

‘alayhinna minhunna l-malāḥatu wa-sh-shiklū
 wa-khālun ka-khāli l-badri fī wajhi mithlihī
 laqīnā l-muná fihī fa-ḥājzanā l-badhlū⁵²

[The women] set out like shining stars from which
 they took their beauty and their coquetry,
 and a birthmark (like that of the full moon) on a face like it
 was where we found what we desired so we refrained from
 making gifts (?).⁵³

Here, as in Poem 2 above, the beloved’s birthmark is likened to a spot on the moon’s surface; here the poet says figuratively “the birthmark of the full moon” (*ka-khāl al-badr*). But this poem also expands this celestial motif by comparing the group of beautiful women to brightly shining stars. The reader is asked to remember this pattern of alternating subsets—specks of contrasting color on sheets of expensive material and lunar simile—because al-Sarī al-Raffā’ will return to it again at the end of his chapter on naevi descriptions.

The next two poems in this chapter (Poems 5 and 6) are about male youths, whereas Poems 2 and 4 (discussed above) are about females. The similarities with the imagery that has come before is apparent. In Poem 5, the beloved is described almost as if he were a doll whose beauty is literally handcrafted.⁵⁴ The birthmark on his cheek is as though it had been painted there intentionally and his skin is so soft it is as if God has “given him a coat of pearl for skin (*albasahū qushūra d-durri jildā*).” The last line of the poem links it implicitly with the poem that follows, which in turn associates it with Poem 2 above: “And on his cheeks you’ll see / no matter when you come, a rose.” Keeping this rosy-cheeked boy in the front of our minds, let us consider the proposed connection with the poem that follows. The next poem (Poem 6) is also on a youth; one “cutely coquettish with nice eyes / a marvel like his creator” with two jet-black temple curls over his cheeks.⁵⁵ In the third line of this four-line poem, the poet describes the beloved’s birthmark as “cutting the heart of one who loves him (*yuqattī‘u qalba man ‘ashiqah*)” and it is this image of “cutting” that links the two poems. In the second line of Poem 2 (omitted from al-Nuwayrī’s version of the poem) the beloved’s birthmark is said

⁵² Poem by Muslim ibn al-Walid (d. 208/823), known as Ṣarī‘ al-Ghawānī (al-Sarī al-Raffā’, *Kitāb al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb*, 1:60–61). In al-Sarī al-Raffā’’s anthology, the 2nd hemistich of the 2nd line begins “*laqītu*,” but I have adopted the reading of the poet’s *Diwān* and other sources as cited in the textual apparatus.

⁵³ The concluding phrase “*fa-ḥājzanā l-badhlū*” is highly unclear; the translation offered here is a guess.

⁵⁴ Poem by Dīk al-Jinn (d. 235 or 236/849–51) (al-Sarī al-Raffā’, *Kitāb al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb*, 1:61).

⁵⁵ Poem by Kushājim (d. ca. 350/961) (al-Sarī al-Raffā’, *Kitāb al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb*, 1:61–62).



to be cutting as well: “The beauty of the birthmark on her cheek cuts my heart; / if she were to unveil it, it would [positively] resound with magic (*tanaghghama bi-s-sihri*).” We can see how common metaphors serve to connect poems in these sequences, yet just as common metaphors and figures are repeated in these sequences, they are also implied. These implied figures also serve to connect poems in a sequence. Let us return to the rose on the youth’s cheek; this is a common enough image in erotic poetry.⁵⁶ But the rose on the beloved’s cheek is not always a mere rose; it can also be a freshly cut rose, as in the following hemistich: “His cheeks like roses freshly cut” (*wa-khudūduhū ka-l-wardi hīna qaṭa‘tuhū*).⁵⁷ And we can see the same imagery in the following line from a poem, which appears elsewhere in al-Sarī al-Raffā’s anthology:

*lahu wardun ‘alā l-wajna/-ti mamnū‘un mina l-qaṭfī*⁵⁸

He’s got a rose on his cheek
That’s forbidden to pluck.

The connection between roses and cutting is not made explicit but it certainly does seem plausible that there is an allusion to an imagined correlation that both of these poems conjure up. The figure of cutting plants may also tie into the idea of the *himá* (sanctuary) and its injunctions. In any case whether or not the cutting birthmark reminds the reader of cut roses, the arrangement of these two poems can be explained more simply: they are both on male youths, whereas Poems 2 and 4, which are grouped together, are both on women.

The next two poems (Poems 7 and 8) both compare parts of the beloved’s body to precious materials. In Poem 7, the beloved’s curls are made of jet, his [or her] brow is made of pearl, the birthmark on his [or her] cheek is a “flower of musk on moist earth.” In Poem 8, it is the birthmark that is compared to jet, after having been said to resemble the black spot of the heart, set in a cheek of pearl. The final three poems (Poems 9, 10, and 11) form a series and seem again to be linked—like the other groupings we have considered—by shared imagery or paronoma-

⁵⁶ It crops up several times in the chapter following the chapter on [descriptions of] naevi in al-Sarī al-Raffā’s anthology, the chapter on cheeks (*fī al-khudūd*); see 1:66, Poems 94 and 95; 1:68, Poem 98; 1:70, Poems 102 and 103; 1:70–71, Poem 104; 1:73, Poems 108 and 110; 1:74, Poem 111; and 1:74–75, Poem 113. See also further examples in the chapter after this one, “on [descriptions of] cheeks (*wajanāt*).”

⁵⁷ This line is from a poem by the unknown author of “Khadīm al-Zurafā’ wa-Nadīm al-Luṭafā’,” a seventeenth-century anthology preserved in the Bodleian Library (Oxford) MS Huntington 508, fol. 40a.

⁵⁸ Poem by Khālid al-Kātib (d. ca. 269/883) (al-Sarī al-Raffā’, *Kitāb al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb*, 1:81, Poem 127). See also in the supplement (*dhayl*) in *Amour divin et amour profane dans l’Islam médiéval: À travers le Dīwān de Khālid Al-Kātib*, ed. Albert Arazi (Paris, 1990), 258, Poem 49.



sia. Poem 9 is also included in al-Nuwayrī's text; it is the poem about the female visitor which draws upon pilgrimage imagery (see above). As we have seen, this poem includes a comparison of the beloved's birthmark to the black stone (*hajar*) of the Ka'bah. The root *h-j-r* appears to link this poem with the first line of the next poem (Poem 10) in the sequence:

[من الطويل]

مُقَلَّةٌ وَحَشِيٌّ الْمَحَاجِرِ أَدْعَجُ	أَغْنُ رَبِيبُ الرَّبِّبِ الْغَيْدِ وَالْمَهَا
كَنْفَطَةٌ زَاجٍ فِي صَفِيحَةِ زَبْرَجٍ	لَهُ وَجَنَاتٌ نُكْتَةٌ الْخَالِ وَسُطَّهَا

*aghannu rabibu r-rabrabi l-ghīdi wa-l-mahā
bi-muqlati waḥshiyi l-mahājiri ad'ajī*

One from the gazelle flock: gentle-voiced, supple-necked, and well-raised,
alongside a wild cow with the big, black eyes of one feral.

And if it is *hajar* (the stone) in the preceding poem that leads to *mahājir* (eyes) in the next, it is then the second and final verse of this poem that introduces us to the concluding movement of the chapter:

*lahu wajanātun nuktatu l-khāli waṣṭahā
ka-nuqtati zājin fī ṣafīḥati zibrijī*

Upon his cheeks, the spot of a birthmark in the middle
is like a speck of copperas on a sheet of gold

The reader will recall the way this chapter began: with an alternating series of poems on specks of contrasting color on surfaces of expensive material and poems involving lunar similes. Thus we see that this—the final line of the penultimate poem—recalls the movement that began the chapter. Even readers who do not know Arabic can appreciate the paronomasia in the pair *nuktah* (spot) and *nuqtah* (speck) in this line and how it recalls the word that featured prominently in Poems 1 and 3, *nuqtah*. Technically, this feature of Arabic rhetoric is known as “*al-jinās al-muḍāri*” or, to use Pierre Cachia’s expression, “Variant Paronomasia,” in which the “matching terms” differ by one letter, representing a phoneme from the same, or a proximate, area of articulation as the phoneme it replaces (i.e., here *kāf* and *qāf* both represent velar sounds).⁵⁹ Likewise, the surface (i.e., the beloved’s cheek), which in the opening poem was “a sheet of ivory” (*ṣafīḥat ‘āj*) is described

⁵⁹ See Pierre Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician Or The Schemer’s Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic Badī’ Drawn from ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī’s Nafahāt al-Azhār ‘alā Nasamāt al-Ashār* (Wiesbaden, 1998), no. 42. Strictly speaking, the *kāf* is postpalatal and the *qāf* is uvulovelar; see further EI2, s.vv. “*kāf*” and “*kāf*” (both by H. Fleisch).



here as “a sheet of gold” (*ṣafiḥat zibrij*) and as in Poem 3 the birthmark is likened to “a speck of copperas” (*zāj*). These similarities and final-syllable *ḍ*-sounds make the connection between the end of the chapter and its beginning unmistakable. And if it were not already sufficiently clear, this poem is followed by a one-liner, the last poem of the chapter, which—mirroring the alternating sets at the beginning of the chapter—includes a lunar simile, along with a whole host of velar plosives:

[من البسيط]

يَا حُسْنَ خَالٍ بِخَدِّ قَدْ كَلِفْتُ بِهِ كَأَنَّهُ كَوَكَبٌ قَدْ لَزَّ بِالْقَمَرِ

yā ḥusna khālin bi-khaddin qad kaliftu bihī
ka-annahū kawkabun qad luzza bi-l-qamarī

O beautiful mole on a cheek I've fallen in love with
It's as though a star has been stuck on to the moon.

This moon image—following on from the verse about a drop on a sheet of gold, which rhymes in *jīm*—brings the reader back to the beginning, giving this chapter of naevi verses a certain symmetry.

What is notable about the thematic progression and style of arrangement we find in the anthologies composed by al-Nuwayrī and al-Sarī al-Raffā' is that the anthologists fashioned a structured, literary order out of a well-known corpus of images and tropes. Anthologists always demonstrated their erudition through selection and commentary—the conventional standard by which anthologies are judged—but the dimension of arrangement is yet another technique of composition inherent in curatorial production. By employing the technique of variation in selecting and arranging epigrammatic poems on one narrowly defined poetic topic, anthologists could weave together an entirely different reading experience than one in which the poems are arranged more explicitly. By shedding light on this technique of variation in the arrangement of poetic collections, I hope to have shone a light on the literary potential lurking in many poetic collections once believed to have been put together “at random.”

