Poetry for Easy Listening: *Insijām* and Related Concepts in Ibn Ḥijjah’s *Khizānat al-Adab*

If one considers the history of the indigenous Arabic tradition of poetics and rhetoric one cannot help being impressed by the ever-growing terminological sophistication in the study of figures of speech, the schemes and tropes of ‘*ilm al-bad‘. In the late third/ninth century the poet and prince Ibn al-Mu‘tazz set the trend in his modest but seminal treatise with a mere handful of terms: five principal “novel” kinds called *bad‘* and some thirteen further “embellishments” (*maḥāsin*). Ibn Abī al-Īsba‘, who died early in the Mamluk period, in 654/1256, discusses 125 kinds,¹ claiming to have discovered thirty of them himself. From then on, the rate of growth decreases. Nearly two centuries later, Ibn Ḥijjah al-Ḥamawī (d. 837/1434) lists 142 kinds,² and another three hundred years on ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusi distinguishes 150 kinds.³

A study of these works, which also serve as anthologies of prose and above all poetry, might give an impression of the increasing sophistication and artfulness of the poetry itself, or even its growing artificiality and obscurity. To some extent there is truth in this, although the poetry in these works is carefully selected in order to illustrate the schemes and tropes, the puns and ornaments, and is therefore not truly representative of poetic practice as a whole. It is well known that general works on Arabic literary history often speak of “decadence” after the Abbasid period. This decadence is seen, on the one hand, in the alleged ornateness and flowery rhetoric of elite style, and on the other hand in the alleged influence of so-called Middle Arabic and the colloquial language, resulting in simplification and the infringement of “pure” syntax and style by “vulgarisms.” In short, according to this view one either finds what is obscure and difficult but vapid and trivial, or what is simple but stylistically marred and, as often as not, equally empty, trivial,
and banal. "The best of them," said Nicholson in his *Literary History of the Arabs*, speaking of poets in the Mamluk era, "are merely elegant and accomplished artists, playing brilliantly with words and phrases, but doing little else." These words are quoted by Homerin, reviewing the neglect of poetry from the Mamluk period; in fairness to Nicholson, one should add that he admits that "until they have been studied with due attention, it would be premature to assert that none of them rises above mediocrity."

It is extremely unlikely that the reigning view on the superiority of the older poets will ever change, but the generally negative and disparaging remarks on post-Abbasid poetry may well be replaced by more balanced judgements as post-Abbasid poetry is slowly beginning to be investigated in more detail. Here I shall concentrate on the concept of stylistic and poetic "easiness" as we find it in Ibn Hijjah’s work on *badi’*. Ibn Hijjah, poet and *kātib*, wrote his *Khizānat al-Adab* on the model of *Sharḥ al-Kāfīyah al-Badī’īyah* by the well-known poet Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. 749/1349): both works are commentaries on *badi’īyah* poems composed by the authors themselves, in *bāsīt* meter and rhyming in *-mī*, in praise of the Prophet (like, before them, al-Būšīrī’s celebrated ode), each verse of which exemplifies a particular figure of speech or stylistic embellishment. *Khizānat al-Adab* contains a large quantity of poetry from all ages, much of it from post-Abbasid or Mamluk times. Since normally a figure of speech or trope does not exceed the compass of one or two lines, most of the quotations are short, but one also finds longer fragments and poems, including *muzdawijahs* of 133 and 158 couplets.

Most of the "embellishments" are thought of as features that are somehow changed from or added to an underlying basic utterance: a metaphor instead of the literal word, a pun, antithesis, syntactical or semantic parallelism that can be superimposed on plain expressions. Instead of adding, one could presuppose other mutations: suppression in the case of ellipsis and conciseness, permutation in the case of some syntactic rearrangements. There are also "figures" that cannot so easily be described, for instance the more impressionistic concepts of *nazāhah*, "chaste diction," particularly when in biting lampoons one manages to avoid obscenities, or *salaḥat al-ikhtirá’,* "originality." The same is valid for a few chapters that deal with easy diction and smooth style, which form the subject of this article.

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6 *Khizānah*, 95–96/1:172–74.

7 Ibid., 493–98/2:362–69.
The most important of these is the section on insijām, “fluency.” It is obviously a concept that is dear to Ibn Hijjah, for the section is the longest of all by a wide margin, apart from the only section that surpasses it, the very extensive chapter on tawriyah. A later author, Ibn Ma‘ṣūm, who completed his large-scale bāḍī’īyah commentary Anwār al-Rabī‘ in 1093/1682, goes even further, making insijām by far his longest chapter. The term insijām is derived from a root denoting flowing, streaming, and pouring forth of water. In the metalanguage of bāḍī‘, the dominant semantic fields are those of jewelry, embroidery, and other sartorial imagery; it is appropriate that the limpidity of streaming water is used for what comes down to the absence of ornament. For, paradoxically, insijām is a kind of bāḍī‘ that is defined by being devoid of bāḍī‘. “Water” implies not only smoothness and fluency, but sparkle and lustre: in Arabic, as in English, one speaks of the “water” of a sword. It is unique among drinks and food in that its tastelessness is praised and called sweetness. Ibn Hijjah’s description of insijām, given at the beginning of the chapter, is as follows:

By insijām is meant that [the text] flows like water when it runs down (inḥīdār), because it is free from complexity (‘aqaḍāh), so that it would almost stream forth (yasīl) in its elegance (riqqah), because of the smoothness of its construction (suḥūlat tarkībih) and the sweetness of its diction (‘udhūbat alfażīh). . . . The scholars of bāḍī‘ are unanimous in defining this kind of bāḍī‘ as being remote from artificiality and free from kinds of bāḍī‘ (an yakūna

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11Among the few who have dealt with this topic is Abdelfattah Kilito, “Sur le métalangage métaphorique des poèticiens arabes,” Poétique 38 (1979): 162–74.

He adds that \textit{insijām} in rhymed prose means that the rhymes appear to be unintentional and spontaneous. In the Quran it is seen in the occasional short passages that scan as poetic meters; Ibn Hijjah gives examples at some length.\footnote{\textit{Khizānah}, 236–38/1:417–21.} Another paradox seems to be lurking here: \textit{insijām} in metrical speech implies that it sounds almost like prose, and conversely, when prose chances to come out according to one of the recognized poetic meters, it is \textit{insijām} too. As far as we can judge, \textit{insijām}, as a separate section in lists of \textit{bādī}, started its life precisely as the last-mentioned kind: prose that fortuitously turns out to be metrical, for this is how Usāmah Ibn Munqidh, the first to do so, defines and illustrates the term in his work on \textit{bādī}.\footnote{Usāmah, \textit{Bādī}, 131–32; he discusses prose that is unintentionally metrical but does not mention the Quran. Ibn Abī al-Iṣba‘, \textit{Tahrīr}, 429 discusses the Quranic phenomenon and refers to a book of his, \textit{Al-Mizān}, on this topic. See also Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, \textit{Al-Fawā‘id} (Cairo, 1327), 219–20; al-Suyūṭī, \textit{Al-Itqān} fi \textit{’Ulam al-Qur’ān} (Cairo, 1975), 3:296–97 (ch. 58).} \textit{Insijām} in its broader sense is first found in Ibn Abī al-Iṣba‘.

Immediately after defining \textit{insijām} Ibn Hijjah says that “most of the poetry of al-Shaykh Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Anṣārī, Shaykh al-shuyūkh of Hamāh… corresponds to this definition.” This poet, also known as Ibn al-Ra‘fā‘, died early in the Mamluk period, in 662/1264;\footnote{Ibn al-Ra‘fā‘, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Muḥsin, was born 586/1190; see Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, \textit{Al-Wafī bi-al-Wafayāt}, 18:546–56, where he is highly praised for his beautiful and artful poetry, full of wit (\textit{nukat}), punning (\textit{tawriyāt}), easy rhymes, “sweet syntax” (\textit{al-tarkīb al-‘adhb}), correct diction, and eloquent ideas.} later in the chapter, Ibn Hijjah quotes six fragments or short poems by him, with a total of 57 lines, which illustrate his “amatory fluency” (\textit{insijāmātuh al-gharāmīyah}).\footnote{\textit{Khizānah}, 249–51/1:436–39.} It appears that \textit{insijām} and love poetry are closely connected, for Ibn Hijjah says at the outset that the masters of this style are \textit{ahl al-tāriq al-gharāmīyah}, “the people of the amatory path,”\footnote{Ibid., 236/1:417.} or \textit{ašhāb al-madhhab al-gharāmī}.

This love may be profane or mystical, or even both at the same time; it is not always possible to distinguish between the two categories. Before we look at the poetry in more detail, consider the following short text, a lover’s complaint:

\begin{quote}
Khabbīrūhu tafsīla hāl jumlatan; fa-‘asāhū yariqqu lī wa-la‘llah!
Kam tanaḥnaṭu idh tabaddā, ḥidhāran min raqībī, wa-kam takallaftu
\end{quote}

Ṣādatī, ‘āwidū riḏākum wa-‘ūdü ‘an jafākum, fa-mā baqiya fīya faḍlah! Dhubtu shawqan, fa-‘ālijūnī bi-qurbin; muttu ‘ishqan, fa-ḥannīnūnī bi-qublah! Wa-ṣa‘bun taghyīrū ma‘ fī al-jibillah.


[Tell him the details of my state, and all of it; perhaps he will have pity on me, maybe . . . ! How often did I say “Ahem” when he appeared, being wary of my watchful guard; how often did I feign a cough! I do not stray from the right path of loving him, however much or little critics may reproach me. Intoxication by love’s passion is a part of me by nature: and it is hard to change what’s in one’s nature.

My masters, let me have your favor once again, after your harshness, for I cannot bear it any longer! I’ve pined away with passion; cure me now with nearness! I’ve died of love; embalm me with a kiss! Distract me from a censurer—as soon as he tells me how to behave, he’s plagued by inattentiveness: I say, “For God’s sake, leave me!” But he perseveres. Few people will abandon evil “for God’s sake.”]

A pleasant piece of literary prose? Perhaps the recurrent rhyme in -lah has given the game away: it is in fact poetry, by the above-mentioned Ibn al-Raffā‘, as the following layout makes clear.19

Khabbirūhū tafsīla ḥāliya jumlah
fa-‘asāḥū yariqu lī wa-la‘allah
Kam tanaḥnaḥtu idh tabaddā ḥidḥārān
min raqībī wa-kam takallaftu su‘lah
Laysa lī ‘an hudā hawāhu ḍalālun
akthara al-lawma ‘ādhilī aw aqallah
Rukkanbat fī jibillatī nashwatu al-‘ishqi wa-ṣa‘bun taghyīrū ma‘ fī al-jibillah
Sādatī ‘āwidū riḏākum wa-‘ūdü

19Ibid., 249–50/1:438. In the “prose” version I have cheated a bit in giving prose forms instead of “poetic” deviations and rhymes (thus ḥālī, jumlatan, ‘ishq, baqiya, whereas the poem has ḥāliya, jumlah, ‘ishq, baqi).
This gives an idea of what Ibn Hijjah calls “fluency”: no intricate word-play, the few antitheses are simple (line 3: hudá/daláл, akthara/aqalla; line 5: rid˚akum/jaf˚akum), as is the syntactic, semantic, and phonetic parallelism in line 6. Both halves of the poem (lines 4b and 8b) end with a maxim-like sentence, the latter being a little joke in that it gives a twist to the imprecation bill˚ah in 8a, and using the colloquial lillah with short a in the last rhyme. If, as the earliest known treatment of insij˚am, by Us˚amah Ibn Munqidh, suggests, the “figure” was originally conceived as prose unintentionally coming out metrically, as poetry, then an important criterion is apparent artlessness. A test for poetry would consist in writing it out as prose, as I have done above, and see how long it takes for a new reader to discover that it is in fact poetry.

Ibn Hijjah quotes some 112 different poets in the chapter (including himself, with a piece of 19 lines). Many are well-known, others are obscure or wholly

Ibid., 274/1:475.
unknown. The majority are late, but there are some lines by early poets: Imru’ al-Qays, with a line from his *Mu’allaqah* (“A-gharraki minnī anna ḥubbaki qāṭīfī . . .”) and the line that ends with the well-known words “. . . wa-kullu gharibin lil-gharibi nasibū” [a stranger is related to every other stranger].21 Many other early poets are also represented by a few lines. Poets from the Abbasid era are better represented, some by longer quotations, such as al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (30 lines) and Mihyār al-Daylamī (26 lines). High scores among pre-Mamluk poets are for Bahā’ al-Dīn Zuhayr (d. 656/1258), with 48 lines, and especially Ibn al-Fārīd (d. 632/1235), with 130 lines (half of them from what looks like a conflation of his two *Tā’īyah*), which is remarkable in view of the profusion of figures of speech in his verse. Among the Mamluk poets are al-Shābīb al-Zārif and his father ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Tiāmsānī, Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Nūbātah, Ibn al-Wardī, and Burhān al-Dīn al-Qīrāṭī. I shall quote and translate short poems or fragments by all five of these.

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-`Afīf al-Tiāmsānī, nicknamed al-Shābīb al-Zārif, “the Decent Young Man” (ẓārif also means “elegant, witty, charming”) was born in Cairo in 661/1263 and died at Damascus at the very young age of 26, in 688/1289, two years before his father.22 Ibn Hījāh quotes seven pieces or fragments by him, with a total of 51 lines, all of them love lyrics. His verse is indeed smooth and fluent, though not without obvious rhetorical craftsmanship. An example:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Lā takhī mā fa’alat bi-ka al-ashwāqū} \\
\text{wa-ishrah hawāka fa-kullunā ‘ushshāqū} \\
\text{Fa-‘asā yu’tūnaka man shakawta la-hu al-hawā} \\
\text{fī ḥamlīhi fa-‘āshiqūna rifāqū} \\
\text{Lā tajza’anna fa-lasta awwala mughramin} \\
\text{fatakat bi-hi al-wajanātū wa-l-ahḍāqū} \\
\text{Wa-iṣbir ‘alā hajrī al-ḥabībi fa-rubbamā} \\
\text{‘āda al-wisālu wa-lil-hawā akhlaqū} \\
\text{Kam laylatin as’hartu ahḍāqī bi-hā} \\
\text{wajdan wa-lil-aflākī bi iḥḍāqū} \\
\text{Yā rabbu qad ba’uda al-ladhīna uḥībbuhum}
\end{align*}
\]

21 *Dīwān*, ed. Abū al-Fadl Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1969), 357; it does not sound very authentic.

‘annî wa-qad alifa al-rifâqa firâqû
Wa-iswadda ḥazzî ‘indahum lammâ sarâ
fihi bi-nâri šâbâbatâ ihrâqû
‘Urbun ra‘aytu aṣâḥża mîthâqîn lahum
an lâ yaṣâḥха ladayhimû mîthâqû’

[Don’t hide what love has done to you:
display your passion; we are lovers all.
If you complain of love to someone, he
may help you bear it: lovers are all friends.
You must not grieve, you’re not the first who loves
and has been killed by murderous cheeks and eyes.
Be steadfast when your love deserts you, for
you may be reunited. Passion has its ways.
So many nights I kept my eyes awake,
love-sick, besieged by thoughts all round.
Lord! Those I love are far from me;
parting from friends is part of normal life.
My luck with them has blackened, with
the scorching fire of passion burnt.
They’re Bedouin nomads, most reliable, I find,
in that one never can rely on them.]

The “fluency” consists in the absence of difficult words and intricate syntax. The
few instances of word-play are simple: aḥdâq and iḥdâq (line 5), rifâq and firâq
(line 6). A sprinkling of antitheses adds clarity to the ideas expressed
(hiding/displaying, grief/steadfastness, parting/union). As in the poem quoted above,
several lines end with a general statement resembling a maxim (lines 1, 2, 4) and
the poem is rounded off (at least in the curtailed version given in the Khizânah)
with a neat paradox, a line that stands out in being the only one that does not
contain a reference to love or lovers.24 There is a contrast or even a conflict, not
resolved, between on the one hand the optimistic and consoling first four lines,
addressed to the lover (or perhaps spoken by the lover to himself), and on the

23Khizânah, 252/1:441; cf. Dīwân, 161, which adds one line after vs. 1 and three more at the end.
In line 6, Khizânah has al-firâqa firâqû, which does not make sense; the version of the Dīwân has
been followed instead. In the last line one might read yaṣâḥђu, instead of the subjunctive, since no
wish or effect is involved.
24Vs. 1 has ashwāq, ḥawâ and ‘uṣhshâq, vs. 2 ḥawâ and ‘āšiqûn, vs. 3 mughram, vs. 4 ḥabîb and
ḥawâ, vs. 5 wajd, vs. 6 uhibbuhum, vs. 7 šâbâbatî.
other hand the unredeemed misery described in the second half of the poem, where the second person singular (comfortingly included in “all of us”) is replaced by the first person singular throughout, apparently isolated from “them.” It could be argued, of course, that such sudden changes of mood are normal in the love-stricken.

Ibn Ḥijjah also quotes the following four lines by him:

Bi-tathannī qawāmika al-mamshūqī
wa-bi-anwārī wajhika al-ma‘shūqī
Wa-bi-ma‘nan lil-ḥusni mubtarūn fī-
ka wa-qalbin ka-qalbiya al-maḥrūqī
Jud bi-waṣlīn aw zawratin aw bi-wa‘din
aw kalāmin aw waqfatin fī al-ṭarīqī
Aw bi-irsālīka al-salāma ma‘a al-rī-
ḥī wa-illā fa-bi-al-khayāli al-ṭarūqī

[By the swaying of your slender body, and the lights of your beloved face, By a rare and novel beauty in you, and a heart burnt black like my own heart: Come live with me, or visit me, or promise me, or say something, stop briefly on the street, Or send a greeting with the wind; if not, then visit me at least at night in dreams!]

This little poem is more unified than the previous one; it consists of only one sentence that is long but transparent, neatly divided into two equal halves. The lines are devoid of any puns, and employ none but the simplest metaphors; the only art lies in the artless diction and the pleasing anticlimactic series in the last two lines, in which the requests become, on the whole, progressively longer and emptier.

More intricate word-play and greater frequency of it are not incompatible with insijām. Here is a piece by the father of al-Ṣabb al-Zārīf, ‘Afīf al-Dīn al-Ṭīlimsānī (610–690/1213–1291).26 By calling him one of the ‘ārifūn, Ibn Ḥijjah indicates that the verses should be given a mystical interpretation:

25Khizānah, 252/1:441. In the Dīwān (167–68) the poem has 13 lines, of which Ibn Ḥijjah offers 1, 2, 4, and 5. Instead of wa-qalbin ka-qalbiya al-maḥrūqī the Dīwān has wa-khaṣṣrīn ka-qalbiya al-masrūqī.

26Krenkow-[Yalaoui], ‘Ṭīlimsānī’; Brockelmann, GAL, 1:258, S1:458.
Ludh bi-al-gharāmi wa-ladhdhati al-ashwāqi
wa-ikhtar fanā’aka fī al-jamāli al-bāqi
Wa-ikhla’ sulūwaka fa-huwa thawbun mukhlaqun
wa-ilbas jađīda makārimi al-akhāqi
Wa-tawaqqā min nāri al-ṣūdūdī bi-shurbatin
min mā’i dam’ika fa-huwa ni’ma al-wāqi
Wa-idhā da’āka ilā al-ṣībā nafasu al-ṣābā
fa-ajib rasūla nasīmihi al-khaffāqi
Wa-idhā sharibta al-ṣirfa min khamri al-hawā
iyyāka taghfalu ’an jamāli al-sāqi
Wa-ilqa al-ahjbbata in aradta wisālahum
mutaladhdirhan bi-al-dhulli wa-al-imlāqi
A-wa-laysa min ahlā al-maṭāmi‘i fī al-hawā
‘izzu al-ḥabībi wa-dhillatu al-‘ushshāqi27

[Take refuge in love and the pleasure of passion
and seek your extinction in beauty that lasts.
Take off the old cloak, now worn out, of your solace;
and get yourself dressed in a new set of virtues.
Seek protection ‘gainst fire of rejection by drinking
the water of tears: they’re the safest protection.
When the zephyr invites you to amorous folly,
obey then the messenger sent in its fluttering breeze.
And when you have drunk the unmixed wine of passion,
be careful to notice the cupbearer’s beauty.
And meet those you love, if you wish to be one with them,
while you relish in being submissive and poor.
For isn’t this one of the sweetest ambitions in love:
the beloved exalted, and humbled the lovers?]

The poem is based on an often-expressed paradox: a lover’s true happiness exists
in being miserable, and it ought to be his highest ambition to be lowly and
submissive. This is expressed through various instances of paronomasia:
ludh/ladhdha, mukhlaq/akhlaq, tawaqqā/wāqqi, ṣābā/ṣibā, mutaladhdirhi/dhull,
Combined, these two figures suggest a punning antithesis of ladhdhah “pleasure”
and dhillah/dhull “submission” that here, exceptionally, goes beyond the confines

27Khizānah, 260/1:453.
of a single line (see lines 1, 6 and 7) and is reinforced by the fact that the very first word, *ludh* (from a different root), is a palindromic of *dhull*. Yet, in spite of all this apparent artifice, one can understand that Ibn Hijjah cites it as an example of *insijam* ‘that stirs the passions and ardent emotions.’

Not all poems quoted are on love secular or mystical. The longest poem, by Ibn Nubātah (686–768/1287–1366), is a *muzdawijah* of 158 *rajaz* couplets in praise of the ruler of Ḥamāh, al-Malik al-Afdāl. After a brief description of nature, it turns into a hunting poem, with a brief panegyric at the end. The poem reads smoothly indeed, and approaches prose not only in being relatively free of obscure diction and far-fetched imagery, but also because it is basically a narrative, from the beginning of the hunt (line 23: "When the time for the shoot* approached, we set out . . .") until the returning, with a heavy bag (lines 137–39: "God, what a fine and blessed sight, the manner we returned from the mountain’s summit, our hands filled with the spoils, thankful for the bounty bestowed upon us, thronging round the Victorious King, al-Malik al-Manṣūr* like comets round the luminous moon"). Within a framework of verbs in perfect tense at intervals (*sirna* . . . *hattā nazalnā* . . . *wa-ibtadara al-qawm* . . . *wa-aqbalat mawākiḥu al-ṭuyūr* . . . *sirnā* . . . *wa*, etc.), the action and scenes are depicted in the intervals by means of circumstantial clauses, extended attributive clauses, similes (*ka-annahā* . . .), exclamative sentences (*fa-yā la-hā* . . ., *fa-ḥabbadhā* . . ., *kam* . . ., *wāhan la-hā* . . .) and other constructions. Shooting turns to hawking and to hunting with hounds and cheetahs, and all of it underlines both the bounty and the bloodshed that is customarily ascribed to rulers in panegyric poetry. Ibn Hijjah, praising the poem, says that ‘If the Sharīf could have seen it, he would have sponged off of (*tatffaļa*) the breeze of its verses [i.e., plagiarized them], and he would have acknowledged that *The Chanter and the Groaner* does not chant and warble as sweetly.’ He refers to Ibn al-Habbāriyah (d. ca. 509/1115) and his collection of poems in *rajaz* meter with mostly animal fables, even though Ibn Nubātah’s poem is more akin to the model set by Ibn al-Mu’tazz and Abū Fīrās. Ibn Hijjah is enthusiastic, too, about a poem by Ibn al-Wardī (691–749/1292–1349) which is a versified deed of purchase, improvised when challenged on 14 Ramadān of the year 715/1316. It begins as follows:

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29 With pellets, *ramy al-bunduq*, for shooting birds.
30 Ibn Hijjah explains that al-Malik al-Afdāl’s earlier name was al-Malik al-Manṣūr.
32 *Khizānah*, 272–73/1:473–74. The date, as can be expected here, is given in the poem itself.
Bi-ismi ilāhi al-khalqi hādhā mā ishtarā
Muḥammadu ibnu Yūnusa ibni Sunqurā
Min Māliki ibni Aḥmada ibni al-Azraqī
Kilāhumā qad ‘urifā min Jilliqī

[In the name of the God of all creatures: this is what has been bought
By Muḥammad Ibn Yūnus Ibn Sunqur
From Mālik Ibn Aḥmad Ibn al-Azraq,
Both known persons from Damascus.]

Truly fluent like prose, it is versification, nazm, but not everyone would call it poetry, shīr. It is perhaps not strange that the poem is not found in Ibn al-Wardī’s Dīwān. Ibn Ḥijjah could have used the second and third hemistichs of this fragment as illustrations of another ‘figure’ of bādi’, called iṭṭirād (lit. "uninterrupted sequence"), which consists in using personal names in poetry in a seemingly artless manner.34

The Egyptian poet Burhān al-Dīn al-Qirātī (726–81/1326–79), a friend of Ibn Nubātah, is represented with three fragments taken from one poem, the first two being the following:

Akhadhat Bābilu ‘anhū / ba’da tilka al-nafathātī
Fa-huwa ghuṣnun fī in’itāfīn / wa-ghażālun fī iltifātī
Ḥasanātī al-khaddī minhū / qad ațālat ḥasarātī
Kullamā sā’a ƙa’alan / qultu “Inna al-ḥasanātī . . .”
Wa-li-sū’i al-ḥazzī ʂārat / ḥasanātī sayyi’ată
A’shaqu al-shāmātī minhū / wa-hiyya ikhba bābī mamātī

Bi-abī laḥṣū ghazālīn / qā’ilin fī al-khalawātī:
“İnna lil-mawti bī-aqdā- / ƙi jufūnī sakaraṭī”
Qultu “Qad mittu gharāmān” / Qāla li “Mut bi-ḥayātī”36

36Khizānah, 273/1:474.
[Babylon took from him
some of these magic spells:]
He is a twig the way he bends,
a gazelle the way he turns.
The beauties of his cheek
have prolonged my miseries.
Whenever he behaves badly
I say, «Surely the good deeds . . .»
But to my misfortune my good deeds
have turned into evil deeds.
I am in love with his moles
though they be the causes of my death.
O, how dear to me is the glance of a gazelle
saying in the desert,
"Death’s throes are in
the cups of my eyelids”
I said, “I am dying of passion!”
He replied to me, “Die, by my life!”

The usual motifs—the twig, the gazelle, magic charms, cheeks, moles or beauty spots, and finally death by love—make for easy listening, together with the smooth syntax, short lines, and easy diction. There is hardly anything deep in such a poem, although one notices little touches that lift it above the wholly trite. By saying that the “prehistoric” Babylonians derived their magic from the beloved, it is suggested that he is a timeless, primeval being, perhaps an angel fallen from heaven like Harūt and Marūt. The lover, in turn, pretends to have fallen: in love and into sin. His beloved’s bad deeds have literally been “taken away” by the incompleteness of the Quranic quotation as well as by his beauty; conversely, the lover’s goodness has turned into badness as stated in the next line and implied by

37 Babylon is associated with the fallen angels Harūt and Marūt and with magic.
38 « . . . will take away the evil deeds» (Quran 11:114).
39 Dayf, who quotes these lines (ʿAṣr al-Duwal, 293, omitting vss. 4–5), places this line at the beginning. He interprets qaʿil as from the root qyl ("taking a midday nap"), which is possible. In the version quoted by Ibn Hijjah “saying” is more appropriate, since the following line must be spoken by the “gazelle.”
40 Literally, “intoxications,” hence the “cups.”
41 Dayf, child of his time, assumes that the beloved is female.
the mention of drunkenness further on. There is an obvious play on the two meanings of ḥasanār, aesthetic and moral “beauties.” The last word is a linguistic joke, playing on two meanings of the preposition bi- in “by my life”: either an implied oath: “[I swear] upon my life,” or literally “by means of my being alive.”

There are two other sections in badī’ lists, including Ibn Hijjah’s Khizānah, that are not wholly unlike insijām. Ibn Ḥijjah deals with them in two much shorter consecutive sections. The first is suhūlah, which means, of course, “easiness, smoothness, facility”; as we have seen, Ibn Hijjah uses the word when describing insijām. He is aware that the concepts are related, as appears from the following:

*Suhūlah* is mentioned by al-Tīfāshī in connection with the figure of ẓarāfah (“elegance”); some people associate it with insijām. It is mentioned by Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī in his book *Sirr al-Faṣāḥah (The Secret of Eloquence)*, where he says that it consists of the words being free from artificiality, complexity, and tortuousness in the expression *(khuluṣ al-lafz wa-al-takalluf wa-al-ta’qīd wa-al-ta’assuf fī al-sabk).* Al-Tīfāshī defines *suhūlah* as “easy expressions, that are distinguished from others even to those literate people who have the least taste, and which bespeak of a sensitive feeling, a fine nature, and a sound reflective mind.”

Almost all the illustrations are from Bahā’ al-Dīn Zuhayr, “who holds the reins of this kind.” No attempt is made to distinguish between *insijām* and *suhūlah* and it is doubtful that Ibn Hijjah would insist on a distinction; he is bound to follow his

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44Not found in the consulted editions of Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (d. 477/1074), *Sirr al-Faṣāḥah* (Cairo, 1932 and Beirut, 1982). Until this point, Ibn Hijjah is quoting, or near-quotting, al-Ḥilli’s commentary (*Sharḥ al-Kāfīyāh*, 311), which has ẓarāfah instead of ẓarāfah.
45Khzānah, 554/1:478.
model, al-Ḥill, who, in turn, merely collected those terms of ḏādi‘ that were current. Judging by the examples, suhūlah seems to be applied even more than insijām to poetry that is “easy,” in that it avoids difficult words, difficult syntax, and difficult thoughts. One example, by al-Bahā’ Zuhayr, is on the old conceit of offering to return a kiss as if it were a present that could be given back:46

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Man lī bi-qalbin ashtarī} & / \text{hi min al-qulūbi al-qāsiyih} \\
\text{Wa-ilayka yā malika al-milā} & / \text{ḥi waqaftu ashkū ḥāliyah} \\
\text{Innī la-atlubu ḥājatan} & / \text{laysat ‘alayka bi-khāfiyih} \\
\text{An‘im ‘alayya bi-qublatin} & / \text{hibatan wa-illā āriyah} \\
\text{Wa-u‘iduhā la-ka lā} & / \text{‘adim-/ta bi-‘aynīhā wa-kamā hiyah} \\
\text{Wa-idhā aradta ziyyādatan} & / \text{khudhḥā wa-nafṣī rāḏiyyah}47
\end{align*}
\]

[Who has a heart for me that I could buy, a hard one! 
To you, O king of pretty ones, I’ve come with my complaint. 
I want one thing; it will not be unknown to you: 
Please make me happy with a kiss: a gift, or else a loan; 
You’ll have it back precisely as it was, my dear! 
But if you’d like some more, please take them, it’s my pleasure.]

The other, following section is entitled ḥusn al-bayān,48 a term that should be taken in a vague and general sense, such as “beautiful exposition, or clarity of expression.” Ibn Hijjah describes it as follows:

They say that it means the clear expression (iba‘nah) of what is in the soul in eloquent words that are remote from intricacy (lubs), since the intention of it is to utter the sense by means of a lucid picture (ikhrāj al-ma‘ná ilá al-sūrah al-wādīḥah) and to convey it to the understanding of the recipient in the easiest manner.

46Cf. the joke told in Ibn Qutaybah, ‘Uyān al-Akhbār (Cairo, 1925–30), 2:55 and other sources; see Ulrich Marzolph, Arabia Ridens (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), 2:47 (no. 175).
In view of the more precise sense of "imagery" that the term bayān carried in Ibn Ḥijjah’s time, according to the more formal and scholastic study of eloquence and style, one might believe that here, too, he refers above all to imagery, seeing moreover that he speaks of a "picture/image." Yet in the rest of the chapter and its illustrations this is not borne out.

Although insijām and related terms were introduced in studies on badi‘ at a relatively late stage, this does not mean that the concepts of fluency and seeming ease were absent from earlier phases. Both terms for eloquence, bayān and balāghah, near-synonyms before they acquired more specialized technical meanings, stress the clarity and communicativeness of eloquence that seem to favor easiness over obscurity. Ja‘far Ibn Yahyā al-Barmakī is reported to have described true bayān as “what is far from artifice (ṣan‘ah), free of complexity (ta‘aqqud), and not in need of interpretation (ta‘wil);” this view was endorsed by al-Jāḥiz and many others.50 Suhilah is mentioned often, usually favorably. It is the first of forty-six stylistic traits of the poetry of ‘Umar Ibn Abī Rabī‘ah listed in Al-Aghānī and attributed to Muṣ‘ab Ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Zubayrī (uncle of al-Zubayr Ibn Bakkār, d. 256/870).51 Particularly common is the concept of the "seemingly easy,” often expressed as al-sahl al-munṭanī‘, or al-muṭmī‘ al-munṭanī‘ but found in other expressions. Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ is reported to have defined eloquence as “what an ignorant person hears and thinks (mistakenly) he can do equally well.”52 Ishāq al-Mawsilī (d. 235/850) called the poetry of Mansūr al-Namar “easy of diction, difficult to aspire to” (sahl kalāmuh, ṣa‘b marāmuh).53 Ismā‘īl, son of ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ibn Yahyā al-kāṭib (d. 132/749), defined a good prose writer as “he who writes a letter so that people reading it imagine they can do as well, but when they try they cannot.”54 Al-ʿAṣmā‘ī is credited with a definition of poetry as “what is concise, easy, delicate, and subtle of meaning; if you hear it you think you can reach that level, but if you try it, you find it far from your grasp. All the rest is mere versification.”55 Ibrāhīm, son of al-ʿAbbās Ibn al-Aḥnaf, describing his father’s

50 Abū al-Faraj al-xCDshahānī, Kitāb al-Aghānī (Cairo, 1927–74), 1:120–21.
poetry, said he had never found anything by a modern poet that was "more
difficult while being easy" (asʿab fī suhūlah). Similar sayings abound.

This preference for easy comprehension in poetry seems to contrast with the
opinion that the basic difference between poetry and prose is that the former tends
to obscurity and the latter to limpidity. In his epistle on the difference between
prose and poetry, Abū ʿIṣḥāq Ibrāhīm Ibn Hilāl al-Ṣābī (d. 384/994) wrote that as a
consequence of its prosodic restrictions "the most splendid (afkhar) poetry is what
is obscure (mā ghamūḍa) and only gives up its purport after some delay," whereas
"the most splendid epistolary prose (tarassul) is what has a clear meaning and
gives up its purport as soon as one hears it." Al-Ṣābī, himself a prose writer,
exaggerates: certainly in his day, the prestigious epistolary style tended to rival or
surpass poetry in obscurity and ornateness. The issue of obscurity in Arabic
literary criticism, from the scattered remarks by al-Jāhīz to the important contribution
on the topic by the sixth/thirteenth-century theorist Ḥāzim al-Qartājannī, has been
studied by Albert Arazi in his article on this epistle.

Although critics and theorists, ancient and modern, often pay lip-service to the
ideals of clarity and easiness in general terms, these are not very rewarding
concepts to them since, like happy families to novelists, they offer few opportunities
to show one’s critical and analytical skills. Easy poetry offers not enough of a
challenge, nor does the concept of easiness itself. We must be grateful to Ibn
Hijjah and other writers of badiʿiyah commentaries that they did not disdain to
deal at length with easy poetry, stooping from being critics to being "merely"
consumers of pleasant verse. To them, insijām and related "figures" are an excuse
for quoting good or occasionally excellent poetry which does not depend primarily
on artifice. The chapters serve to redress the balance to some extent between the
artful and the seemingly artless. It is not strange that the insijām chapter is so
extremely lengthy in Ibn Hijjah’s Khizānah and Ibn Maʿṣūm’s Anwār al-Rabīʿ: it
helped them to give their works more of the character of a representative anthology.
"Fluency" is neither absent from the poetry of the Mamluk period, nor particularly
common in it: it is found in all periods. The phrase "easy listening" in the title of

55Abū al-Faraj, Aghānī, 8:365; cf. Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, Kitāb al-Ṣīnaʿatayn (Cairo, 1971), 67;
56Bahāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Ḥamdūn, Al-Tadhkirah al-Ḥamduʾīyah, ed. Iḥsān
ʿAbbās and Bakr ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1996), 6:357; Albert Arazi, "Une épître d’Ibrāhīm b. Hilāl
al-Ṣābī sur les genres littéraires," in M. Sharon, ed., Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in
Honor of Professor David Ayalon (Jerusalem, 1986), 473–505 (see 498); Ziyād al-Zuʿbī, "Risālah
Abī ʿIṣḥāq al-Ṣābī fī al-Faq ʿbayna al-Mutarassil wa-al-Shāʿir: Dirāsah Tawthiqiyyah Naqdiyyah,"
this paper suggests pleasant rather than great poetry, and it is true that many of the poems that show *insijām* do not seem to tax the listener, just as some muzak, meant to be relaxing and reassuring, has been purged of dissonants or “difficult” features. Nevertheless, there are many other poems that, though easy to listen to, hide deeper layers of meaning and thought for those listeners who make an effort.