The Rude, the Bad and the Bawdy

Essays in honour of
Professor Geert Jan van Gelder

edited by

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and Arie Schippers

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Dignity at Stake: *Mujūn* epigrams by Ibn Nubāta (686–768/1287–1366) and his contemporaries

Thomas Bauer

PRELIMINARY NOTE

Between c. 720 and 760 AH four of the most important poets of the Mamluk period composed a large number of *mujūn* epigrams thus reviving a genre that had nearly died out after its first blossoming in the early and middle Abbasid periods. In the Mamluk period, however, *mujūn* was no longer the same as it was in the Abbasid period. The following is a very preliminary study of *mujūn* epigrams by Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī, who was generally considered the most important poet of the period and who set the standard in the *mujūn* chapter of his *dīwān* of epigrams entitled *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī.* Epigrams by his contemporaries Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī (667–750/1278–1350) and Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn aṣ-Ṣafadī (696–764/1297–1363) will be taken into account cursorily. Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār (d. 749/1348) will be given somewhat more prominence in the following section.[1] Ibn Dāniyāl, who had died already in 710/1310 and is more interesting for his shadow plays and longer poems than his epigrams, and Ibn Sūdūn, a writer of the following century, will be disregarded.

Aṣ-Ṣafadī is the author of several books on literary subjects such as the comparison (*tashbīh*), the double entendre (*tawriya*), the topic 'eye' etc., which could be called 'studies-cum-anthologies'. They are divided like a syllogism into First *Muqaddima* 'premise I' and Second *Muqaddima* 'premise II', which comprise the study, and a final section, the *Natīja* or 'conclusion', comprising the anthology. With something similar in mind, I will adopt

[1] 750/1350 is the most probable dating of Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī's death. See Thomas Bauer, 'Ibn Nubātah al-Miṣrī (686–768/1287–1366): Life and Works. Part I: The Life of Ibn Nubātah', *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12.1 (2008), pp. 1–35, p. 29 n154.

this pattern for the present article. *Muqaddima I* includes, in addition to general remarks, an attempt to classify the most important themes of Mamlūk *mujūn*, *Muqaddima II* gives an overview of the *mujūn* epigrams composed by the four poets mentioned above, and the final *Natīja* presents a selection of epigrams from the chapter *al-Mudāʿaba wa-l-mujūn* from Ibn Nubāta's still unedited *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī*.[2]

MUQADDIMA I: CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES OF 8TH/14TH CENTURY *MUJŪN*

The 7th and 8th /13th and 14th centuries saw a revival of genres that had once flourished during the early and middle Abbasid period (2nd to 4th/late 8th to 10th centuries) but left little traces in the centuries in between.[3] Hunting poetry is one example, *mujūn* is another.[4] The authors of the Ayyubid and Mamluk period were quite conscious about their Abbasid predecessors, but they did not copy them. Instead, they developed and transformed the genre and adopted it to their own needs. In the case of *mujūn*, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 391/1001) was a model to which the literati of the Mamluk period referred several times.[5] Aṣ-Ṣafadī described Ibn Dāniyāl as 'the Ibn al-Ḥajjāj of his age and the Ibn Sukkara of his city';[6] Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī (686–768/1287–1366) published a selection of Ibn al-Ḥajjāj's poetry under the title *Talṭīf al-mizāj min shiʿr Ibn al-Ḥajjāj*[7]; and Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī composed a *muʿāraḍa* on one of Ibn al-Ḥajjāj's poems.[8] Yet nearly all of these poets also composed *mujūn* poetry that had little in common with that of their Abbasid predecessors. They explored new subjects, used new forms such as the shadow play or the *zajal*, and even a new language as in the case of al-Miʿmār's *azjāl* (sing. *zajal*) in the Cairene colloquial.

The most widespread poetic form in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods was the epigram, a short, pointed poem of mostly two or three lines. Epigrams were omnipresent at the time.[9] They are found in the *dīwān*s of poets, in anthologies, in books of *adab* and history and often enough even in religious texts. In addition to Ibn Nubāta's *al-Qaṭr an-*

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[2] I would like to thank Adam Talib, not only for improving my English, but also for his comments and critical remarks.

[3] On genre in Arabic literature see Gregor Schoeler, 'The Genres of Classical Arabic Poetry: Classifications of Poetic Themes and Poems by Pre-Modern Critics and Redactors of Dīwāns', in *Quaderni di Studi Arabi, nuova serie* 5–6 (2010–2011), pp. 1–48.

[4] On Mamluk hunting poetry, see Thomas Bauer, 'The Dawādār's Hunting Party. A Mamluk *muzdawija ṭardiyya*, probably by Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Faḍl Allāh', in A. Vrolijk, J.P. Hogendijk (eds.), *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 291–312.

[5] See the forthcoming study of this poet by Sinan Antoon (*The Poetics of the Obscene: Ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Sukhf*, Palgrave–Macmillan).

[6] E.K. Rowson, 'Ibn Dāniyāl', in EAL, p. 319.

[7] Ed. Najm ʿAbd Allāh Muṣṭafā, Tūnis 2001.

[8] See al-Ḥillī, *Dīwān*, pp. 561–563.

[9] See EI^3, s.v. 'Epigram 1. Classical Arabic' [Geert Jan van Gelder], as well as Adam Talib, 'Pseudo-Ṯaʿālibī's *Book of Youths*', *Arabica* 59.6 (2012), pp. 599–649, esp. pp. 609–18.

Nubātī, the first collection of epigrams by a single author, several poets compiled collections of their epigrams arranged according to genre. Three of these thematically arranged *dīwān*s of epigrams contain a chapter dedicated to *mujūn* and related topics. On the basis of these three *mujūn* chapters, which will be discussed in more detail in the *Muqaddima II*, we will try to elucidate what was considered *mujūn* poetry in the 8th/14th century. I will limit myself to ten examples to supplement the twenty-one epigrams given in the *Natīja* below. As an homage to the most important *mujūn* poet in the period between Ibn Dāniyāl and Ibn Sūdūn, I will take these examples from the *Dīwān* of Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār.[10]

The first thing to note is that Mamluk-era *mujūn* is a slippery genre. Comparing epigrams no. [1] and [13] in the *Natīja*, for example, one would hardly consider them to belong to the same genre, but they are nevertheless grouped together in the same chapter. It is also obvious that E.K. Rowson's definition of Abbasid-era *mujūn* is not applicable without modification. According to this definition, '[...] *mujūn* refers behaviourally to open and unabashed indulgence in prohibited pleasures, particularly the drinking of wine and, above all, sexual profligacy. *Mujūn* literature describes and celebrates this hedonistic way of life, frequently employing explicit sexual vocabulary, and almost invariably with primarily humorous intent.'[11] Though texts of this kind still account for a large part of Mamluk *mujūn*, it cannot be denied that a number of completely different themes were incorporated under the banner of *mujūn*.

Since it is obviously no longer possible to find a definition that encompasses all kinds of poems included in the *mujūn* category, the following classification into three major categories may be helpful:

Category A comprises poems in which *behavior of questionable appropriateness* is displayed, proclaimed, or reported. This category comes close to Rowson's definition of Abbāsid *mujūn*. A typical example is the following epigram by al-Miʿmār:

يا لائمي في ذا العذار أَفْتِنِي هل يُرْكَبُ الجَحْشُ بلا مِقْوَدِهْ
أُحِبُّ أربابَ اللحى شَهوةً وكلَّ مَن لحيتُهُ في يَدِهْ

> You blame me for [desiring one] whose beard has sprouted. Tell me your verdict: Can a donkey foal be ridden without a rein?
> I go crazy for men with full beards; yeah, even those who can grip theirs with their hands![12]

In this epigram, the nature of *mujūn* as 'counter-genre' is clear.[13] Whereas the love of youths who have not yet grown a dense beard was tolerated according to social norms,

[10] *Dīwān Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār*, ed. Thomas Bauer, Anke Osigus, Hakan Özkan. In preparation. In the following quotations from the *Dīwān al-Miʿmār* I will give the number according to this edition and additionally mention the folium of the Escorial manuscript, our main source.

[11] E.K. Rowson, '*mujūn*', in *EAL*, p. 546.

[12] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 176 [Sarīʿ], MS El Escorial 463, f. 25b.

same-sex relations between fully grown men were not. Apologising for loving a youth who has already begun to grow a downy beard is one of the main topics of *ghazal* poetry. In al-Miʿmār's epigram, however, the poet confesses to loving grown men, even those with long beards. In addition, the speaker has not been struck by love for a particularly charming person, but rather admits to loving *all* bearded men; he is not the victim of the untamable force of love, but rather pure lust (*shahwa*). If the celebration of 'unabashed indulgence in prohibited pleasures' is the core of *mujūn*, this epigram can be reckoned a very typical representative of it.[14] This poem is an example of a sub-category of Category A, which I would call the 'ostentatious violation of norms' sub-category.

The epigram that immediately precedes the confession of love for bearded in al-Miʿmār's *Dīwān* is a different case. In it, al-Miʿmār uses one of his favourite word plays: the word *qāʿida* is the active participle of the verb *qaʿada* ('to sit') in the feminine gender. Besides 'sitting', it is also a noun that means 'base'. In the architectural lexicon, however, it did not designate the 'base' of a column or pillar, but rather the capital, which 'sits' atop the column.[15] Al-Miʿmār uses this double meaning to create the following beautiful *tawriya*:

يا ليلةً مرَّتْ بِنَا فَهَلْ تَراها عائدَهْ
عَمُودُ أيري قائمٌ وهْيَ عليهِ قاعدهْ

Oh what a night we spent together! Will it ever come once more?
My penis pillar stood upright as she was sitting upon it / *was a capital upon it*.[16]

In this epigram, a violation of social norms is much less visible. Pre-modern Islamic societies in general were not prudish, and it was not against social norms to have good sex. We are not told if the woman was the legitimate wife or concubine of the speaker, in which case the act described in the epigram would comply even with religious norms. In any case, boasting about a violation of norms is obviously not the poet's concern. If any norm is broken, it is the genre convention of the *ghazal*. In *ghazal*, the poet may very well allude to the sexual act, but he should not describe it as outspokenly and in such detail as in our epigram.[17] Since poems of this kind were never included in *ghazal*-chapters of anthologies at the time, but could crop up in *mujūn*-chapters, there can be no doubt that *mujūn* is the genre to which it belongs. Poems of this kind should, however, be distinguished from the ostentatious-violation-of-norms sub-category. One could call

[13] Julie Scott Meisami, 'Arabic *mujūn* Poetry: The Literary Dimension', in F. De Jong (ed.), *Verse and the Fair Sex: Studies in Arabic Poetry and in the Representation of Women in Arabic Literature* (Utrecht: M.Th. Houtsma Stichting, 1993), pp. 8–30, here p. 19.

[14] E.K. Rowson, '*mujūn*', in *EAL*, p. 546.

[15] This has already been suspected by William Popper, *The Cairo Nilometer*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951, p. 43, and is corroborated by a number of al-Miʿmār's poems.

[16] Al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 175 [Rajaz], MS El Escorial 463, f. 25b.

[17] As in poems in which the beloved appears as *zāʾir* 'visitor', see Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts* (Wiebaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), p. 506–512.

them the 'highly explicit' sub-category. Poems of this type talk about sex or other pleasures that are not principally prohibited in an affirmative way. It is only the way in which the subject is discussed that makes this poem transcend the borders of genres like *ghazal* or *khamriyya*. In cases like these, the inappropriateness lies in the presentation rather than what is presented.

Boasting about sexual conquests or reports about an attempt to seduce – irrespective of their religious permissiveness – is a major topic of category A poems. Since Ibn Nubāta does not have much to offer in this respect, I will give another example by al-Miʿmār. In the following epigram, the speaker tries to entice a *muqriʾ* (a Quran reciter), who holds a post in a *madrasa* (religious college), which is a *waqf*-endowment:

قُلتُ لِذَا المُقْرِي ٱستَمِعْ يا صَاحِبَ الوَظَائِفْ
أَصْبَحَ أَيْرِي واقِفاً فَٱعْمَل بِشَرْطِ الوَاقِفْ

'Listen,' I said to the Quran reciter, 'You, who are employed here:'
'My penis is standing upright so do according to the condition of the upright / *waqf-donor*!"[18]

On the other hand, most poems about sex do not talk about good sex, but about bad sex; these will be treated in category B.

As for wine-poetry, the situation did not deviate much from the Abbasid pattern. Wine poetry continued to be produced in the form of the idyllic *khamriyya*, even by poets like al-Miʿmār. In such poems, the subject is treated without provocation and with hardly any reference to the religious prohibition. In addition to this, wine remained a topic in *mujūn* poetry (and, in the case of al-Miʿmār, hashish became a new topic), where it was often treated in the ostentatious-violation-of-norms sub-category, as in the following epigram by al-Miʿmār:

أَفْتَوا إذا غُصَّ شَخْصٌ بالخَمْرِ يَدْفَعُ رُخْصَهْ
فادْفَعْ بِذٰلِكَ هَمِّي فَالهَمُّ أَعْظَمُ غُصَّهْ

Legal scholars say that it is permitted to cure choking with wine.
So use it to dispel my sorrows, for sorrows are the worst form of suffocation![19]

Poems in category A are not necessarily about sex or drugs, though. In the following epigram, the builder al-Miʿmār boasts about his prodigal lifestyle, building himself a 'house of pleasure':

وَلائمٍ في المالِ أَفْسَدْتُهُ وذاكَ فيهِ عَيْنُ إصْلاحِي
وبَيْتُ مَالِي حِينَ خَرَّبْتُه عَمَّرْتُ مِنهُ بَيْتَ أَفْراحِي

They criticise me for wasting all my money. This they think is how they'll set me right.

[18] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 330 [Rajaz], MS El Escorial 463, f. 47a.

[19] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 273 [Mujtathth], MS El Escorial 463, ff. 39b–40a; رخصه according to the majority of manuscripts; El Escorial has غُصَّه instead.

> But though I ruined the house of my fortune, I used it to build the house of my pleasures![20]

Building a 'house of pleasures' may of course lead to penury (*iflās*), which is an important subject in the poetry of al-Miʿmār and others. This leads us already to category B.

Category B includes poems about all different kinds of misfortune: Things do not work as they should; trouble and embarrassments of all kinds arise. These mishaps are depicted and confessed in an ironic tone. Poems of this kind are (or at least should be) characterised by a certain degree of self-deprecation (though, as aṣ-Ṣafadī shows, not all poets could manage that).

As I have already indicated, most *mujūn* poems about sex fall into this category. Instead of boasting about a spectacular conquest, a poet usually related the humiliating story of a spectacular rebuff. He confessed his impotence or, the other way around, his horniness at the most inappropriate times; Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī's epigrams about masturbation fall into this category. In other poems, the speaker complains about the size of his penis or, more often, the size of the potential place of penetration, which is either too big or too small. A single example by al-Miʿmār should suffice. It is a poem in which he makes use of still another meaning of the root *q-ʿ-d*. The word *qawāʿid* is not only a plural of *qāʿida* in its sense 'sitting (f.)', 'base', and 'capital', but is also the plural of *qāʿid*, meaning a 'woman who is too old to bear children'. This meaning is used in the following epigram:

صغيرةٌ كلَّفتُها أيْري فقالتْ وَيْكَ باعِدْ
ما ظنّ يحملُ ذا العمو د مِنَ النساء سِوَى القواعد

> I wanted to impose my penis upon a young girl, but 'you better keep away!' she said.
> 'This column cannot be expected to bear other women than old ones / *capitals*!'[21]

Occasionally poems on wine may also fall into category B rather than Category A; for example when the poet talks about the embarrassing consequences of drunkenness. The following example shows that *mujūn* poems need not be in the first person, which gives them a (pseudo-)-autobiographical touch. This poem is instead narrated in the third person about someone suffering the detrimental effects of mixing hashish and wine:

خَلَطَ الحَشِيشةَ بِالنَبِيـ ـذِ فمالَ سُكْراً واْخْتَلَطْ
وغَدَا يُعَرْبِدُ في المَقا مِ فَقُلْتُ ما هذا اللَغَطْ
فَأجابَنِي لمّا صَحَا سَامِحْ أخَاكَ إذا خَلَطْ

> Having mixed hashish with wine, he became confused and staggered in his inebriation.
> He started to riot in the place, and I said: 'What's the turmoil?!'
> After he had sobered up, he answered: 'Have mercy with your brother when he mixes!'[22]

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[20] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 143 [Sarīʿ], MS El Escorial 463, f. 21b.
[21] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 174 [Kāmil], MS El Escorial 463, f. 25b.

The nub of the poem is the fact that the last hemistich is a quote from al-Ḥarīrī's 23rd *maqāma* (*al-Maqāma ash-Shiʿriyya*), in which it is a response to an accusation of plagiarism.[23]

Excluding hashish, the topics of the preceding poems are all quite compatible with the Abbasid pattern of *mujūn*. It is striking, however, that a large number of epigrams about mishaps considered *mujūn* by the Mamluk period poets who wrote them have nothing to do with sex or drugs or the violation of any social norms. These poems are hardly compatible with common definitions of *mujūn*: things do not work properly; riding animals stumble, get lame or old; cloths are stolen in the bath; people or animals are bothersome; one cannot get rid of one's slave or wife; one cannot cope with extraordinarily hot or cold weather. Poems about the hardships of Ramadan are of this variety and they treat a religious matter in an ironic tone. The subject was quite popular in al-Miʿmār's work:

شَهرُ الصيامِ مُبارَكٌ إن لم يَكُن في شَهر آبِ
خِفْتُ العَذابَ فَصُمْتُهُ فَوَقَعْتُ في وَسَطِ العَذابِ

> The month of fasting is a blessed month – as long as it doesn't come in August.
> I feared the torments [of hell] so I observed the fast – and found myself already amidst hell![24]

It should be noted that a tone of irony regarding religious matters could appear in different genres in Mamluk times as, for example, in more or less frivolous quotations from the Quran and the Ḥadīth in *ghazal* and *madīḥ* poems.[25] Given this openness towards religious matters, I found nothing especially blasphemous among the *mujūn* poems in our corpus. Unlike as in the Abbasid period, blasphemy seems not to have been an agenda of *mujūn* any longer. Satire (*hijāʾ*) of religious figures such as Sufis or the holders of religious offices, on the other hand, is quite common, especially in al-Miʿmār's *Dīwān*.

A few poems, like the next one, may belong to both categories A and B. The complaint about annoying animals makes it a Category B-poem. The remedial measure that is proposed, however, falls into one of the sub-categories of Category A: the ostentatious violation of norms. Remarkable is the daring enjambment, which may suggest that the therapy has already started:

إنَّ البَرَاغِيثَ اللِئا مَ قَسَوْا عليَّ فَقُلْتُ ما لي
إلّا الخُمُورُ إذا اُخْتُمَر تُ وقَرِّضُوني ما أُبَالي

[22] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān*, no. 291 [Kāmil], MS El Escorial 463, ff. 41a–41b, see also Franz Rosenthal, *The herb; hashish versus medieval Muslim society* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 66.

[23] See ash-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 5 vols. (Beirut: 1413/1992), vol. 3, p. 158.

[24] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 34 [Kāmil], MS El Escorial 463, f. 7a.

[25] See Geert Jan van Gelder, 'Forbidden Firebrands: Frivolous *Iqtibās* (Quotation from the Qurʾān) According to Arab Critics', *Quaderni di studi arabi* 20–21 (2002–2003), pp. 3–16.

> When the wicked fleas have no mercy on me I say: No remedy against them
> Besides wine. They keep on biting, but I don't care any longer when I'm drunk![26]

Category C comprises poems about troubled friendships. In these cases, it is a friendship or another close relationship that does not function properly. The poet expresses his disappointment about a friend, feels abandoned, forsaken or deceived, or complains about his loneliness or inability to make friends.

A large number of these poems deal with troubled communication between friends. A joke may be misunderstood; a present may be delayed or not live up to expectations. Poems in which friends (or ex-friends) are addressed can range from playful teasing to mild criticism to downright *hijāʾ* (invective). It should be noted that *mujūn* and *hijāʾ* were seen as related genres at the time. In the British Library manuscript of the *Dīwān* of al-Miʿmār, the only manuscript of the *Dīwān* that is arranged thematically, *mujūn* poems are included within the *hijāʾ* section.[27] Despite this, and despite the fact that the dedicatee of this article is a pioneer in the study of *hijāʾ*, I will not treat poems that belong to the genre of *hijāʾ* and focus rather on those that are *mujūn*.[28]

Another group of poems of this kind are poems in which the poet has not yet received a present but is asking for one. The act of begging may be seen as humiliating and so is dealt with in a humorous way. Here again it is self-mockery rather than criticism of perfidious friends that is in the focus.

It is quite obvious that Category C is actually a sub-category of B. In the case of Category C, the 'thing' that does not function properly is friendship. To make it a separate category is mainly justified by the fact that with Ibn Nubāta it seems to be the most important category in his chapter on *al-mudāʿaba wa-l-mujūn*. Ibn Nubāta must have been quite conscious of this fact as the chapter heading demonstrates. Unlike earlier instances, he added the word *mudāʿaba* ('teasing back and forth') and even put it before the word *mujūn*. This reference to communication with 'others' is characteristic of the more communicative nature of Mamluk literature as compared to earlier periods.[29] Obviously, this general trend can be noticed also in the case of *mujūn*.

Since a number of poems of this category can be found in the *Natīja*, a single example by al-Miʿmār may suffice. It is a complaint about being forsaken while ill. The epigram is most certainly an adaption of one of Ibn Nubāta's (see *Natīja* [13]). The rhyme is maintained, but the meter al-Miʿmār uses is shorter and Ibn Nubāta's reference to a single visitor is deleted, thus making it more generally applicable:

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[26] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 381 [Kāmil], MS El Escorial 463, f. 54a.

[27] *Dīwān al-Miʿmār*, MS British Museum 8054, f. 52b: *fīmā warada lahū mina l-hajw wa-mā yajrī majrāhu*.

[28] Geert Jan van Gelder, *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes Towards Invective Poetry (*Hijāʾ*) in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

[29] See Thomas Bauer, '"*Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī*!" Toward an Aesthetics of Mamluk Literature', *Mamlūk Studies Review*, forthcoming, and id., 'Mamluk Literature as a Means of Communication', in S. Conermann (ed.), *Ubi sumus? Quo vademus? Mamluk Studies – State of the Art* (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2013), pp. 23–56.

لم يَعُودُوا بي بضُعْفي وبِفَرْطِ اللَوْمِ عَـادُوا
ثُمَّ قالوا هُوَ ماضٍ كلُّ ماضٍ لا يُعَـادُ

When I felt weak, nobody came to visit me. It was only severe rebuke that made them come to my sickbed.
Then they said: 'He passes away, and what passes away will not come back again / be visited'[30]

It is obvious that wit, irony and (self-)mockery are indispensable qualities of *mujūn* poems. In the Mamluk period, this aspect is certainly more important than the celebration of prohibited pleasures. But humour is not exclusive to *mujūn*. Is there ultimately a common thread linking the three categories A, B, and C? I would say yes and venture the following characterization: *mujūn* poems from the period in question are characterized by an attitude of relaxation, of letting-go, of a loosening of discipline so that one could talk about things about which one could not talk – at least not in this manner – without the risk of violating one's dignity. By composing *mujūn*, the poet puts his dignity at stake, even if only playfully and ironically. An honourable and dignified man should not discuss his erectile dysfunction in public, nor boast about having sex with bearded men, nor talk about licit sex in a highly explicit way. Similarly it is undignified to fall from a mule, ride a lame donkey, be stuck with bothersome slaves, or be forced to beg for a coat or one's livelihood. Seen in this way, the subject of friendship fits the genre perfectly: a distinguished and dignified person should have friends – trustworthy friends. He should not need to bestow upon them the honour of a visit, rather he should be visited by them. In his chapter on 'the positive sides about being imprisoned', ath-Thaʿālibī quotes the poet ʿAlī ibn Jahm, who says that prison is the proper place for a noble (*karīm*) man because 'in [prison] he is the one who is visited and not the one who visits' (*yuzāru fīhi wa-lā yazūru*).[31] This piece of wisdom from Abbasid times was still valid in the Mamluk period. So long as one was not in prison for some abominable act, it was better to be visited in prison than to beg or to humble oneself or to have no friends at all.

'Dignity at stake' is, therefore, the common denominator in *mujūn* poems of the 8th/14th century and so it is interesting to see how authors indulge in the production of *mujūn* epigrams differently depending on the degree of dignity they stand to lose. This subject is the topic of *Muqaddima II*.

[30] al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān,* no. 187 [Ramal], MS El Escorial 463, f. 27a.

[31] See ath-Thaʿālibī, *Taḥsīn al-qabīḥ wa-taqbīḥ al-ḥasan*, ed. Shākir al-ʿĀshūr (Damascus: 2006), p. 46.

MUQADDIMA II: FOUR MAJOR AUTHORS OF *MUJŪN* EPIGRAMS IN THE 8TH/14TH CENTURY

Jamāl ad-Dīn Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī (686–768/1287–1366)[32] was the main representative of 'high' literature, including poetry and prose, in his day. Born into a family of scholars, he began his career as an intellectual and poet in Damascus, where he spent the greater part of his life. His style is characterized by a permanent striving for elegance and sophistication. He earned his greatest fame for his elaborate *madīḥ*-poems and his polished prose letters, but also for his epigrams. *Mujūn* is certainly not the first genre that comes to mind when Ibn Nubāta is mentioned, but, after all, his contribution to the genre is not entirely insignificant. I have already mentioned his comprehensive selection from the Dīwān of Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Talṭīf al-Mizāj*. In his own work, Ibn Nubāta treated *mujūn* exclusively in the form of epigrams. This is not surprising since the *zajal*, an important vehicle for *mujūn* for poets like al-Miʿmār, was not really Ibn Nubāta's style (he shunned dialect more than obscenity), and long *mujūn* poems (*qaṣāʾid*) in the style of Ibn al-Ḥajjāj were hardly composed at the time except by Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī.

Most of Ibn Nubāta's *mujūn* epigrams can be found in *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī*, a pioneering work and one of his most popular. In all likelihood, Ibn Nubāta was the first poet to have the idea of compiling a *dīwān* of poetry made up exclusively of epigrams and arranged according to theme and genre. The work, the title of which will be explained in the commentary to poem 18b in the *Natīja*, was finished prior to the year 729 and dedicated to Abū l-Fidāʾ, a descendant of the Ayyubids.[33] Between 710/1310 and 732/1331, he ruled Ḥamāh as governor for the Mamluk sultan, who awarded him the title of al-Malik al-Muʾayyad. *Al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* is preserved in several manuscripts, the most reliable of which was written in 732 by Ibn Nāhiḍ, a personal acquaintance of the author.[34] The fourth chapter (following chapters on *madḥ*, *ghazal*, and *rithāʾ*) is titled *al-mudāʿaba wa-l-mujūn* and comprises sixty-six epigrams, amounting to almost one quarter of the entire book. In a later recension, the number grows to seventy-seven despite the omission of several epigrams from the earlier version.[35] This proportion shows that Ibn Nubāta had no problem putting his dignity on the line. After all, he managed to get along without holding a major scholarly or administrative position until comparatively late in life. When circumstances finally forced him to enter the chancellery of Damascus at the age of 57 in 743, his fame as poet, prose writer and intellectual was beyond question. Most of his

[32] See Thomas Bauer, 'Ibn Nubātah al-Miṣrī (686–768/1287–1366): Life and Works. Part I: The Life of Ibn Nubātah', *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12.1 (2008), pp. 1–35; and *idem*, 'Ibn Nubātah al-Miṣrī (686–768/1287–1366): Life and Works. Part 2: The Dīwān of Ibn Nubātah', *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12.2 (2008), pp. 25–69.

[33] It is mentioned in the *ijāza* for which aṣ-Ṣafadī asked Ibn Nubāta in this year, see ibid., Part I, p. 5.

[34] MS Paris 2234, fol. 158–200, completed on 9 Rabīʿ II 732 by Taqī ad-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Nāhiḍ al-Ḥalabī (on him see aṣ-Ṣafadī: *Aʿyān al-ʿaṣr wa-Aʿwān an-naṣr*, ed. ʿAlī Abū Zayd, 6 vols. [Beirut/Damascus: Dār al-Fikr al-Muʿāṣir, 1418–1419/1998], vol. 1, pp. 126–27).

[35] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī*, MS Florence, Laurenziana 521, ff. 65b–78b. This recension is not taken into account here.

mujūn epigrams, however, (including all those given in the *Natīja*) were composed earlier during his career as a 'freelance' intellectual.

In his *mujūn* epigrams, sex plays a comparatively minor role, as does the indulgence of any kind of violation of norms. More central is the self-deprecating treatment of misfortune. The most important topic, though, is friendship, as the examples chosen for the *Natīja* show.

Ibn Nubāta's *Qaṭr* set a precedent. The first to emulate this model was the Aleppan littérateur Badr ad-Dīn Ibn Ḥabīb (710–779/1310–1377). Ibn Ḥabīb composed his own *dīwān* of epigrams immediately after he encountered Ibn Nubāta's *Qaṭr*. It is his very first work, and he cannot have been much older than eighteen at the time of its composition. It is obvious that for a youngster at the very start of his career, before he had acquired any dignity to put at stake, *mujūn* was not an appropriate genre. No wonder then that of the four epigram collections in question, Ibn Ḥabīb's is the only one that does not include *mujūn*.[36]

The next to follow Ibn Nubāta's model was the poet Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī (667–750/1278–1350).[37] He was of Iraqi origin, but settled in Mārdīn, which was under the suzerainty of the Artuqid dynasty, and came to the Mamluk Empire only as a guest. There, at the court of the Ayyubids of Ḥamāh, he met Ibn Nubāta. They seem to have got along quite well, though later authors tried to play them against each other. In any case, their styles are conspicuously different. It was in Ḥamāh that al-Ḥillī got the inspiration to compile his own *dīwān* of epigrams. Al-Malik al-Afḍal, son of and successor to al-Malik al-Muʾayyad, suggested that he compile such a *dīwān* of epigrams – at least this is what al-Ḥillī says in his dedication to this patron.[38] Al-Afḍal reigned between 732/1332 and 742/1341, but as he quickly lost interest in poetry and turned to asceticism, his encouragement of al-Ḥillī must have come in 732 or only a few years later. At that time, more than ten years had elapsed since al-Ḥillī had compiled a *Dīwān* of poetry, comprising both long and short poems, including strophic poetry, 'at the suggestion of al-Nāṣir b. Ḳalāwūn, probably in 723/1322'.[39] Following al-Afḍal's spurring, al-Ḥillī did little more than excerpt existing poems or parts of existing poems and re-arrange them in twenty chapters (instead of the twelve chapters in his Dīwān). The result was a small book entitled *Dīwān al-Mathālith wa-l-mathānī fī l-maʿālī wa-l-maʿānī*, which includes only epigrams of two and three lines.[40] In this respect, al-Ḥillī was stricter than Ibn Nubāta, who included some longer pieces in his

[36] See Thomas Bauer, ' "Was kann aus dem Jungen noch werden!" Das poetische Erstlingswerk des Historikers Ibn Ḥabīb im Spiegel seiner Zeitgenossen' in O. Jastrow, S. Talay, and H. Hafenrichter (eds.), *Studien zur Semitistik und Arabistik: Festschrift für Hartmut Bobzin zum 60. Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), pp. 15–56.

[37] See Wolfhart Heinrichs, 'Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī', in EI^2 8:801–805.

[38] Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī, *Dīwān al-Mathālith wa-l-mathānī*, MS Paris 3341, ff. 1b–2a.

[39] W. Heinrichs, 'Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī', p. 802b.

[40] The only edition so far (Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Ḥimṣī, Damascus 1419/1998) is based on a single, not very good manuscript and contains an inacceptable number of mistakes. The one- and four-liners in this edition are, without exception, errors. A new edition, based on the Paris manuscript, is a strong desideratum.

al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī. On the other hand, al-Ḥillī's *Dīwān al-Mathālith wa-l-mathānī* contains very little (if any) material that had not already been included in his *Dīwān*.

In the long *Dīwān*, *mujūn* poems appear in sub-chapter (*faṣl*) three, *fī l-iḥmāḍ wa-l-mujūn*, of chapter (*bāb*) eleven, *fī l-mulaḥ wa-l-ahājī wa-l-iḥmāḍ fī t-tanājī* ('jocular verse, satirical poems, and obscene poems').[41] The *faṣl* contains thirty-five poems, some of them of considerable length. For the corresponding chapter in his *Dīwān al-Mathālith wa-l-mathānī*, al-Ḥillī chose eight two-liners and five three-liners from his *Dīwān*. None of the thirteen epigrams is a secondary epigram (i.e. an epigram that was created by excerpting two or three lines from an originally longer poem), nor did the author add a single line to the versions given in the *Dīwān*. There are, however, a number of textual variants the status of which can only be ascertained by a critical edition of both the *Dīwān* and the *Dīwān al-Mathālith wa-l-mathānī*. For the *mujūn*-chapters, we lack both. In both the latest editions of al-Ḥillī's *Dīwān* and the (very faulty) edition of his epigram collection, the *mujūn*-chapters have fallen victim to censorship and are omitted completely. For the *Dīwān*, readers may resort to the *editio princeps* of al-Ḥillī's *Dīwān* (Damascus 1297–1300/1879–1883), which is the only edition of the *Dīwān* to include the *mujūn*-chapter, though it is not in its proper place; it is included at the end so the user has the opportunity to remove it.[42] For *Dīwān al-Mathālith wa-l-mathānī*, the excellent manuscript Paris 3341 has to be used. Folio 20 is out of order, but this problem can easily be fixed. The *mujūn* chapter (chapter 19) here bears the headline *Fī l-hazl wa-l-iḥmāḍ li-ʿiddat aghrāḍ*.[43] Here is a concordance of the *mujūn*-epigrams in *Dīwān al-Mathālith wa-l-mathānī* and their counterparts in the Damascus edition of al-Ḥillī's *Dīwān:*

	Ms. Paris fol.	*Dīwān* (page/line)
1	49b	567/3–4
2	20a	567/6–7
3	20a	568/10–11
4	20a	569/4–5
5	20a–b	568/16–18
6	20b	563/13–14
7	20b	570/15–16
8	20b	571/5–6
9	50a	569/17–19
10	50a	563/16–18
11	50a	569/7–8
12	50b	569/21–570/2
13	50b	568/13–14

[41] Translation W. Heinrichs, 'Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī', p. 802a.

[42] See W. Heinrichs, 'Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī', p. 805a.

[43] MS Paris fol. 3b; the word *al-hazl* is omitted on fol. 49b.

It is remarkable that al-Ḥillī adopted the new form of an epigram *dīwān*, but did not adopt Ibn Nubāta's new approach to the genre of *mujūn*. Instead, all his *mujūn* epigrams are about masturbation, penetration, or farting. Like Ibn Nubāta, al-Ḥillī was not dependent on a prestigious position and consequently had no problems writing rather outspoken *mujūn*. Unlike Ibn Nubāta, the Iraqi al-Ḥillī was more firmly rooted in the Abbasid tradition and composed *mujūn* very much in the vein of his Abbasid predecessors.

Khalīl ibn Aybak aṣ-Ṣafadī (696–764/1297–1363) followed a few years later with his own *dīwān* of epigrams entitled *ar-Rawḍ al-bāsim wa-l-ʿarf an-nāsim*. The editor considers it one of aṣ-Ṣafadī's latest works, but it cannot be that late.[44] When aṣ-Ṣafadī met Ibn Nāhiḍ (who was incidentally also the copyist of the manuscript of *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* used for this study) in Aleppo in the year 756, he 'heard my book *ar-Rawḍ al-bāsim* and others'.[45] It is reasonable, therefore, to suspect that the book was compiled not too long before.

The book is arranged in 46 chapters. Almost all headlines denote a theme rather than a genre; the penultimate chapter '*Fī l-mujūn*' is an exception to that rule. It is made up of forty-five epigrams, which amounts to less than six per cent of the whole work. This comparatively low percentage corroborates the impression that aṣ-Ṣafadī did not feel comfortable writing in the genre of *mujūn*. Unlike the other authors dealt with here, aṣ-Ṣafadī pursued an official career as secretary, though because he was hard of hearing he never reached the position he deserved to on account of his talent. It seems plausible (though it remains speculation) that this social circumstance made him reluctant to indulge in *mujūn* too excessively and openly. Already at the beginning of the *mujūn* chapter, the author stresses that the following is fiction: *qawl bi-lā ʿamal*, and he repeats this phrase later on.[46] There is little self-mockery in his chapter; instead, several of aṣ-Ṣafadī's epigrams describe the mishaps of others, not his own. Strangely enough, aṣ-Ṣafadī explains the crux of his epigrams several times, saying that they contain a paronomasia (*jināṣ*), a double entendre (*tawriya*), or a quotation (*taḍmīn*). The last of these is the most common type deployed in the chapter. But whereas quotations that are taken out of context and given a completely new meaning were also popular with other authors of *mujūn* at the time, I did not encounter word-plays based on spelling (like in the following) in the works of the other four poets:

تَقُولُ إِذْ رَقَدَتْ في الفَرْشِ هَلْ لَكَ في كأسٍ تُرَوِّي عِظَامَ المَيْتِ في الجَدَثِ
فَقُلْتُ – والقَصْدُ لا يَخْفَى على فَطِنٍ – إِنْ كانَ شَيْئاً فَكأسٌ نَاقِصُ الثُّلُثِ

Lying drowsy on the mat, she said: 'What about a cup of wine that can moisten the bones of a corpse in its grave?'

[44] See aṣ-Ṣafadī, *ar-Rawḍ al-Bāsim wa-l-ʿArf an-Nāsim*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Mujīb Lāshīn (Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-ʿArabiyya, 1425/2005), p. 28.

[45] See aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 1:127.

[46] aṣ-Ṣafadī, *ar-Rawḍ al-Bāsim*, p. 246, 253.

> I answered – and smart people will understand what I mean – 'If anything, it's a "cup one-third empty".'[47]

The 'cup one-third empty' is, of course, the word *k-ʾ-s* without its middle letter, which thus gives *k-s* or '*kuss*' ('cunt'). What starts in a quite original way in picturesque decadence – a drowsy woman on her bed offering wine – is, at least to my mind, spoiled by the redundant filler 'smart people will understand' (in Arabic stylistics this would have been called *ḥashw* or 'stuffing') and the all too trivial word play that constitutes the point.

As for the themes treated in aṣ-Ṣafadī's *mujūn* chapter, sex clearly dominates, but the theme of non-sexual mishaps is also present. In this respect, aṣ-Ṣafadī follows Ibn Nubāta (though the subject of 'friendship' is absent from the *mujūn* chapter). Unfortunately, aṣ-Ṣafadī does not only follow Ibn Nubāta's scheme in his book and in his *mujūn* chapter, he actually plagiarizes him. The second epigram in aṣ-Ṣafadī's *mujūn* chapter is about the cloth for his turban that was stolen.[48] The whole idea (perhaps including the theft itself) is taken from Ibn Nubāta's *Qaṭr*, however.[49] Aṣ-Ṣafadī's chapter ends with another instance of plagiarism. Aṣ-Ṣafadī's last poem is almost identical to a well attested epigram by al-Miʿmār.[50]

Ibrāhīm al-Miʿmār (d. 749/1348) was a stonecutter and builder. His *Dīwān*, preserved in at least seven manuscripts, consists of epigrams and a *maqāma* in standard Arabic, and *mawāliyyā* and strophic poems mostly in dialectal Arabic. The *Dīwān*, which was not compiled by al-Miʿmār himself, is preserved in two recensions: one long and one short. In all three manuscripts of the long recension and three of the four manuscripts of the short recension, the non-strophic poems are arranged alphabetically according to rhyme-letter. In the thematically arranged (and rather deficient) manuscript from the British Library, *mujūn* is grouped together with invective (*hajw*).[51]

As a craftsman, al-Miʿmār did not have to worry about scholarly dignity and so he could indulge in *mujūn* as much as he liked; and liked it he did! The selections of al-Miʿmār's poems in anthologies and biographical dictionaries suggest that he owed his fame to his *mujūn* poems especially. This impression cannot be fully corroborated by his *Dīwān*, however. It is true that al-Miʿmār fancied *mujūn* of any kind and did not even shy away from the extraordinarily obscene. It is also true, however, that the proportion of *mujūn* poems among his epigrams is clearly lower than twenty percent. Nevertheless he remains the most important and original *mujūn* poet of the time, not only on account of his epigrams, but also for his *azjāl*. I would say that his series of three *azjāl on intoxicating substances* – on wine, beer, and hashish – are among the most impressive specimens of

[47] aṣ-Ṣafadī, *ar-Rawḍ al-Bāsim* no. 685 [Basīṭ], p. 249.

[48] aṣ-Ṣafadī, *ar-Rawḍ al-Bāsim* no. 678, p. 247.

[49] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 179, MS Paris 2234, fol. 184a.

[50] Compare aṣ-Ṣafadī, *ar-Rawḍ al-Bāsim* no. 721, p. 261 and al-Miʿmār, *Dīwān* no. 173, MS El Escorial 463, fol. 25a .

[51] MS British Museum 8054.

eastern *zajal* poetry and a conscious attempt by their author to open up new literary dimensions for this form of popular poetry.[52]

One of the fascinating things about literary life in the Mamluk period is the fact that almost all layers of society took part. This is, as we have seen, also the case for a genre as precarious as *mujūn*, to which such different characters as the sophisticated elite writer Ibn Nubāta, the touchy intellectual aṣ-Ṣafadī, the cosmopolitan tradesman al-Ḥillī, and the semi-educated craftsman al-Miʿmār contributed, each in his own conspicuously different way.

This article began with several epigrams by the popular poet al-Miʿmār. It is only fitting, therefore, that it should conclude with a selection of epigrams composed by the elite poet Ibn Nubāta, who was in many ways al-Miʿmār's exact opposite, thereby demonstrating the broad unity of Mamluk literature across all social boundaries.

NATĪJA: TWENTY-ONE *MUJŪN* EPIGRAMS BY IBN NUBĀTA AL-MIṢRĪ

[1]

Category A, the portrayal or description of behavior of questionable appropriateness is not a major subject in Ibn Nubāta's *mujūn* epigrams. Most epigrams of this kind are moderate confessions of hedonism, such as the epigram that concludes the *mujūn* chapter in the *Qaṭr*. The notion of a 'violation of norms' is barely present, if at all. If the following were an Abbasid poem (or one by Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī), it would have been included in a chapter on wine poetry (*khamriyyāt*). Ibn Nubāta himself composed a number of *khamriyyāt*, especially in the *muwashshaḥ* form, in which bacchic and erotic subjects are treated in much the same way as in this epigram. There is, however, no *khamriyyāt*-chapter in the *Qaṭr*, which is perhaps why this epigram was included in the *al-Mudāʿaba wa-l-mujūn* section. The point of the epigram revolves around a *tawriya*. The speaker craves the lad's *ḥadīth* 'talk' and his *ʿatīq* 'old, good wine'. This last word suggests the unintended sense of *ḥadīth* meaning 'new', thus giving the pair of opposites 'new and old'. Setting aside this typically post-Abbasid rhetorical device, this is one of the most Abbasid-style poems in the chapter:

إنّي إذا آنستُ همًّا طارِقاً عجّلتُ باللذّات قطع طريقِهِ
ودعَوتُ ألفاظ المليح وكأسه فنَعِمتُ بين حديثه وعَتيقِهِ

When sorrow seeks to join me in the night, I hasten toward pleasure so as to block its path.
I ask the beautiful lad for his conversation and his cup, and relish in his *new and old* / talk and his old wine.[53]

[52] On the beer *zajal* see Hinrich Biesterfeldt, '*Mizr fī Miṣr*. Ein Preisgedicht auf das Bier aus dem Kairo des 14. Jahrhunderts', in Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Verena Klemm (eds.): *Differenz und Dynamik im Islam: Festschrift für Heinz Halm zum 70. Geburtstag* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2012), pp. 383–398.

[53] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 210 [Kāmil], MS Paris 2234, fol. 189b.

[2]

The following poem could also be subsumed under the category of *khamriyyāt*. This time, Ibn Nubāta's confession of hedonism is not a solipsistic declaration. Instead, an anonymous interlocutor is addressed. He is obviously a poet composing a hunting poem, in which he describes 'tall' and 'reddish-brown' horses. But hearing the words *nahd* and *kumayt* the poet cannot help but think about a girl's bosom and dark red wine, for which *kumayt* is one of the most common designations. The conversational nature of the poem together with its point – again relying on *double entendre* – makes it a clearly post-Abbasid epigram. Again, the notion of a violation of social norms is hardly present. The person being addressed is even expected to share in the poet's pleasures:

يا واصف الخيل بالكميتِ وبالـ ـنَهد أرِحْني من طُول وسواسِ
لو كنتَ تحت الدجى تُشاهدني لاَستحسنَتْ مقلتاك أفراسي
لا نَهْدَ إلّا من صدر غانيةٍ ولا كميتاً إلّا من الكاسِ

You with your horses 'reddish-brown and lofty', would you give me a rest from this endless temptation!
If only you'd spied me, 'neath the cover of darkness, your eyes would have seen the beauty of my 'mares';
Nothing's so 'lofty' as a woman's full bosom and nothing so 'red' as the wine in my cup.[54]

[3]

The 'boasting about a violation of norms' is, however, not completely absent in Ibn Nubāta's *mujūn* chapter. One of the main topoi in *mujūn* is confessing love for a man who has already grown a dense beard. As already mentioned above, it is the density (or fullness) of the beloved's beard that divides *ghazal* and *mujūn*. As this example clearly demonstrates, it is not religious, but social norms that matter most. Ibn Nubāta's example:

وقالوا أحاطَت ذَقنُه بخدوده ووجدك لا ينفكُّ يذكر حُسنَهُ
فقلتُ نعم ضَيفٌ بقلبِيَ نازل أعظِّم مثواه وأكرم ذقنَهُ

They said: A beard covers his cheeks, but in your passion you still praise his beauty!
Yes, I said. A guest has taken up residence in my heart so I exalt his abode and honour his beard![55]

The last hemistich seems to be a quotation or an idiom of some kind, but I could not verify it in the sources accessible to me. This is, by the way, one of the main obstacles in studying *mujūn* from the Mamluk period. All too often, the modern reader is quite aware of the fact that there is 'something' behind the last word(s) of the epigram – a quotation,

[54] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 149 [Munsariḥ], MS Paris 2234, fol. 180a.
[55] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 189 [Ṭawīl], MS Paris 2234, fol. 186a.

an allusion, a hidden double meaning – but cannot figure out what it is. For quite a number of epigrams, we may never be able to discern with certainty what exactly the point is.

[4]

A quotation or saying may also be the root of the point in the following epigram, but it is fully comprehensible regardless. It is an example of the narrative form of category A and one of the most sexually explicit epigrams in Ibn Nubāta's *mujūn* chapter.

يا رُبَّ ليلٍ بِتُّه متنعّماً برشيقةٍ تعيَى بردفٍ مثقلِ
أيري بجانبِ كسّها في جُحْرِها عرف المحلّ فبات دون المنزلِ

How many a night did I enjoy with a slender girl who wearies of the burden of her heavy buttocks.
My penis was in the burrow besides her cunt. He knew the proper place of alighting, but preferred to spend the night outside home.[56]

[5]

One of the rare epigrams in which Ibn Nubāta boasts of a sexual conquest is the following, which uses the terminology of the goldsmith's craft:

يا حبَّذا الظبي الذي قد كان يعتمد النِفَارا
عاينتُ صَوْغ صِفاته فجعلتُ خاتمَهُ سِوَارا

There was a shy gazelle who always used to run away.
But I learned how to mould his temperament and made his seal ring my bracelet.[57]

[6]

In the following epigram the poet addresses his slave girl *Shahd* ('Honey'). The final word *ʿusayla* is a diminutive of *ʿasal*, another word for 'honey', but also designates the sexual act. Since it is in complete accordance with both religious and social norms to have sex with one's slave girl, it is only the brazenness of the poem that makes it *mujūn*:

يا شهدُ لا والله أقـ ـنَعُ أن أعاودَ قُبلَتكْ
ما أنتِ عندي شهدة حتى أذوق عُسَيلتك

By God, Honey, it's not enough for me to kiss you over and over.
You won't be a real 'honey-comb' to me till I get to taste your 'honey'.[58]

[7]

[56] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 198 [Kāmil], MS Paris 2234, fol. 187b.
[57] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 192 [Kāmil], MS Paris 2234, fol. 186b.
[58] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 174 [Kāmil], MS Paris 2234, fol. 183b.

Slave girls do not only grant pleasure; they can also be annoying. This leads us to category B. The point of the following epigram rests on the use of *jināS* (paronomasia):

رامتْ زبيباً ولوزاً ورُمتُ بَيناً ورِحلَه
فتلك تطلبُ نُقلاً والقلبُ يطلبُ نَقله

She wanted raisins and almonds, I wanted space and departure.
She was asking for sweetmeats (*nuql*), while my heart was trying to get away (*naqla*).[59]

[8]

In the next epigram, the source of embarrassment is a mule. Again *jināS* (paronomasia) is used; this time between the rhyme words (*qaṣaṣā – qafaṣā*). The phrase *aṣbaḥat qafaṣan* is still today often used to mean 'it became like a prison'. Note the dialogic introduction:

أصبحتُ يا سيّدي ويا سَنَدي أقُصُّ في أمرِ بغلَتي القصَصَا
بالأمس كانَت لفَرطِ سُرعتها طيراً وفي اليوم أصبحتْ قَفَصا

I've been reduced, my lord and my sustainer, to telling stories about my mule.
Just yesterday it blazed so fast it was a bird, though today it's come to be a cage.[60]

[9]

In the following epigram Ibn Nubāta recycled an idea he had first used some years before in a letter to the Khaṭīb of Damascus, Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Qazwīnī, during one extraordinary cold and snowy winter in 716/1316–1317. Making use of several quotations from the Quran, he writes:

أمّا أنا فقد تحصّنتُ في هذه ﴿الواقعة﴾ [الواقعة : ١] بظلّ ﴿السماء ذات البروج﴾ [البروج : ١] ⁎
ولبستُ السنجاب الأبلق إلا أنه من زرقة الجَسَدِ وبياض الثلوج ⁎

As far as I am concerned, to protect me from this 'terror' (Q 56:1), I have taken refuge in the shadow of 'the heaven with the fortresses / zodiac' (Q 85:1), | and I put on the fur of the white-spotted squirrel by combining the blue of the (skin of my) body with the white of the snow.[61]

Ibn Nubāta pretends to be clad in a coat made of the fur of a *sinjāb*, a sort of squirrel whose fur was imported from Russia or the Caucasus. Its colour is blue and white. But in fact, Ibn Nubāta could neither find shelter nor afford such a precious fur coat, and therefore had to rely on the white of the snow and the blue of his cold skin. The poet liked this idea quite a lot and not only did he use it in several of his collections of prose

[59] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 181 [Mujtathth], MS Paris 2234, fol. 184b.
[60] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 151 [Munsariḥ], MS Paris 2234, fol. 180a.
[61] The text here is according to the autograph manuscript *Min Tarassul Ibn Nubātah*, Escorial MS 548, fol. 91b.–92b. A full version is given in Thomas Bauer, '"Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī!" Toward an Aesthetics of Mamluk Literature' (to appear in *Mamlūk Studies Review*).

texts, he also transformed it to an epigram, which he included in his *Qaṭr*. It came into the *mujūn* section because it is a confession of being impoverished and helpless in the face of cold weather, but also perhaps because – at least in the letter – the poet is pretending to beg for the gift of a fur coat. Since the idea was first used in a letter, a dialogic structure suggests itself:

يا سيّدي عَطفاً فإني ميّتٌ وفي دمشق اليوم بردٌ قد عَتَا
زرقةُ جسمي وبياض ثلجها سنجابي الأزرق في فَصل الشتا

Compassion, Sir, for I'm dying as the cold in Damascus is harsh beyond measure!
The blue of my (frozen) body and the whiteness of the snow are my coat of blue-squirrel fur this winter![62]

[10]

The genre *mujūn* intersects with the genres of love poetry (*ghazal*), wine poetry (*khamriyya*) and invective (*hijāʾ*), but it has hardly any connection to the genre of threnody (*rithāʾ*). The following epigram, however, is one such exception. It deals once again with a slave, but the trouble this slave causes is quite different from other annoyances commonly mentioned in *mujūn*: he is dead. At first glance, it is difficult to understand why this poem was placed in this chapter, but a comparison with other epigrams in the *mujūn* chapter provides an explanation. It shows that its main focus is less on the trouble created by the dead servant, but rather the subject of the poet's loneliness. This epigram takes us from category B to category C: trouble with friends, which is treated in a self-deprecating manner. Obviously this epigram falls under this latter category, although self-directed irony is not very prominent in it. The point here revolves around a *tawriya*: the word *faraj* means 'relief' and is also the servant's name:

كان لي عبدٌ تسمّى فَرَجاً نَصَبَ الدهرُ عليه الشبكا
وأنا اليومَ كما تبصرني لا أرى لي فَرَجاً إلا البُكا

I had a servant, Faraj / *relief* was his name. Fate cast its net upon him.
And now, as you see, I cannot find relief / *Faraj* except in tears.[63]

[11]

The next epigram is a rare combination of two different themes of Ibn Nubāta's *mujūn*: sex and friendship. Still, it does not sound very much like *mujūn* but rather a poem of advice and admonition. For a fuller understanding, it is helpful to know the variant reading in the printed *Dīwān* where the first words are: يا أير لا تركن لعلقٍ 'Oh penis, don't rely on a rent-boy'.[64] The headline says that the redactor 'copied this from the poet's autograph'. Given the fact that Ibn Nubāta constantly revised his own works and

[62] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 208 [Rajaz], MS Paris 2234, fol. 189a.
[63] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 207 [Ramal], MS Paris 2234, fol. 189a.
[64] Ibn Nubāta, *Dīwān*, p. 270.

compiled an entirely new version of his *Qaṭr* in later years, this statement is credible. Therefore it may be taken for granted that the 'beardless' young man (*amrad*) in the first version of the epigram is in fact a rent-boy. The epigram thus combines two *mujūn* themes. The first line is about trouble, in this case with rent boys (category B), while the second is about friendship (category C). The message of the poem is to warn against relationships that are based on money. They never lead to honesty and friendship; not those in which you are the one who pays nor those in which you receive remuneration:

لا تَبْغِ للأمرد عهداً ولا تَثِقْ به واتركه معْ نفسِهِ
ولا تُرَجِّ الودَّ ممن يرى أنّك محتاجٌ إلى فلسه

Don't seek company with a beardless (rent-)boy; don't put your trust in him but leave him to himself.
And don't hope for love from one who thinks that you are in need of his money.[65]

[12]

One of the main topics Ibn Nubāta writes about is his disappointment with friends. The inclusion of epigrams of this kind in the chapter *al-Mudāʿaba wa-l-mujūn* is justified by a witty point, which gives the poems an air of self-deprecation. In the following epigram, the point is constituted by a *tawriya*. *Wadd* and *Sudāʿ* are the names of pre-Islamic Arabian gods, which also have another meaning that is the one primarily intended in the epigram:[66]

ألا يا رُبّ خِلٍّ أرتجيه كما يُرجَى من الوَثَنِ انتفاعُ
رميت بودّه وصدفتُ عنه فلا ودٌّ لديَّ ولا سُواع

On how many a friend have I pinned my hopes! It was as if I'd asked an idol for help!
So I tossed aside his friendship and turned away from him. And here am I: No *Wadd*/friendship and no *Suwāʿ*/rest at night.[67]

[13]

People in the pre-modern Middle East were horrified by the idea that they would die as a 'stranger' (*gharīb*) far from home, mourned by no one. To be sick and house bound, not visited or comforted by anyone, came close to that. It happened once to Ibn Nubāta. He was ill, and nobody visited him except for the famous scholar Kamāl ad-Dīn ibn az-Zamlakānī (667–727/1269–1327).[68] Ibn Nubāta memorialized this event in an epigram in which he made use of the double meaning of the verb *ʿāda* 'to return' and 'to visit (a sick person)'. Since both meanings are incorporated, the stylistic device here is not *tawriya*, but rather *istikhdām*:

[65] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 197 [Sarīʿ], MS Paris 2234, fol. 187a.
[66] See EI^2 svv.
[67] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 188 [Wāfir], MS Paris 2234, fol. 185b-186a.
[68] On him see aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 4:624–642.

مرضتُ فعادني أزكى البرايا وأغنى عن مراض الودّ حادوا
رأوا أنيّ إلى الأجداثِ ماضٍ فقالوا كلّ ماضٍ لا يُعادُ

When I was ill, the most righteous of all mankind visited me and I saw I had no need for any of those ill-loving people who'd shunned me.
They thought that I was on my way to the grave and said: 'What passes away will not come back again/be visited'[69]

As we have seen before, al-Miʿmār borrowed and popularised this idea.

[14]

In another epigram, Ibn Nubāta complains about Shihāb ad-Dīn al-Amshāṭī (d. 725/1325), who, in Ibn Nubāta's eyes, started to neglect him after he became successful.[70] This time it is the friend's name Shihāb (ad-Dīn), which provides the basis for another *istikhdām*:

ولي صاحبٌ قد غيّرتْه سَعَادةٌ فما كدتُ من بعدِ التواصُلِ ألقاهُ
أرى الشهب في الدنيا يؤثّر حكمها وهذا شهابٌ أثّرتْ فيه دنياه

I have a friend who's been changed by worldly bliss. I hardly see him anymore whereas before we were together all the time.
I always knew that stars had the power to change the world, but this one's a star/Shihāb whom the world has changed instead.[71]

[15]

Of all the troubled friendships in this period the most spectacular was certainly the friendship of Ibn Nubāta and aṣ-Ṣafadī, which left deeper traces in the work of Ibn Nubāta than in aṣ-Ṣafadī's. Ibn Nubāta repeatedly complained about aṣ-Ṣafadī's disloyalty as in the following epigram, in which an *istikhdām* is created with the word *al-khalīl*, which means 'friend' and was also aṣ-Ṣafadī's given name:

فديتُ من الخُلاَّن قوماً سألتُهمْ دَوامَ الوفا إنّ الوفا لقليلُ
وإنّ ٱفتقادي واحداً بعد واحدٍ دليلٌ على أنْ لا يدوم خليلُ

I would do anything for those friends whom I asked for everlasting loyalty – though loyalty is rare.

[69] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 202 [Wāfir], MS Paris 2234, fol. 188a, see also Ibn Nubāta, *Dīwān*, p. 172

[70] On him see aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr* 1: 287–292.

[71] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 193 [Ṭawīl], MS Paris 2234, fol. 186b.

And the fact that I lost them one after the other is proof that no friend/Khalīl lasts forever.[72]

[16]

The permanent cause of strife in Ibn Nubāta's and aṣ-Ṣafadī's friendship was the charge of plagiarism – an accusation that was all too justified as can be seen in the instances of plagiarism in aṣ-Ṣafadī's *mujūn* chapter. The following epigram was composed as a reaction to a dispute that arose when Ibn Nubāta recited a poem about a headache and aṣ-Ṣafadī claimed that he was not the author of the poem:

وصديقٍ أنشدتُه لِيَ بَيْتَيْـ ـنِ حَوَت في الصُداع معنىً بديعا
فادَّعاها لأجنبيٍّ ولو كا نَ ٱدّعاها لَخاف أمراً شَنِيعا
وغَدَتْ لا له ولا لِيَ تُعْزَى وٱسترحنا من الصُداعِ جميعا

When I composed two brilliant and original verses about a headache and recited them to a friend,
He pretended that a third person had invented the idea. If he'd claimed they were his own, he should've braced himself for something horrible!
And so it was attributed neither to him nor to me – and we both were rid of the headache.[73]

In fact, Ibn Nubāta did not really give in; he included the headache-poem in his *Qaṭr*.[74]

[17]

The exchange of presents was an important means for people of all social layers to create, strengthen and consolidate social relations of any kind.[75] In the correspondence of Ibn Nubāta, aṣ-Ṣafadī and other contemporaries, presents play a central role. But gifts do not always turn out as expected. When Ibn Nubāta received a gift of dates sent by a friend, he inevitably noticed that the dates were not without blemish. He used the double meaning of *nawan* ('date pits', but also 'distance, remoteness') to create the following epigram:

يا صاحباً لي إن يغِبْ فعُهودُه لم تُنسَ حيثُ تناست الغُيَّابُ
أرسلتَ تمراً بل نَوىً فقَبِلتُه بيَدِ الوِداد فما عليك عتابُ
وإذا تباعدت الجسوم فودُّنا باقٍ ونحن على النَوَى أحْبابُ

[72] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 163 [Ṭawīl], MS Paris 2234, fol. 181b–182a.

[73] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 164 [Khafīf], MS Paris 2234, fol. 182a, see also Ibn Nubāta, Dīwān, pp. 311–312.

[74] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 8 [Wāfir], MS Paris 2234, fol. 160a, see also *Dīwān* p. 312.

[75] See Elias Muhanna, 'The Sultan's New Clothes: Ottoman-Mamluk Gift Exchange in the 15th Century', *Muqarnas* 27 (2010), pp. 189–207; as well as Jocelyn Sharlet, 'The Thought that Counts in Gift Exchange Poetry by Kushājim, al-Ṣanawbarī, and al-Sarī al-Raffā'', *Middle Eastern Literatures* 14.3 (2011), pp. 235–70; and idem, 'Tokens of Resentment: Medieval Arabic Stories about Gift Exchange and Social Conflict', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 11 (2011), pp. 62–100.

When you are far, my comrade, I do not forget the time of our company though others forget one another when they are out of sight.
You sent me dates, nay: date pits. I received them with a hand of friendship – no blame on you!
Yet though our bodies be far apart, our affection abides and we love each other – despite the distance / date pits.[76]

[18a]

In another instance the donor had promised to send Ibn Nubāta a present of sugar, but it did not arrive. Ibn Nubāta complained of the delay:

كلّ فِعال العـلاء تُعجِبُني كأنّني بالعَـلاءِ مَفْتُـونُ
يُحمِضُ بالمطْلِ حُلوَ مَوعدِه فوَعْدُه سُكّرٌ وليـمـونُ

All those deeds of magnanimity are my delight. It's as if I've fallen in love with magnanimity.
His sweet promise is soured by long delay, thus he made a promise of sugar and lemon.[77]

[18b]

The complaint worked and the gift arrived so, of course, Ibn Nubāta had to answer it with another epigram. This is based on a play on words using the term *al-qaṭr an-nubātī* (or, more correctly, though minus the pun: *al-qaṭr an-nabātī*). It is the designation for sugar molasses, which was cheaper than refined sugar. It also provides the title of his epigram anthology, where it could be interpreted in three different ways: as (1) sugar molasses, (2) Ibn Nubāta's drops, i.e. his epigrams, which are 'drops' compared to longer poems, and (3) it could refer to himself, who is the 'drop' = offspring of ʿAbd ar-Raḥīm Ibn Nubāta, the famous preacher. The epigram shows that he used this wordplay already before he compiled his anthology of epigrams:

حلا ثنائي على عليٍّ كما حَلا جُودهُ المواتي
فرُحتُ ذا سُكّرٍ بيَاضٍ وراح ذا سكّرٍ نبَاتي

Sweet is my praise of ʿAlī, and sweet is his favorable generosity.
Now I've got white, refined sugar, and he's got *sugar molasses* / Nubātian sugar.[78]

[19]

A present of roosters was faultless. Ibn Nubāta had nothing to criticize. Instead, he asked the donor to repeat his gift. It is certainly this dimension of 'begging' that made the

[76] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 165 [Kāmil], MS Paris 2234, fol. 182a.
[77] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 183 [Munsariḥ], MS Paris 2234, fol. 185a.
[78] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 184 [Majzūʾ al-Basīṭ], MS Paris 2234, fol. 185a.

epigram shift from the *madīḥ* section to the *al-Mudāʿaba wa-l-mujūn* chapter. A *tawriya* is created by the double meaning of the word *ʿurf*:

وصلتنا ديوك برّك تُزهي بوجوهٍ جميلةٍ مستجادهْ
كلّ عُرفٍ يروق حسناً وإنيّ أرتجي أن يكون عُرفا وعاده

The roosters, presents of your kindness, have arrived and shine with their beautiful appreciated faces.
Each rooster's comb excites admiration for its beauty, and I can only hope that it will be *a rooster's comb* / custom and habit.[79]

[20]

The notion of begging is also present in the following epigram, with which Ibn Nubāta claims his reward for a panegyric poem. The poem's *rawī* (rhyme-letter) was the rare consonant *zāy*, one of the most difficult consonants to rhyme in Arabic:

نظمتُ للصاحب المرجَّى زائيّةً كالجمان تُلقَطْ
تروم من برِّه نُقُوطاً والحُكْم للزاي أن تُنقَّطْ

For the friend on whom I put my hopes I composed a poem rhyming in *zāy*, as beautiful as collected pearls.
It asks [in turn] for a kind wedding gift (*nuqūṭ*) for it is a rule that the *zāy* should have a dot / present.[80]

[21]

A few epigrams in the chapter are simply jokes with friends. They are not self-deprecating, but the victim of the sarcasm is the friend, such as in the following two-liner in which the friend's son is addressed with common expressions from love poetry, but the poem takes a surprising turn:

سَلَبتْ محاسنُكَ الغزال صفاته حتى تحيّر كلّ ظبي فيكا
لك جِيدُه ولحاظُه ونِفارُه وغدا تصير قُرونُه لأبيكا

Your beauties have stolen the gazelle's properties so that all gazelles are baffled when they see you.
You've got the gazelle's neck, its glances and its shyness, and soon your father will get its horns.[81]

[79] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 199 [Khafīf], MS Paris 2234, fol. 187b.
[80] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 201 [Basīṭ], MS Paris 2234, fol. 188a.
[81] Ibn Nubāta, *al-Qaṭr an-Nubātī* no. 180 [Kāmil], MS Paris 2234, fol. 184b.

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