ وجنةً من فائق الكواكب شمسًا ثم
أقمسارًا
لولا العذار لما أسطاعت لنا مقل إلى محيَّاة باهي الحُسن
إبصارًا
كالشمس لم تُطِق الأبصار رؤيتها لولا سحابٍ لطيف
حؤلها دارًا

May I be made the ransom of a sprouting beard that
settled on the cheeks of one who – being a sun – is
superior to the stars and moon.

If it weren't for his beard, our eyes could not look at
his face with its radiant beauty.

Just like the sun, which our glances could never look
at were it not for the fine clouds that surround it.

The last example is not a love poem, but a commemoration of the beginning of beard growth. Thus it demonstrates the social importance of the beard, and the vitality of traditional *ghazal* images of it until as late as the middle of the 19th century. Its author is the famous and influential Christian poet and scholar Nāṣīf al-Yāzījī (1214–1287/1800–1871), who

was also famous for his mastery of the chronogram, a stylistic device very popular during the Ottoman period. Chronograms make use of the fact that every letter of the Arabic alphabet has a numerical value, too. It is the chronogrammist's task to find an expression fitting to the event to commemorate. At the same time, the sum of the numerical values of every letter of this expression must yield the year in which the event took place.³⁴ People commissioned poets like 'Abdallaṭīf Faṭhallāh or Nāṣīf al-Yāzījī to compose chrono-epigrams on occasions like the death of a relative, the return from pilgrimage, the completion of a building, the birth of a child, or a wedding. Another such occasion was the growth of a beard. 'Abdallaṭīf Faṭhallāh wrote thirteen epigrams on this topic, al-Yāzījī four.³⁵

In the first line of the following epigram, Shaykh Nāṣīf starts with the image of the bright cheek that is compared to the moon, whereas the beard supplies the night in which the moon rises. The second line presents another image common in (apologetic and non-apologetic) love epigrams. In these epigrams, poets reinterpret the beloved's beard as being ants that creep along the beloved's cheeks in order to taste the honey of his saliva. Yāzījī's epigram is not a love poem. Nevertheless, he heavily draws on the themes and imagery of traditional homoerotic love poetry. The main difference is that whereas the beloved's "honey" is most often his saliva, here it is the honey of his eloquence (a subject treated sometimes in love poetry as well, anyway).

Now the chronogram comes in. The second hemistich of the second verse starts with the word *arrikh* "Note the date!". It is the signal to indicate that the sum of the numerical values of the following letters yields the date to be commemorated. In this case, it is the phrase *yahūmu 'alayhi namlu 'idhārī* "the ants of a beard swarm around it". In Arabic script, the phrase is written with the following fifteen letters: *y-h-w-m-l-y-h-n-m-l-dh-r*. Taking the numerical values of these letters, which is 10 for *y*, 8 for *h* etc., we get

33. FAṬHALLĀH, *Dīwān*, vol. 1, p. 451 (no. 510, meter *basīf*).

34. BAUER 2003.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 514.

the following calculation: $10 + 8 + 6 + 40 + 70 + 30 + 10 + 5 + 50 + 40 + 30 + 70 + 700 + 1 + 200 = 1270$. As a result, we learn that the year in which al-Ḥusayn's beard started to grow on his cheeks was the year 1270 a.H. (equivalent to 1853–1854 CE).³⁶

أَبْدَى الْحُسَيْنُ لَنَا الْعِذَارَ فَقُلْ لَهُ إِنَّ اللَّيَالِي مَطْلَعُ
الْأَقْمَسَارِ
وَلَقَدْ نَرَى فِي فَيْكِ شَهْدَ فَصَاحَةٍ أَرْخَ يَحْدُمُ عَلَيْهِ نَمْلُ عِذَارِ

Ḥusayn reveals to us his beard, so say to him: "The moon rises at night."

We perceive the honey of eloquence in your mouth—note the date!—and the ants of a beard swarm around it.

'Abdallaṭīf Faṭḥallāh and Shaykh Nāṣīf are among the last notable poets of Arabic beard poetry. From the middle of the 19th century onwards, élites in the Middle East increasingly adopted the values of Western societies, among them the belief that love and sexuality should be restricted to heterosexual monogamy. Intellectuals started to eye the long tradition of Arabic homoerotic poetry with suspicion, and it came to an end around 1850. The end of homoerotic poetry also meant the end of Arabic beard poetry after more than a thousand years. But that is a different story.³⁷

Bibliography

- 'ABD AL-HĀDĪ 2001: 'ABD AL-HĀDĪ, Ḥ. M., *Mu'allafāt Shams ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥasan an-Nawājī ash-Shāfi'ī*, 'Ammān, Dār al-Yanābī', 2001.
- ARVAS 2014: ARVAS, A., "From the Pervert, Back to the Beloved: Homosexuality and Ottoman Literary History, 1453–1923" in: McCULLUM, E. L. & TUHKANEN, M., *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 145–163.
- BAUER 2014a: BAUER, Th., "Male-Male Love in Classical Arabic Poetry", in: McCULLUM, E. L. & TUHKANEN, M., *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 107–124.
- BAUER 2014b: BAUER, Th., "Dignity at Stake: Mujūn Epigrams by Ibn Nubāta and his Contemporaries", in: TALIB, A., HAMMOND, M. & SCHIPPERS, A. (eds.), *The Rude, the Bad and the Bawdy. Essays in honour of Professor Geert Jan van Gelder*, Cambridge, Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014, p. 160–185.
- BAUER 2011: BAUER, Th., *Die Kultur der Ambiguität*, Berlin, Insel Verlag, 2011.
- BAUER 2009: BAUER, Th., "al-Nawājī", in: LOWRY, J. E., STEWART, D. J. (eds.), *Essays in Literary Biography 1350–1850*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2009, p. 321–331.
- BAUER 2003: BAUER, Th., "Vom Sinn der Zeit. Aus der Geschichte des arabischen Chronogramms", *Arabica* 50, 2003, p. 501–531.
- BAUER 1998: BAUER, Th., *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine literatur- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Gāzal*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1998.
- BAUER & NEUWIRTH (2005): BAUER, Th. & Neuwirth, A. (eds.), *Ghazal as World Literature I. Transformations of a Literary Genre*, Beirut & Würzburg, Orient-Institut Beirut, Ergon, 2005.
- DUNNE 1996: DUNNE, B. W., *Sexuality and the "Civilizing Process" in Modern Egypt*, PhD. Diss., Georgetown University, Washington D.C., 1996.
- EL-ROUAYHEB 2005: EL-ROUAYHEB, Kh., *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- GAL: BROCKELMANN, C., *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, first publ. 1898, Leiden, Brill, 1943–49.
- Greek Anthology: The Greek Anthology, With an English Translation by W.R. Paton*, vol. 4, London, 1916.
- GUGLER 2014: GUGLER, Th. K., "Okzidentale Homonormativität und nichtwestliche Kulturen", in: MILDENBERGER, F. (et alii) (eds.), *Was ist Homosexualität?: Forschungsgeschichte, gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen und Perspektiven*, Hamburg, Männerschwarm, 2014, p. 141–179.
- KLAUDA 2008: KLAUDA, G., *Die Vertreibung aus dem Serail: Europa und die Heteronormalisierung der islamischen Welt*, Hamburg, Männerschwarm, 2008.
- MASSAD 2007: MASSAD, J.A., *Desiring Arabs*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- NEUWIRTH (et alii) (2006): NEUWIRTH, A. et al., *Ghazal as World Literature II. From a Literary Genre to a Great Tradition. The Ottoman Gāzal in Context*, Würzburg, Ergon, 2006.
- ROWSON 1991: ROWSON, E., "The Effemates of Early Medina", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, 1991, p. 671–693.
- SANDERS 1991: SANDERS, P., "Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law", in: KEDDIE, N.R., BARON, B. (eds.), *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1991, p. 74–95.

36. YĀZIJĪ, *Dīwān*, p. 428 (meter *kāmil*).

37. See BAUER 2014a, p. 119–122, and DUNNE 1996.

- TALIB 2013: TALIB, A., "Woven Together as Though Randomly Strung: Variation in Collections of Naevi Poetry Compiled by al-Nuwayrī and al-Sarī al-Raffā", *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17, 2013, p. 23–42.
- VOß 2014: VOß, H. J., "Homosexualität in den Naturwissenschaften", in: MILDENBERGER, F. (et alii) (eds.), *Was ist Homosexualität?: Forschungsgeschichte, gesellschaftliche Entwicklungen und Perspektiven*, Hamburg, Mönnichswarm, 2014, p. 345–373.
- WKAS: ULLMANN, M. (et alii), *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 5 vols., 1957–2009.

Primary texts

- FATHALLĀH, *Diwān*: FATHALLĀH, 'A., *Dīwān al-muftī 'Abd al-Laṭīf Fathallāh*, ed. Zuhayr Fathallāh, 2 vols., Beirut & Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1404/1984.
- IBN AL-QĀḌĪ, *Durrat al-ḥijāl*: IBN AL-QĀḌĪ, *Dhayl wafayāt al-a'yān al-musammā durrat al-ḥijāl fī asmā' ar-rijāl*, 3 vols., ed. Muḥammad al-Aḥmadī Abū n-Nūr, Cairo, Dār at-turāth, 1391/1971.
- Khal' Ed.*: NAWĀJĪ, an-, *Khal' al-'idhār fī waṣf al-'idhār*, ed. Ḥusayn 'Abd al-'Āl al-Lahībī, *Majallat Kulīyyat al-Fiqh* 5.10, Kufa, 2010, p. 207–264.
- Khal' Ms.*: NAWĀJĪ, an-, *Khal' al-'idhār fī waṣf al-'idhār*, ms. Munich cod. ar. 598.
- ŞAFADĪ, *Wāfī*: ŞAFADĪ, aṣ-, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, vol. 22, ed. Ramzī Ba'albakī, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1404/1983.

- ŞAFADĪ, *Wāfī*: ŞAFADĪ, aṣ-, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, vol. 11, ed. Shukrī Fayṣal, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1401/1981.
- SARĪ AR-RAFFĀ', *Muḥibb*: SARĪ AR-RAFFĀ', aṣ-, *al-Muḥibb wa-l-maḥbūb wa-l-mashmūm wa-l-mashrūb*, ed. Miṣbāḥ Ghalāwunjī, Mājid Ḥasan adh-Dhahabī, 4 vols., Damascus, Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya bi-Dimashq, 1985–86.
- SARRĀJ, *Maṣāri'*: SARRĀJ, aṣ-, *Maṣāri' al-'ushshāq*, ed. Aḥmad Şidqī ad-Dajānī, 'Ammān, Wizārat ath-thaqāfa, 2004.
- YĀZIJĪ, *Dīwān*: YĀZIJĪ, N. al-, *Dīwān ash-shaykh Nāṣif al-Yāzījī*, ed. Naẓīr Marūn 'Abbūd, Reprint, Beirut, Dār Marūn 'Abbūd, 1983.

Additional Note

After completion of the article, al-Lahībī published a revised edition of *Khal' al-'idhār*:

- an-Nawājī, *Khal' al-'idhār fī waṣf al-'idhār*, ed. Ḥusayn 'Abd al-'Āl al-Lahībī, Dimashq, Dār Tammūz, 2017.

Relevant to the subject of beard and hair is vol. 30.1 of the journal *al-Masāq*, a special edition dedicated to the subject of "Hair in the mediaeval Muslim world", introduced by the following editorial:

- SIJPESTEIJN, M., "Beards, Braids and Moustachios: Exploring the Social Meaning of Hair in the Mediaeval Muslim World", *al-Masāq*, 30:1, 2018, p. 4–8.