

Part 1: Language and Literature

Chapter 50: Arabic Literature, Poetic and Prose Forms

A. Poetry

Let us imagine an Arab Bedouin riding his camel on frequent long journeys across lonely deserts. While the rhythmic beating of the padded hoofs on soft sand breaks the stillness of the air, the rider is sunk deep in recollections of his own past. As he feels excited to share his mood with his “two companions and fellow-travellers,” there is nothing more natural than that he should start chanting in unison with the movement which has the sole possession of his entire perception. This unsophisticated outpouring of one’s heart in response to an occasional urge took the form of *rajaz* – the simple iambic alternation of *harakah* (moved or vocalized) and *sukun* (quiescent consonant) corresponding to the alternation in the lifting and lowering of the camel’s feet. (Cf. the *khabab* in which the pattern of alternation corresponds to the pace of the horse.)

The observation of the effects of the “song” induced a deliberate practice to beguile the man and quicken the animal. As the practice grew and attracted talent, formalities accumulated by common taste and general acceptance, giving rise to the *art of poetry*. The art was not slow to create for itself forms much more varied and complex than the original *rajaz*. About the middle of the second/eighth century when al-Khalil scrutinized the structure of Arabic poetry according to the quantitative measure suggested to him by the different tones on the rebound of the smith’s hammer (just akin to the camel’s tread) he admirably reduced it to a system of prosody consisting of 16 material forms.

Some foreign influence is not precluded from the development of some of these standard Arabic forms, all of which, of course, did not, and could not, have an equal measure of antiquity or popularity. What is

remarkable is that this system of prosody sufficed to serve as the hard core of future indigenous development as well as assimilation of foreign models up to the present day.

By the quarter of the fifth century A.D. when we get our first yet full acquaintance with Arabic poetry, myriads of tribes hailing from different quarters of the country had commingled sufficiently at commercial co-literary fairs, e.g. that of 'Ukaz, religious such as at Mecca, and cultural as that at Hirah, to evolve a common language and widely appreciated norms and forms of artistic composition, though, naturally enough, they exhibited peculiarities of usage of speech. This common literary medium which developed out of the North Arabic, coinciding with the steady decline of the economic, political and cultural influence of the South, was leavened mainly in Hirah with the accompaniments of material and religious civilization as augmented with currents – Judaic, Christian, and Graeco-Roman – from the opposite end of the Northern Desert.

Generally speaking, it was precise to finesse so far as Bedouin life and environment were concerned, but lacked the facility for conveying abstract ideas and general concepts. However, it possessed, by the very nature of its being a compromise between various dialects, an immense wealth of synonyms together with ample resources of rhyme and assonance inherent in its schematic morphology. Thus *saj'* (rhyme) came to be the first and natural form of artistic composition prompted by the instinct for symmetry and balance in the structure of short, compact sentences especially designed for intonation and oral transmission without being committed to writing.

The *saj'* existed before metre; the evolution of metrical forms only pushed it to the end of a verse under the name of *qafiyah*. It is sometimes overlooked that the *qafiyah* constituted an essential element – and not an additional, far less artificial, embellishment in the structure of Arabic poetry. In other words, verse without *qafiyah* has been unknown in Arabic during its infancy as much as in its youth and old age. As we shall see later, so long as there was healthy development, any tendency on the part of the *qafiyah* to rigidity and monotony was checked in due time by adequate adaptation to the requirements of the theme (*vide* the evolution of *muzdawij* and *musammat*).

In the period of decadence it was not sheer conservatism but a deep realization of its essential worth, which caused artificiality to be preferred to freedom. The positive function of the *qafiyah* in laying down rails, so to say, for the movement of thought, is demonstrated by the spontaneous rush of the imagination of the audience to the end – almost the entire later half – of a line ahead of actual recitation by the poet.¹ Such a thrilling experience of effective communion between the poet and his audience is in no way rare wherever Arabic poetry (or Persian or Urdu poetry for that matter) is recited even today. This is quite apart from the practical utility of the *qafiyah* in helping memorization as alluded to before.

In the sociological fabric of the pre-Islamic time the poet occupied a very high and influential position. The popular mind was impressed so deeply with the efficacy of his art that it believed him to be in communion with some super-natural source vaguely identified with a jinnee or a devil. But the conception about his art was the same as about the skill of a horseman, it had to be consecrated entirely

to the cause of the solidarity and the ascendancy of the tribe. The poet had a task irrevocably assigned to him, which was to act the spokesman and the counsel on behalf of the tribe.

Hence, he was expected to specialize in a knowledge of the tribal saga supporting the cause for his clients and against their rivals.² In short, poetry was appreciated primarily as a weapon of offence and defence in the struggle of tribes against tribes; its function was to commemorate the glories of the poet's own tribe, exalt its achievements in war and peace, and embolden it against the other tribes by holding them to scorn. There was little room for the personality of the poet to detach itself even for a while from the interests and the fortune of the tribe.

Naturally enough, the motifs of pre-Islamic poetry sprang fundamentally from the spirit of the *jahiliyyah* – the ignorance of a moral code of conduct characterized by a strong sense of tribal solidarity based on blood kinship, and highly volatile passions cramped within stunted sympathies and primary selfish impulses.³ Thus, the two oldest kinds of verse were the *hija'* (satire) and the *fakhr* (self-glorification) with the keynote of the *hamas* or desperate pursuit of unbridled aggression. True, the *nasib* (erotic verse) also must have had an independent form in the oldest time but all the same it could not have occupied a position other than the subsidiary one which is assigned to it in the scheme of the *qasidah*. After all, the theme of love had no bearing on the security of the tribe. The very reason that its interest was human and universal, i.e. not peculiar to the tribe, was enough to render it inconsequential.

Leaving aside the *hija'*, which has throughout maintained its independent form, the *fakhr* in its kindred form of *madih* (eulogy) came to assume the pivotal position in the structure of the *qasidah*, which was devised especially to rope in the *nasib* and many other minor forms of occasional verse to sub-serve it. This "loose-knitting" of the diverse kinds into a rigidly conventional structure seems to have come into vogue not long before our earliest acquaintance with Arabic poetry, i.e. about 125 years before Islam.⁴ The order in the composition of the *qasidah* is invariably as follows. First comes the *nasib* by way of a prelude, second, the *madih* as the main part, and third, the *khatimah* (epilogue) which is most didactic. A certain proportion was observed particularly between the first two parts on the principle that the *nasib* should neither over-shadow the *madih* nor pass without fulfilling its function of catching the ear of the audience for the latter.

The Nasib

Usually the poet pictures himself as confronting, in the course of his journeys to and from, the remains of the encampment which once had been the scene of his love. This gives him the opportunity to depict with remarkable pathos the scene of the separation and recollect in moving terms the charms of the beloved and the pleasures of her company in the past. The physical charms are dwelt upon with much gusto and not a little sensuousness. The discreteness of the Arab mind is amply shown in concentration on the individual parts of the body one by one.

To take just one typical instance, the Arab poet has a long breath in expatiating on the saliva – its purity,

coolness, freshness, and fragrance like that of “early morning rain collected in a clear stony pond” – which nectar he would suck, draught after draught, with the zest of a drunkard in order to convey the meaning of the simple word “kiss.” A life free from hard work is idealized for its effect in promoting feminine delicacy and untarnished complexion. To stay behind the curtains, well protected from the rigours of the weather, and jealously guarded in the manner of “the delicate shell of an egg under the feathers” was the vision which enthralled the heart of a young damsel.

Qualities of heart, particularly modesty, gentleness of manners, friendliness towards neighbours, and mirthful coquetry in the company of the lover, are also highly appreciated but only as adjuncts of physical beauty. Having perforce to suffer long spans of solitude due to unsettled life, the Bedouin acquired high sensitivity to any stimulus to his memory.⁵ Hence addresses to the natural surroundings associated with the exploits of the past and outbursts of sympathetic response to the cooing of the dove and the like are an ubiquitous feature. Further, it was the relish for musing which earned for the image of the beloved (*khayal* or *taif*) a special place in Arabic poetry.

The poet’s feeling of love for the beloved is expressed only in general terms such as the comparison of his own heartache to that of “a she-camel who has lost her young.” For the rest, the pursuit of love is only reminiscent of “the hot chase of a game.” The only relieving feature is that of the Arab lover insists on a response to his love, and that without any trace of cringing. He would start taking pride in his own qualities so as not to leave any doubt about his deserts for the esteem of the beloved, but in the end he would not mind warning bluntly that although he relishes coquetry he cannot brook any affront to his dignity. That is why in describing the union he would take care to mention the yielding, passive and tacit though it may be, on the part of the beloved.

Incidental to the journeying of the poet in quest of love and fortune comes the description of the animals and the natural scene. It has been said that the camel occupies the same place in Arabic poetry as the cow in the *Rg-Veda*. The horse, no less indispensable for the normal pursuits of life including war, comes next. Though the description came soon afterwards to sound jejune even to the townsfolk of Baghdad, one cannot help being moved even today by the tenderly feeling shown to the two animals which equals to, sometimes even exceeds, that reserved for the members of the household.

To bring out certain points of comparison in the riding beasts, the poet turns to the wild animals, among which the pride of place goes to the wild ass, the wild cow and the ostrich. The subject of wild life is frequently enlivened with fine thrilling scenes of flight and chase. The natural scene is, of course, is dominated by clouds, thunder, lightning, rain and the mirage, not to speak of the desert and the mountain valleys.

The Madih

The *nasib* formed only a prelude to catch the ear of the audience, the main theme being the *madih*. Though in the form of personal eulogy, it is really a concentration of the pride in the tribe. The particular

patron to whom the verses are addressed is a mere peg on which to hang the ideal that united the tribe as against other tribes. The so-called virtues constituting this ideal are, in addition to the *hamas* already noted, the over-powering passion for vendetta, loyalty to friends and allies (and not to any moral law or civic organization), and hospitality to guests. The pride in valour was so all-engrossing that the dictates of prudence always needed a special and somewhat diffident, pleading.

But, as a rule, the Bedouin considered it below his dignity to try strength with an unequal foe, which is reflected in his acknowledgement of merit on the other side. Those who refused to be restrained by the collective interest and initiative of the tribe in practice of these same virtues were designated the *sa'alik*, i.e. disowned outlaws, whose production bears the exceptional feature of defiance of tribal authority and extra hardihood. Hospitality and generosity were characterized by the same excesses as courage and aimed only at achieving prominence over other tribes. With the transition from tribal into some kind of State organization as, for example, at Hirah, the panegyric tended to be more and more personal and acquired features of flattery.

The Khatimah

The didactic epilogue was devoid of any depth of thought and merely embodied lessons learnt from practical experience in the particular and limited milieu. Religion sat very lightly on the pagan Arab, some occasional references to pre-Islamic ritual only prove that it was treated as part of an inherited tribal custom⁶ without symbolizing any moral ideal. The absence of religious thought and feeling is fully confirmed by the total lack of reasoning of any kind whatsoever.

Death is frequently mentioned as a stark fact, but it only stimulated bravery, rather rashness, on the battlefield, on the one hand, and a sort of hectic hedonism in the intervals of peace, on the other. It is in this context that the poetry of Jewish and Christian poets and such pagan poets as were influenced by their thought (e.g. Zuhair and the Hanifs) assumes a distinctive character. The idea of submission to a Supreme Power controlling man and the universe, a life after death involving moral retribution, and a spirit of peace and respect for the rights of others (the very anti-thesis of *hamas*) stand out as streaks of early morning light in the surrounding darkness.

Such poetry flourished mostly in Hirah and the oasis towns like Yathrib and al-Ta'if, which were also the centres of material civilization. Hence truly religious thought and emotion are found side by side with exhilarating pictures of urban refinement in luxury as in the poetry of 'Adiyy b. Zaid. It is noteworthy that the Romans and Christians were throughout, from the beginning down to the 'Abbasid period, the purveyors not only of wines but also of the etiquette of wine-drinking.⁷ Anyhow, wine-drinking had become a common habit. On the other hand, artistic music and dancing, so far as they are mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry, are mere clichés popularized by individuals who had occasions of frequenting centres of high life under Persian and/or Roman influence. Both these arts were neither indigenous to nor common in the Arabian Society of the days before the Islamic conquests.

The *qasidah* presented a series of thoughts moulded in self-contained verses strung together in the most impressive form of a single metre and *qafiyah*. A thought running into more than one verse was a rarity and regarded somewhat as a weakness of the poet. But one wonders whether the outward unity which was so perfect as to invite the charge of monotony from the uninitiated possessed also a similar unity of thought and ideas.

The fact is that there was enough of coherence internally within the two main parts, viz. the *nasib* and the *madih*, though the appreciation of it depends upon a certain degree of familiarity with the pattern of life and the train of thought and feeling generated by it. It was only the transition from the first to the second part which was rather abrupt, either lacking a link altogether or depending upon one which was clearly artificial and weak. It is, however, untrue to say that the Arabs were not conscious of it; on the other hand, they were throughout applying their ingenuity to *husn al-istitrad* (grace of digression).

Similarly, there is no doubt that the ideas as well as the modes of expression were stereotyped, but the primary reason for it is to be sought in the physical existence of the Arab Bedouin which was characterized, above all, by little variety. The pre-occupation with a hard and meagre subsistence in a monotonous natural scene contributed to averseness to all serious reflection and to poverty of theme. At the same time the totalitarian demands of tribal loyalty left little room for indulgence in personal experience or individual reaction. As soon as thought was quickened by spiritual impulses from Judaism and Christianity and the monotony of life was relieved by the encroachment of Aramaean and Persian material civilizations, the structure of the *qasidah* proved accommodating enough to change.

In addition to *hija'*, there was one more form of artistic poetry, namely, the *ritha'* (elegy), which maintained its position independently of the *qasidah*. Although this form too had its own clichés and was dominated by the spirit of *hamas* and the passion for vendetta, yet the element of strong personal emotion running through it is often genuine and highly remarkable. It is this reliability of the personal element which brings to the fore the strength of the lament of the sisters as compared with that of the wives, which is again a projection of the all-powerful importance of blood kinship.

The tradition has concerned itself only with the preservation of artistic poetry;⁸ unconventional pieces prompted by events of everyday life were allowed to lapse. Yet a number of them noted for wit and humour (*al-mulah*) are available for enjoyment on informal occasions.

Islam and Poetry

Wherever the ideals of the *jahilliyyah* suffered a decline owing to the growth of a sense of justice and corporate life under some kind of civic and political organization, there was left little scope for self-glorification at the expense of others (i.e. *hija'*, *fakhr*, and *hamas*). Al-Jumahi makes an interesting point when he attributes the paucity of poets and the meagreness of poetry in the tribe of Quraish already before the advent of Islam to a sense of respect for the rights of others as exemplified by the incident arising out of the lampooning by ibn al-Zib'ara.⁹

Thus, pre-Islamic poetry being so dependent on tribal wars for its impulses and motives, Islam was bound to make the ground slip under the feet of the poets. As soon as the faithful renounced all pride (*al-nakhwah*) and blind partisanship (*al-‘asabiyyah*) in favour of a universal egalitarian brotherhood and organized their life under a government by-law, which guaranteed mutual rights and obligations, eliminating resort to force, and treated satire as punishable libel, the poets naturally felt that their day was over.

Unable or unwilling to appreciate any ideal of morality, they turned their invectives against the person of Muhammad and aligned themselves actively on the side of his opponents. It was such poets, and not poets or poetry in general, who were denounced in the Qur’an as incapable of leadership due to lack of moral thinking and purposeful activity.¹⁰ Severe penalties had also to be meted out to a number of them such as Abu ‘Azza, al-Nadr b. al-Harith and Ka’b b. al-Ashraf – all of whom had played a part as active competitors while using the art of poetry as an additional weapon directed especially against the person of Muhammad, whose kindness they were not loth to exploit whenever they found themselves helpless.

But the reason for the vehement pique and chagrin of the poets against Islam went much deeper. The ideals of the *jahiliyyah* were not the only thing involved, their art itself was threatened with dislodgment from the position of supremacy enjoyed theretofore. Was there not the Qur’an held up as a challenge to artistic composition? It is quite understandable that the Arabs should be completely at a loss to place the Qur’an in any of the categories of artistic composition known to them. They would call it *al-shi‘r* (poetry) when their own poetic production was so palpably different from it both in form and content.

Only poetry had been known to exercise such sway over the minds of the people as the Qur’an did. If it were not poetry it could only be grouped along with the utterances of a soothsayer (*kahin*) or a person in trance (*majnun*). This equation, however, had an ostensibly disparaging intent inasmuch as such utterances were seldom held in high esteem as a piece of art. The allusion was only in their enigmatic character in which the people deciphered fortune and prophecy. When at last they turned to the content, they gave unmistakable proof of their *jahiliyyah* outlook on finding the Qur’an to be merely a bundle of “the stories of the ancient peoples” (*asatir al-awwalin*).

Soon they propped up one of them, al-Nadr b. al-Harith, to draw the people away from the Qur’an with his skill in reciting the stories of Rustan and Isfandiyar. As a matter of fact, the form of the Qur’an is derived from a familiar pattern, yet it represents a new class by itself. It is prose composed of short, compact sentences which, when read together, sound as balanced counter-parts (*mathani*), The endings (*fawasil*) of them having a distinguishable cadence free from the shackles of a regular *saj‘*. It bewildered and dismayed the Arabs that this form which, in contrast with the familiar pattern of the soothsayers, tending to simplicity rather than artificial encumbrance, should soar to such height of inimitable perfection as to constitute a challenge to poetry.

The same is true of the diction employed in the Qur’an: it is clear and easily intelligible (*mubin*), yet pure and elegant. But whatever the elegance of form and diction, the uniqueness of the Qur’an lay particularly

in its content, the reflection on the world of nature as distinguished from an aesthetic worship of it, the search for a goal of life and an ideal of morality in human conduct, in short, the awakening of the forces of good in the nature of man to set limits to, and control, the evil in himself. It was this content which made the Qur'an the prototype of an entirely new class of literary composition. In later times it was an aberration of the pre-Islamic taste which exalted the excellence of the word over and above that of the content. [11](#)

It is quite easy for us to realize the dismay of the poets whose production, when judged subsequently by the standards of the Greek philosophers, was found to be nothing but an exhortation of lewdness, only two qualities of character, namely, bravery and generosity, were such as could be said to be harmless to the youth. But the Prophet appreciated their art much more than they realized. He could not taboo poetry; rather, he would listen eagerly to the verse of Umayyah b. Abi al-Salt and many others. He was not even indifferent.

On the other hand, he adopted the way of active patronage and guidance to make clear the demands for adjustment. As an example, let us take the case of Ka'b b. Zuhair. The ode which brought him the *burdah* (mantle) as a prize is in the traditional style. It opens with erotic verses lamenting separation from the beloved, Su'ad, and recalling her physical charms, not excluding the intoxication of the saliva compared to wine. The *madih* puts a new aspect in so far as the glorification of the new ideal is concerned. [12](#) But the poet did not yet know how to restrain his passion for satire; he had to make amends for suppressed expressions on the Ansar.

Thus, the only demand made by orthodox Islam on the poets was to avoid the proud and gleeful recounting of adventures of sinful pleasure such as abound in the verses of the "Vagabond Prince," and to refrain from indulging in tribal pride or exaltation of force regardless of moral rectitude. [13](#) Within these ordinary limits of decency and peaceful life the old literary traditions were to survive and grow. It has particularly to be noted that erotic interest in woman or even the mention of wine as a symbol of joyful experience was lawful pursuit, and not in renunciation, of sensuous pleasure. As the examples of Dabi' b. al-Harith and al-Hutai'ah would prove, only the satire and the libel were sternly put down.

Development of the Ghazal

The detachment of poetry from the passions and the fury of tribal antagonism as well as the absence under the Orthodox Caliphate of that corruptive patronage which draws talent away from the universal human interests to flattery of personages, conducted inevitably to concentration in the theme of love in poetry and song. These arts were cultivated in the Hijaz by the sprightly and intelligent youth from among the nobility of the *Ansar* and the *Muhajirin*, who were precluded from playing their part in politics and government and were at the same time pampered with frequent accessions to their already vast hereditary fortune in the form of largesses on behalf of the Umayyads.

Thus frustration, leisure, and opulence all combined to turn the creative genius to art and amusement.

The peculiarly Islamic institution of rehabilitating the prisoners of war as members of the households of the conquerors, instead of segregating them in penal camps, has always had far-reaching consequences, in the field of cultural inter-change but never were such consequences so great as in the case of the conquest of Persia. Suffice it to say that it was the new Persian element in the households of Mecca and Medina which for the first time introduced artistic music and dancing in the very heart of Arabian society. [14](#)

In the special traditions of the people and the time, there was no music and dancing without poetry. Therefore, poetry underwent a highly welcome and profound change both in form as well as content. Whereas in the *jahiliyyah* period the motif of aggressive self-glorification often made some of the more militant tribes positively to discourage the *ghazal*, it now came to be the main theme catering to the refined aesthetic taste and tenderly feelings of the new society. Naturally enough, the erotic prelude came in hand for development as an independent form, which, by the way, marked the beginning of the breaking up of the “loose unity of the *qasidah*.”

The development of the independent form of the *ghazal* took two distinct and parallel lines. First, the licentious (*al-ibahiyy*) *ghazal*, best represented by ‘Umar b. Abi Rabi‘ah (d.c. 101/719), flourished in the towns and faithfully reflected the high life obtained there. As compared with the pre-Islamic *nasib*, this *ghazal* is an end in itself. The poet is no longer a warrior made essentially of hard stuff, who snatches a few moments of respite to devote to the hot pursuit of a woman. Rather, he is an amiable and amorous youth entirely devoted to the cultivation of his feeling of love and desire for soft dalliance without being distracted by any thought of tribal security and personal safety.

The description of physical charms is no more a mere description; it is rather a fine aesthetic appreciation of beauty. Still more remarkable is the shifting of the focus inwards and the transformation of the union into an exchange of feeling and sentiment. [15](#) And both the lover and the beloved are endowed with sharp wit, humour, and the mood for sport. In short, the qualities of the mind and the longings of the heart come to the fore and find unimpeded expression. Special delight is taken in the evasion of social restrictions and the celebration of clandestine visits while the congregation at the time of the *hajj* is brought in as the connoisseur’s opportunity for the enjoyment of beauty from near and far.

The second kind of *ghazal* was born of the ideal of Platonic love cultivated in the desert. The chastening influence of the restraints of Islam on the simple-living Bedouins had the remarkable result of originating the conception of love shorn of all tinge of bodily lust – an ideal conception thoroughly unknown to the pre-Islamic Arab. This ideal is enshrined in the highly subjective verse centring on the popular stories of Majnun–Laila and Jamil–Buthainah. They may or may not have been real historical personages; what really matters is that they do represent a type of idealistic lover who regards any touch of lust as desecration of love, beauty, and art. No wonder that the physical charms are over-shadowed by a *tete-a-tete* between two hearts full of deep pathos.

Vilifying Ghazal

It has already been noted that the lover-poets of the towns were really men of frustrated political ambitions. Their impotent rage against the rulers would not be held back even when they sought to beguile it with art. Rather it is highly interesting to note that it should turn the artistic form of the licentious *ghazal* into an instrument for vilification and political vendetta. Taking the typical example of ibn Qais al-Ruqayyat (d.c. 80/699 – 700) one finds him mentioning Umm al-Banin, the wife of Walid b. ‘Abd al-Malik, as the object of his flirtation. His aim was no other than to leave the Umayyad monarch smarting with anger, even though sometimes he adroitly contrived in the verse itself to absolve the innocent lady of guilt.

Apart from political vendetta, it became a commonplace with the poets to give rebirth to *hija’* in the form of *ghazal* by mentioning the ladies and the female relations of their enemies in shamefully amorous terms. How unrelated to truth all this was, is illustrated by the incident of Umm Ja‘far. When she could not keep patience over al-Ahwas, a Medinese poet, mentioning her in his verses in order to bring her people into disrepute, she caught hold of him one day in the market-place and demanded of him the money which, she made out, he owed to her. As the poet swore that he did not know her at all, she remarked, “Of course, you do not know me, yet you mention many things about me in your verses.”

It is no surprise that State authority was sometimes invoked against such poets in the same way as it was invoked in the case of the direct *hija’* of al-Hutai’ah and others. At the same time there is evidence to show that at least the high-class ladies aspired to have their charms sung by the poets in the same way as in our own days they would feel proud to see their photographs in newspapers. It must, however, be remembered that, on the whole, “licence” was confined to a disregard of social conventions relating to contacts between the two sexes; otherwise, obscenity was guarded against in all good taste.

In regard to form, it is enough to remind ourselves that the lover-poets of Mecca and Medina produced for the first time a lyric verse especially designed to be set to music. With this purpose they naturally referred such metres as were short and characterized by an easy flow, though they continued to rely mainly on the old tradition itself. Consequent upon the development of natural, humanistic interests, all artificiality about the language and pompousness was shed and simple unaffected expression in familiar words and soft tones came to be aimed at. To some, though very limited, extent, continuous verse also came into use for such purposes as the reproduction of dialogues in love-poetry.

It so happened that the merits of the Umayyad poetry set out above received little appreciation owing to the pre-occupation of the scholars with such pre-Islamic poetry as might be helpful in the study and preservation of the idiom of the Qur’an. With regard to its appreciation, the time factor alone was the prime importance; hence the prejudice in favour of the pre-Islamic verse became stereo-typed and all pervading. It was ibn Khaldun who first realized that, linguistic research apart, the intrinsic artistic merits of the Umayyad poetry were definitely far superior to those of the pre-Islamic poetry.

And the reason for it was that those who lived under Islam benefited from the model of high class speech provided by the Qur'an and the Hadith; hence, their literary taste improved a great deal beyond that of the pre-Islamic people. That this improvement should have taken a generation to manifest itself fully in poetry (and also in prose), was quite natural and should not stand in the way of tracing it to its origins in Islam. The depth of thought, the richness of imagination, the paramountcy of content, the search within for the feelings of the heart, and the consciousness of the restraint of reason, and its Holy Book, and these general qualities are perceptible in the post-Islamic production even where the themes are un-Islamic.

It was perhaps this un-Islamic element such as the "licence" in *ghazal* and the lampooning in the *naqa'id* which, in addition to the necessities of linguistic research, turned the attention away from the contribution of Islam to the literary production of the Umayyad period. Ibn Khaldun further tells us that some of the learned scholars of his time had to acknowledge their dormant impression of the superior merits of the post-Islamic production, as if it were to their own surprise, but were unable to give any reason for it. ¹⁶ No wonder that the view of Ibn Khaldun should remain unattended until it found an echo in Taha Hussain, although the latter's judgment seems to have been the result of the application of the modern standards of literary criticism in the West.

If one were to look for the dominating motif of poetry in Islam itself, it will be found in the verses of the Kharijites. Their production represents a characteristic regimentation of the pre-Islamic qualities of hardihood, courage, and sacrifice in the service of the ideology of Islam. Just because it is as true of life as the poetry of the pre-Islamic age, the new spirit, ideals, and sentiments are clearly discernible. Yet it symbolizes, according to the cultural milieu of the Kharijites, the purely ancient Arab tradition as mellowed by the Islamic Puritanism.

Most interesting is the survival without any loss of attraction of the erotic theme in a society where even the "talk" of wine or a mere hint of laxity in relationship between the two sexes was an unpardonable offence. Equally notable is the spirit of martyrdom which would not allow virility to be impaired by a relish of tragedy and pathos for their own sake.

While under the Islamic influence poetry was set on its course of development along natural, humanistic lines, the corruptive patronage of the Court stepped in to revive the old tribal antagonism and buy off unscrupulous, though talented, poets to act as its propagandists. Thus the trio – Farazdaq, Jarir, and al-Akhtal – attained high fame in the field of panegyric and lampoon. They couched praise for the Umayyads as well as invectives against their opponents in the true form of the *qasidah* with its carefully chosen diction and high-flown style. The Christian al-Akhtal, who, by the way, was considered to be free to revel in wine without offending Muslim piety, was also remarkable for his willingness to step in where a Muslim, irrespective of his alignment, feared to tread, namely, the satire against the Ansar. The counter offensive from the other side showed a much more genuine feeling of devotion not only to the House of the Prophet but also to the ideal of justice and public weal popularly associated with it.

The contrast between the settled life in the towns and the Bedouin ways of the desert has throughout been a powerful factor in Arab thought and history. Islam, with its marked predilection for congregational activity, accelerated as never before the process of drawing emigrants from the desert, who flocked into the towns to enlist in military service, State organizations, and economic activity. This created nostalgia in the mind of some poets who introduced a new theme, viz. the comparison of new life, including the charms and manners of the damsels of the towns, with the old ways of the desert.

Even in regard to the *qasidah*, though its conventional form remained intact, the new pattern of society changed the modes of thought and the manners of expression sufficiently to render the purely Bedouin tradition a mere curiosity. This curiosity had its last protagonist in Dhu al-Rumma (d. 117/755). It is somewhat in the same spirit that the oldest and the simplest form of *rajaz* were employed in long *qasidahs* pedantically over-loaded with rare vocabulary.

The 'Abbasid Era

With the advent of the 'Abbasids the correlative patronage of the Court, which siphoned poetic talent into the *madih*, expanded to such an extent that only a few could keep themselves free from it just because they were consciously determined to do so. Curiously enough, as the Caliphate declined it only led to a multiplicity of such centres of patronage and thus the servility of the poets went on increasing further and further. At any rate, the growth of luxury and the enrichment of culture from foreign sources were bound to seek an outlet in new forms and modes of poetry.

Fortunately the traditional *qasidah* did comprise within its orbit a large number of themes concerned with peaceful enjoyment or warlike activity, which, in their developed form under the Empire, now claimed separate treatment. All that required was to salvage the various themes from regimentation by all the engrossing passion of tribal solidarity as signified by the supremacy of the *madih*. This process, which started with the development of the *ghazal* under the Umayyads, took its full course in the following era until all the topics treated incidentally in the old tradition branched off into independent kinds.

Further Development of the Ghazal

It will be remembered that Islam, not being a monastic religion, regards woman not as a taboo but as one of the three things dearest to the Prophet. Thus, the theme in itself, far from offending the moral sense, was particularly compatible with Islam's bold affirmation of nature. Significant is the use in the Qur'an of this very imagery of woman and wine for the conveyance of an idea of the highest bliss in the heavens. It must, however, be admitted that a certain degree of licentiousness has actually attended upon the development of the *ghazal* from the very beginning.

Towards this element of licentiousness the early Islamic society adopted an attitude of practical toleration as apart from official recognition; it was only the personal scandal which was generally condemned by the people and sternly curbed by the State. This tolerant attitude is best embodied in an

incident at the Court of Sulaiman b. 'Abd al-Malik. Once when al-Farazdaq recited to the monarch such verses of his as amounted to a confession of adultery, the monarch perhaps could think of no better way of expressing his appreciation than to embarrass the poet with the threat of legal cognizance and penalty.

But calmly the poet asked him, "The sanction behind the penalty?" "Of course, the Qur'an," replied the monarch, whereupon the poet retorted, "All right, the Qur'an itself assumes my innocence when it says of the poets that they 'celebrate in speech what they do not practice!'"¹⁷ Truly, there is much more than wit in the argument of the poet; it gives pointed cognizance to the fact that a poet relies mainly on his mental experience. Practical experience has no essential bearing on art; rather, it is a matter of personal character.¹⁸

In the words of Nuwas, one can safely and effectively "talk of fire without burning one's mouth." Thus cultivation of the erotic verse, including the licentious *ghazal*, originated and flourished vigorously under Islam in public circles. But as soon as it was transferred to the royal palace it suffered from the same servility to the over-indulged baser instinct of the patrons as the *madih* in relation to their inflated sense of vain-glory. At the palace the poet was promoted to the position of boor, companion who shared the privacy and the intimacy of the patron, and enlightened, diverted, and amused him with appropriate citations, impromptu compositions, and ready wit.

It is legitimate to link this institution with the life of the pre-Islamic poet, al-Nabighah, at the court of Hiraah, but one has to take note of the steadily increasing dissoluteness and sexually exhibitionism which began with al-Walid II and reached its climax in Abu Nuwas.¹⁹ This exhibitionism was designated separately as *al-khala'ah al-mujun* and was relished only in the company of intimate friends as a source of enjoyment. From the palaces it percolated down to public circles and was preserved only for the sake of witticism and elegance of language – obliquity it was condemned outright as obscene and in sheer bad taste.

Bohemianism

In public circles the joys of life were idealized in terms overtly disdainful of moral restraint under the pressure of another set of circumstances in which national and political rivalries played a significant part. It has been noted above that in the initial stage licence in poetry was treated apart from the personal character of the poet. But gradually the poet's own guilty conscience and the general social approbation caused him to introduce in poetry itself some sort of defence of his own promiscuous way of life. This involved an active propagation of the disregard of social and moral values, scorn for the religious preceptor, an invidious lack of faith in after-life and at the same time a somewhat philosophical justification for the excesses from God's quality of "forgiveness."

Even this development left the larger section of society unalarmed; it was taken merely as an exercise of wit and humour. Soon, however, there was a further development in the peculiar atmosphere of

Baghdad which was torn by Persian–Arab rivalry – a rivalry fanned by the alignment of the Persian element with the ‘Abbasids. In Baghdad certain types of literary Bohemians, mostly Persians, organized themselves into cells or clubs where wine, women (those of a low status, of course) and poetry full of sarcasm for the orthodox way of life were zealously enjoyed. From apologetics it now passed into the phase of active glorification of practical libertinism.

And all this was done in a spirit of arrogant demonstration of the intellectual refinement and cultural superiority of the Persians so much so that *zarf* (quickness of wit) came to be proverbially associated with this class of proud libertines – *zindiqs* as they were called.²⁰ Although it is very doubtful that many of these Bohemians were genuinely devoted to Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism as against Islam, it is a fact that some of them were bold enough to mention the names of Zoroaster and Mani as the Bacchus-like patrons of libertinism as against the restrictions on pleasure symbolized by Islam.

Anyway, there is little doubt that this cultural arrogance was linked with the aspiration to greater and greater political control, which made the ‘Abbasids closely watch and suspect their own supporters. While the public were left speculating as to the cause of the sudden downfall of the Barmakids, a methodical *zindiq*-hunt was set afoot, the verses of the poets were incriminatingly dissected at ceremonial trials and the guillotine applied to the partners in the widespread net of conspiracy.²¹ Thus the poetry of Bashshar (d. 168/784) came to be typical of that pursuit of refinement and culture which is associated with the enjoyment of woman and wine and their celebration in arts and song enlivened by wit, humour, and sarcasm on social and moral restrictions.

Before we pass on it has to be added in regard to these libertines that their fund humour and sarcasm was not exhausted in their engagements with the opponents, their unprincipled levity often caused them to exercise the same resources against one another. Hence, most of them have the reputation as satirists as well.

New Features of the Ghazal

A few special features of the new *ghazal* under the ‘Abbasids have to be noted. First, there was the addition, almost substitution, of the male for the female object of love. It must be admitted that it almost amounted to a common social vice attributable to Persian influence. Secondly, a refined taste in similes and metaphors and the subtlety of imagination in general are also traceable to the same source. Thirdly, though gleeful descriptions of wine were quite old in Arabic poetry, the subject came now to be cultivated as an independent art. As with the theme of beauty so with that of wine; it is no longer a mere description of the transparency of the glass, the colour of the wine, the various stages of brewing, and the haggling of the wine-seller over its price, nor is wine-drinking a mere appurtenance of nobility.

The emphasis now is on the inner sensation of abandonment and revelry experienced by the drunkard. Lastly, one has to take account of the special characteristic of Islamic society which causes even renegades of the type of Abu Nuwas to be over-taken by remorse and pious reflection in old age.

Hence, *al-shaib w-al-shabab* (old age and youth) developed into a recurring and semi-independent theme closely associated with the *nasib*. It is characterized by recollections of the pleasures which are no more than reach or capacity – a feature inherited from pagan poetry. Under the influence of Islam it was complemented with a desire to make amends for the erroneous ways of the past.

Moral, Philosophical and Mystic Poetry

It would be a very lopsided view indeed if we imagined the 'Abbasid society to be merely that which is pictured by the boon companions of the *elite* and the Bohemians of the metropolis. Religion and morality had their own devotees and champions in no way negligible either in numbers or in importance. In the very nature of things, however, religion, as apart from religious sentiment, could not be cultivated in poetry. Morals formed a fit theme for poetical art. They also had a precedent in the so-called wise sayings of the pre-Islamic poets, though these latter were entirely devoid of any element of reasoning in them.

Abu al-'Atahiyah (d. 213/828) introduced moralizing verse characterized by thought and reflection but it was because of this very new basis that it came in for reserve and suspicion. Also, it inevitably involved criticism of the prevalent modes of society. Abu al-'Atahiyah sometimes appears as the spokesman of the down-trodden masses bringing to the notice of the Caliph their economic plight and difficulties. Most unfortunate of all, the entire theme was permeated with a mood of pessimism which persisted and was steadily augmented by the influx of philosophical ideas and monastic tendencies.

Philosophical poetry reached its highest achievement with Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri (d. 449/1057), who made a frontal attack on all religions as such and exalted reason in opposition to revelation. Yet he remained the pessimist *par excellence*. His eclecticism also centred on the austere as exemplified by the particular features of Indian philosophy proved no more delectable in verse than religion. Even though Abu al-'Ala' was a master of literary arts, his philosophical poetry remained a simple statement of judgment and argument unclothed in poetic imagery; hence, it provided enough justification for denouncing it as "no poetry at all" (ibn Khaldun).

His resort to jugglery with words is also a further proof, if proof were needed, of his woeful failure to devise a truly poetic form for the presentation of his philosophical thought.²² That is why his poetry seldom achieved any high degree of popularity, though he was, and has throughout been, highly respected as a scholar. It is wrong to attribute this to the prejudice against the anti-Islamic ideas contained in it. Had it been so, the production of the libertine poets would not have fared any better.

The true reason is that Abu al-'Ala's poetry was bare of essential poetic appurtenances. In the words of an Arab critic, the art of poetry consists in making a thing appear beautiful: the intrinsic beauty of the thing or the idea would not make up for any crudity of presentation. The libertine poets were accomplished masters of this art of presentation; hence, unlike Abu-'Ala', they were widely enjoyed but seldom respected.

In contrast with philosophy, mystic ideas belong essentially to the theme of love and naturally command for their expression all the paraphernalia of love and poetry. The high sentimentalism of the mystic poets was enough to ensure for them a strong popular appeal, in consequence of which they came in for persecution while Abu al-‘Ala’, a lone voice, was left comfortably alone. Again, we have to note that, significantly enough, the popularity of mystic poetry survived all questioning of the orthodoxy of its contents and even the attacks on the person of the mystics.

But the excessive sentimentalism of the mystic poetry centring on the beatific vision is such as to have a lamentably adverse effect on the search for clear, practical ideal of life and the urge to realize it through activity. The passivity of an intoxicated visionary, as opposed to the ardent activity of a devoted missionary, formed the keynote of it.

Formal Panegyric

Apart from the lighter side of the life in the privacy of the palace, which was shared and recorded by the *nadim*-poet, there were many formal occasions and official assemblies at the Court when the emphasis was on decorum and dignity. On such occasions it was the strictly conventional form of the *madih*, the *qasidah*, which was in vogue. In view of the rigidity of its forms had already noted, it is no surprise that it required the highest skill to handle it with success. In any case, the monotony of the stereo-type could only be made up with hyperbole and rhetorical tropes of all kinds. Some pedantic display of logic and philosophy was also introduced as a novelty.

As these formal panegyrics were designed in the manner of the party press of our own day to exalt the powers that be in the eyes of the public, naturally enough they were replete with references to the political ideology – often bound up with specific religious belief and dogma – of the ruling dynasty as, for example, the claims of the ‘Abbasids *vis-a-vis* the ‘Alids. But, while there were scores of those who for sordid gain served as mere trumpeters, there was no dearth of those who spoke from conviction. And in fairness it must be said that the conscientious objectors on the side of the opposition were given a long rope only if they had the courage to forgo the patronage of the Court.

It was also in this traditional form fit for themes of grandeur and no levity that the incidents of the wars were pictured. They came to be particularly relished by the Bedouin spirit of the Hamdanids under the shadow of the Crusades. Another theme cognate with it was that of the prison-poems (*al-habsiyyat*) best represented by Abu Firas (d. 357/968). They are an impressive blend of nostalgia for home, pathos of suffering, and indomitable courage.

Complaint against Time (Shakwah al-Zaman)

Perhaps the most depressing aspect of the poetry of these times is the common expression of dissatisfaction with one’s lot and a feeling of insecurity in respect of life, property, and position. As undeserving people enjoy wealth and power and real merit is neglected, nay persecuted, consolation is

sought in the acceptance of this state of affairs as the “way of the world” – the decree of fate beyond the control of man.

There was no such dominant note of despondency and helplessness when the pre-Islamic poet occasionally bemoaned the inscrutability of fate (*jadd*) and the failure and his hard struggle (*jidd*) to bring him the coveted reward. Even in the early days of Islam fate did not appear to be so arbitrary: when there was dissatisfaction it was directed against *persons* – tyrants and other dynasties. It is only in the late ‘Abbasid period that the complaint against “Time”²³ became almost a fashion, so much so that the poets simulated it in the same way as they simulated love.

Personal and Occasional Verse

It was characteristic of the progress of culture that poetry be sought after as the medium of the communication of thought and feeling occasioned by the vicissitudes of personal relations and small incidents in everyday life. The pre-Islamic poet also had frequent occasions to address his “*ibn al-‘amm*” (cousin) in reprobatory terms, but his utterances were deep-rooted in the actual matter-of-fact struggle for existence. The *ikhwaniyyat* of the period under review constitute a branch of cultivation of elegance. The difference is the same as between an actual fighter and an amateur sportsman.

The topics range over estrangement, effort at reconciliation, and tickling and teasing through wit and humour. These categories, however, appear to be sham when compared with the impressive genuineness of the pieces relating to incidents in everyday life as, for example, the one attributed to a *literatus* who was compelled to part with his collection of books in a time of adversity. This kind of poetry concerning the unaffected, natural gushing forth of some poignant feeling or passion aroused by the actual facts of life reached its full development in Spain in general and in the verses of al-Mu‘tamid in particular.

A strong element of genuine enthusiasm and personal acrimony is also evoked by the rivalry among the diverse national groups: the Arabs, the Persians, the Turks, the Romans and the Negroes. Pride-cum-satire was the popular form of championing one nationality against the other on the basis of ethnology, history, mental qualities, and cultural achievements. This must be distinguished from the aspect noted above which concerned the exaltation of a particular kind of social and cultural life.

Descriptive Poetry

Beauty no longer remained confined to nature: there were high mansions, fortified castles, exquisite mosques, and public buildings, and, above all, public and private gardens, aqueducts and boat-houses – all claiming attention from the artist and the poet. Even the starlit sky and the cloudy horizon were endowed with a new charm. To the Bedouin they gave only a simple impression of awe and induced a mood of little good cheer; to the Baghdadi who went out for a stroll in the evening they catered to his desire for the enjoyment of beauty. Thus, the descriptive poetry of this period, which often monopolizes

the larger part of long *qasidahs*, is almost something new.

It is exhilarating indeed to find roses being compared to cheeks and tall cypress to the slim stature of damsels rather than *vice versa* as of yore. Flowers in particular were the craze to the tasteful and the elegant, which even used them as symbols of moods and sentiments in their exchanges of love.²⁴ No surprise that the description of flowers (*al-zahriyyat*) should grow into a semi-independent branch of poetry in which al-Sanubari (d. 334/945) distinguished himself in the East.

Yet there is nothing comparable to the poetry of Spain so far as high sensitivity to nature is concerned. There the poet not only describes and enjoys nature but also shows himself to be in communion with it. Another branch of descriptive poetry which attained semi-independent form was *al-tardiyyat* (venery poems). It also reflected an ample measure the trappings of luxury and civilization around an old traditional interest.

Panegyrics on the Prophet (al-Mada'ih al-Nabawiyyah)

As we have seen earlier there was no time lost in celebrating the achievements of the Prophet and composing panegyrics on him in the traditional form and style of the *qasidah*. When the Umayyads fanned political partisanship by employing the poets to denounce their rivals, it evoked a new spirit of selfless devotion to the cause of the 'Alids, which found its most forceful exponent in al-Kumait. It soon became a panegyric on the family on the Prophet which was characterized, apart from legal arguments in favour of the 'Alid claims, by a good deal of symbolism of pathos and suffering drawn from the incidents of history.

A concomitant theme of high general interest was the condemnation of tyranny, oppression, and mis-rule coupled with the fervent hope of return to ideal conditions at the hands of the virtuous Imams. The two sides carried on the old bout right through the 'Abbasid period during which the 'Alids continued to be in the wilderness of opposition. In later times when the political controversy lost a good deal of realism and turned into mere sectarian ritual, this kind of poetry was taken over into the circles of the Sufis, who concerned themselves particularly with its content of loyal sentiment and tragic pathos.

These Sufi composers, it will be remembered, were seldom men of high literary attainments nor did they care to examine facts and rely on them alone. Rather they would introduce all sorts of superstition which would feed sentimentalism. A famous example of this kind is the pseudo-*Burdah* of al-Busiri (d. 694/1294 – 95) which, though not devoid of literary elegance, is typical of superstitious belief and is esteemed primarily for its supposed magical properties.

The framework of these panegyrics being that of the traditional *qasidah*, the essential prelude of erotic verses was there. It was, however, observed as a convention that in this particular context "love" should be characterized by restraint and dignity rather than "licence." For example, it was specifically disallowed to mention a male object of love or to refer to the hips or the charm of the naked shin among the

physical attractions. It will be seen that this only confirms the thesis advanced earlier that erotic interest in woman (without licence) was no offence to Muslim piety.

Still later when originality became rarer the form and the theme of the panegyric on the Prophet were used for the demonstration of one's skill in rhetorical tropes, such *qasidahs* were designated the *badi'iyyat*. That kind of play with words is, of course, beyond the purview of poetry proper.

Adaptation of Metre and Diction

It was indicated at the very beginning that the metrical forms handed down by the pre-Islamic poets continued to hold their own throughout the classical period. We have only to review the adaptation of these forms to the demands of new developments in theme and style. First, there was the preference of short, flexible metres and then, with the dethronement of the *madih*, the tendency to short pieces devoted to single or closely allied themes.

However, the only departure from the tradition with regard to the *qafiyah* was the adoption from the Persian of the *muzdawaj*, i.e. tanzon with each verse having a separate rhyme for its two hemi-stitches (instead of the whole poem having a single rhyme for the endings of each verse). This was the form attributed to the Zoroastrian scriptural psalms which the *zindiq* poets were charged with reciting in secret. And obviously this was the form best suited for the epic which, because of its length, made it well-nigh impossible to sustain one single rhyme-ending.

But though the form of the epic narrative (*al-sh'ar al-qasasiyy*) was found, the Arabic poets failed to achieve anything remarkable in the field from an aesthetic viewpoint. The early pioneers, ibn al-Mu'tazz and al-Khuraimi, were tolerably good in picturing national calamities but unfortunately it was now reduced to a mere mnemonic versification of the chronicles of kings and dynasties without anything of genuine poetry about it.

No sooner did the need to please the vanity of the patron disappear than the diction tended to be unaffected, soft, sweet, and naturally fit for the theme and content. Abu al-'Atahiyah, himself a pitcher-seller, succeeded particularly well in employing the simple language of the common people without any loss of standards. On the other hand, this trend towards the natural and the unaffected suffered some degeneration at the hands of the libertine poets like Bashshar, who did not mind effeminacy and the verbatim reproduction of the idiom of the sporting women in the private company of lovers.

Strophic Verse

It is quite understandable that the need for strophic verse should arise as soon as music and dancing were introduced in Arabia consequent upon the Islamic conquest of Persia. Al-Khalil has left behind a few verses which are like a formula for the rhythmic beating of the feet.²⁵ Further, the attempt to evolve an artistic form for the special purposes of music and dance took the direction of adaptation of the old tradition rather than a complete innovation.

The full length poem was divided into parts consisting of two or more verses, each part having a different single rhyme for its several hemi-stitches but all the parts followed by the repetition of a particular verse with a rhyme of its own and thus held together as if by a string (Ar. *simt*; hence the device called *al-tasmit*). This evolution must have taken place at a very early period since it is ascribed without certainty to Imru' al-Qais. It was the same device which was employed to take greater liberties with rhyme (and also metre) in Spain under the name of *al-muwashshah* (from *wishah* meaning girdle).

Later, when the colloquial dialect was fully admitted to this form it came to be known as the *zajal*. Thus, it came to be an artistic form just free enough to be within easy comprehension and unsophisticated taste of all, yet devoid of none of the essentials of traditional art. From Spain it was brought to Egypt and the East and achieved a high degree of popularity. There were still more spontaneous forms of strophic verse in which the street vendors and the like moulded their cries but in all cases the *qafiyah* was fully relished and the variety of it in different strophes was compensated with the uniformity of the refrain in between them.

B. Prose

The earliest specimens of Arabic prose coming down to us from the pre-Islamic times fall into the following categories:

1. Proverbs
2. Oracular sayings
3. Orations and
4. Accounts of battles and stories of love, adventure, and entertainment.

Except for the last category the form in vogue was unmistakably epigrammatic and high condensed, consisting of short, cadenced and loosely rhymed sentences. This form was quite in conformity with the morphology of the language and the peculiar temperament of the Arab, particularly in view of his reliance on memory alone for preservation and transmission. No surprise that whatever did not conform to this requirement of form was simply allowed to go by the board.

The oracular sayings were almost lacking in any content whatsoever. If the oracle excelled in anything it was mere adroitness in ambiguity. The most remarkable from the viewpoint of the content were, of course, the proverbs, of which the few highly suggestive words often symbolized a whole story deep-rooted in the simple Bedouin life. Hence, they were early recognized as a source, second only to poetry, for the knowledge of the history, manners, customs, and superstitions of the Pre-Islamic Arabs. In subsequent periods also, there was a remarkable curiosity to pick up pithy and suggestive lines and phrases from poetry and prose and to pass them round in speech and writing. Thus, the stock of proverbs, which in Arabic include idioms and phrases in common use, never ceased increasing and

receiving variety from the changes in the pattern of life. Often they mirrored the experiences, complimentary and otherwise, of contacts between the various nationalities.

The orations were designed for actual needs arising out of war-like tribal activity or communal social relationships. Though prose, however, exquisite, was always rated as a lesser form of art, there is no doubt that oration had sufficiently developed into a recognized literary medium. It would also be justified to assume that sermonizing for its own sake, as, for example, on wise conduct and good behaviour had come into vogue.

The evening get-together in the courtyard, generally under the auspices of some generous dignitary, is the age-old manifestation of the Arab instinct for communal social life. The importance of this feature in the hard, matter-of-fact life in the inhospitable desert cannot be over-emphasized. It is also quite understandable that the main diversion on this occasion should be a round of talks on events and anecdotes bound up either with historical curiosity or common interest in love and adventure.

The contents of this *samar* can be easily be distinguished as (a) the narratives of the battles of the Arabs, (b) stories of love and adventure of Arabian provenance, and (c) stories borrowed from foreign sources. Some traces of the beast-fable have also been found scattered here and there. Nevertheless, pure fables were seldom flair of the Arab mind even in subsequent times. Naturally enough, this evening talk was couched in simple informal language with emphasis on content rather than on elegance of word, and the way in which it has been recorded by the scholars of early Islam can at best be described as quotation from the speech of the narrator.

Influence of the Qur'an and the Hadith

The unique position of the Qur'an as the first book in Arabic has already been noted. It, for the first time, made Arabs fully aware of the potentialities of prose as an artistic form. Still more important in another way was the normative influence of the Hadith. It is certainly wrong to assume that the influence of the Qur'an was in any way circumscribed by its claim to inimitability because even an unattainable ideal is always potent enough to set the direction of effort in the future. But, of course, there was an air of formality about the Qur'an.

On the other hand, the Hadith represented the model of effortless, everyday speech – simple, terse, to the point, efficacious of purpose, and interspersed with flashes of vivacity and humour. The most important general contribution of both the Qur'an and the Hadith was to drive home the primordial need for setting an aim and a purpose in speech and composition and making both the content and the word fit and conform to the same. The new outlook on literary beauty as related to a definite purpose represented a radical change from the old tradition of aimless talk – “the wondering into every valley” (Qur'an) – and gave birth to a mental discipline which is the hallmark of the orations and the epistolary compositions of early Islam.

The official correspondence of the early Caliphs and their addresses on different occasions of war, legislation, and administration are all marked by a simple and direct style of flowing naturally from high concentration on purpose and thus surpassing all art. Yet they show all the dignity of authority. It will be remembered that orations and epistles were the two branches of literary composition which were especially favoured in early Islam by the needs of administration as well as congregational activity and social life. They only underwent a portentous change at the hands of the Persian secretaries, who introduced in the Arab chanceries all the fanfare of the Sassanian Court by way of pompous language and grandiose style.

Early Works on Adab (Belles-Lettres)

The early literary activity (apart from poetry) concerned itself mainly with compilation and narration rather than personal creation. The scholars and the students were content with collections of texts and explanations of important pieces of poetry, proverbs, orations, sayings of prophets and wise men, historical narratives, and witticism – all considered to be the necessary equipment of polite education and moral instruction. These collections were like packets in which the knowledge of their compilers was lumped together without any systematic arrangement or classification, the compilers themselves contributing only a few comments here and there. Only ibn Qutaibah (d. 276/889 – 90) introduced some order into the invaluable chaos.

The beginning of original production was closely bound up with an interest in man and his natural surroundings. Curiously enough, this interest was roused by the rivalry among the various nationalities within the 'Abbasid Empire. The political and social conditions of the time promoted interesting, even though acrimonious, discourses on the characteristics – physical, temperamental, and cultural – of the peoples of different lands as exhibited in their current behaviour and past history. Al-Jahiz (d. 255/868 – 69), one of the first Mu'tazilites to study the Greek naturalists endowed these discourses with the superb literary form of *causerie* or short tract characterized by a combination of erudition and artistic skill with the spirit of reliance on facts of observation and history rather than on speculative deductions.

Thus, highly scientific data, worthy of a Darwin, relating to the processes of adaptation between man and nature, came to form the theme of high literature and art. Al-Jahiz's "Book on Animals" (*Kitab al-Hayawan*), a fine specimen of the wedlock between art and science, is a definite gain to literature and a high compliment to the general culture of the time. Only one is left wondering whether science would not have prospered better by an early separation from its charming companion.

Popular Anecdote

Beyond the circle of scholars and students the interest of the common people lay in the anecdote couched in simple, unsophisticated language. They sought light entertainment by listening to stories of love or adventure or a blend of both. Apart from the pre-Islamic lore, the wars of Islamic conquest lay handy for the purpose and were especially suited to satisfy at the same time religious fervour, national

pride, and the instinctive love of adventure. There is ample evidence to show that the conquests were actually the subject of a saga which, however, could enter the books only surreptitiously.

Two other streams contributed to the fund of anecdotes in the early Islamic period: first, the South Arabian lore in which the Umayyads took particular interest as part of the glorification of the Arabs, and, secondly, the Jewish religious lore which was widely and indiscriminately drawn upon the *qassas* (religious sermonizers). None of these stories, however, could find artistic presentation because the regard for historical truth prevented their incorporation in book form: the dangers which were guarded against are illustrated by the corruptions that evaded detection and are found today here and there.

Even when they were collected in book form at a very late period and they continued to be regarded below the dignity of a scholar. Of course, the stories of love which are not liable to be mixed up with religion and history were given freer admittance to the literary circles, but even these (e.g. the story of the ideal love of Majnun or the profane love of Waddah al-Yaman) were recalled only with reference to poetry and seldom took any definite artistic form in prose. Whatever form these popular stories possess has only been achieved effortlessly through common repetition.

Story Cycles

The indigenous stories of love alluded to above were simple incidents which could not keep the attention of the *samar*-hungry audience for any considerable time. As town life grew, the need was felt for cycles of stories or stories within a story, separate yet inter-connected with a string plot which would keep the curiosity on its edge for as long as "Thousand and One Nights." This need was met, in the first instance, by import from Persia, which had long been known to be the store-house for such stories.

The Persian *afsanah*, the prototype of the Arabic story cycles, had passion, wonder, and surprise as the keynotes of its content, it is the quest for the wonderful and the surprising which brings in super-natural elements and magic to heighten the effects of adventure, and treachery and moral depravity to enhance love. This element of wilful selection and exaggeration of the unusual in actual life should not be overlooked in making any sweeping generalizations in regard to the state of society. The over-tone is particularly deceptive in regard to historical personalities as, for example, Harun al-Rashid, who though he indulged in luxury and sensuous pleasure in private life, would never allow any lapse from dignity and moral propriety in public.

It was perhaps in the original core of *Hazar Afsanah* itself that popularly idealized historical personalities were woven into the texture with a view of imparting a touch of reality to the fiction. Yet it is remarkable that this particular branch, as contrasted with that of *Kililah wa Dimnah*, was successfully cultivated at Baghdad and Cairo. The anonymous *maddahs* went on dressing up the borrowed material and augmenting it with their own creation until the whole stock was moulded into a more or less fixed but sufficient polished form.

The professionals, whose job was gradually reduced to vocal performance, often to the accompaniment

of simple instrumental music, circulated and transmitted the stock by oral tradition among themselves until it was redacted in book form in about the ninth/15th century. The form and the content of these story cycles would be better appreciated if it is constantly kept in view that they were never meant to be read; they were recited to an audience seeking mental relaxation rather than intellectual satisfaction. They were designed simply to amuse and not popularize or criticize any particular view of society. Rather, the surmise is that they were secretly helped into circulation by the powers that were interested in turning the attention of the masses away from political and social problems.

Hence, all the emphasis is on the tempo of action to the subservience of everything else. Further, in the very nature of circumstances, the style and the diction could only be such as were regarded elegant and interesting by the standards and taste of the common people. It really reflects very well on the common culture of those days when people could learn how to appreciate and enjoy elegance of language in their ordinary social surroundings without necessarily studying at school. But after all the story cycles were never regarded as a piece of literature (*adab*) and were never read and taught by scholars as such. It was only in the West that the scholars thought it worthwhile to devote time to the *Alf Lailah wa Lailah*.

The *Siratu 'Antar*, another notable work of the same class, bears the impress of conscious art, its texture being loose-rhymed prose embroidered with some 10,000 verses. In point of content, a hero of the pre-Islamic times is made to live through 500 years of Islam down to the Crusades, personifying in himself all the chivalry of the famous knights of Islamic history as well as the legends of the Persian epic. It sprang into popularity in the tense atmosphere of the Crusades and represents fully the peculiar temperament of the time.

High-class Fiction

It will be seen from the preceding two paragraphs that the imagination of the Muslim masses, like that of the masses of any other people, was strongly tempted to dramatize history and to develop the hard core of facts in fabulous stories. But such a pursuit was totally barred to a Muslim scholar by his high sense of intellectual honesty and academic responsibility cognate with the sanctimonious regard for religious purity. As fiction was disdained and frowned upon by the cultured, it was condemned and relegated to the circles of the common people.

Pure fiction, which posed no danger of distortion to valuable fact, was quite welcome in literary circles. But, again, *literati* were earnest people who would relish a fable only if it had some moral import in the manner of the stories of the Qur'an. It will, however, be observed that the reliance of the Qur'an on the known incidents of history, rather than fables, to point a moral is highly significant as being in full accord with the peculiar temperament of the Arab. Not that the Arab was weak in imagination; he only considered it somewhat childish to invent fictitious tales, which is best evidenced by the clear absence of a mythology even in the pre-Islamic days.

He was indeed very fond of moralizing but would do so only through direct, pithy, and pointed proverbial

sayings supported by illustrations from real life. The style of the Qur'an in this respect stands in sharp contrast with that of the sacred books of India, which seek to convey the truth mainly through fables. Thus, it was only when highly cultured Persians consecrated themselves to the service of Arabic that the treasures of the Indo-Persian tradition were transferred into this language. As these were mere translations, their contents do not belong to Arabic: only the use of the artistic form of Arabic for this kind of composition was a notable innovation.

The rendering of the *Kalilah wa Dimmah* by ibn al-Muqaffa' was designed to be read by the educated class who relished it for its moralizing on the conduct of private and public affairs. It was warmly appreciated as a novelty and versified more than once, but the attempts at imitation of the model failed to achieve any considerable measure of success. Thus, pure fiction too, like the fanciful encrustment of history and religion, fell to the lot of the common people who indulged in it for sheer amusement.

The unproductivity of the Arab-Islamic milieu, so far as high-class fiction is concerned, has only to be viewed by the side of unparalleled success in the preservation of the religious texts, the scrupulous eschewing of the subjective element in historical annals, and the evolution of a full-fledged science for establishing the authenticity of a text with reference to the character of the narrator. In short, the learned and the scholarly devoted themselves to checking the rampancy of the imagination of the unlettered rather than giving free reins to their own fancy. Further, the authority of the *Shari'ah* left no need for any emotional pleading or intellectual canvassing by dramatization of social problems; hence the absence of the story or the novel except for literary and philosophical themes.

Literary Epistle (Risalah) and Rhetorical Maqamah

The extra-ordinary interest in linguistic studies provided a scholar in early Islam with a vast fund of vocabulary and usage as well as a sense of elegance and beauty in expression. He, however, waited for events and occasions in actual life to put his knowledge and skill to use; hence, the absence of any prose form than the oration and the epistle. The disputations on the merits of the various nationalities and different classes of people brought into vogue for a while the short topical essay. But the natural, forthright style soon started soaring high at the hands of the Persian scribes until it became thoroughly inflated and encumbered.

To this encumbrance the Christian scribes further added the embellishment of *saj'*, and the over-played art degenerated into tiresome gymnastics. There was, however, some expansion in the range of the epistlecum-essay writing, which opened up a welcome outlet for literary skill. Tracts on the rules of good conduct were very popular, some of which on Persian model were meant especially for kings, while others were addressed to all classes. Similarly, there was a plethora of manuals of instruction through which all men of consequence were eager to communicate their wisdom.

But the most important branch conducted merely for the sake of pleasure was "letters" addressed to fellow-scholars and patrons touching upon purely academic and literary problems. Pride and rivalry

helped to impart zest to such a pursuit. The style was high-flown and ornate with the obtrusive aim of pedantry. A further development of this tradition of the literary epistle (*al-risalah*) was the *maqamah*, which represents perhaps the first attempt to invent a loose framework of picaresque romance for the display of one's literary knowledge and skill.

The idea must have been suggested by the presence of a real character in the Arabicized Persian society of the time – a witty and somewhat unscrupulous prodigy of letters, devoid of patronage from high-ups and loth to engage himself in any lucrative work, thus compelled to shift for himself by roving from town to town and “begging” by the public display of feats of improvisation on the interesting and instructive situations of life. The emphasis is, no doubt, on the exhibition of linguistic virtuosity but there is throughout a vein of witticism which is sometimes employed for parodying society, manners and peoples.

As this form came to be the dominant one in Arabic prose, a large variety of it depicting incidents and situations concerning particular classes such as the '*ulama*' and the lovers, was successfully attempted in every age. It has throughout remained a typically indigenous product, especially suited to the equipment and training of the Arabic scholar as alluded to above.

Development of the Story for Literary Theme

The significance of the *maqamah* lay in the Arabic scholar at last condescending to create out of imagination the framework of a story, however short and undeveloped, with a view to displaying his profuse but pent-up literary skill. For the newly released fancy Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'rri borrowed the wings of the popular traditions relating to the Prophet's Ascension (*al-mi'raj*) to the heavens. His *Rislat al-Ghufran* is really a *maqamah* cycle under the overall covering of a *risalkah*. The story is no more than a frail show-case to display the author's store of knowledge, just a device to string together a series of expositions of problems and judgments relating to the poetry, literature, and grammar.

As the author was also a philosopher and a critical observer of beliefs and practices, he brought out the witticism characteristic of the *maqamah* for an audacious burlesque of contemporary state of learning and society, which imparted a unique quality to the work. The state excelled only in pedantry and artificial beauty. Yet the review of the entire field of literature, beliefs, morals, and manners in the course of an imaginary flight remained the high watermark of the traditional Arabic scholarship.

Story for the Philosophical Theme

The philosophical romance of ibn Tufail (d. 580/1184) entitled *Hayy Bin Yaqzan* is a complete surprise in Arabic literature in more ways than one. Here for the first time we have the plot as the main concern of the author. Sufficient attention is also paid to characterization and setting. The style is sub-ordinated to the theme. It will be recalled that the general body of Muslim philosophers had been confronted with a two-fold problem: the capability of reason to attain to reality unaided by revelation, and the identity of

reality notwithstanding the difference in the source and the categories of knowledge imparted by religion.

Soon intuition, the *tertius gaudens*, achieved a lasting victory over both. On the one hand, it established its claim to be the essence of religion and, on the other, it was recognized as the higher form of philosophy. The importance of the latter development, which was by far the greater victory, has not often been fully appreciated. It was a momentous step indeed to accept intuition as part of a man's natural equipment, cognate with reason, for the "realization" of truth. Anyway, it was for the purpose of explaining all these points together that the philosophers conjured up the vision of a Solitary Man, cut off from all knowledge of religion yet attaining to a vision of God through the proper use and development of his faculties alone.

Historical Writing

The Arabic historian was solely concerned with the preservation of authentic records. He would not digest the facts and attempt at their reconstruction and interpretation of the reader. The merit of a historian like al-Tabri (d. 310/922 – 23) lay only in the extent and variety of his information, his own personality could be discerned only in the indication here and there and a preference for one of the several versions of a particular event. This self-imposed restraint on the part of the historian, like the similar scruples of the *adab* producer, betokened only high devotion to truth nurtured by the traditions of religious sciences.

As a matter of fact, it proved to be a valuable asset in eliminating, so to say, the middlemen and enabling all posterity to get a purely objective view of the past. Even when the annalistic framework was not strictly adhered to and the method of topical historiography was initiated by al-Mus'udi (d. 345/956 – 57) the style continued to be dominated by reporting. However, this deliberate suppression of the personal element contributed to the lack of any prose for historical writing. Such development had to wait until the beginning of the eighth/14th century when ibn al-Tiqtaqa produced his book *al-Fakhri*.

Keeping in view the fact of its being an innovation, the success achieved was remarkable. A lucid and fluent yet brilliant style is applied to carefully selected facts combined with appropriate comments. But again, this admirable example was not sufficiently followed up. Rather the main development from which ibn al-Taqtaqa revolted consciously, had already proceeded far on the lines of the transference and application of the epistolary style – grand and verbose, as already noted – to historiography. It was fortunate indeed that this style was carried to palpable absurdity quite early by al-'Utbi (d. 427/1035 – 36).

It was decisively rejected by the Arab taste only to find favourable development in Persian. Court patronage of the historians also brought in the need for flattery and exaggeration, but it must be said in fairness that historian did not absolve himself totally of regard for truth in the manner of poets. On the whole, the style of the official amanuenses and the Court historians of the late 'Abbasid period belongs to the same *genre*.

The best examples of Arabic historical prose, both in regard to form and content, are the private memoirs of personal experiences of war and peace like the *Kitab al-I'tibar* of 'Uthman ibn Munqidh (d. 584/1188 – 89), and the accounts of travels. In the latter class of works one finds not only observation and effective narration but also the author's own appraisal of personalities and events in the light of history and contemporary society. Generally, the style is simple and natural and even where art is displayed, as in the case of ibn Jubar (d. 614/1217 – 18), it is not over-played at the expense of the content. Al-Ghazali's *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* forms a class by itself – an auto-biographical account of mental conflict and spiritual quest written with such simplicity and naturalness as defy all art.

Influence on the West

Looking in retrospect over the entire field of Arabic prose and poetry, the general reader will not fail to be struck particularly with a few features which stand out prominently. First, there is the perfect symmetry, so characteristic of all Muslim art, the unfaltering rhythm, and the regular rhyme which at once give the general impression of order, system, and exquisiteness in the construction of the verse. Secondly, there is the entire scheme of romantic love as embodied in the tradition of the *ghazal*. It is not fully appreciated, especially among the Muslims who take it as a matter of course, how much the Islamic outlook on woman and sex relationship has to do with the sentimental romantic love.

Love as an art can only flourish in a society where the company of woman is sublimated into a virtue. A further condition for the growth of romanticism is the recognition of certain ethical rules for courtship, a certain idealization of restraint. Such restraint is only symbolic of awe for the independent will of a separate individuality (best exemplified in the economic rights of women in Islam) coupled with a tenderly appreciation – so different from lustful exploitation – of the frailty and delicacy of the feminine constitutional and sentimental make-up.

In the blind fervour of the extremist revolt against the denial of human rights to women in the West, the last basis of all chivalry and romance is much liable to be forgotten. Anyway, it was these two features – the exquisite form and the romantic content – of the Andalusian poetry which impressed the troubadours of Provence so deeply. Needless to say that lyrical poetry of romantic love had a special development in Spain so as to become unique even in Arabic. In the same way the strophic verse blossomed in Spain as nowhere else. The tradition, however, goes back to the Umayyad *ghazal* with Islam intervening between it and the frank hedonism of the *jahiliyyah*.

Turning to prose, one finds Arabic offering, at its best, aphorisms, apologues, popular fables characterized by the spirit of adventure, and picaresque romance (*maqamah*). Actually, these were the very curiosities which achieved a ready success in medieval Europe through oral transmission and book translation. It was not very appropriate indeed that works like the *Arabian Nights*, which were meant only for recital in the marketplace, were read in book form in Europe.

This was bound to produce certain revulsion at a later period when they were to be devoid of the finer

elements of literary art. Anyhow, “orientalism” – a touch of the fabulous, the wonderful, and the exotic – entered the thought processes of the European writers and poets. Still more important is the percolation of some of the higher devices resting on characteristically Islamic traditions like the *mi’raj* into the *Divina Commedia* and the Solitary Man into *Robinson Crusoe*.

Bibliography

Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*; Jurji Zaidan, *Tarikh al-Adab al-‘Arabiyyah*; Ahmad Amin, *Fajr al-Islam*, *Duha al-Islam*, and *Zuhr al-Islam*; Taha Hussain, *Hadith al-Arba’ah*, Parts One and Two; Zaki Mubarak, *al-Mada’ih al-Nabawiyyah*, Cairo, 1935; H. A. R. Gibb, “Literature,” *The Legacy of Islam*.

1. Note the definition by ibn Qutaibah of a born poet as “the one who indicates to you the end of a verse in the very beginning of it, and the qafiyah in the fatihah (opening word) itself.” Al-Shi’r w-al-Shu’ara’, Cairo, 1367/1947, 1, p. 36.
2. It was perhaps an account of this special knowledge that he was called sha’ir, i.e. the “kenner,” who knew better than others. There is, however, another view which traces the word to its Hebrew counter-part meaning “chanting” and “singing.” Anyhow, the poet only knew and sang whereas the authority for taking decisions and giving judgments rested with another class known as the hukkam. Fajr al-Islam, p. 56.
3. The schooling of the impulses through hudud Allah (limits of the Sacred Law) pinpoints the difference between the jaahiliyyah and Islam.
4. Consistently with the Arab habit of ascribing long, gradual developments to particular persons, the innovation of the qasidah is said to have originated with Muhallil b. Rabi’ah (c. 500 A.D.), whose very name bears testimony to his contribution. Al-Jumahi (Tabaqat, Cairo, 1952, p. 24) dates it from the time of ‘Abd al-Muttalib and Hashim b. ‘Abd Manaf.
5. There are touching stories of lovers who would intercede with the hunters to have the gazelles set free because of the resemblance of their eyes to the eyes of the beloved; cf. Raghibat al-‘Amil, 7, p. 39.
6. The stock phrase attributed in the Qur’an to the pagans in defence of their ways that “they found their forefathers practising them” faithfully exposes their lack of thought and reasoning.
7. Vide al-Ma’arri, risalat al-Ghufran, ed. Bint al-Shati, p. 246.
8. Al-Jumahi, op. cit., p. 11.
9. Ibid., p. 197; see also p. 217 where the same reason is adduced for the meagreness of poetry in al-Ta’if and ‘Uman.
10. Qur’an (26:224) et seq. There is an exception in favour of those who are devoted to righteous belief and good deeds.
11. The example of the Qur’an illustrates the principle of novelty in literary form. In order to achieve the paramount purpose of communication and effect, novelty must always be embedded in familiarity.
12. The verses of ibn al-Zib’ara are much more explicit on the subject of renunciation of the old and devotion to the new ideal, vide al-Jumahi, op. cit., pp. 202 – 03.
13. An excellent example of the change of values in this respect is provided by the hija’ of al-Najashi which was taken by ‘Umar to be a eulogy, vide ibn Qutaibah, op. cit., 1, p. 290.
14. Up until the days of ‘Umar, Arabian music was nothing but intonation of voice in the manner of a camel-driver reciting his songs (vide al-Aghani, 8 p. 149, quoted in Fajr al-Islam, p. 120). This accounts most plausibly for the absence of reference in the Qur’an to music and dancing while the symbolization of wine is so common-place.
15. Vide al-Jahiz quoted in Duha al-Islam, 1, p. 15.
16. Ibn Khaldun, Maqaddimah, Chap., 6 (49).
17. Ibn Qutaibah, op. cit., 1, p. 451.
18. In all Islamic literature some of the best wine songs have been produced by those who never tasted it. After all, does an actor actually experience death before he successfully acts the scene on the stage? Even the poets who waxed eloquent on the properties of the saliva safeguarded the chastity of the lady-love by saying at the end that they knew of it just as one knew of the water in the cloud by the flash of lightning.

- [19.](#) It is only an exuberance of popular fancy which has foisted with mujun of Abu Nuwas on the company of Harun al-Rashid. Ibn Khaldun has noted the incongruity of it with the restraint and dignity of the bearing of the great monarch.
- [20.](#) Any exact parallel is to be observed in our own day: Is it not that wine-drinking, ballroom dancing, and cabaret shows are associated with the superiority of the cultural taste and the intellectual refinement of Western provenance?
- [21.](#) It is not merely a sentimental reaction but a perfectly reasonable attitude that the liberties taken by Iqbal's "love in the presence of God be denied to one who talks of God from the atheistic viewpoint. A verse of Hafiz ridiculing formalism in religion will be appreciated by the Muslims, who would legitimately resent the same being quoted in the context of an anti-God movement. Also, significant are the words in which al-Mahdi interceded with his father, al-Mansur, on behalf of Muti' b. Iyas. He pleaded that Muti' was only a fasiq (libertine) and not a zindiq, i.e. not committed to over-throwing the existing order.
- [22.](#) In our own time Iqbal succeeded eminently where Abu-'Ala' failed miserably. Iqbal's employment of the traditional language of the mystics, which sometimes misleads even great scholars to take him for a mystic, is a device to make his ideas appear beautiful. Such a popular and familiar literary medium is all the more essential when the ideas are novel and unfamiliar.
- [23.](#) This is the "abuse of time" which is expressly prohibited by the Prophet. Only he would curse the stars who believe him to be a passive object under their blind inexorable influence. Islam, on the other hand, stands for man's active and dominant role in setting the pattern of life through the instrumentality of the process of time as ordained by God; cf. Iqbal, *Asrar-i Khudi*.
- [24.](#) See the interesting treatise on elegant manners by al-Washsha' (Leiden, 1887).
- [25.](#) Vide *Risalat al-Ghufran*, p. 183.

Chapter 51: Arabic Literature, Poetic and Prose Forms

A. Grammar

The intellectual activity of the early Muslims stemmed directly from their devotion of religion. The Arabs had throughout been sensitively proud of their language; contacts with foreigners were regarded by them as derogatory to pure Arabism. However, before Islam any corruption of the dialect was but a social drawback; after Islam, any lapse from the norm inevitably led to distortion of the sacred text with dire consequences both in this as well as in the next world. Curiously enough, it was Islam itself which brought about the commingling of the Arabs with the non-Arabs on a vast and unprecedented scale.

In the very second decade of the Hijrah the Arabs were carried on the crest of a wave of military conquests across the bounds of their homeland to settle down in the neighbouring countries of Iraq, Persia, Syria, and Egypt. At the same time there was a large influx of aliens, mostly prisoners of war, into the principal towns – Mecca and Medina – of Arabia itself. Before long, there appeared for the first time in history a considerable and growing number of neophytes seeking initiation into Arab society with a conscious effort to learn, imbibe, and serve that new religious culture which was only couched in

Arabic and had its prototype in Arab milieu.

Naturally enough, the inaptitude of these neophytes in the use of the Arabic tongue excited the laughter of the younger folk in Arab households, it also shocked the elders as it amounted to inadvertent profanity and distortion of the Qur'anic verses.¹ The corruptive effects on the new generation of the Arabs – the townsmen among them – were no less disconcerting; the daily usages marked a sharp decline from the Qur'anic idiom. Thus, there is little doubt that about the middle of the first century of the Hijrah the Muslims were squarely face to face with their foremost literary problem, viz, the need for the preservation of the Qur'an.

The Arabs needed reinforcing their own natural way of speech with a discipline of conscious effort; they were also eager, in keeping with the true spirit of Islam, to pass on to the myriads of non-Arabs, who daily swelled the ranks of the faithful, not only the religion and the practices of Islam but also the language as a key to a first-hand knowledge of its primary source or sources.² Actually, however, only a few of the Arabs concerned themselves with those branches of studies which involved the use of the method of *qiyas*, i.e. analogy and deduction.³

Such creative intellectual activity was notably flair of the non-Arab inhabitants of Iraq, which province occupied a unique position in the incipient literary life of Islam. It is worthwhile recalling that the province had been the cradle of ancient civilizations and the nursery of cultural currents from the Hellenes, including those relayed from the important academy of Jundi-Shapur; hence, the mental attitudes of its inhabitants bore the stamp of philosophical scientific discipline. Still more remarkable was the spirit motivating the political relationship of these "intellectuals" with their proud and unlettered masters, the Arabs, and their peculiar religious and cultural propensities towards Islam and the Arabic language.

In contrast with Syria and Egypt, it will be seen that the *Ajmis* of Iraq were from the very beginning determined to assert their own individuality, albeit only within the pale of Islam and on the ground of Arabs' own devotion to the Arabic language. Even the Sh'ubiyah movement, the outburst of an outraged sense of superiority of the Persians over the Arabs, involved no resilience from loyalty to the language of the Qur'an. It was a clear parallel to early Shi'ism, which was calculated to work out the political ascendancy of the Persians but only under the supreme and authoritarian over-lordship of the House of the Arabian Prophet.

Basrah and Kufa, the two cantonments of the Arabs, provided ideal conditions for fruitful contact between the Arabs and the non-Arabs. Of particular importance were the proximity of the two towns to the northern Arabian desert, long regarded as the preserve of the linguistic norm, and the market-place of al-Mirbad – on the outskirts of Basrah – was no less a close-by rendezvous of the *A'rab* (Bedouin Arabs of the desert) and the *literati* until the former, becoming aware of the demand, themselves came to offer their linguistic materials to the *elite* of Iraq and western Persia.

According to the classical tradition, it was Abu al-Aswad (Zalim b. 'Amr) of al-Du'ali (or Dili), a poet,

warrior, and teacher died (69/688 – 89) at the age of 85), who took the first step to stem the tide of growing laxity and error in the use of the Arabic tongue. He was an active partisan of ‘Ali in politics and actually fought against Mu‘awiyah at Siffin. It is, therefore, no surprise that he should take pride in claiming that the rudiments of Arabic grammar were confided to him by ‘Ali. This assertion can safely be dismissed as only an instance of the too frequent attempt to trace all learning to ‘Ali, the “Gateway of the City of Knowledge.”

It is also true that Abu al-Aswad himself cannot be credited with having worked out the fundamentals of Arabic grammar as such.⁴ But it is reasonably certain that he did institute something which, to later historians of the development of grammar, appeared to be the genesis of it. Let us examine what it was actually. Until the time with which we are concerned, the Arabic script, originally taken over from the Syriac-Nabataean writing, remained without a system of *i‘rab*, i.e. vowel-marks. Nor was there any established practice as to the *i‘jam*, i.e. diacritical marks, to distinguish letters of similar shape. Of course, there was no urgent need for either so long as the main dependence was on memory and writing was regarded as a mere casual help.⁵

In context of the new demands made by the change in the social pattern, the alert and acute mind of Abu al-Aswad realized the inadequacy of the written consonantal letter to evoke the correct unmarked vowel, which had ceased to come natural as of yore. He, therefore, must have been the first to conceive the idea of introducing some further aid to make the people “know and observe correct speech.” It appears that at the first innovation was opened Ziyad b. Abihi, the Governor of Basrah, with whose sons Abu al-Aswad might have discussed it. After some time, however, all conceded that it was absolutely needed and Abu al-Aswad went forward to lay down the following system:

1. the vowel “a,” the pronunciation of which needs a full upward opening (*fathah*) of the mouth, to be marked with a dot above the letter,
2. the vowel “i,” the pronunciation of which needs a little downward movement (*kasrah*) of the mouth, to be marked with a dot below the letter,
3. the vowel “u,” the pronunciation of which needs a rounded closing (*dammah*) of the lips, to be marked with a dot in front of the letter.⁶

This system of dots is to be seen in one of the oldest copies of the Qur’an dated 77/696, now preserved in the National Library at Cairo. The text on parchment is in black, while the vowel dots are in red, in accordance with the usual practice. It has been noted that a similar system of dots was in use in the writing of Syriac, and, though Abu al-Aswad’s contacts with the Syrians are not expressly alluded to, it stands more than probable that having realized the urgency he turned round and took the cue from his compatriots of the Syrian Christian Church.⁷

It is also possible, as some reports make out, that Abu al-Aswad went a step further to propound some broad distinctions in the main parts of a sentence such as the subject and the predicate. On the whole,

however, his contribution was merely to focus attention on the usage of vowel endings as the distinctive characteristic of Arabic. Hence, observation of vowel endings was designated *al-‘Arabiyyah*, i.e. the art of speech in the correct and characteristic Arab way. The use of vowel-endings itself was known as *al-i‘rab*, i.e. rendering into the proper Arabic way.⁸ The *al-‘Arabiyyah* was undoubtedly an embryonic form of Arabic grammar.

The emphasis on *al-‘Arabiyyah* grew in proportion to the need for saving the Qur’an from being consigned to antiquity. So far the method used was mere *talaqin*, i.e. putting the particulars in the mouth of the student. Only the necessary terms and signs for indicating the different vowels in speech and writing had been devised. As yet there was no *ta‘lil* or reasoning on the basis of general principles governing the incidence of the *i‘rab*. But certainly the *i‘rab* was under intense and searching observation, from which it was not a far step to collecting a number of analogous examples and inducting from them some rules for general guidance.

This was the beginning of the discovery of the logical structure of the language which, in the words of Sarton, was as much a scientific discovery as, for example, the discovery of the anatomical structure of the human body. This scientific discovery, the *Nahw* proper, reached the proportions of a separate branch of study at Basrah with ‘Abd Allah b. Abi Ishaq al-Hadrami (d. 117/736) and his student, Abu ‘Amr ‘Isa b. ‘Umar al-Thaqafi (d. 149/767). Both the teacher and the student were non-Arab clients (the latter being the client of none other than Khalid b. al-Walid) who relished putting the Arabs to shame on the score of incorrect speech. They had a reputation for boldness in *‘ilal w-al-qiyas*, i.e. induction of causes from an array of analogous examples.

Even in the first flush of discovery, they were so confident of the principles arrived at that they did not mind criticizing on their basis the ancient model poets such as al-Nabighah, not to speak of the contemporary al-Farazdaq. When the latter composed a vitriolic satire against his dogmatic critic, ibn Abi Ishaq would only retaliate by pointing out a grammatical mistake even in the satirical verse.⁹ The student elaborated the method explicitly, as in discovering principles which held well generally and in listing the deviations as *lughat*, i.e. exceptional usages. And it was he who embodied the results in two books said to have been the first on the subject.

It must be noted that *al-lahn*, i.e. incorrect speech, which gave stimulus to the thought of Abu al-Aswad, had by the turn of the first/seventh century assumed alarming proportions. It had percolated to the ranks of the *elite* of the Court and the administration as well as the circles of the learned such as the traditionists and the jurists. But the deterioration, as far from inducing an attitude of toleration, gave rise to a strong reaction against what was regarded almost as a sin, and there was a determined effort not so much to preserve the purity of the Qur’anic text as to make the ordinary speech conform to the standards of its idiom.¹⁰ It was at this very time that *al-Nahw*, the science of “the proper way of speech of the Arabs” (ibn Jinni), was fully recognized as an independent branch of study and the term *al-nahwi* became widespread in popular parlance.¹¹

The Basrah School reached its perfection in the following age, which produced such giants as al-Khalil and Sibawaihi. Al-Khalil b. Ahmad, a truly versatile genius of Arab descent (al-Furhudi/al-Farahidi, al-Azdi), whose contribution alone would outweigh the achievement of the host of non-Arabs, was born in 100/718 – 19 and died sometime between 170/786 and 175/791. There can be no greater testimony to his powers or originality than the discovery of Arabic prosody without any previous pattern, taking his cue merely from the rhythmic beats of the smith's hammer.

No surprise that after benefiting from the teachings of 'Isa b. 'Umar, he should have been able to elaborate the framework of Arabic grammar, a framework within which *al-i'rab* could be explained and reasoned out. But al-Khalil cared neither for fame nor for material gain; it is said of him that he lived in a state of abject penury while his students made a fortune with the learning imbibed from him. It fell to the lot of his Persian student Sibawaihi,¹² who also had direct contact with 'Isa b. 'Umar, to complete the work of al-Khalil and to arrange and produce his findings in concrete book form.

Sibawaihi (Abu Bishr 'Amr b. 'Uthman b. Qanbar), a native of Shiraz who died at the young age of about 40 years in the last quarter of the second century of the Hijrah, really proved to be another genius for comprehensiveness, if not so much for originality. His *Kitab* has throughout the ages been regarded as the final word on Arabic grammar and has become proverbial for its unique position in the field. Those who followed Sibawaihi right down to the present time could only comment upon, remove obscurities, arrange and rearrange the materials furnished in the "Book" without adding much to it.

It has been a vexed question as to whether the main concepts of Arabic grammar are an indigenous growth or they are traceable to some external pattern. Modern scholars have stumbled upon casual resemblances such as those with the Indian *Praticakhyas*, but they offer no secure ground for any assumption of borrowing. It must be remembered that the Arabic grammar is concerned mainly with the *i'rab*, which is a peculiarity of the Arabic language and was actually realized and proudly asserted to be so by the early grammarians.

Hence, it is no less misleading to make much of the similarity between the division of a word in "*ism*," "*fi'l*," and "*harf*" in Arabic and the analogous categories in Syriac or Greek. Obviously, the Arabic grammarians had to chalk out and proceed on their own lines and, in fact, they have given us a fair idea of how they applied their efforts on the problems, which was peculiarly their own. As hinted earlier, they began by observing the various positions of the words in a sentence and the particular *i'rab* taken by them in those positions.¹³ These rules went on developing in the direction of reducing further and further the number of exceptions which would not admit of their general application.

What helped the people of Iraq in this undertaking was a flair of *'ilal* and *qiyas*, which was exhibited in an equal measure in grammatical and literary studies as well as in *Fiqh* and jurisprudence.¹⁴ This flair certainly bears the impress of Hellenism. Nevertheless, it remains a mere conjecture that the early Muslims took over anything specific from Greek sources in grammar, in the same way as it is a mere wishful thought that *Fiqh* is indebted to anything specific in the Roman Law.¹⁵

The cornerstone of Arabic grammar is the correlation of the *i'rab* of the different parts of a sentence based on the theory of an *'amil*, i.e., an efficient cause supposedly resident in one of the parts and governing the whole. The earliest trace of it is perhaps in the *Kitab al-'Awamil* of al-Khalil – a work known to us only by its title. But there is no reason to suppose that al-Khalil diverged in any way from the general line pursued thitherto by 'Isa b. 'Umar and others. Unless, therefore, this *'amil* theory is proved to have been formulated on a familiar pattern, the indebtedness of Arabic grammarians to any external source will remain highly problematic.

There is, however, yet another development of Arabic grammar which is clearly and directly traceable to Greek influence. The most notable and lasting effect of the assimilation of Greek logic and philosophy in the 'Abbasid period was a general tendency to remould into logically defined systems almost all the nascent branches of learning, which until then lacked a rigid order. So far as Arabic grammar is concerned, the development took place when a Mu'tazilite Mutakallim and a *nahwi* were combined in the person of Abu al-Hassan 'Ali b. 'Isa al-Rummani (d. 384/994).

Actually, the process reached its culmination in al-Rummani so as to justify his being credited with that highly conventional logical reasoning which has since formed such a notable feature of Arabic grammar. This new development is amply borne out by a saying that out of the three contemporaries the words of al-Sirafi (Abu Sa'id al-Hassan b. 'Abd Allah) were thoroughly understood without a teacher, those of Abu 'Ali (al-Hassan b. Ahmad) al-Farisi were only partly so, whereas those of al-Rummani were not intelligible at all.¹⁶ Even though Abu 'Ali al-Farisi, who, according to solve the above testimony, was himself partly affected by the innovation, is reputed to have commented that if *Nawh* be what was expounded by al-Rummani, then he had nothing to do with it, and *vice versa*.

Undoubtedly, al-Rummani, did not bring out a new system of grammar, he only applied the methods and the jargon of Aristotelian logic to the adumbration of those nebulous conceptions which, in the simple language of the old tradition as represented by al-Sirafi, were easily comprehended by the average student. There was a similar transformation in Arabic rhetorics, too. Further, it will be noted that by this time the Arabs had acquired some familiarity with Greek grammar, which warranted their indulging in a comparison of its merits with those of Arabic grammar. By the latter was considered to have already possessed a separate entity with a different development.

While the general trend to Basrah was to go ahead with the formulation of general rules, there also developed a reaction against the scant attention paid to the angularities of actual usage, which, however, came to the fore only when Abu Ja'far (Muhammad b. Abi Sarra 'Ali) al-Ru'asiyy took it over as the basis of the rival school of Kufah founded by him in the latter half of the second/eighth century. The Kufans would assiduously collect such instances as violated the general rules of the Basrans and would treat them not as exceptions but as the basis of another general rule opposed to that of the Basrans.

This school achieved a meteoric rise in importance under the favour of the 'Abbasid caliphs. Two of its

very influential representatives at the Court were: (a) al-Kisa'iyy (Abu al-Hassan 'Ali b. Hamzah), the Persian student of both al-Khalil and Abu Ja'far al-Ru'asiyy, who came to be regarded as the compeer of Imam Abu Yusuf under Harun al-Rashid, and (b) al-Farra' (Yahya b. Ziyad), the Dailamite, who was appointed tutor to al-Mamun's sons and was designated as *Amir al-Mu'minin* in the realm of *Al-Nuhw*.

Ultimately, however, Baghdad proved a veritable crucible for the gradual fusion of the two schools through inter-change. From the end of the third/ninth century onwards there flourished at the metropolis scholars who were free from prejudice for or against any particular town or tribe and were actuated by sheer academic interest and reasonableness.

Just one more development may be noted. Abu 'Ali al-Farisi, who has been mentioned above, had an illustrious student called 'Uthman b. Jinni (d. 296/1002), the son of a Greek slave, regarded as the last of the philosopher-grammarians. But ibn Jinni did not help in clothing the *'amil* theory with the armoury of logic; rather he submitted the *'amil* theory itself to the scrutiny of reason. The result was a scathing attack on the false notion that one particular word in a sentence governed the whole.

The hint dropped by ibn Jinni was picked up in far distant Spain by "ibn Madda'," the Zahrite Qadi of Cordova under the Muwahhids, who in his *al-Radd 'ala al-Nuhat* attempted something in grammar akin to al-Ghazali's *Tahafut* in philosophy. However, his attack, though not lacking in flashes of brilliance, remained a cry in wilderness as no alternative formulation of Arabic grammar on a basis other than the *'amil* theory was ever achieved, far less accepted.

To sum up, the inspiration for Arabic grammar came from religion; the need for it was created by the commingling within Islam of the Arabs and the non-Arabs. The methods of observation and induction yielded the discovery of the main body of "laws" in the working of language. The only snag was that the laws of language are not so uniform and immutable as the laws of nature. The older school of grammarians at Rasrah suffered from an immature pedantry which was aggravated by the desire of the non-Arabs among them to outdo the Arabs.

At a very early time 'Isa b. 'Umar had the temerity to boast in the presence of the Arab philologist, Abu 'Amr b. al-'Ala', that he ('Isa b. 'Umar) was a greater master of Arabic than Ma'add b. 'Adnan, the progenitor of the Arabs! And both 'Isa b. 'Umar and Abu 'Amr b. al-'Ala' exhibited a tendency to prefer such readings of the Qur'an as, in their opinion, were more a consonance with the general rule of grammar.¹⁷ This authoritarianism on the part of the "wisdom of the school seeking to improve upon the facts" (Noldeke) was checked by the rise of the rival school of Kufah. Rather, the latter erred on the other extreme. It is said of al-Kisa'iyy that in his avid search for the unusual and the exceptional he would not pause to test the reliability of his sources.

Nonetheless, a relieving feature of the situation was that dogmatism always felt compelled to bow before actual usage, as typically exemplified in the contest between Sibawaihi and al-Kasa'iyy at the Court of Harun al-Rashid.¹⁸ Ultimately, Baghdad provided the necessary atmosphere for the gradual shedding of

prejudices and the engagement of all in a joint effort to erect a common edifice large enough to accommodate the conflicting viewpoints on most, if not all, of the established usage. The final success was vitiated by sporadic attempts at putting possible constructions on actual usage.

This tendency was decried at the very start by ‘Isa b. ‘Umar,¹⁹ but it reappeared prominently later on and is justly parodied by Abu al-‘Ala’ al-Ma‘arri in his *Risalat al-Ghufran*.²⁰ The instruments of Aristotelian logic helped to hammer out the crudities of enunciation and adumbration. Finally, there was an attempt to rebuild the entire system on a simpler basis other than the *‘amil* theory, which, however, did not fructify. On the whole, the Arabic grammar remains a magnificent achievement – religious in spirit, linguistic in material, scientific in methods, and logical in form – which has been eminently successful in preserving the Qur’an and keeping its idiom unchanged yet alive throughout the centuries.

B. Lexicography

The preservation of the Qur’an involved the institution of such disciplines as would effectively safeguard not only the authentic rendering of the text but also the warranted understanding of its import against error, corruption, or ignorance overtaking those for whom it was “plain Arabic” at the time. The former purpose was achieved through *al-‘Arabiyyah*, which later on developed into a full-fledged science under the name of *al-Nahw*. The next concern was naturally the meaning conveyed by the text. In the beginning, there could have been little difficulty about it in the same way as about the vocalization of the text which was just a matter of natural aptitude.²¹

However, with the lapse of time and the changes in the social pattern, uncertainties began to creep in around words and expressions which had gradually assumed an air of rarity. Obviously, the way to clearing such doubts and uncertainties was to search for the occurrence of those words and expressions in the speech of the Arabs elsewhere.²² In doing so, care had to be taken that the citations should faithfully reflect the idiom of the time of the Prophet during which the Qur’an was revealed. That is to say, either the citations should belong to the period contemporary with, or immediately antecedent to, the Qur’an or be called from the current usage of those whose social pattern had continued unchanged and who, therefore, could be relied upon to have preserved the idiom from the time uncorrupted and untainted by the extraneous influences.

Consequently, a zealous hunt was afoot to collect and preserve as much of pre-Islamic poetry, proverbs, and orations as could be salvaged from the memories of the people together with the current idiom of the *A‘rab*, i.e. the people of the desert impervious to influences from outside. The method of collection was identical with that of the collection of the Hadith.

The end of the first/seventh century witnessed the rise of a band of scholars especially noted for their profundity in the field of *al-lughah* (Arabic usage) with its ancillary branches of *al-sh‘r* (poetry), *al-akhbar* (historical annals), *al-ayyam* (accounts of tribal wars, and *al-ansab* (genealogies). The most prominent name among these scholars is that of Abu ‘Amar b. al-‘Ala (70/689 – 154/770), an Arab

nobleman of Basrah and an associate of 'Isa b. 'Umar. His collection of Arabic philology, when piled up, touched the ceiling of his asceticism towards the end of his life. Yet he continued to be the primary source of knowledge for the next generation.

While the process of collecting the vocabulary and the illustrations of its diverse uses was still going on, the genius of al-Khalil, whom we have mentioned before, burst with the idea of arranging and fitting the vocabulary into the orderly scheme of a lexicon. Actually, al-Khalil is known as the author of the first Arabic lexicon called the *Kitab al-'Ain*, but the authorship is a bit disputed. This much, however, is certain that even if the actual compilation was not exclusively or partially the work of al-Khalil, the idea of a lexicon and the scheme thereof were first conceived by him. Let us now examine what the scheme is like.

Al-Khalil starts with (a) reducing all words to their roots, i.e., the radical letters (*al-usul*) which form an immutable kernel in contra-distinction to those that are added (*al-zawa'id*) in the course of derivation and inflexion. Next (b) he classifies the roots according to the number of letters comprised in them: 2, 3, 4, and 5. Each class of words is then arranged in a separate part and even within each class special treatment under distinctive heading is resorted to in the case of words containing one or more of the vowels, double letters, or a *hamazah*.

The above framework is in line with al-Khalil's attempt at a computation of Arabic vocabulary, which is a further proof of his originality. The quest he pursued on the same structural basis in a mathematical way. By multiplying the 28 letters of the alphabet by 27 (28 minus one, to drop out double letters) he got 756 forms of the bilateral (there being no uni-literals in Arabic). Dividing this number by two, he had 378 combinations irrespective of the order of the two letters. Taking these bi-literal forms as one unit and adding a third letter to them, he worked out the number of tri-literal forms and so on.

It will be observed that the above method yielded the theoretically possible combinations of letters, all of which are not in actual use (*musta'mal*). Consequently, al-Khalil had to mention each and every possible combination and indicate if any specific forms were unused (*muhmal*). A further peculiarity, which made reference so difficult and cumbersome, was that in the arrangement of the lexicon he concerned himself merely with combination of letters and mentioned all the forms yielded by a change of order of the letters under one and the same heading. For example, under MY one will find both MY and its reverse (*maqlub*) YM.

Within the above framework, intrinsically scientific but practically unhandy, the order was according to the opening letter of the alphabet in the words. But the order of the alphabet observed by al-Khalil was not free from novelty; the grouping was according to the part of the mouth, from down the throat right to the lips, which produced sound. This novelty has been aptly noted and the similarity between it and the practice of the Sanskrit lexicographers has aroused a good deal of speculation. There is no doubt that the present day arrangement, based on grouping of words according to the shape of the letters in writing, was the one in common use even at that distant date, though the Arabs were also familiar with

the order according to the *abjad* system, which was originally taken over from the Syriac (and Hebrew) along with the art of writing.²³

The phonetic–physiological system of al-Khalil was neither common at the time nor did it achieve popularity afterwards. But any significance which its similarity to that of Sanskrit might suggest is whittled down by due consideration of the fact that in all probability it developed indigenously out of the practice of the recitation of the Qur'an. With the emphasis on recitation it was but natural the phonetics should receive special attention and that there be a grouping of letters on that basis. Actually, evidence does not want that the linguists did engage themselves in such a study; there were some differences too between the Basrans and the Kufans as to the order of the alphabet on the basis of phonetics.²⁴ Moreover, al-Khalil also paid some regard to the frequency of the letters in use. Otherwise, *'ain* would not have come first in order.²⁵

No doubt, the general lexicon of al-Khalil represented an idea much in advance of his time. For the following century or so no one dared imitate, far less improve upon, his scheme. In the meantime, however, much valuable work was done in the form of small tracts comprising words, synonyms, and cognates with their fine shades of meaning grouped around particular subjects. Typical of such subjects are: *al-ibil* (the camel), *al-matar* (the rain), *al-silah* (the weapons), and the like. Similarly, special features of the Arabic usage were also singled out for monographic treatment: (a) *al-muthallathat*, (b) *al-maqsur w-al-mamdud* (c) *al-itba' w-al-muzawajah*, (d) *al-ajnas*, and (e) *al-nawadir*.

Some philologists wrote running commentaries (concerned merely with the meaning of selected words and phrases supported with illustrations from other sources) on the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet under such captions as *Gharib al-Qur'an*, *Gharib al-Hadith*, *Majaz al-Qur'an*, *Ma'ani al-Qur'an*, etc.

1. Al-Asma'i (Abu Sa'id 'Abd al-Malik b. Quraib), an Arab of Basrah, was born in 122/739 or 123/740 and died in about 217/832. He amused Harun al-Rashid with his stock of interesting anecdotes about the life of the *A'rab*.
2. Abu Zaid (Sa'id b. Aus) al-Ansari was another Arab of the Basrah who reached Baghdad during the time of al-Mehdi and died about 215/830, then over 90 years of age. He was not inhibited by partisanship and eagerly learned from al-Mufaddal and other Kufans. By common agreement, he is regarded as thoroughly trustworthy, though his pedantry is often a source of amusement.
3. Abu 'Ubaidah Ma'mar b. al-Muthanna, *a maula*, said to have been of Persian Jewish descent, was born in 110/728 at Basrah where he spent most of his life. He was patronized by the Baramikah and was summoned to Baghdad by Harun al-Rashid to read his works to him. While rendering yeoman service to the Arabic philological studies, he collected the *mathalib* or the vices of the Arab tribes and caused such offence to tribal pride that at his death nobody attended his funeral.
4. Ibn al-A'rabi (Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ziyad) was the son of a Sindian slave and the foster-

child of the famous Kufan philologist, al-Mufaddal al-Dabbi. His prodigious memory was a storehouse of Arabic philology and folklore. Remarkably enough, he relied on his own independent sources and questioned not without success the authority of al-Asma'i and Abu 'Ubaidah. He died about 231/845.

The special treatises referred to above naturally swelled to a considerable extent the volume of material which lay ready at hand for incorporation in a general lexicon. Another such lexicon was produced, rather dictated mostly from memory, by ibn Duraid (Abu Bakr Muhammad b. al-Hassan, born at Basrah in 223/837 and died 321/933) who enjoyed the patronage of the Mikalids of Fars. Though ibn Duraid claims that his work is much easier for reference than that of Khalil, the fact is that there is little improvement so far as the scheme, particularly the break-up of the vocabulary into structural categories, is concerned.

Even the irksome device which jumbles up all the orders, forward and reverse, of a combination of letters under one and the same heading, continues to be there. Only the phonetic order of the alphabet is discarded. Much of the confusion was caused by the nebulous state in which *al-tasrif* (etymology) happened to be at that time. There was so far no clarity as to the roots of words, particularly those containing a vowel, a double consonant, or a *hamazah*. Similarly, lack of clarity as to the distinction between *al-usul* and *al-zawa'id* caused the different categories to be mixed up. As a matter of fact, it was this uncertainty which made it expedient for ibn Duraid to insert a miscellany here and there, apart from the *nawadir* or peculiar usages and expressions listed under appropriate captions at the end.

There is indeed one important point of difference which is indicated by the very name, *Jamharat al-Lughah*. Ibn Duraid included in it only the familiar and the useful and eschewed the obsolete and the discordant. This was the beginning of a process of subjecting to criticism and sifting out the useful and the dependable from the large mass of material left behind by the early scholars, who were concerned with collecting and recording whatever they came across. At the time when the mistakes were being corrected, an attempt was also made to supply the omissions in the works of the early authors.

These, in short, are the new features noticeable in the lexicographical productions of the fourth/tenth century. Particularly notable in this respect is the *Tahdhib*, whose author, Abu Mansur Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Azhari (d. 370/980), a student of ibn Duraid, was urged to wanderlust in the desert for the collection of *al-lughat*. Incidentally, he fell captive into the hands of a Bedouin tribe; this provided him with desired opportunity. Equally important is *al-Muhit* of al-Sahib b. 'Abbad, who died in 385/995.

The culmination of the critical activity of the fourth/tenth century aiming at authenticity and comprehensiveness, was reached in the *Sihah* of al-Jauhari, Abu Nasr Isma'il b. Hammad (died about 398/1007), a native of Farab who settled down at Nishapur. The very name *Sihah* reminds one of the *Sihah* of al-Bukhari. It has already been hinted at that the method of collecting *al-lughat* was essentially the same as the one applied to the collection of the traditions, only a higher degree of stringency was observed in the case of the latter than the of the former.

This aptly illustrated by the example of al-Asma'i who is held to be trustworthy in regard to hadith, but he risks conjectures in matters pertaining to the *lughat* and even embellishes anecdotes for the sake of amusement.²⁶ Anyway, it is worthwhile to note that even the nomenclature of the hadith such as the *mutawatir* and the *ahad* was applied to the *lughat* and the degree of reliability of any particular usage determined accordingly. In the beginning it was not uncommon even to mention the *isnadi* or the chain of narrators and to discuss the personal character and reputation of the transmitters.²⁷

Thus, a compendium of the *Sahih* was sought to be arrived at in the field of *lughat* parallel to a similar, though much more scrupulously worked out, effort in the field of religious tradition.²⁸ It has, however, to be noticed that the *Sihah* suffered grievously from an unfortunate circumstance: the author was overtaken by a fit of melancholy which rendered him incapable of revising the manuscript. Further, due to the absence of any authentic copy of the text, a good of corruption also set in. All this necessitated a re-examination of the work in glosses and commentaries by later writers.

The work of al-Jauhari was still more remarkable in another way. In it the entire vocabulary was integrated (instead of being split up into structural categories) and arranged in alphabetical order with the first reference to the last letter and a second reference to its combination with the first. This new scheme at once became popular and was highly appreciated as particularly suited to a language in which the endings of the words and a unique importance for the purposes of rhyme (*qafiyah* and *saj'*). Apart from the merits of this integrated scheme, the development and standardization of *al-tasrif* (etymology) at the hands of al-Mazini (Abu 'Uthman Bakr b. Muhammad, d., 249/863), ibn Jinni, and al-Rummani during the course of the fourth/tenth century removed a good deal of the confusion which marred the works of al-Khalil and ibn Duraid.

We have now reached a time when the Arabic vocabulary was supposed to have been exhaustively collected and the meanings of words established with reasonable certainty. Henceforth, efforts were directed at collecting the material scattered in the previous works either (a) in the form of large comprehensive dictionaries or (b) in concise handy volumes designed for the ordinary student. Naturally, the latter often dispensed with illustrations and citations. The most important works of the former category are:

1. *Al-Muhkam* by the blind Spanish scholar, ibn Sidah (Abu al-Hassan 'Ali b. Ahmad?, d. 460/1068), was held in great esteem for comprehensiveness and absolute reliability. But perhaps the author did not like innovations; hence, he went back to the earliest model of al-Khalil for its arrangement.
2. *Al-'Ubab* (incomplete) was composed by Radi al-Din Hassan al-Saghani, born in Lahore in 570/1174. He settled in Baghdad where he dedicated his work to ibn al-'Alqami, the minister of al-Musta'sim, whence he was sent out twice as ambassador of the 'Abbasid Caliph to the court of Iltutmish at Delhi.
3. The *Lasan al-'Arab* was compiled by ibn Mukarram/ibn Manzur (Jamal al-Din Muhammad), who was born in 690/1291 and died at Cairo in 771/1369. It is expressly based on the works of ibn Duraid, al-

Azhari, al-Jauhari, and ibn Sidah.

Of the latter category, the work which achieved a high degree of popularity in the *Qamas* of Majd al-Din al-Firuzabadi (Muhammad b. Ya'qub) who died in 816/1413. It draws upon *al-Muhkam* and *al-'Ubab*.

Yet another work which deserves special mention is the *Asas al-Balaghah* of the well-known Mu'tazilite al-Zamakhshari (Abu al-Qasim Jar Allah Mahmud b. 'Umar, born 467/1074 and died 538/1143). The author was a native of Khwarizm who spent a long time in Mecca and Baghdad. He realized that the mere recording of meanings was an insufficient guide to the practical use of words. He, therefore, would give the occasions and the contexts in which the words were employed. What is still more remarkable is the arrangement of the *Asas*, which is in the alphabetical order with reference to the first (and the second and so forth) letter of a word. That is to say, its arrangement is exactly the same as has come into vogue in modern times since the impact of Western literary influences.

It is interesting to note that the early trend towards compiling treatises dealing with the words grouped around particular subjects did not die with the appearance of the general lexicons; it had an uninterrupted development on parallel lines. The greatest work of this kind is *al-Mukhassas*, the vocabulary is grouped under the subject headings, e.g., the hair, the eye, etc, which are classified into "books" such as that on "human body." Even if the position of *al-Muhkam* is not wholly unsurpassed, that of *al-Mukhassas* is definitely so.

Once the framework of a general lexicon was fixed, the running commentaries on the rare and difficult words in the Qur'an and/or the Hadith were also brought under that form.²⁹ Similarly, no time was lost in extending the facility and the benefits of a general dictionary to the other specialized branches such as zoology, botany, biography, geography, bibliography, and finally the encyclopaedias (*al-mausu'at*). It may be observed in this connection that interest in language and literature, which the scheme of a lexicon was originally designed to sub-serve, seldom disappeared in any of the works, however specialized and limited the scope of their treatment.

It would, for example be really odd to conceive of a zoologist or a geographer who was not familiar with the references in the Qur'an and the hadith or who would be unable to recall poetry, proverbs, and pith sayings concerning animals or towns. This all-pervading interest in humanities is perhaps the most valuable asset of Islamic culture.

In conclusion, it will be recalled that the early philologists were fully conscious of the sanctity of their tasks; they showed themselves to be scrupulous in method and honest in purpose. But the scope of the linguistic studies was bound in the course of time to extend beyond that was strictly relevant to the Qur'an and the Hadith. As the bounds of the sacred faded into those of the profane, the common failings of vanity, mere guess or conjecture or even unguarded reliance on genuine misunderstandings contributed to the interpolation of the spurious.

Also, as these studies came to be held in high esteem and patronized with abundant monetary gifts, the

veterans in the field were sometimes tempted to window-dress faked rarities in their shop. But the probe into their personal weaknesses, so characteristic of Islamic religious and literary tradition, and the severe tests subsequently applied to their statements served to a large extent to clear the chaff from the grain. On the same way it is impossible to claim that the entire vocabulary and the usage were exhausted, yet there is no gainsaying the fact that an enormous part of them was actually encompassed.

The charge that the Arabic philologists concerned themselves too exclusively with the idiom of the Qur'an and showed no interest in contemporary deviations from the same, tantamount to questioning their objective or purpose, which has been steadily confirmed throughout the ages. In regard to the scheme and the arrangement of a lexicon, the early pioneers proceeded on the basis of a scientific etymological analysis of the structure of the vocabulary. Practical convenience was achieved later in the superbly original plan of al-Jauhari, which remains the one especially suited to the genius of the language. Even the model which has become so popular in modern time is traceable to al-Zamakhshari.

Bibliography

Al-Suyuti, *al-Muzhir*; Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-Udaba'*; ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat al-A'yan*; ibn Kahldun, *Muqaddimah*; Hajj Khalifah, *Kashf al-Zunun*; Jurji Zaidan, *Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabiyyah*; Ahmad Amin, *Duha al-Islam*, Part 2, Chap. 6; *Zuhr al-Islam*, Part 2, Chaps Three and Four.

1. This is amply borne out by the different versions of what prompted Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali to turn to grammar.
2. It is noteworthy that Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali, who showed himself genuinely anxious to help the non-Arabs learn Arabic and Islam, did so in spite of his jealousy of their prosperity and influence. There was not the slightest trace of any tendency among the Arabs to sit Brahman-like over the treasures of religious knowledge.
3. This applies equally to grammar and to al-ra'i in the realm of Fiqh.
4. Encyclopaedia of Islam, "Abu al-Aswad."
5. In the Islamic literary tradition, the written book long continued to serve merely as an aide memoire – a copy of what was preserved in memory and not vice versa.
6. It will be remarked that the other synonyms such as nasb, jarr, and raf' also refer to the same varied movement of the mouth. Closely parallel to the Arabic terms are the Persian equivalents: zir, zabar, and pish.
7. The Syrian Christians of the west had another Greek alphabet (five altogether: Y, E, H, O, A), instead of the dots, were used as vowel marks. At some later date, not exactly ascertained, the Arabs also replaced the dots with letters of their own alphabet albeit in an abbreviated form: َ from ٲ, ِ from ٴ (somewhat doubtful), and ُ from ٵ. Obviously, the change must have been necessitated by the use of dots for diacritical marks along with their use for vowel marks. The diacritical marks are said to have been brought into somewhat systematic use at the behest of al-Hajjaj b. Yusuf, the Governor of Iraq, by Nasr b. 'Asim (d. 89/708), who, remarkably enough, is also reckoned as one of the founders of Arabic grammar. For some time the two kinds of dots were distinguished by the different colours of the ink. The replacement of the vowel dots with abbreviations of ِ, ُ, and ُ is sometimes ascribed to al-Khalil b. Ahmad, which is supported by the title Kitab al-Naqi w-al-Shakl among his works.
8. Al-Suyuti, *al-Ashbah w-al-Nazash'ir*, Hyderabad, 1359/1940, 1, p. 76.
9. Al-Jumahi, *Tabaqat*, Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 1952, pp. 16 – 17.
10. J. Fuck, *al-'Arabiyyah* (Arabic translation), Cairo, 1951, pp. 26, 65, 74.
11. Ibid., p. 30.
12. The reading "Sibuyah" is not supported by comparison with "Niftawaihi," which the latter is in no doubt because of its occurrence in the rhyme of a verse. Vide ibn Khallikan, *Wafayat*, "Ibrahim b. Muhammad b. 'Arafah."

[13.](#) Cf. Fuck, op. cit., pp. 11 – 12.

[14.](#) What distinguished the Fiqh of Abu Hanifah was exactly the same: the probing into the “efficient cause” (‘illah) governing a number of given instances and then applying the same to unforeseen circumstances. The people of the Hijaz were extremely chary of such reasoning and it is no mere chance that they came to be notorious for their ignorance of grammar. It is remarkable that the opponents of Abu Hanifah, who wanted to run down his school of Fiqh, thought it necessary to make fun of the application of his methods of grammar. Cf., Fuck, op. cit., p. 65.

[15.](#) M. Hamidullah, “Influence of the Roman Law on Muslim Law” – a paper read before the All India Oriental Conference, December 1941.

[16.](#) Yaqut, Mu‘jam al-Udabi’, “‘Ali b. ‘Isa.”

[17.](#) It must be pointed out that it was merely a choice from among the various current readings; there was no attempt to “correct” the Qur’an in line with usage elsewhere. As pointed out by Wolfensen, it is an entirely wrong and unscientific approach on the part of some Western scholars to judge and criticize the Qur’an on the basis of pre-Islamic poetry. Apart from any religious sentiment, the Qur’an is the oldest and most reliable book. Other sources, though relating to anterior times, are posterior to it in point of actual compilation. Turikh al-Lughat al-Simiyyah, Cairo, 1926, pp. 169 et seq.

[18.](#) The reference is to what is known as “al-Mas’alah al-Zunburiyaah.” When Sibawaihi challenged al-Kisa’iyy on a point of grammar, the matter had to be refereed for decision to the Arabs. It is alleged that the Arabs were bribed to save the face of the royal tutor. The incident affected Sibawaihi so deeply that perhaps it caused his death pre-maturely.

[19.](#) Once when al-Kisa’iyy began giving the various grammatically correct readings of a particular phrase, ‘Isa b. ‘Umar rebuked him saying, “I want the actual way in which it is spoken by the Arabs,” Yaqut, op. cit., “‘Isa b. ‘Umar,” last paragraph. This tendency is to be compared with the hiyat – permissible tricks for evading the Law – in which some of the legists exhibited their acumen.

[20.](#) Al-Ma’arri contrives to bring the grammarians and the poets in the heaven together when the latter protests at the former’s purely speculative interpretation of verses, e.g. p. 152 of the Risalah, ed. Bing al-Shati, Cairo.

[21.](#) In the words of Abu ‘Ubaidah introducing his Majaz al-Qur’an, “The Qur’an was revealed in clear Arabic language and those who heard it recited by the Prophet had no need of asking for its meaning...”

[22.](#) Cf. the saying attributed to ibn ‘Abbas, “When you be in doubt about any rare expression of the Qur’an, seek it in poetry.” Al-Suyuti, al-Muzhir, ed. Muhammad Ahmad Jad al-Maula and others, Cairo, 2, p. 302. It was in consideration of this that linguistic studies were regarded an obligation on a par with the obligation of prayer; cf. the verses (ibid). Ibn al-Qatta’ (al-Af’al, Hyderabad, p. 3) went so far as to declare that anyone who decries the poetry of the Arabs is a sinner, and the one who runs down their language is an infidel (kafir).

[23.](#) It was in that original source that numerical values were assigned to the letters in that order, which is still adhered to in Arabic and other Islamic languages for purposes of chronograms. The assertion by later Arab philologists that abjad, hawwaz, etc., were the names of the inventors of the art of writing (al-Suyuti, op. cit., 2, p., 342) should be taken merely as a recollection of the old borrowing.

[24.](#) In Duraid, Jamharat al-Lughah, Hyderabad, cf. the Preface; cf. also al-Suyuti, op. cit., 1, p. 85.

[25.](#) Al-Suyuti, op. cit., 1, p. 90.

[26.](#) Cf. Ahamd Amin, Duha al-Islam, Cairo, 1952, 2, p. 301. Abu ‘Ubaidah once ridiculed al-Asma’i’s extreme cautiousness in the interpretation of the Qur’an by asking him whether he was sure of the meaning of al-khubz (bread). Cf. Yaqut, op. cit., “Ma’mar b. al-Muthana.”

[27.](#) Al-Suyuti, op. cit., 1, pp. 118 et seq.

[28.](#) Just because the sciences of al-Hadith and al-lughah were recognized as twins, the highest academic title for the learned in either was the same, al-hafiz. Ibid., 2, p. 312.

[29.](#) Cf. Kashf al-Zunun 2, pp. 1204 – 06.

Chapter 52: Arabic Literature: Theories of Literary Criticism

In this account of the Arab contribution to the theories of literary criticism, the term “Arab” is used in a wide sense to include all the Arabic-speaking peoples, and the writers who used Arabic as their cultural medium, regardless of their racial origins.

Literary criticism is also broadly used to cover the whole field of literary appreciation, analysis, judgment, and comparison on the practical as well as the theoretical side. In this broad sense, *Balaghah* – which concerns itself with the study of the figures of speech and the stylistic aspects of literature in general – may be included under literary criticism, at least of the golden era of the early centuries of Hijrah, although, generally speaking the relation between the two is a matter of controversy.

The period covered by our treatment is likewise a fairly long one. It extends from the first/seventh century to the present time, and it corresponds to the Islamic era in the history of Arabs. For, although the Arabs achieved a high measure of perfection in their poetry two centuries before Islam, they did not reach the mature stage of theorizing about literature and its excellence until their minds were stirred and stimulated by the call of the new religion that arose in their midst. The fact that the miraculous sign of the religion of Islam came in the form of a “Clear Arabic Book” was destined to play an important role in Arabic language and literature, and consequently in the enrichment of Arabic literary criticism.

From early times, the Arabs were noted for their literary excellence. Poetry and oratory were the chosen forms of their artistic expression. As early as the second half of the sixth century A.D. when Arabic poetry was in its flowering period, some rudimentary forms of practical criticism could be observed. These were preserved by narrators, and later recorded by the early authors of the general studies of the Arabic language and literature. Some time before Islam there grew a number of marketplaces in the Hijaz where people of different tribes used to assemble for trade as well as for literary contests.

Names of recognized arbiters in those contests, such as that of al-Nabighah al-Thubyani, and their judgments and criticisms were handed down to posterity by the *rawis* (transmitters). Naturally, very little explanation or justification was offered for such judgments, and very often one verse or one poem would be given as a ground for a high praise of a poet or for a comparison between two contestants in the marketplace. Some of the Prophet’s Companions were known for their appreciation and sound judgment of pre-Islamic poetry. The Second Caliph ‘Umar, for instance, was reported to hold that al-Nabighah was the greatest of the *Jahiliyyah* poets, and when he was asked the reason for this pronouncement, he answered, “Al-Nabighah never used redundant words, always avoided the uncouth in poetry, and never praised a person except for true merit.

By the end of the first/seventh century Arabic culture had spread outside Arabia in various directions with

the spread of Islam. The mind of the new Muslim community was getting ready for a general intellectual awakening. The first to reap the benefit of those efforts were the religious fields on one side and the linguistic and literary on the other. Some scholars busied themselves with the explanation of the Qur'an and the understanding of its challenge of miraculous literary excellence. Others concentrated on tracing pure linguistic usages of the Arabic language and standardizing its grammar and syntax. Some directed their efforts to collecting pre-Islamic poetry and preserving it against loss.

The stage was now set for the beginning of a golden era in authorship which lasted several centuries. The critical problems raised by the Arab authors during this period can be summed up under the following main headings:

1. Literary aspect of the Qur'anic *i'jaz* (eloquence of discourse), and the extent to which literary could aid in discovering the secrets of that *i'jaz*.
2. Unique and sometimes obscure usages of the Qur'anic style.
3. Authenticity of literary texts transmitted by the *rawas* from pre-Islamic and early Islamic times.
4. Classification of the Arab poets, both Islamic and pre-Islamic.
5. Merits and demerits of the ancients and moderns in Arabic literature, and controversies between traditionalists and innovators.
6. Claims of meaning and expression to literary excellence.
7. Originality and imitation, and the phenomenon of plagiarism.
8. Nature of speech and articulation.
9. Meaning and essence of literary excellence, in structure, signification, effectiveness, and formal beauty.
10. Definition of the figures of speech.
11. Standards for the comparison between rival poets.
12. Norms of excellence in the chief poetical arts, such as panegyric, satire, and elegy.
13. Linguistic aspects of literary art.

These various problems of literary criticism were treated sometimes separately in a specialized fashion, and sometimes together in manuals or textbooks. The stylistic aspects in particular received a large share of the Arab authors' attention, and the researches around them grew until they formed a separate critical branch under the name of *Balaghah*. This was mainly the outcome of the Muslims pre-

occupation with problems of the Qur'anic exegesis and *i'jaz*. Greek writings on rhetorics which were translated into Arabic as early as the third/ninth century also contributed to the growth of the science of *Balaghah*. In fact, that science dominated the Arabic critical field all through the later centuries of Islam from the seventh/13th to the 12th/18th.

The above enumeration of the different aspects of Arabic literary criticism will indicate the immensity of its wealth, and the difficulty of separating the Arab contribution in this field from their contribution to the development of Arabic language and literature in general. Many a general book on literature, such as the *Kitab al-Aghani* (Book of Songs) by Abu al-Faraj, would also claim a place among the books of literary criticism. The same can be said by the unique excellence of the Qur'an.

But the following survey of the main features of Arabic literary criticism we shall limit ourselves to singling out some of its outstanding landmarks and making a brief halt at each of them.

1. On the early grammarians, philologists, and literary critics of the first stage in Arabic authorship was ibn Sallam (d. 231/845). His book *Tabaqat al-Shu'ara'* is representative of the critical attainments of his period. Criticism, he maintains, needs long training and experience, and a critic must be an expert on his subject and well versed in the practice of his art. In other words, taste alone does not meet the requirements of criticism, and must be supplemented by experience and long study. He also adds that poetry, like the sciences and other arts, needs its own special technique and culture. He was aware of the established truth that abundance of practical study is worth more than all academic knowledge.

The second point stressed by ibn Sallam in his book is the importance of verifying the poetical texts and of ascertaining their origin. This is the first step in textual criticism and must be taken as its foundation. He directed a violent attack on the manner in which some Arab chroniclers accepted and narrated ancient poetry, and, therefore, questioned the authenticity of many of their texts.

The other important point in ibn Sallam's book is the division of poets into classes. With regard to time, poets were either Islamic or pre-Islamic. He tried to classify the poets of either era according to the abundance and excellence of their poetry. In his classification he also took into consideration the place of origin.

Although ibn Sallam failed to support judgments he passed on poets and poetry by analyzing the texts or describing the qualities of each particular poet, yet it must be admitted that Arabic criticism was taken by him a step further, especially as regards questions of verification and classification of poets. What we miss in his book, however, is criticism in the sense of a discerning study and a methodical approach. The first attempts at methods are not to be found earlier than the fourth/tenth century.

Al-Jahiz (d. 255/869), who was one of the leading Mu'tazilites and writers of the third/ninth century, tried in his book *al-Bayan w-al-Tabyin* to give a picture of criticism in pre-Islamic times and the first/seventh century. The criticism of that period, he maintained, was elementary, but, to a marked degree, sound and convincing, as it emanated from genuine practical literary taste. The critics of that period, according

to him, managed to discover a number of defects in poetical craftsmanship and to give valuable practical advice to orators and poets.

Al-Jahiz's book was an echo of the intellectual life of the Arabs of the third/ninth century. At that time the mosques of Kufah and Basrah were not only places for worship and administration of justice, but also schools for the teaching of language, grammar, Hadith, and jurisprudence, as well as platforms for narrators to relate to the assembled audiences the story of the Prophet's life and conquests. Leaders of theological schools and religious divisions used to go there for dialectical discussions, and a large number of people attended them in quest of knowledge.

Anyone who spoke in the mosque had to possess the ability to express himself clearly, to attract and persuade the audience. Thus, a new kind of study came into being to show the qualities an orator needed, and to point out the defects of different speeches. Observations on effective and defective public speaking contained in al-Jahiz's book can be grouped under the following headings:

- (1) Correctness of pronunciation and defects caused by deformities of the vocal organs.
- (2) Proper and improper employment of language and harmonious and disharmonious use of words.
- (3) Syntax and the relations between words and their meanings, clarity, conciseness, suitability of expression to different occasions and audiences, and of speech to its intended objective.
- (4) The appearance of the orators and the agreeableness of their gestures and mannerisms.

Another third/ninth century literary celebrity was the writer ibn Qutaibah (d. 276/889), and the author of many books on literature and Qur'anic usages. In one of his books, *al-Shi'r w-al-Shu'ara'*, he urged people to form independent judgments and use their own power of appreciation. He attacked the philosophers' approach to criticism and their use of logical method in the appreciation and analysis of literary texts. One of the critical problems he raised was that of the division of poets into those who deliberate upon, revise, and perfect their poetical works, and those who depend on the spontaneity and easy flow of their poetic inspiration.

He also opposed the tendency always to give preference to the ancients just because they were ancients. Literary talent, he argued, was not confined to any particular period. A modern poet might easily surpass an ancient in literary creativeness and workmanship.

The contribution of the poet Prince 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 296/908) to the development of Arabic criticism and his influence on it were of a different character. He made a study of *badi'* which was considered in his days an innovation in the poetical art, and set out to prove that it was not a new creation at all. His book *al-Badi'* was the first attempt at a systematic treatment of the figures of speech, which he divided into three main categories: (1) the metaphor which is the pillar-stone of poetry, (2) artifices connected with the form only and not with the essence of poetry, such as assonance (*tajnis*) and

anti-thesis (*mutabaqah*), and (3) the dialectical style which takes the form of a logical argument (*al-mabhath al-kalami*).

By quoting copious examples from the Qur'an, the Hadith, the speeches of the Prophet's Companions, and the language of the Bedouins, ibn al-Mu'tazz tried to show that the use of the figures of speech was inherent in the nature of poetry, and that the Arabs practised the art long before the time of Bashshar, Muslim ibn al-Walid, and Abu Nuwas. These modern poets of the 'Abbasid period did not invent the art but simply extended its use until it was thought a new creation. It is an open question whether ibn al-Mu'tazz was influenced, in his *Badi'*, by Aristotle's writing, especially the *Rhetorics* translated into Arabic during the third/ninth centuries.

But the treatment of ibn al-Mu'tazz has the unmistakable stamp of originality, and the subject seems to have begun to interest Arab critics in the second/eighth century as an Arabic literary phenomenon. The influence, if any, might be sought in the prominence given to metaphor and in the attempt at definition and division of literary artifices.

But the real disciple of the philosophical sciences and the author who manifested Aristotle's influence very clearly was Qudamah ibn Ja'far (d. 337/948). His book *Naqd al-Shi'r* is perhaps the first Arabic book to carry in its title the word *naqd* which is the Arabic equivalent of criticism. It is conceived and planned in the Aristotelian fashion of logical divisions and definitions. The author begins by defining poetry as regular speech with metres, rhymes, and meanings, proceeds to explain and justify this definition on logical grounds, and then adds words as the fourth element constituting poetry.

Out of the relations between these four simple elements he creates four complex ones, which evolve out of the harmony between them. He points out those earlier Arab authors have neglected the critical side of the studies of the poetical art, and directed their energies to the less important aspects, namely, prosody and linguistic considerations. His, then, was an attempt to create a real science of criticism and set the norms of excellence for the principal categories of Arabic poetry.

2. Arab contribution to literary criticism assumes clearer and mature forms in the fourth/tenth century. On the specialized side we meet with al-Baqillani (d. 403/1012), who gives a scholarly account of the Qur'anic *i'jaz*, al-Amidi (d. 371/981), who leaves us the best classical Arabic comparison between two great poets, representatives of two schools of poetical art, and al-Qadi al-Jurjani (d. 366/976) the writer of the earliest critical treatise on a great Arabic figure in the literary history of the Arabs. On the general side, at least two contributions must be mentioned here. The first is that of Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 356/956), the writer of *Kitab al-Aghani* (The Book of Songs), and a unique book of its kind in the literatures of the world. And the second is that of Abu Hilal al-'Askari (d. 365/1004), who attempted to give a complete systematic manual of Arabic rhetorical and critical principles as they were known at the time.

Now, to take the general contributions first. The "Book of Songs is a literary encyclopedia, in 20

volumes, dealing essentially with lyrical poetry which was set to music and singing by the musicians and singers of the early centuries of Islam. But around this theme the author collected a large amount of critical and biographical information of a great number of Arab poets. The critical aspect of *al-Aghani* has received the attention of modern academic research. The wealth of narratives and biographical data contained in the book has been a boon to modern Arabic play and story writers.

Al-‘Askari made the two arts of poetry and prose the subject-matter of his treatment and tried to systemize and enlarge upon the earlier general attempts of al-Jahiz, ibn Mu‘tazz, and Qudamah. The two Arabic rhetorical conceptions of *fasahah* and *balaghah* received at his hands satisfactory definitions, the first being connected with elegance and purity of style, and the second with communicating and conveying the desired meaning in a convincing and effective manner. Long chapters on distinguishing the good from the bad in speech, on the nature of literary art, and on the technique of composition and good description, with copious examples of excellent poetry and prose, occupy about half the book. The rest is an enumeration and elucidation of literary artifices, the number of which al-‘Askari raised to 35, which is more than double the number given earlier by ibn al-Mu‘tazz.

Al-Jurjani’s treatise on *i‘jaz* takes its place among Arabic critical books on account of its attempt at applying the critical conceptions to reveal some of the secrets of the Qur’anic literary excellence. In doing this the author subjected some of the highly esteemed Arabic poems to severe test of criticism to show the fallibility of human products. The Qur’anic *i‘jaz*, he maintained, was something more than and above that which critical standards could explain, something that could be felt more than known by the expert and cultured reader or listener. This theory of *i‘jaz*, peculiar to Muslim culture, we meet again in a different setting when we come to ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani.

The two treatises which exemplify Arabic criticism proper in its methodical form are those of al-Amidi and al-Qadi, Al-Jurhani referred to earlier. Al-Amidi’s *Muwazanah* (Comparison) between Abu Tammam and his disciple and kinsman al-Buhturi is the first systematic treatment of its kind in Arabic criticism. The author collects the common meanings between the two poets and, on the basis of a rigid comparison between each pair of words of similar meanings, decides which is more poetical in that particular context. He takes account of the supporters of each poet, reproduces the reasons given by them for their stand, and brings into relief the faults and plagiarisms of each of the two great poets.

Although the subject of al-Amidi’s study is a particular case of comparison, and the features it concentrates on are the artistic and poetic ones only, it claims a high value because of its success in going beyond the particular comparison to a more general comparative study. It adopts the method of adducing comparable examples from the poetry of the forerunners of the two poets, thus enlarging its scope and claiming for it a larger share of critical accuracy. It exhibits the traditional literary models and reveals its author’s wide knowledge of Arabic poetry and his cultivated analytical literary taste. It also gives one of the best practical accounts of the phenomenon of plagiarism, which greatly occupies the attention of Arabic critics, permeates a good deal of their comparative studies, and to some extent,

colours their judgments of literary values.

Another valuable contribution in the fourth/tenth century to methodical criticism is the “Arbitration” (*Wasatah*) of al-Adi al-Jurjani between al-Mutanabbi, the famous Arab poet of the eastern Arab world of Islam, and his antagonists. Al-Mutanabbi, by his arrogant personality, wide ambition, and forceful poetry, created adversaries as well as staunch supporters wherever he went. Many grammarians, linguists, critics, and rival poets, shared in finding faults with his poetry and revealing plagiarisms, which, they claimed, he committed against previous masters of Arabic poetry, while others hailed him as the greatest Arab poet that ever lived.

Many treatises were written about him. The situation called for a sympathetic arbiter, and al-Jurjani tried to play the role. His introduction to *Wasatah* contains a good deal of theorizing about literature. An example of this is his interesting, and almost modern, analysis of poetical ability into four component factors: Natural aptitude, intelligence, acquaintance with and memorization of past models, and practical training. These, he maintained, were factors of a general nature, applicable to all humanity, and not confined to a certain age or generation. Another example is the discussion of the influence of environment on poetry, with illustrative examples from the poetry of Bedouins and city dwellers.

All the different aspects of al-Mutanabbi's poetry, viz, his philosophizing tendency to complication, occasional leaning on previous poets, the system of building up his poem and the use of *badi'*, all received a masterly analysis at the hands of al-Jurjani. The book succeeds in giving a general picture of literary criticism in that period. It abounds in opinions of critical scholars and recalls many famous comparisons held between poets, both past and contemporary. In short, the *Wasatah* of al-Jurjani along with the *Muwazanah* of al-Amidi represents the peak of practical Arabic criticism and illustrates the Arabs' mature efforts in that field of literary study.

3. The claims of the Arab contribution of the theories of literary criticism is still to be reached in the fifth/11th century at the hands of 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 471/1078), the author of the two well-known critical books: *Dala'il al-I'jaz* and *Asrar al-Balaghah*. The first book, although primarily concerned with explaining the secrets and signs of the Qur'anic *i'jaz*, faces the wider issue of literary excellence in general and reaches a fundamental theory of structure, while the second searches deep into literary images and discovers, in the form of a psycho-literary theory, what the author takes to be the real secret of eloquence.

Each of the two volumes advances a thesis, explains it, discusses its applications indifferent rhetorical species, and answers any adverse criticism which it might arouse. They survey the field of Arabic literary criticism in the author's time, point out the lack of true scientific thinking, and the pre-occupation of authors with the non-essentials in literary art, and try to lay the foundations for a new science which would satisfy both the objective and the subjective aspects of literary appreciation. A modern reader of the two books feels inclined to presume that 'Abd al-Qahir thought of literary composition in terms of its two-fold division of structure and beauty.

But it is also possible that when the author wrote his first book he was mainly occupied with and guided by the thesis that eloquence is a product of correct structure and signification. At a later stage, and perhaps owing to other cultural influences and maturation of thought, he found that an important aspect of literary art, namely, its impact on the reader or the listener, still called for a separate and fuller treatment. The starting point in his line of thinking in *al-Dala'il* was the consideration of the place of words and meanings in the art of expression. Some of the ancients, e.g. al-Jahiz, had considered eloquence to be mainly dependent on the quality of the verbal elements, that is, the words.

But, argued 'Abd al-Qahir, words in themselves do not make language. They do so only when organized in a system of construction according to the requirements of the meaning. The important element in literary composition, then, is structure, and the essence of structure of meaning. Once meanings are defined in the intellect in their proper order, their verbal expressions follow faithfully in a determined fashion. A literary composition achieves its end if it is properly suitably constructed. It becomes vague, obscure, complicated, and generally defective when the verbal element does not harmonize with the meanings, or when the meanings themselves are not clear and coherent in the mind of the speaker or the writer.

Hence, it follows that our main concern in rhetoric should be with techniques of structure, such as junction and disjunction, mention and omission, definitiveness and in-definitiveness, etc. Our chief occupation here should be the study of the characteristics of meanings in construction, which is a combination of language and grammar. This new technique was ably and effectively applied by 'Abd al-Qahir to the study of the Qur'anic composition, and consequently to the analysis and appreciation of specimens of the highest literary models, and it yielded a complete system which later authors turned into a definite rhetorical branch, namely, the science of meanings (*ma'ani*).

In this analysis of the *Dala'il*, 'Abd al-Qahir found himself repeatedly resorting to the process of introspection, and suggesting that the best way to discover the secret of literary excellence is to look inwardly into oneself and find out what impressions, satisfactions, emotions, and excitements the whole composition leaves on one's soul. It appears as if this aspect of literary art directed 'Abd al-Qahir, in his second book *Asrar al-Balaghah*, to go deeper into the aesthetic side of literature and find out the secrets behind the felling of enjoyment produced by beautiful literary works. Thus, the field of research was transferred to the laws of human thought.

What goes on in our minds and souls when we hear a beautiful literary passage? Why do such artifices as alliteration and assonance please us? And, why do such phenomena as superfluity and obscurity of expression displease us? What is the secret behind the aesthetic effect of a good metaphor or a cleverly conceived compound simile? Which is more appealing to our taste – the spontaneous and easy flowing poetry of al-Buhturi or the deep and meditative poetry of Abu Tammam? And why? If we can refer such questions to some inherent characteristics in our perceptions and conceptions, in our cognition and imagination, we can be assured of a solid foundation for a study of literary appreciation.

In this part of his inquiry ‘Abd al-Qahir shifted the emphasis from constructing the meaning to communicating it in an effective and pleasing manner. The new domain of his study becomes the variety of ways and means for expressing the meaning in an artistic fashion. In this he showed himself to be clearly aware of the fact that literature is part of a wider field, namely, art. Occasionally, in his analysis and argumentation he would appeal to other fine arts such as painting and sculpture. His approach in this second inquiry gave later authors the basis for creating the two separate rhetorical sciences, the science of exposition (*bayan*) and that of embellishment (*badi’*).

Put together, the results of his two inquiries could be summarized as follows:

- (a) Excellence in literature should be judged from the quality of the structure of the meaning expressed and its pleasing effect on the mind and soul of the reader (or listener) rather than from its verbal aspects.
- (b) The beauty of metaphors lies in the fact that they give to style novelty, vigour, and movement, and that they bring out the hidden shades into a perceptual relief.
- (c) Composite comparisons by similitude please the human understanding for a variety of reasons: all abstract to the concrete, and from what is known by reflection to what is known intuitively or through sense-perception; man naturally enjoys seeing different things unified by links of similarities and the enjoyment is enhanced when the discovery is reached after a reasonable amount of intellectual activity – if the intellectual activity involved is too little or too exacting, the enjoyment is diminished or marred.

The functions of the intellect are thinking, reflection, analogy, and inference, and all these are exercised and perceiving relations between different things; the rhetorical figures are the embodiments of all these considerations.

In assessing the value and place of ‘Abd al-Qahir’s contribution to the theories of Arabic criticism, we must bear in mind two considerations: the first is that certain Arab scholars of the flourishing period of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries did anticipate ‘Abd al-Qahir in some aspects of his theory. Al-Jahiz, for example, discussed at length the art of oratory from the point of view of its relation to the audience and expressed, though briefly, the idea that good speech affects the heart in a variety of ways. Al-Qadi, al-Jurjani also showed his interest in the psychology of literature and, as mentioned earlier, analysed in a psychological fashion the poetical ability into natural and acquired elements.

The second consideration which has been explored by modern research is that ‘Abd al-Qahir must have been acquainted with the Arabic versions of Aristotle’s *Poetica* and *Rhetoric* where the First Master probes the affective side of literature both in his treatment of tragedy and in his exposition of the art of metaphor. These various probable anticipations, however, did not diminish the claim of our later Arab author to originality. It is to his lasting credit that in the sphere of a literary study he tried to harmonize the rigour of scientific thinking with the spontaneity of literary taste, and succeeded in this to a remarkable degree.

4. We do not come across another great figure in the study of rhetoric during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries A.H., like ‘Abd al-Qahir, nor even a vigorous follower of the founder of the science to develop further his ideas and widen the scope of their application, yet during this period much was added to the wealth of Arab contribution to literary criticism, mostly in general comprehensive surveys. One of the great minds of that period is Ibn Rashīq al-Qairawani (d. 436/1044), the author of a standard book on the art of poetry entitled *al-Umdah fi Mahasin al-Shi’r wa Adabih*. It is one of the fullest treatments of the technicalities of Arabic poetry and its principal kinds.

Another fifth/11th century critic is Ibn Sinan al-Khafaji al-Halabi (d. 466/1073), the author of *Sirr al-Fasahah*. Ibn Sinan’s chief contribution is in the domain of linguistic criticism where he deals with the sounds of the Arabic language, their classifications, and their characteristics. Al-Zamakhshari of Khwarizm (d. 538/1144), the Qur’anic commentator, deserves a special mention here because of his consistent application of the rhetorical approach to the explanation and interpretation of the Qur’an. His book *al-Kashshaf* claims a high place among the Qur’anic commentaries.

He is also the compiler of *Asas al-Balaghah*, an Arabic dictionary, which is unique in its attention to original and metaphorical usages of the Arabic language. A later author and critic, Dia’ al-Din Ibn al-Ayhit (d. 637/1239), left us a most valuable and interesting book on the two arts, of the writer and of the poet, entitled *al-Mathal al-Sa’ir*. He dealt with the literary art in two sections: one on verbal expression and the other on meaning, and managed to include under these two headings all the artifices and figures of speech which previous authors since the beginning of the third/ninth century had been exploring, defining and illustrating.

He also restated the problems of word and meaning, plagiarism, and norms of comparison in a masterly manner, exhibiting searching, analytical power and independence of thought. Moreover, he invented a practical method for the training of the undeveloped literary talent, which relied on the two factors: the natural aptitude and the nourishing of the ability on classical models. The method is explained in detail, and illustrated from the history of literature as well as from the personal experience and literary works of the author. Ibn al-Athir was so convinced of the originality and applicability of his method that he claimed for himself the title of *mujtahid* or Imam in the same way as the founders of Muslim schools of jurisprudence, Malik and al-Shafi’i, for example, were regarded by posterity.

We may end this series of the great minds with Yahya Ibn Hamzah al-‘Alawi (d. 729/1328), one of the Imams of Yemen and the author of *al-Tiraz al-Mutadammin li Asrar al-Balaghah wa ‘Ulum Haqa’iq al-I’jaz*. The author criticizes books on the subject of literary criticism for being too detailed and thus tedious, or else too brief and consequently insufficient. He acclaims ‘Abd al-Qahir as the founder of the science but confesses that he knew of his two books only indirectly through references to them in the writings of other scholars. He mentions some of the authors with whose books he was acquainted, including Ibn al-Athir.

The motive for writing his book, he indicates, was to help his students understand al-Zamakhshari’s

approach to the Qur'anic exegesis and *i'jaz*. According to al-'Alawi, the Arabic literary sciences are four: the science of language which deals with the significance of separate words, the science of grammar which deals with words in composition and predication, the science of syntax which deals with the morphology of single words and their conformity to regular patterns in the Arabic language, and lastly, the combination of the two branches of *Fasahah* and *Balaghah* which are called *ma'ani* and *bayan* respectively, and which are the highest of the literary sciences.

After a long introduction, the book proceeds to deal theoretically with the cardinal questions in the rhetorical sciences, such as truth and metaphor, kinds of truth, kinds of significance, divisions of metaphor, linguistic sounds, single words and compound words and their characteristics, and requirements and examples of excellence in the various literary artifices.

But here we seem to have reached a parting of the ways between rhetoric and criticism. The separation is supposed to have been started by Abu Ya'qub al-Sakkaki al-Khwarizmi (d. 626/1228), the author of *Miftah al-'Ulum*. He is credited with the delineation of the boundaries of literary sciences in the manner referred to above which al-'Alawi must have followed in *al-Tiraz*. In the third division of these sciences, al-Sakkaki puts *'ilm al-ma'ani* and *'ilm al-bayan* conjointly, the first dealing with the characteristics of speech composition by virtue of which they conform to the requirements of the occasion, and the second with the different ways of expressing the meaning to complete the desired conformity.

By this division al-Sakkaki seems to have carried a logical conclusion the distinction which 'Abd al-Qahir indicated between questions of speech structure and composition and those of signification and effectiveness. To this dual division, al-Sakkaki appended a small section on the special aids to speech beautification, which later became the domain of a third separate science, namely, *badi'*. This process of narrowing the critical field to *Balaghah* and of demarcating its sciences was completed and standardized a century later by al-Khatib al-Qazwini (d. 739/1338) who condensed al-Sakkaki's *Miftah* into a textbook called *Matn al-Talkhis*.

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Chapter 53: Persian Literature

A. Persian Literature of Early Times

The earliest remnant of the Aryan languages of Iran which antiquity has bequeathed to us is the language of the Avesta, the sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion.

For About 900 years the people of Iran had no script in which they could write the Avesta. So they continued to learn it by heart and thus communicate it from generation to generation right from the seventh century B.C. to the third century A.D.

A special script was at last invented for this book in the third century A.D. The Avesta written in this particular script has been known as the Zend Avesta. At times it has been just mentioned as the Zend. The French scholar Anquetil du Perron who was the first to have studied it in India at the end of the 12th/18th century, introduced it to the West. For a considerable time it continued to be known as the Zend language in Europe. At present, however, the more accurate term of "Avestic language" is in vogue. The script in which the Avesta was recorded should be known as the "Zend script."

Much as been speculated on the origin and times of Zoroaster, and different theories have been advanced in this respect from the earliest times. What appears to be most authentic at present, however,

is that Zoroaster preached his religion between 660 and 583 B.C. in the north-eastern zone of the Iranian plateau in Central Asia. It is plausible that he sprang from the Median stock, lived in the north-west of the present day Iran, and from there he travelled east to Central Asia. Of the extant languages and dialects of the Iranian plateau Pashto or Pakhto has the closest affinity with the Avestic language.

This lends support to the view that the Avestic language was spoken in the north-eastern regions of the Iranian plateau in the seventh century B.C. The Avesta is a massive work, a major portion of which has been destroyed and forgotten owing to the vicissitudes of time and the domination of Iran by foreign nations. What remains today of this book was compiled in the early days of the Christian era. It comprises 15 out of the 21 original parts and if the extinct parts were proportionate in volume to those present about one-fourth of the book may be said to have perished.

From the philological point of view, the extant parts of the Avesta were not written in one period of history. On the contrary, its composition may be divided into three sections. The Gathas, which are composed in poetry, doubtlessly constitute the earliest part of the book. The Avesta is a collection of the Canon Laws and decrees of the Zoroastrian faith which were formulated in different ages. The last of these is contemporaneous with the rise of the Achaemenian power in the sixth century B.C. Possibly when Old Persian, i.e. the language of the coins and inscriptions of the Achaemenians, was current in the western and southern regions of the country, namely, Media and Parsa, Avestic happened to be the language of the eastern or at any rate of the north-eastern provinces of Iran.

Philologically speaking, the Avestic language runs parallel to and is contemporaneous with Sanskrit and, apparently, the origin of both these languages can be traced back to yet another ancient language which was perhaps the original language of the Indo-Iranian Aryan stock.

The language of the coins and inscriptions of the Achaemenians, ever since they came to power in the middle of the sixth century B.C., is distinctly Aryan in character and is known as Old Persian. This language is also contemporaneous with Avestic, and the growth and development of the two dates back to the same age. There are reasons to believe that when Avestic was passing through the early stages of development in the eastern provinces of the Iranian plateau the Old Persian language was also making headway in the west and south-west of Iran.

With the establishment of the Achaemenian Empire the people of Iran suddenly found themselves to be the neighbours of various Semitic nations of western Asia including the regions of western Iran. The Semitic languages made an inroad into the country and their influence was so strong that the Aramaic language and script were officially adopted by the Iranians. The Achaemenian kings were men of liberal views and they guarded full freedom of belief to their subject races as well as liberty to develop their own languages. That is why the cuneiform Achaemenian inscriptions are recorded not only in Old Persian but also a parallel translation of the same runs of Syriac, Elamite, Nabataean, and Aramaic languages.

The establishment of the Achaemenian Empire saw the people of western Iran divided into two main

groups, namely, the Medes and the Persians (“Parsis”). It appears certain that either they spoke the same tongue, i.e. Old Persian, or their languages had very close kinship with each other. We find no traces of the Median language in the Achaemenian inscriptions. Apparently, if the Medes had spoken a different language, the Achaemenian emperors who had employed the Syriac, Ealmite, and Nabataean languages in their inscriptions would certainly not have ignored Median. Moreover, a couple of words of this language and the names of the Median chiefs that have come down to us suffice to establish the close affinity of Median with Old Persian.

From 330 B.C. when the Macedonians conquered Iran, Greek became the official language of the country and continued to enjoy the status for a long time. Right down to the Christian era Greek is the only language to be seen in the Seleucid and Parthian writings. Needless to say that during this span of three and a half centuries the Iranian languages continued to flourish. Old Persian, however, is an exception, which gradually went out of use. We can witness definite marks of decay in the Old Persian writings of the later Achaemenian period in contrast with those of the earlier one.

At the dawn of the Christian era we find two languages in the Iranian plateau running parallel to each other. One of these grew and developed in the eastern regions. This has always been called “Dari” by the Iranians. The other which flourished in the western parts of the country was known as “Pahlawi.” These two languages have come down to our own times. Many dialects of “Dari” still continue to exist in the eastern regions of the Iranian plateau as far as the Chinese frontiers: the most important of these are spoken in the Pamir region.

The Pahlawi language has lived in the form of verse known as “Fahlaviyyat,” in the books written in Persian on the art of poetry and in dialects spoken in the north, south, and west of the country.

The above-mentioned two languages have very intimate relationship and these have apparently stemmed from the same origin. A number of Aramaic words, however, entered Pahlawi and these have been known as “Huzvaresh” or “Zuwarishn.” These words found their way also into books of lexicography. In the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent these have been erroneously given the name of the “Zend and Pazard” language. “Dari” was too far away to receive the impact of the Aramaic language. On the contrary, it accepted the influence of the eastern languages such as Tukhari, Sughdian, and Khwarizmi.

At first the Aramaic script was adopted for both the languages. Later, however, a change took place and certain Aramaic letters were put together in Pahlawi to form what later came to be known the Pahlawi script.

The Orientalists did not fully grasp the significance of these subtle technical differences and they have been treating old Pahlawi and Dari as one language. Consequently, they have been employing the terms Northern Pahlawi or the Parthian Pahlawi for the later language. In recent times, however, some of them have defined it as the Parthian language whereas Pahlawi itself has been referred to as the Southern or

Sassanian Pahlawi.

The number of the extant pre-Islamic works of these two languages is very small. The most important ancient work in Dari consists of the Manichaean texts and translation of parts of the Avesta into old Dari known as "Pazand." The contemporary Dari has also been employed in some of the inscriptions of Sassanian kings.

Both Dari and Pahlawi possessed literature of their own before the advent of Islam. This literature, unfortunately, has not come down to us.

The history of the earliest Iranian dynasties during the Islamic period begins from the year 205/820. The dynasties which sprang up in the eastern regions raised the structure of their national politics on the basis of language. Since the language of these tracts was "Dari," the literature produced in it was bound to outshine Pahlawi literature.

In 429/1038 the Saljuq Turks poured out of Turkestan to invade Iran. They gradually conquered the whole country. Since they hailed from the east and their officials also belonged to this region, it was natural that they should adopt "Dari Persian" as their Court language, which they carried to the farthest corners of Iran. Consequently, in the first quarter of the fifth/11th century, Dari had attained the status of the common literary language of the whole country. It gained supremacy in other regions also where Pahlawi had been the popular spoken language until then.

From this date Dari became the undisputed literary language of Iran and, like many other dialects prevalent in the country, Pahlawi was reduced to the status of a dialect. The last vestige of Pahlawi in the form of inscriptions and coins in Tabaristan in the north of Iran date back to the middle of the fifth/11th century.

The first specimens of Pahlawi literature which belong to the early centuries of the Hijrah consist of a number of books of religious nature which the Iranian Zoroastrians had written with the specific object of preserving their Canon Law. These books were taken to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent when the Zoroastrians migrated there. European scholars have been publishing their texts since the last century. Amongst these, certain books are claimed to have belonged originally to the pre-Islamic Sassanian era. There is ample evidence, however, to prove that these were composed during the Islamic period.

What is now known of Pahlawi literature is confined to these very books and treatises. They suggest that Pahlawi literature had, at any rate towards the end of the Sassanian period, flourished on a vast scale. It is an undeniable fact that, while during the 400 years which immediately preceded the Saljuq period, Dari had been recognized as the literary language of the country; Pahlawi had flourished on the north, south, and west of the present day Iran. Of this only a specific form of verse known as "Fahlaviyyat" has come down to us, the quatrains of Baba Tahir-i 'Uryan of Hamadan being its most remarkable specimen.

B. The Beginning of Modern Persian Literature

The present day language of Iran is the latest evolutionary of “Dari” and is known as “Farsi” or the Persian language. The people of Iran themselves, however, have always employed the word “Persian” for whatever languages have flourished in the country. In the past the two languages under discussion which flourished simultaneously have been known as the “Dari Persian” and the “Pahlawi Persian.”

The Persian language of today, namely, Dari, originated, as mentioned above, during the Muslim period in the east of Iran. The important centres of this language were the cities of Transoxiana and Khurasan, to wit, Samarqand, Bukhara, Balkh, Merv, Herat, Tus and Nishapur. These centres extended even to Sistan. This explains why the most eminent poets of this language down to the Saljuq period hailed from these particular cities. Gradually, Dari expanded from Khurasan and Transoxiana to other parts of Iran, so that by the Ghaznavid period it had extended to Gurgan, Damghan, and Rayy, and by the Saljuq era it had travelled as far away as Adharbaijan, Isfahan, and Hamadan.

In the province of Fars it did not achieve the status of a popular language even in the days of Sa‘di and Hafiz. That is why these two great poets have revelled in the mastery of this language and in the expression of their poetic genius through it. Both of them also composed verse in the Pahlawi dialect of Fars, popularly known as the Shirazi language.

The rules of prosody of Arabic poetry were formulated by Khalil ibn Ahmad. These were assiduously observed by the Iranian writers in their Persian works. Considerable literature was produced on the subject both in Iran and in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Consequently, the same Arabic names were retained for Persian metres and rhymes, so much so that even the same Arabic word *afa‘il* was employed for purposes of scansion. Metres can be classified into three groups, i.e. metres common to both Arabic and Persian, metres which were the outcome of the Iranian genius and did not exist earlier, and metres which were, on the reverse, typical of and exclusive to Arabic poetry.

Amongst the exclusively Persian metres the most well-known is the one employed in the quatrains of Baba Tahir ‘Uryan of Hamadan. In the pre-Islamic times right up to the Achaemenian period the only verse known was the blank verse. Specimens of poetry preserved in the Avesta and Old Persian are all composed in blank verse. This type of poetry was also in vogue in Pahlawi and Dari, the two languages so closely related to each other.

The forms of Persian verse have also an independent character and they have not always followed the Arabic pattern. The “*mathnawi*,” “*tariji‘-band*,” “*tarkib-band*,” “*musammat*,” “*muthallth*,” “*murabba‘*,” “*mukhammas*,” “*mustazad*,” and “*rubai‘*” are all exclusive to Persian poetry, and they have originated solely in the Persian genius. Persian verse has also influenced Urdu and Turkish poetry. Similarly, the rhymed verse and many figures of speech own their origin to the creative genius of the Iranian mind. “*Muwashshah*” and “*mulamma‘*” are also Persian in origin.

C. Different Epochs of Persian Poetry

The oldest extant specimens of Persian verse date back to the middle of the third/ninth century. But these fragments are not sufficient to afford us a true picture of the contemporary Persian poetry. What emerges beyond doubt, however, is the fact that the Tahirids (205/820 – 259/872) and later the Saffarids (254/867 – 296/908) played a worth role in ushering in a new era of Persian literature.

Throughout the fourth/tenth century Persian literature continued to flourish with remarkable success at the Samanid Court and in the vast regions lying between the Chinese frontiers and Gurgan on the Caspian Sea. The court of Nasr bin Ahmad, the Samanid ruler, is especially famous for the large number of poets associated with it. Since then the current of Persian literature has flowed continuously.

Modern Persian poetry, in its earliest stages, was characterized by a note of realism. The realist school held its own for 200 years until the end of the fifth/11th century. The greatest Iranian poets of this school who flourished during the fourth/tenth century were Rudaki (329/941), Shahid Balkhi (325/937) and Daqiqi (341/952). Early in the sixth/12th century it gave way to naturalism. Meanwhile, the Iranian Sufis had discovered in poetry a most suitable vehicle to disseminate their philosophical message to the people. Sufism or Islamic mysticism had become popular in Iraq in the middle of the second/eighth century. In the earliest stages it merely laid emphasis on piety and godliness and no elaborate system had yet evolved.

Kufah and Basrah were the earliest centres of this movement. Later, however, Baghdad stole the limelight and became associated with great names in mysticism. From Baghdad it spread out in two directions, viz, North Africa and the “Maghrib” on the one side and north-east of Iran, that is, Khurasan and Transoxiana on the other. In the West it came to be linked up with Greek thought, especially with Neo-Platonism and with certain Israelite doctrines. In the East, especially in Khurasan and Transoxiana, it developed kinship with the teachings of Manichaeism and Buddhism which had enjoyed wide popularity in these regions for centuries. From here it travelled to India and developed in what may be called the Indo-Iranian school of mysticism.

This latter school gained immense popularity and through Iran it spread to Western Asia and even to North Africa. It still continues to exist in the entire Islamic world from the borders of China to Morocco. The great mystics of Iran chose Persian for imparting their noble thoughts to all classes of people. That is why most of the books of the Indo-Iranian school of mysticism were written in Persian prose or verse and the language of mysticism in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent has always been Persian. Symbolism inevitably enjoys profound importance in the mystic cult. For fear of opposition at the hands of the devout the mystic poets were constrained to express their views and beliefs in the language of symbols.

They were, thus, destined to contribute to the special school of symbolism in Persian poetry. The earliest amongst the great Sufis to compose verse in this fashion is the celebrated poet Abu Sa'id Abu Khair (357/967 – 440/1049). Sana'i (437/1046 – 525/1131), Farid al-Din 'Attar (627/1229), and Maulana Jalal

al-Din Rumi (604/1208 – 672/1273) may be considered the greatest of the symbolists among the poets of Iran. *Hadiqat al-Haqiqah* of Sani'i, *Mantiq al-Tair* of 'Attar and the *Mathnawa* of Rumi may be regarded as the most important books of mysticism ever written in Persian.

On account of this great tradition Persian poetry produced during the whole of this period in Iran and the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent is steeped in mysticism. The recital of this kind of verse in the assemblies of prayer and devotion among different sects of Sufis, at times to the tune of music and occasionally to the accompaniment of dance, has been regarded as one of the most important observances of the mystical creed. Even men who did not belong to any school of mysticism had to compose, whether they liked it or not, their poetical works, especially their "ghazals," in a mystical strain.

Mystic poetry of Iran and the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent forms a subject that requires a very elaborate discussion. In fact, it is one of the most profound literary and philosophical themes of all times. The Iranian mystics, apart from expounding the fundamental doctrines and essential principles which have deep academic and philosophical significance and are the especial concern of those wholly steeped in mysticism, have also instructed the common folk on what is popularly termed as generosity and manliness (*futuwwat*).

This teaching mainly consisted of certain moral precepts and aimed at inculcating amongst the common mass of people the feeling of manliness, courage, forgiveness, and generosity, and might be compared with the institution of knighthood or chivalry prevalent in Europe in the Middle Ages. Many books were produced on this subject in Arabic and Persian and these have been known as books of generosity and manliness (*Futuwwat Nameh*). This particular institution travelled from Iran to all the Islamic countries as far away as North Africa and the "Maghrib" and is still lives in many parts of these lands.

It may be pointed out that mystical verse in the Persian language has provided the civilized humanity with the most cosmopolitan type of poetry, and this branch of Persian literature excels all other kinds of poetry both in sweep and charm.

In the pre-Islamic Iran epic poetry and national sagas had always enjoyed wide popularity. In the Islamic period this tradition was not only maintained but it also received further impetus. Initiated by a few earlier poets it found its culmination in Firdausi's (411/1020) great classic *Shah Nameh*, which remains to be one of the most outstanding epic poems of all times. He completed its first narrative in 384/994, and the second in 400/1010. In this field, as in many others, Persian literature is immensely rich. A number of epic poems were composed in successive ages in Iran and in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, and this tradition was maintained until a century and a half ago.

Amongst the most important of these are, chronologically speaking, *Garshasp Nameh* of Asadi (465/1073) which was completed in 458/1066, *Wis-o Ramin* of Fakhr al-Din Asad of Gurgan (middle of the fifth century A.H.) and the quintet (*khamseh*) of Nazami of Ganjeh who remained devoted to its composition from 572/1176 to 599/1202. Nizami's style in epic poetry won especial favour both at home and in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent and a number of poets wrote under this unique influence,

amongst the most notable of them being Amir Khusrau of Dhelhi (651/1253 – 725/1325), Khwaju-i Kirmani (689/1290 – 763/1362), and Jami (817/1414 – 898/1493).

This typical epic style has left a deep impress on the Turkish language, and many Turkish poets have imitated it, some of them merely translating the same contents into their own language. Amongst these may be counted the epic poems of Mir 'Ali Sher Nawa'i (844/1440 – 960/1500) composed in the Chaghata'i, i.e. the eastern dialect of Turkish, and the epics of Fuzuli of Baghdad (970/1562) in the Azari, i.e. the western dialect of the Turkish language.

Among the other chief characteristics of Persian poetry are the composition of philosophical verse and the introduction of philosophical generalities in poetry composed in simple language. We have it on the authority of the oldest specimens of Persian poetry that poetry and philosophy had forged a close link together ever since Persian poetry originated in Khurasan and Transoxiana. The most important book on practical philosophy to have gained immense popularity amongst Muslims in general and the Iranians in particular in the early Islamic period was *Kalileh wa Dimneh* which was at first translated from the original Sanskrit work *Panchatantra* into Pahlawi and presumably brought to Iran in the sixth century A.D. in the reign of Khusrau Anushirwan (Nushirwan the Just).

It was translated from Pahlawi into Syriac about the same time. In the early Islamic period the famous Iranian scholar ibn al-Muqaffa' rendered it from Pahlawi into Arabic. It was later versified by Rudaki, the greatest poet of the Samanid period and one of the great names in Persian poetry in its whole history of the last 1200 years. Only a few couplets of this long poem have survived.

Another book which dealt with practical philosophy like *Kalileh wa Dimneh* was the famous work *Sindbad Nameh*. This was also rendered into verse by Rudaki. That is why his name has been prefixed with Hakim or philosopher since old. This also suggests that there was a considerable element of philosophy in this poetical works. Another great contemporary of Rudaki, namely, Shahid Balkhi, was known as one of the famous philosophers of his time. He had also entered upon a controversy with yet another famous physician-philosopher Muhammad bin Zakariya Razi and composed some treatises in refutation of his views.

Afterwards, many Iranian poets expounded valuable philosophical themes in their works and were known as philosophers. Kisa'i of Merv was one of them. Firdausi and 'Unsuri also enjoyed the title of Hakim or philosopher for having introduced philosophical themes in their works. The great poet Nasir Khusran (394/1004 – 481/1088) expounded philosophical thought in all his poetical works in addition to a few books of philosophy that he wrote in Persian prose from the Isma'ite point of view. The Isma'ilites of Iran always attached great importance to the Persian language in disseminating and inculcating amongst others the philosophy of their own sect. That is why they were even known as the "educationists" or "Ta'limites."

The poets of this sect always introduced an element of philosophy in their works. Amongst the eminent

Iranian philosophers and thinkers, Persian verse has been ascribed to Abu Nasr Farabi (d. 339/950), Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), Khuwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi (597/1201 – 672/1274), Imam Fakhr al-Din Razi (554/1159 – 606/1209), Afdal al-Kashani (d. 615/1218), Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi Maqtil (d. 587/1191), Jalal al-Din Dawwani (830/908 – 1426/1502 – 1503), Mir Sayyid Sharif Gurgani (740/816 – 1339/1413), Mir Muhammad Baqir Damad (d. 1041/1631), Sadr al-Din Shirazi, i.e. Mulla Sadra (d. 1050/1640 – 1641), and Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari (1212/1295 – 1797/1878).

One can say that there was hardly any philosopher in Iran who did not express his beliefs in poetry. Some of them like Afdal al-Din Kashani composed a considerable amount of verse. Philosophical thought also found expression in the quatrains of the famous scholar and philosopher 'Umar Khayyan (d. 517/1123 – 1124). The collection of these quatrains forms today one of the most famous books in the world, and has been translated into almost all the civilized languages including many dialects of Pakistan and India. One of the most important features with which we are confronted in Persian literature, irrespective of prose or poetry, is the effort on the part of the Iranian philosophers to affect Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, the Stoics, Zeno, and scepticism as well as a part of the philosophical teachings imparted in Alexandria and Edessa, and the fundamentals of Islam. Some of them harmonized mysticism with philosophy and divine law, and in this field Persian is decidedly the richest language in the world.

In the eighth/14th century Hafiz, the great immortal poet of Iran, while following the naturalist school which had reached its highest point of glory in Rumi's poetry (606/1200 – 691/1292) had laid the foundation of impressionism in Persian poetry. This school did not find its roots in Iran for about a hundred years and it was only at the end of the ninth/15th century that a few great Persian poets lent it a new charm and colour. This was the time when the Mughul dynasty had reached the height of its power and splendour in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Persian enjoyed the status of official language of the Mughul Court. All notable men of the sub-continent had fully imbibed Persian culture in all walks of life.

Every year a large number of Iranian intellectuals and artists would travel to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent either to settle down there permanently or to make it a temporary home. These scholars introduced this school of poetry in India where it won immense popularity. It found its highest expression at the Courts of Jalal al-Din Akhbar (r. 963/1556 – 1014/1605) and his successors, namely, Jahangir (r. 1014/1605 – 1037/1628), Shahjahan (r. 1037/1628 – 1068/1658), and Aurangzib (r. 1069/1658 – 1118/1707). Under the patronage of these Courts, rich and exquisite works of poetry were produced. There are a large number of poets who attained eminence in this style, popularly known in Iran as the Indian School of Poetry.

Among them 'Urfi (963/1556 – 999/1591), Naziri (1023/1614), Zuhuri (1024/1615), Talib Amuli (1036/1627), Qudsi (1056/1646), Kalim (1061/1651), and Sa'ib (1012/1603 – 1083/1672) had been attracted from Iran and they provided both stimulus and schooling in numerous well-known poets of the local origin. The most brilliant amongst this galaxy of poets were Faidi (953/1546 – 1004/1596), Abu al-

Barakat Munir (1055/1645 – 1099/1688), Ghani (1072/1661), Nasir ‘Ali (1108/1696), Ghanimat (1107/1695), Ni‘mat Khan ‘Ali (112/1709), Bidil (1134/1722), Nur al-‘Ain Waqif (1191/1776), Siraj al-Din ‘Ali Khan Arzu (1169/1756), Ghalib (1213/1798 – 1285/1868), ‘Ubaidi Suhrawardi (1306/1889), Shibli Nu‘mani (1274/1857 – 1332/1914), Girami (1345/1926) and many others. The literary tradition bequeathed by them still lives in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent.

The last great poet of the Persian language in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent was Muhammad Iqbal (1289/1873 – 1357/1938) who infused a new life in Persian poetry, rejected the impressionist school that had preceded him, and revived the symbolist traditions with magnificent results.

In Iran a new movement in poetry made itself manifest at the end of the 12th/18th century which promised pastures anew. As a consequence, most of the poets returned to naturalism. The tendency to revitalize and revivify Persian verse and to bring it closer to Western poetry is distinctly visible in Iran. There are even attempts at going to such extremes as surrealism. The younger Iranian poet is, however, passing through a period of transition and has yet to determine his final attitude. Nevertheless, one comes across exquisite pieces of poetry produced by some of the poets and poetesses of the younger generation. This augurs well for a great future. It is not unlikely that a new school of poetry will emerge before long.

One who wishes to study the evolution of Persian poetry and its different schools and styles in minute detail will perforce have to make a deep study of the works of quite a few hundred poets of Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan, India, and Turkey – men who selected this language as their medium of expression and stuck to the Iranian tradition of poetry.

It may be observed that all the important poets of Persian language, whether they were of the Iranian or Indo-Pakistani origin, or whether they hailed from certain Central Asian and Caucasian regions formerly treated as parts of Iran, were Muslims. Only with regard to Daqiqi, the celebrated poet of the Samanid period, it has been contested by a few scholars that he belonged to the Zoroastrian faith. Be even this cannot be taken for granted. In the eight/14th century, however, a Zoroastrian poet Bahram bin Puzdhu rendered two books of the Zoroastrian religion into verse, namely *Zartusht Nameh* and *Arda Viraf Nameh*.

D. Persian Prose

Modern Persian is today one of the richest languages in the world. It retains a link, close or distant, with all the Aryan languages in the East as well as those in the West. It, thus, bears a close resemblance to all these languages in respect of grammar, syntax, and composition. However, on account of the deep attachment of the Iranian scholars to Islamic learning and sciences on the one hand and to Arabic language on the other, Persian became progressively richer and vaster language.

In the middle of the first/seventh century when the people of Iran embraced Islam, the Arabic language

gained a complete hold on that country. It came to be looked upon not only as the language of religion but also one of arts and letters. During the early period of the 'Abbasid Caliphate when a strong movement was launched to produce scientific and literary works in Arabic, the Iranians played a very important role in it. They were also conspicuous in rendering translations of Pahlawi, Syriac, and at times even Greek works. They also composed a large number of original works in Arabic. After this Arabic became so widely popular and gained such an immense hold on Iran that the most important books in the field of Arabic grammar and lexicography were written by the Iranians.

Many of the Persian poets composed Arabic verse and some of their works have been acknowledged amongst the finest and most exquisite specimens of Arabic poetry. The Iranian philosophers adopted Arabic as the medium of their expression from the very beginning. Only a few of them ever attempted to compose their philosophical works in Persian. Books produced in Iran on the subjects of astronomy, mathematics, and medicine were mostly written in Arabic. Some of the Iranian historians also selected Arabic as their vehicle of expression. Most of the religious literature, including jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), Hadith, and commentary on the Holy Qur'an, were also produced in Arabic.

From the earliest period the Persian language had imported Arabic elements. Especially in the domain of technical terms Persian was completely overwhelmed by Arabic. Incidentally, the Iranians have given special meanings to many Arabic words which have also passed into Urdu in their changed Persianized sense. The overwhelming influence of Arabic on the Persian language is traceable in different epochs of Iranian history.

However, we find that some of the great scholars of Iran like Ibn Sina, Nasir Khusrau, Afdal al-Din Kashani, and Abu Raihan al-Biruni have at times shown in their Persian works a tendency to coin fresh Persian words instead of employing the current technical and scientific Arabic terms. Certain other writers have also shown a tendency to employ new compound epithets of purely Persian origin in their works. The outstanding specimens of this trend in the Indo-Pakistani Persian literature are visible in *A'in-i Akbari* of Abu al-Fadl.

The excessive use of Arabic words in Persian prose started in the fifth/eleventh century. *Kalilah wa Dimnah* which was rendered into Persian by Nasr Allah b. 'Abd al-Hamid from the Arabic version of Ibn al-Muqaffa' may be regarded as the first specimen of this type of writing. Amongst other books written in this style may be enumerated *Marzban Nameh* of Sa'd al-Din of Varavir, *Tarikh-i Wassaf*, *Tarikh-i Mu'jam*, and *Durrah-i Nadirah*, the last being the work of Mirza Mehdi Khan, the historian of the Court of Nadir Shah. But the number of such books is very small. In fact, 99 Persian books out of 100 have been written in simple and direct style and they have always reflected the contemporary idiom, except where a writer has deliberately digressed from the natural style to employ Arabic phrases, a tendency which had been regarded as a kind of literary treat.

As a result of the systematic development of Persian poetry and use of symbolism, Persian prose evolved a new style in which the writer would lay the highest emphasis on allusions, metaphors, and

rhetorical devices. We notice the same trend in the recent prose styles of some European languages. This is exceedingly sophisticated style of Persia prose in which the content was obscured by vague rhetoric and long repetitious sentences reached its zenith in the ninth/15th and tenth/16th centuries. It also penetrated into the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent where we find in *Seh nathr-i Zuhuri* and *Rasa'il-i Tughra-i Mashhadi* its most outstanding specimens.

This style won remarkable popularity in the field of Court documents, royal commands and decrees, and official correspondence. The tradition passed on to the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent and found its finest expression in *Manshaat-i Abu al-Fadl Allami*. It also found its way to Turkey and during this period the official correspondence of the Ottoman Caliphs was wholly conducted in the same style as that in Persian. The “Court style” originated in Iran in the sixth/12th century, enjoyed a large, uninterrupted era of popularity and found its best specimen in *Manshaat-i Mirza Tahir Wahid* composed in the 11th/17th century. It was, however, dealt a fatal blow by Mirza Abu al-Qasam Qa'im Maqam Farahani (1193/1779 – 1251/1835) whose prose was distinguished for the simplicity and purity of its style.

The contemporary Persian prose has a highly simple, facile, and elegant expression. It has freed itself from the conventional ornate and abstruse style. Today it has drawn itself far closer to the idiomatic and colloquial Persian expression than ever before.

During the long history of Persian prose a very large number of books have been written in all branches of knowledge such as jurisprudence, commentary on the Holy Qur'an, scholastic theology, mysticism, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, arts, ethics, tales and fables, and even such subjects as handicrafts. However, a majority of prose works in Persian have always been confined to history and practical ethics. That also explains why all books on the history of the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent during the Islamic period have been produced in Persian. On this very account some knowledge of Persian may be regarded as an essential pre–requisite for learning history of some of the Asian countries. In fact, Persian literature may be divided into poetry and history as its two main component parts.

E. Persian Grammar and Lexicography

For a long time the Iranians paid no heed to Persian grammar since they were no strangers to the rules of their mother tongue. The only expositions of Persian grammar in the past consisted of brief notices which some of the grammatical works started in right earnest when during the Mughul rule in India Persian became the literary as well as the Court language of the subject were for a considerable time confined mostly to the Indo–Pakistan sub–continent alone.

In the field of Persian lexicography as in grammar, not much interest was shown in the past. The works produced contained a rather limited number of uncommon words employed in poetry. When a proof was required regarding the authenticity of a certain word, it was furnished from the couplets in which it had been used.

It is quite apparent that at first the necessity for such dictionaries arose in the western parts of Iran where Dari was not the language of the people. The first dictionary to have ever been produced in Persian was compiled by Qatran Urumawi, the famous poet who lived in Tabriz and died in 465/1075. This book is now extinct. After him Asadi of Tus, who also lived in Adharbaijan and died in the same year as Qatran, completed his famous dictionary which is the oldest extant work on the subject.

As mentioned earlier, the Saljuqs had carried their official language, Dari, right into Adharbaijan in the wake of their conquests. Since the people of this province spoke Pahlawi, they found it difficult to understand meanings of certain words which were familiar to Dari but did not exist in Pahlawi. Hence, the urge to compile these works in Adharbaijan.

The most important role in the compilation of dictionaries was undoubtedly played by lexicographers of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. During the Mughul period the Court language of the Empire was Persian. People, for whom it was not the mother tongue, stood in need of books for guidance and help. In the 11th/17th century special attention was paid to this work, though dictionaries had been in the process of compilation since a hundred years earlier.

For a long time the works of the Indo-Pakistani lexicographers or those of the Iranian scholars who had migrated to the sub-continent continued to be the most authentic source of reference even for the Iranians themselves. The most outstanding of these books are *Farhang-i Jahangiri* of Jamal al-Din Inju, *Farhang-i Rashidi* of 'Abd al-Rashid of Thatta, *Burhan-i Qati'* of Muhammad Hussain Tabrizi, *Asif al-Lughat* of 'Aziz Jang Bahadur, *Bahar-i 'Ajam* of Tek Chand Bahar, *Chiragh-i Hidayat* of Siraj al-Din 'Ali Khan Arzu, *Ghiyath al-Lughat* of Muhammad Ghiyath al-Din, *Farhang-i Anand Raj* of Muhammad Padshah Shad, and *Mustalihat al-Shu'ara* compiled by Varasteh.

The number of lexicographical works compiled in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent exceeds 100 of which the oldest, viz. *Adab al-Fudala'* of Qadi Khan Badr Muhammad of Delhi, was completed in 822/1419. In other words, the period during which these works were diligently and assiduously produced extends to about 500 years.

The necessity of compiling such dictionaries was also felt in Turkey where Persian enjoyed the status of a literary language at the Turkish Court of the Ottoman Caliphs and many a Turkish scholar produced literary works and composed poetry in Persian, so much so that even some of the Turkish emperors composed poetry in the language. As a consequence, a few dictionaries, to wit, *Lughai-i Halimi*, *Lughat-i Sha'uri*, *Dasinah-i Kabir* and *Lughat-i Shah-nameh* of 'Abd al-Qadir Baghdadi, were edited in Turkey. But as against the dictionaries produced in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent in which the meanings of words were also explained in Persian, in Turkey the meanings and explanations were given in Turkish. The Iranians themselves, therefore, have not been able to utilize these works.

To no other area of the world does the Persian language and literature owe so profusely as to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Not only have the scholars there written hundreds of very useful books on

subjects as varied and diverse as history, lexicography, grammar, mysticism, biographies of poets, and commentaries on certain Persian texts, and have preserved and jealously guarded many books lost to posterity in other countries and even in the Persian language. There is hardly any big city in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent where a number of Persian books have not been published. The number of such published works stands at 2,000.

F. Influence on Persian Literature

The history of modern European powers in the East dates back to the Renaissance period. Iran was one of the earliest countries to have come into contact with the West. At first it was the Christian missionaries who set foot on Muslim lands with a view to propagating their religion. They were, thus, introduced to the rich treasure of advanced sciences that had accumulated there through centuries but were unknown to the West. They learnt the Arabic and the Persian languages in order to acquaint themselves with the rich philosophical thought and the subtle beauties and artistries of Persian literature. At first works of Persian classics were rendered into Latin and soon after these were published in some other prominent European languages such as French, English, German and Italian.

The earliest Persian work to have translated into a European language was *Gulistan* of Sa'di. Gradually, the works of Firdausi, Hafiz, 'Umar Khayyajm, Nizami, Jami, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Farid al-Din 'Attar, Nasir Khusrau, and others were translated. These eminent stars on the firmament of Persian literature are now regarded in all Western countries as amongst the great immortals of world literature. It was the dissemination of their thought which provided stimulus to numerous European poets and writers of the 13th/19th century to take inspiration from Persian writers. This influence was at times fully revealed in their works and at others was reflected in their thought.

One of the earliest amongst them was Dante, the Italian poet, who was inspired to write his *Divine Comedy* in which he describes his spiritual flight into heavens and the next world under the influence of Iranian literature. Next, it was the great German poet Goethe who was thrilled by the sheer beauty of Persian literature through German translations of Persian poetry, and who had even pursued for some time the study of Persian language in order to have a fuller appreciation of its literature. He even dedicated to it one of his works *West-östlicher Divan*, and gave to a section of this book the title of "Kitab-i Hafiz."

The well-known English poet Edward Fitzgerald also published a small collection known as *Rub'iyat-i 'Umar Khayyam* which he claimed to have translated from the Persian collection of Khayyam's quatrains. Actually, however, not all these quatrains are by Khayyam himself; some of these are the work of other Persian poets. As such, this collection reflects the thought of a number of Iranian philosophers.

Many of the European poets and writers who acquainted themselves with the thought of Persian poets through translations in Western languages have produced delightful works associated with Persian

literature. Mainly, however, they have come under the spell of Khayyam, Sa'di and Hafiz.

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Chapter 54: Turkish Literature

A. Development of Turkish Prose and Poetry

The earliest surviving written documents of Turkish literature date from the first/seventh century. They consist of short inscriptions in the so-called "Runic" letters in the Upper Yenisei Valley in Siberia. Lengthier documents of the same linguistic type and in the same script survive in the valley of the Orkhon in Outer Ungolia and date from the second/eighth century. These consist of inscriptions in two steles in honour of two princes of the Turkish dynasty of the Eastern Kok Turk State, and a third erected in honour of its old minister. The history of the Eastern Kok Turk is here related in a semi-legendary and artistic way. Other inscriptions in the same script, large and small, are known in Mongolia, Siberia, and Western Turkestan. Manuscripts too, belonging probably to the third/ninth century, have been found. The language of the Turkish runes is characterized by a certain archaism in its phonetics, morphology, and vocabulary.

From the second/eighth century onwards the Uygur Turks became acquainted with Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Syrian (especially Nestorian) Christianity in Northern China and East Turkestan and developed a high culture within the framework of Far Eastern civilization which lasted until the seventh/13th century. The surviving Uygur manuscript and xylographic literature is very extensive and proves a high cultural activity in the fields of religion, philosophy, and other sciences. The script used for these literary works was mainly the Uygur alphabet, derived from the Soghdian script. In addition to the Uygur alphabet, however, these Turks used, besides the ancient Turkish runes, the Manichaean, Syriac, and Brahmi runes.

The Uygur alphabet remained in use until the 12th/18th century among the Turks of China who did not adopt Islam. The conversion to Islam (from the fourth/tenth century onwards) of the Turks of Central Asia was followed by the adoption of the Arabic alphabet. However, the Uygur alphabet remained in use as the Court script. It was given a new lease of life in the Muslim territories by the Mongol conquest, and was used in the seventh/13th to the ninth/15th centuries among the Golden Horde and the Timurids for the Kipchak and Chaghata'i languages. As late as the early tenth/16th century there were still in the Imperial Chancellery in the Istanbul scribes skilled in writing the Uygur script.

The Uygur Turkish or, to use a more suitable term, the old Turkish literary language (for the civilization that used it was wider than the geographical or historical limits of the Uygur State) shows, broadly speaking, the same dialectal peculiarities as the Kot Turkish monuments. The few dialectal divergences are obviously in the main due to the passage of time and to influence from the outside.[1](#)

The conversion to Islam of the Turks of Central Asia began in the fourth/tenth century. Throughout history the Turks proved to be devoted Muslims and zealous defenders and promoters of Islam. Founded on the literary Uygur of the pre-Islamic period, there developed in the fifth/11th century under the Karakhanids, converts to Islam, the Muslim Turkish literary language of East Turkestan written probably from the first in the Arabic alphabet. The best known documents in this language are two didactic poems, the *Qutadghu Bilig* (The Science of Happiness), composed by Yusuf Khas Hajib, and the *'Atabat al-Haqa'iq* (The Threshold of Facts), composed by Adib Ahmad. There is, further, a translation of the Qur'an. Besides these works there is another dating from the same century, the *Diwan-o Lughat al-Turk* of Mahmud al-Kashghari composed in Baghdad in Arabic in order to acquaint the Arabs with the Turkish world. It is a very valuable source for the investigation of the various Turkish tribes, dialects, folk literature, customs, culture, etc. of this time.[2](#)

Islam was established in the fourth/tenth century in the Bulghar kingdom of Kama also. But data are lacking to enable us to decide if there also existed any literature. In any case Bulghar elements are found in the sepulchral inscriptions of the eighth/14th century in the Volga region.[3](#)

The development of literary Turkish in central Asia went on without interruption, but its centres changed from time to time.

The absence of early manuscripts prevents us from giving a definite name to the language of the *Hikmats* (theological didactic poems) of Ahmad Yasavi, the founder of Turkish mysticism, who lived in the sixth/12th century in West Turkestan.

In the seventh/13th century the various literary dialects of the Muslim Turkish world were not yet clearly differentiated from one another. The formation of the Mongol Empire, which embraced almost the whole Arabic world of the period, created for a time an atmosphere favourable to the development of uniform language for a considerable section of the Muslim Turkish peoples. At first Turkish literary activity under the Saljuqs in Asia Minor was to some degree bound up with that of Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The seventh/13th century, however, is an epoch of political agitations in Asia Minor and Eastern Europe. It is, therefore, only in the next century that literary works are mainly to be found.⁴

Literary activity on the northern shores of the Black Sea, in Khwarizm which included the mouth of the Sir Darya, in the Capital Saray, and in the Crimea attained a considerable development by the beginning of the eighth/14th century but no uniform literary language developed. The elements of the literary language of the Karakhanid period were combined with those of the local spoken dialects. In Syria, Egypt, and Persia under Turkish or Turkicized rulers there grew an interest in Turkish. Thus, we find a series of grammar books and lexicons in Arabic from the sixth/13th century until the beginning the tenth/16th century. They all deal with the Kipchak but contain elements from other Turkish dialects in varying degrees.

The prose work *Qisas al-Anbiya'* (Stories of the Prophets), with passages in verse written by N. Rabghuzi, finished in 710/1310, although lacking aesthetic value, is of great literary importance. Another religious work in verse is the *Mu'in al-Murid* of Sheikh Sharif Khuwaja (713/1313). The very attractive romance in verse, *Khusraw wa Shirin* of the poet Qutb (742 – 743/1341 – 1342), although based on the corresponding Persian work of Nizami, has nevertheless many original passages. Khwarizimi's poem *Mahabbatnamah* (The Book of Love), composed in 754/1353, is another work of high literary merit. Seif-i Saray's translation of *Gulistan* (The Rose Garden) that appeared in 782/1380 is another prose and verse book of high literary value. The religious work *Nahj al-Faradis* (Way to the Paradise) of Mahmud b. 'Ali (716/1316) is, properly speaking, a "40-Hadith" book in simple prose with no aesthetic aims. Finally, it may be mentioned the religious prose work of *Mi'rajnamah* (Book of the Ascension) composed for didactic purposes.

Further, there are other works written in Egypt and Syria which are: a *Siyar* book composed in 784/1382, *Irshad al-Muluk w-al-Salatin* composed by Barka Faqih in 789/1387, *Kitab fi al-Fiqh bi al-Lisan al-Turki*, originating probably from the ninth/15th century, *Kitab fi 'Ilm al-Nashshab wa Kitab fi Riyadat al-Khail*, a book on the art of horsemanship translated from Arabic for soldiers in about 808/1405, *Kitab al-Da'wa*, another book on the art of horsemanship also translated from Arabic in 844/1440.⁵

We may date to the eighth/14th and ninth/15th centuries the beginning of the development of the different literary languages in different parts of the Muslim Turkish world.

The Chaghata'i language and literature which developed under the Timurids, the descendants of the second son of Chingiz Khan, represent the most brilliant phase of the development of Central Asiatic Turkish literature. Names are known of a few Turkish poets who lived to the first half of the ninth/14th century. Sakkaki was a panegyrist. Another famous poet was Lutfi. To the same period belong the panegyrist Mir Haidar Majdhub (Turkish Tilbe), Amiri, Sayyid, Ahmad Mirza, Gada'i, Yaqini, and 'Ata'i.

In the second half of the century Chaghata'i literature reached its zenith in Mir 'Ali Shir Nawa'i. In his *Diwan* (Book of Poems) as well as in his numerous other verse and prose works he does not merely imitate the Persian poets, as was the case with his predecessors, but knows how to suit the taste of his contemporaries. He has, therefore, enjoyed great popularity right down to the present day all over the Turkish world. Of importance is his *Muhakamat al-Lughatain* (The Contest of Two Languages) in which he endeavours to show that the Turkish language is no less suitable than the Persian for poetical works and intellectual purposes. He is also the first composer of Turkish collection of the biographies of poets. Nawa'i is considered to be one of the greatest personalities and intellectuals in Turkish literature. The prince and patron of Nawa'i, Sultan Hussain Baiqara, was also a poet.

The founder of the Timurid empire in India in the first half of the tenth/16th century, Babur Shah, was also the author of a number of poems, but he is most celebrated for his *Khatirat-i Babuir* (Memoirs of Babur) or *Buburnamah* (Babur Book) very vividly relating his life and expeditions as well as describing the life and topography of India. He is considered the second great personality of Chaghata'i literature.

Minor personalities of the classical period are Hamidi, Muhammad Salih, Shabani, etc.

Under the Uzbeks, who drove the Timurids out of Central Asia and eastern Persia in the second half of the tenth/16th century, Turkish poets and writers stuck to old Chaghata'i models without producing anything new or original. The historian Abu al-Ghazi Bahadur Khan in the 12th/18th century probably stands alone in endeavouring to avoid in his work Persian and Arabic as well as Chaghata'i Turkish words.

Of importance in Mirza Mehdi Khan's *Sanglakh* (Stony Place), a Turkish Persian dictionary composed in 1174/1760 with its extensive preface on classical Chaghata'i Turkish grammar containing comparisons with Anatolian Turkish.

The same Turkish literary language as was written in the land of the Uzbeks is written to the present day in Chinese Turkestan. Here also Turkish culture has been influenced by Persian.

In the 14th/20th century a new Turkish literature based on the local dialects has been founded under Russian and Kazan Turkish influences. It includes dramatic works among its productions. In accordance with the State policy of the new regime, a special alphabet in Cyrillic letters has been created for the Uzbek language.[6](#)

From the fifth/11th century onwards Turkish tribal and military units began to make raids into Asia Minor,

so that Anatolia lay totally open to the Turks. Thus, the colonization of Asia Minor and Eastern Europe went on with great success. Thanks to the ability of these Turks to adapt themselves in course of time to the changing circumstances of life, they succeeded in founding on very firm bases a strong and lasting State.

Parallel to the political and social development, Anatolian Turkish literature has had an uninterrupted development from the time of the Saljuqs down to the present day. It has, therefore, become the most important and richest branch of all the Turkish literatures and has exercised an influence on the literature of other dialects.

Seventh/13th Century

Already in the seventh/13th century there developed in Anatolia a Turkish literature based mainly on the Oghuz dialect. The well-known Persian mystic Jalal al-Din Rumi and his son Sultan Walad produced some Turkish verses, Ahmad Faqih wrote a fairly long mystic poem, and Shayyad Hamzah left poems of different *genres*.

Yunus Emre was the greatest figure in this century. He is regarded as the best Turkish popular mystic poet. His art is essentially one of the people, i.e. it is Turkish. It was through his mystical verses that there developed a tradition of writing poems in the language of the people and in the popular syllabic metre, which did not lose its power even in the period when Persian influence was at its highest.

Classical profane literature had its first representative in Dahhani. His poems were in an elaborate style and attained a high degree of perfection from the technical point of view.

Another poem of this century was 'Ali's *Qassah-i Yusuf* (Story of Joseph), representing linguistically a mixture of Central Asian literary Turkish and the vernacular Oghuz dialect. Moreover, other works of this and even next century had more or less the same peculiar features, and the rather pure Oghuz dialectal features in the manuscripts of works of these centuries are probably to be ascribed to the later copyists.⁷

Eighth/14th Century

The literary development followed the same line in the eighth/14th century. A certain number of feudal princes in Asia Minor lacked Persian or Arabic culture, and this was the reason why the language of the people became important, why books were written in Turkish, and also why a number of Muslim works were translated from Arabic and Persian into Turkish. During this century there developed in Anatolia several cultural centres, such as Qunyah, Nigde, Ladik, Kastamonu, Sinop, Sivas, Kirsehir, Bursa, and Iznik.

Among the leading poets Ahmad Gulshahri should be mentioned for his artistic merit. He put into Turkish the *Mantiq al-Tair* (Speech of Birds) of the Persian poet 'Attar, expanding it with stories from various

sources. We also possess a number of isolated poems of his. Although a mystic, his literary aims were purely artistic.

The great mystic of this century is, however, 'Ashiq Pasha with his long poem *Gharibnamama* (Book of the Stranger). He is a mere imitator of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Sultan Walad. There also exist a number of detached mystical poems from the pen of 'Ashiq Pasha, but all are far from showing the lyrical merit of Yunus Emre.

In the second half of the century we find classical mystic poetry attaining high perfection in Nasimi. He is a great poet whose mystic lyrics are most expressive. His style is simple but full of power and harmony. In his *Diwan* we find *tuyughs* a verse-form peculiar to Turkish classical poetry and foreign to Persian literature.

Romantic tales and fables were also taken from Persian literature. Among them is to be mentioned Mas'ud's love story in verse, *Suhail wa Naubahar* (two proper names), a translation or rather an expanded adaptation from an unknown Persian work. This story has considerable literary value.

But, with the exception of Nasimi, Ahmadi is the greatest poet of this period. He is the author of the *Iskandarnamah* (Book of Alexander). The subject is taken from Persian sources, but he adds a long section dealing with world history including the Ottoman dynasty. His *Diwan* is more interesting from the artistic point of view. Among his poems there are some which are of local interest.

Further, we must mention Qadi Burhan al-Din who has left a *Diwan* also containing *tuyughs*. His poems have a note of sincerity and passion of their own. He is the first to have attained perfection by the standards of classical rhetoric.

Of the prose works are to be mentioned an anonymous translation of *Kalilah wa Dimnah* and the legendary tales of *Dede Qorqut* mainly about the Muslim-Christian struggle during the Turkish invasion of Anatolia and its vicinity, reflecting vividly the life, customs, and ideals of the Turks of the fifth/11th and sixth/12th centuries.⁸

Ninth/15th Century

In the ninth/15th century Turkish increased in importance as a literary and official language. In the first half of the century there were three great princely families who were patrons of scholars and poets: Karamanoghli at Auniyah, the Jandaroghli at Kastamonu, and the Ottoman Princes in Edirne and Bursa. As in the preceding centuries, the literary activity under them was not confined merely to the translation of Muslim works of a classical character.

In popular religious literature we may mention the *Maulid* (Birth of the Prophet) poem of Sulaiman Chalabi and Ahmad. This fine work has all the qualities of a masterpiece. It has been read by the people, for centuries particularly on the occasion of the religious commemoration of a dead person. In

every century many similar poems have been written in imitation of it.

The most important classical poet of this period is Sheikhi. His version of *Khusrau wa Shirin* of the Persian poet Nizami is more than a mere translation. The *Kharnamah* (Story of the Donkey) is a masterpiece of satire. He is also the author of a *Diwan* which contains a considerable amount of panegyrics and love poems. His part in the establishment of classical poetry is great. His influence continued down to the tenth/16th century.

Another great classical poet of the period is Ahmad Pasha. He surpassed his contemporaries in panegyrics and love poems exercising, thus, a great influence on the poets of his time. Next to him in this field is Najati.

A certain number of chronicles in verse belong to this period.

Prose also developed considerably. In this connection we may mention the anonymous commentary on the Qur'an, *Jawahir al-Asdaf* (Gems of Mothers of Pearls), and the more popular book *Qirq Vezir Hikayalari* (The Tales of the Forty Viziers).

But it was mainly artistic prose that was cultivated, its most brilliant representative being Sinan Pasha with his *Tadarru' Namah* (Book of Supplication). His style is artistically elaborated, yet natural and sincere. Other representatives of artistic prose are Sari Kamal, Ahi, Masihi, and Ja'far Chalabi.

As a reaction to this ornate language the first representative of the *turki-i basit* (simple Turkish), Wisali who wrote in 'arud metres but used exclusively Turkish words deserves to be noted. However, only one couplet of his has come to us.

The writing of history in prose also began to develop. We have many anonymous specimens of Ottoman history. They show us that there existed in the ninth–15th century among the people and especially among the soldiers chronicles which were almost of the nature of epics. The historical works of 'Ashiq Pashazadah, Oruch Beg, and others do not differ much in point of style from these anonymous chronicles. The works of Tursan Beg, Bayati, and some others, on the other hand, were written rather with the object of displaying a particular style and an extensive literary ability.

A fine specimen of unaffected prose of this period is the treatise by Deli Lutfi, which is one of the oldest works of humour in Turkish literature.⁹

Tenth/16th Century

In the tenth/16th century the apogee of Ottoman political power is also reflected in the sphere of literature. Literary activity flourished not only in Istanbul, but also in Baghdad, Diyar-i Bakr, Quniyah, Kastamonu, Bursa, Edirne, Yenije–u Vardar, and Uskup. Philological commentaries and lexicographical and grammatical works were produced. Books without number were translated from Arabic and Persian.

The greatest figures in poetry in chronological order are: Dhati, Khayali, Fuduli, and Baqi. Dhati wrote a large number of works in poetry and prose which are unequal in merit. His imagination and new ideas made him very popular. Khayali surpasses Dhati as a poet. His *Diwan* contains all his works. His most original poems are his love poems. Fuduli must be regarded as the greatest lyrical poet of Turkish literature. Although he used the dialect of Adharbaijan, he exercised such an influence in Anatolia that literary historians regard him belonging to the realm of Anatolian literature.

His love poems and love romance *Laila wa Majnun* have secured him a special place in literary history. Love in his works is never entirely profane in character, thanks to mystic inspiration. No other poet except Nawa'i has acquired a like reputation throughout the whole Turkish world. He exercised an influence even on the musician poets of the lower classes. Baqi was undoubtedly the most reputed poet of his time, his fame stretching as far as India. In the expression of sentiment he is below Fuduli, but the musical charm and faultless ease of his poems have given him the reputation of an inimitable master of classicism. His elegy on the death of Sulaiman the Magnificent is a masterpiece of deep sentiment and grief.

At this period Anatolian Turkish poetry attained the highest point in artistic elaboration and rhetoric. It is true that this was in the main an imitation of Persian poetry. But the Anatolian Turkish poets imitated rather the Indo-Persian poetry and went even further in fineness and abstraction. In the next centuries we see this refinement perfected on its own lines.

Poets belonging to different dervish orders composed didactic works, mystic poems and collections of legends of saints, along with translations of Arabic and Persian mystical works.

Prose in this century assumed a heavier and more artificial form. Outdoing the Persian models, the simplest ideas were expressed by the most complicated images to the detriment of the subject. This lack of taste is found in the greatest stylists of the period: Lami'i, Kamal Pashazadah, Jalalzadah, Faridun Beg, 'Azmi, Qinalizadah, Khuwaja Sa'd al-Din and others. This tendency to artificiality had a much more disastrous effect on prose than on poetry. In very long works, however, it was only the preface that was written in this turgid and clumsy style.

Many literary, historical, religious or moralizing works of the period were in fact written in a simpler language. The same applies to official correspondence and other State documents. In religious works intended for the people every endeavour was made to write as simply as possible. The examples which we possess of the prose of Fuduli and Baqi show an elegant and relatively simple language.

As a reaction to the ornate language, the movement called *turki-i basit* (simple Turkish) has its second well-known exponent in Nazmi of Edirne whose *Diwan*, though, again, in 'arud verse, contains only Turkish words. But he has no artistic abilities.

In the field of historical works great progress was made. Besides rhymed chronicles, we find historical works in prose in continuation of the Saljuq tradition. A number of historical works were written in verse.

With the exception of the Ottoman history by Hadidi they always deal with a single event or the victories of a single emperor or commander. General histories were composed by ibn Kamal, Jalalzadah, Mustafa Chalabi, Muhi al-Din Jamali, Lutfi Pasha, Khuwaja Sa'd al-Din, and 'Ali. Some of these works are the sources for our knowledge of the social history of this period.

Among historical works those which deal with literary history occupy an important place. The first Ottoman collection of biographies of poets was produced by Shahi Beg on the model of Nawa'i's work. This was followed by the works of Latifi, 'Ashiq Chalabi, 'Ahdi, and Hassan Chalabi. 'Ali also gives important notices of poets in his historical work.

It is in this century that there appeared geographical works and accounts of travels. Some are mere translations. The celebrated *Bahriyyan* (Maritime Work) of Piri Ra'is and *Muhit* (Ocean) and *Mir'at al-Mamalik* (Mirror of lands) of Saidi 'Ali Ra'is are the best works of this type. We have further records of voyages both in verse and in prose.

The first grammar of Anatolian Turkish, planned on the model of Arabic grammars, by Qadri of Pergamon, was also written in this century.

Alongside classical literature we find popular literature increasing in every form. Wondering musician-poets were to be found wherever people congregated, and love songs, heroic tales, elegies, and folk-songs were recited. [10](#)

11th/17th Century

In the 11th/17th century knowledge of the Ottoman literary language spread among the Muslim lower classes generally and also through districts to the non-Turkish population or Turks of speaking a non-Ottoman Turkish dialect. The influence of Turkish literature and culture is found as early as the tenth/16th century in the use of Arabic script by the Muslim Hungarians and Croats. There are also found dictionaries of Turkish-Serbian, Turkish-Bosaniak, and Turco-Greek in verse. Istanbul was always the centre to which men of letters and learning flocked from all parts of the Ottoman Empire and from beyond its frontiers.

The classical Turkish poetry of the 11th/17th century was in no respect below the level of the Persian models. The Turkish poets by this time were working on original themes, though the influence of the Persian and Indo-Persian poets was still felt.

Naf'i may be regarded as the greatest master of eulogies (*qasidahs*), on account of the power of his imagination, the richness of his language, and the elevation and harmony of his style. His love poems and his satires (*hajwiyyat*), on the other hand, are less successful.

Another very important classical poet was Nabi who is renowned for his refined didactical poems and descriptions. His verses are still quoted as proverbs. He was also the one who protested against artificial

language, saying, “The *ghazal* book is a dictionary.”

The greatest figure in romance poems (*mathnawi*) is Nav‘izada ‘Ata‘i who takes his subjects from the life of his time.

The number of religious and mystical works, lives of saints, and didactic works connected with different orders is very great in this century. Poetical forms were often used for them.

Literary prose follows the same lines as in the preceding century. The great stylists like Vaisi, Narkisi Oqchizadah, and others carried affectation of language to still greater lengths. Yet works which were in their days considered to have no literary value are now being greatly appreciated.

As an encyclopaedist, Katib Chalabi’s name must be mentioned.

Histories in this century also took the first place among prose works. There are several which have the character of semi-official chronicles. Mainly, though they are translations of general histories of Islam, there are also original works on the same subject, and general and special works and monographs on Ottoman history. The best historians are Katib Chalabi, Pachavi, Na‘ima, and Qochi Beg. The verse chronicles are much below the level of those of the tenth/16th century. The most notable are those of Riyadi and Qafzadh Fa‘idi.

In the field of geography the most important works are those of Katib Chalabi and Abu Bakr Dimashqi. They use European as well as Muslim sources. The *Sayathatnamah* (Voyage Book) of Avliya Chalabi is important as history of all aspect of social life.

The great popularity of the literature of the people continued in this century in all classes of society. The musician-poets became very numerous. We find them in the military classes and in the religious orders. The most important of them are Karaja Oghlan Gavhari and ‘Ashiq ‘Umar. The influence of this popular literature is felt even among the upper classes.[11](#)

12th/18th Century

Literature and culture continued in the 12th/18th century to follow the same lines as in the preceding centuries. There was a fast output in prose and poetry, while the cultural links with Persia and Transoxiana continued. But the tendency to a more individual development gained in strength. Endeavour was made to simplify the language.

Among the poets Nadim in particular acquired a great reputation. By his original themes, rich imagination, sparkling wit, and the harmonious language he surpassed his predecessors and contemporaries. He was the poet who brought much local colour to Turkish literature. He was famous with his *sharqis*, another verse-form peculiar to Turkish classical poetry and foreign to Persian literature. One of his poems he composed in the Turkish syllabic metre and the national form *turku*.

Among the great poets of this century special mention must be made of Raghib Pasha, the last great poet of the classical period.

The poets of this century practiced all forms of poetry, but special attention was devoted to *genres* characteristic of an epoch of decadence. On the other hand, true religious inspiration still contained. The last masterpiece of romantic poetry was Sheikh Ghalib's *Husn-o 'Ishq* (Beauty and Love) with its mystical inspiration and very fine style.

Literary prose tended to become gradually simpler, although imitations of the old artificial style were still found. A well-known stylist, 'Uthmanzadah Ta'ib openly denounced exaggerated artificiality in prose. Historical works occupied the first place, but they could not be compared to those of the preceding century.

The political and military decline of the Ottoman Empire stimulated the writing of a large number of memoirs investigating its causes. The most remarkable of these is that of Qoja Segban Bashi.

From the point of view of geography we may note a number of important descriptions by ambassadors of which that of France by Yirmi Sekiz Muhammad Chalabi is a typical and very interesting example. We may also notice a number of translations of European works on geography.

The writings celebrating the splendid festivals held by the Sultans are important sources for sociological research.

The collections of biographies of poets are even more numerous than in the preceding century.

Popular literature continued to enjoy the same popularity among all classes of society. The works of the musician poets were also well known. Taste for such literature penetrated more into the upper classes.

In this century Ibrahim Mutaferriqah inaugurated printing in Turkish script, but for several reasons printing remained confined to a very restricted sphere throughout the century and did not exercise any particular influence on intellectual and artistic life. [12](#)

13th/19th Century

At the beginning of the 13th/19th century Ottoman literature sank to a very low level which continued until the period of political reform. It was only natural that the old literary tradition could not disappear at one stroke.

The prose of the period before the political reforms was not of much value, although its production was not less in quantity than that of the preceding centuries. The historical work by Mutarcim 'Asim was remarkable for its style and critical analysis. He used even simpler language in his translation of *Burhan-i Qafi* (The Definite Proof) and the *Qamus* (Lexicon). Lastly, mention must be made of the celebrated poet and stylist 'Akif Pasha who, on account of several poems written in the popular metre and some

works in simple prose, could be regarded as the first to have spread literary innovations.

We also had representatives of popular literature. The best known musician-poets were Dertli, Dhihni and Amrah.

B. Development of Turkish Grammar and Lexicography

1. Turkish is an agglutinative language. The *root* which is either verbal or nominal and which (except in the case of certain pronouns) is never inflected always appears at the beginning of the word. Verbal forms are built from the verb-stem, which may be a simple *root* or a root modified by formative suffixes. The verb-stem is followed by suffixes indicating aspect and tense (“voice” and “negation” being shown by aspect suffixes), to produce the tense-stem which, without further suffixation, expresses the third person singular; other persons are indicated by the addition of a personal suffix. The resultant word is a unit as regards stress, intonation, and sound harmony, i.e. assimilation of sounds tending to conform the sounds to the suffixes to the root in general. Phonetic changes in the root or suffixes do not imply semantic modifications.

Nominal forms again are built out of the noun-stem, which may be a simple root or a root modified by formative suffixes.

Prefixes and infixes do not exist in Turkish.

The syntax of the language is based essentially on the following principle. The governing parts of grammatical statement or of a group of statements follow the parts governed. Hence the principal part of the statement or of a group of statements, i.e. the finite verb or predicate, is usually placed at the end, the completed parts follow the complement, the qualified elements (nominal or verbal) are put after their qualifiers (adjectival or adverbial), and the principal statement follows the sub-ordinate.

Turkish in its original form did not include conjunctions. The only sub-ordinate clause which is attested from the earliest documents onwards is the conditional.

The characteristics of the Turkish language outlined above are to be found in the earliest surviving Turkish documents, which date from the first/seventh century.

2. This “pure” language, however, underwent a considerable change when pagan Turks came into contact with the Far Eastern civilizations and religions. The Turkish literary output of the period before the adoption of Islam was mainly translations of the scriptures of various religions. Such translations of sacred texts had to be as literal as possible. Of course, it is no wonder that under the influence of the non-Turkish structures of the languages so translated, this literary dialect, while preserving its native participial and gerundial constructions, acquired new types of sub-ordinate clauses, partly with defective constructions and developed conjunctions formed from Turkish roots. In the field of vocabulary also we find technical expressions, borrowed from the more developed languages of the Far East. This does not,

however, mean that such borrowings were numerous. On the contrary, a great number of expressions were mere Turkish translations from these languages.

3. As to linguistic peculiarities of the first Islamic literary dialect in Central Asia, it differed but slightly from Old Turkish. Religious terms markedly connected with the Far Eastern religious were no more to be found. In their place, we find Islamic terminology. But this latter was not as widespread as one would expect or find in later literary works. Instead Far Eastern terms or Turkish calques from them were still common. The development in the direction of one analytical sentence structure was less pronounced. Though sub-ordinate clauses of the Indo-European and Semitic types began to develop in general, the Turkish sentence with its participial and gerundial forms still prevailed. Nevertheless, new conjunctions were created out of Turkish words or borrowed from Arabic and Persian, and these to a great extent encouraged the development of new Turkish sub-ordinate clauses.

On the other hand, popular words of the Karakhanidian period show very little foreign influence. Both in syntax and lexicography, this influence was restricted to the minimum. In this respect the popular literary products of the earliest Turkish Islamic literature resembled the runic inscriptions.

4. In Khwarizmain period, Arabic and Persian exercised an increasing influence on Turkish syntax. Both in verse and in prose, the basically fixed Turkish word-order became more flexible and the rich stock of terminations that henceforth developed in the language prevented ambiguity and gave it greater clarity. The borrowings from the two main Islamic culture languages, Arabic and Persian, increased. Vocabulary was further enriched by the use of Arabic and Persian loan-words, though the Far Eastern loan-words were still common, and inversion, particularly in verse, was now used to a greater extent. Until the ninth/15th century, Anatolian Turkish also reveals the same characteristics.

5. During the classical period of Ottoman literature, the syntactical influence of Persian in the construction of sentences did not increase. Rather, it diminished in the course of time.

The old Turkish type of sentence with only a single finite verb, but using many participial and gerundial forms was particularly in use in Ottoman prose. This made the formation of very long sentences possible. Inversion, however, particularly in verse, was greatly practiced. Persian and Arabic loan words and grammatical forms became more numerous and Far Eastern loan words were totally forgotten.

6. In modern Turkish, the syntactical influence of Persian in sentence constructions has left few traces. On the other hand, modern writers have drawn fully on the resources of popular speech; the language has thus been greatly enriched and rendered much more expressive, thanks to the harmonious combination of the synthetic structure of the old language with the freer construction and more vivid turns of expression of everyday spoken Turkish.

New constructions of sub-ordinate clauses with conditional or temporal force, formed from a finite verb followed by the interrogative ending, have become meaningless.

In the Turkish vocabulary, Persian and Arabic loan words have become much less numerous, giving place to Turkish words, some of which have even been invented. Loan words from the European languages, mainly at first from Italian then from French, are to be noticed.

7. Thus, we see that in the process of evolution, owing partly at least to the influence of languages of other structural types, both Eastern and Western, Turkish has developed conjunctions, other types of sub-ordinate clauses, and a freer word order in the sentence.

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