THE SEVEN ODES

SOME NOTES ON THE COMPILATION OF THE *Mu'allaqat*

The meaning of the word *mu'allaqat* by which the Seven Jāhili Odes were entitled by some transmitters and commentators has been discussed at length by scholars and several suggestions have been put forward for the interpretation of the word. The story that the Odes were suspended in the Ka'ba has been rejected by the majority of the scholars, but they have almost unanimously agreed, although with some reservations, that "the man responsible in the first instance for selecting the seven poems and making them into a separate anthology was a certain Ḥammād, called al-Rāwiya (the Transmitter)". This statement is indeed based on reports of early authorities who describe the literary activity of Ḥammād under Yazid b. 'Abd al-Malik and Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik and record the tradition told on the authority

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of al-Nahhas (d. 337 H) 1 according to which Hammād was the first who collected the poems of the Arabs and recorded the stories of these poems (wa-kāna awwala man jama'a ašhāra l-'arabi wa-sāqa ahḍithahā Ḥammādun al-rāwiyyatu). He adds, however, that he was not trustworthy (wa-kāna ghayra mauthūqin bihi) 3.

The records about the collection of the Seven Long Odes 4 by Ḥammād al-Rawīya are contradicted by an account of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādi (d. 1093 H), that ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (d. 86 H) “discarded the poems of four of them and established in their place four (other poets)” (wa-qad taraḥa 'Abdu l-Maliki bnu Marwāna shi'ra arba'atin minhum wa-athbatr makānahum arba'atan) 5. If this report were true there must have existed a collection of the Seven Odes in the times of ‘Abd al-Malik. This fact was pointed out by Nāṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṣadāk who quotes as well a saying of Mu'āwiyā, reported by ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādi 6 that “the qaṣīda of ‘Amr b. Kulthūm and the qaṣīda of al-Ḥārith b. Ḥillīza are among the prideworthy creations


2 Yāqūt, op. cit., X, 266; Ibn Khallikān, op. cit., V, 120; J. W. Fücker, F.E. 2 s.v. Ḥammād al-Rawīya.


4 The early sources mention the Seven Odes as al-sab'ū l-mashhūrāt (M. Schlössinger: Ibn Kaisīn's Commentar zur Mo'allaqas des 'Amr ibn Kulṣūm nach einer Berliner Handschrift, ZA, XXVI, 19, note 1); al-sab'ū l-tiwaş al-jāhilīyyīn (ib., 18), al-sumūt (Abū Zayd al-Qurashi: Jamharat ashār al-'arab, Beirut 1963, 80); al-mudhahhabāt (Ibn 'Abd Rabbīhi: al-Īqād al-farīd, ed. Ahmad Amin, Ahmad al-Zayn, Ḥanṣān al-Ṭāhirī, Cairo 1965, V, 269); al-mu'allāqāt (ib., wa-qad yuqiilu lahā l-mu'allāqāt). A poem from the collection of the Seven Odes was referred to as al-wāhiḍa (see al-Jumāhī, op. cit., 115); the poets of the Odes were called asḥāb al-wāhiḍa (ib., 128), as rightly explained by the Editor (ib., note 3). See the discussion of this problem al-Ḥauff, op. cit., 202 - 206.

5 Khūzain al-adab, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn, Cairo 1967, I, 127.

6 Khūzain al-adab, Cairo 1299 H, I, 519.
of the Arabs (min mafākhiri l-'arabi); they were suspended for a long
time in the Ka'ba” and concludes that “people knew about the
mu'allaqāt and their being suspended in the Ka’ba a long time before
Ḥammād”.

A new light on the time of the compilation of the Seven Odes, the
identity of their collectors, the purpose of the compilation and the changes
it underwent, is shed in a significant passage of Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir
Ṭayfūr’s (d. 280 H) Kitāb al-manṭūr wa-l-manṣūm.

According to a tradition told on the authority of al-Ḥirmāzī
Mu’tawiya ordered the transmitters of poetry to choose for him poems
(qaṣā’id) which he would teach his son to recite; they chose for him
twelve poems (qaṣā’id):

1. Qifā nabki min dhikrā ḥabībin wa-manzilī
2. Li-Khauwāta aṭṭalān bī-burgati Thahmādi
3. A-min Ummi Aṣfā dinnatun lam takallāmī
4. Ādhanatnā bī-bayniḥā Asmā‘ū
5. Afṣātī l-dīyārī muḥalluhī fa-mugāmuhā
6. Alā hubbī bī-ṣaḥniki fa-ṣbaḥīnā
7. In buddilāt min ahlīhā wuḥūshān
8. Basaṭāt Rābī’atul h-ḥabla lanā
9. Yā dārā Mayyata bi-l-‘Aly‘ī fa-l-Sanādī
10. Yā dārā ‘Ablata bi-l-‘Iyā‘ī (takallāmī)

Al-Ḥirmāzī remarks that he thinks (wa-awunnu) that the two
additional poems were:

11. Waddi‘ Hurayrata inna l-rakba murtaḥilū
12. (A-)sa’alta rasma l-dārī am lam tas’alī

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1 Maṣādir al-shīr al-jāhili, 170-171; comp. Abū l-Baqā’ Hibatu llāh: al-Manāqib al-mazyadiyya, Ms. Br. Mus. f. 38b: wa-qālī: mafākhiru l-’arabi thalāthatu:n qaṣidatu l-Sārithi bni Ḥillissata l-Yashkurīyyi... wa qaṣidatu Amri bni Kullhāmin l-Taqhīliyyi... wa qaṣidatu Ṭarafata bni l-’Abdī...
4 In the text: qaṣā’ī l-Ḥirmāzīyya: wa-qad ruwiyā anna Mu‘āwiyata min al-ruwātī an yantakhbā lahu qaṣā’īda yurauwihā bnahu; I read: amara l-ruwātā...
5 In the text: in tuhuddilat.
6 In the text: nashaṭat.
7 Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, op. cit., f. 50a.
Another tradition told on the authority of al-Ḥirmāzī traced back to some scholars (… annahu qāla: dhakara lī ghayru wāḥidin min al-‘ulamā‘ī …) gives a valuable report about the selection of the Seven Odes carried out by ‘Abd al-Malik. “The number of seven odes”, states al-Ḥirmāzī, “was fixed by ‘Abd al-Malik and he collected them” (anna l-sab‘a l-qasā‘iḍa llatī sabba‘ahā ‘Abdu l-Maliki bnu Marwānā wa-jama‘ahā). No one in the Jāhiliyya ever collected them (wa-lam yakun fi l-jāhiliyyati man jama‘ahā qaṭṭu). People consider, says al-Ḥirmāzī, that in the Jāhiliyya period they were made use of in prayer (wa-l-nāsu yarauna annahu kāna yuṣallā bihā fi l-jāhiliyyati). Al-Ḥirmāzī records six odes chosen by ‘Abd al-Malik in the following order:

1. Alā hubbī bī-ṣahnikī fa-ṣbaḥīnā by ‘Amr b. Kulthūm
2. Ādhānātā bī-bayniḥā Asmā‘ū by al-Ḥārith b. Ḥillīza
5. In buddilat min ahliḥā wuḥūshan by ‘Abīd b. al-Abras

Al-Ḥirmāzī continues: “Thēn ‘Abd al-Malik stumbled and came to a halt in the choice of the seventh ode (qāla: thumma urtzja ‘ala ‘Abdī l-Malikī l-sābī ḍatu). At that moment his son, Sulaymān, then a young boy, entered into his presence and recited the poem of Aus b. Mağhrā in which the poet says:

Muḥammadun 3 khayru man yamshī ‘alā qadamin wa-ṣāhibāḥū wa-Uthmānu bnu ‘Affānā 4. Muhammad is the best of those who walk on feet and his two Companions and ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān.

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1 This expression is not clear; it may probably denote that they were venerated, esteemed and respected by the people of the Jāhiliyya.
2 In Ms. bi-Liwti‘īn.
3 In Ms. Muḥammadun ṣallā llāhu ‘alayhi wa-ṭāliḥī.
4 A l- J u m ā h ī , op. cit., 410 records some verses of this poem. But the verse quoted by Ibn Abī Ṭāhir consists of the first hemistich of verse four and the second hemistich of verse two, as recorded by al-Jumāhī. The verses of Aus
'Abd al-Malik became impassioned in favour of the poem (wa-ta'aṣṣaba lahā) and said maghghirūḥā i.e. include the poem of Ibn Maghra' in with them (i.e. with the six afore-mentioned ones - fa-qāla 'Abdu l-Maliki, wa-ta'aṣṣaba lahā, maghghirūḥā ay adkhilū qaṣīdata bni Maghra'ā fihā). 1

There is no reason to cast a doubt about the authenticity of these two accounts of al-Ḥirmāzī. The deep interest of Mu'awiyah in poetry, his close contacts with contemporary poets and the high esteem in which he held them are well attested 2. 'Abd al-Malik's familiarity with poetry was not less than that of Mu'awiyah 3. The circumstances mentioned for the composition of the collection by Mu'awiyah for the prince (it was probably Yazīd) are quite plausible: Mu'awiyah wanted to give him a literary education in the manner of Arab society, to teach him the poems which were considered the best and probably most widely discussed and recited in the circles of chiefs and governors4 whom he had

b. Maghra' are mentioned by al-Jumaḥi in connection with the story of a contest between al-Akhtal and Jarir in the presence of al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik. When al-Akhtal recited the poem of 'Amp b. Kūlthūm - al-Walid urged Jarir to recite the poem of Aus b. Maghra' saying, exactly as in the text of I b n A b i Ṭā h ī r, maghghir yā Jarir. L'A, s.v. m gh r mentions that 'Abd al-Malik bade Jarir to recite the verses of Ibn Maghra' saying maghghir (but the verses are not quoted). Comp. al-Z a m a k h a rī: al-Fā'iq, ed. al-Bijāwī-Muḥ. Abū l-Faḍl ʿIbrāhīm, Cairo 1948, III, 40 ('ABD AL-MALIK: maghghir yā Jarir). Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAṣqalānī in his Isdāa, Cairo 1323 H, I, 118, n. 495 records the verse as quoted in the Ms. and mentions the opinion of Ibn Abī Tāhīr about the poem of Aus b. Maghra': "'no-body composed a poem nicer than this."


On the daughter of Aus b. Maghra', Zaynab, see al-Balādhu rī, op. cit., Ms. f. 397a.


1 I b n A b i Ṭā h ī r, op. cit., f. 50a.


3 See e.g. Aghānī, index; al-Suyūṭī, op. cit., 220-221; I b n A b i l-H a d ī d, op. cit., XX, 161-165; Kuthayyir ʿAzza: Dīwān, ed. H. Pérès, Alger 1930, index.

to meet. It was the heritage of Arabism which he had to absorb and display. It was probably the same aim that 'Abd al-Malik pursued when he decided to compile his anthology: to educate the crown prince within the Arabic tradition of poetry. It was evidently the same reason which caused al-Manṣūr to employ al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī and to engage him to compile the anthology of the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*.

Ibn Abī Ṭāhir furnishes us with important details about the Seven Long Odes (*al-qaṣā'īdu l-sab'u l-ṭuwalu*), current in his period, in the third century of the Hijra. He records two lists. In the first list he enumerates eight poems in the following order:

1. Imru l-Qays: *Qiṣā nabki min dhikrā ḥabībin wa-manzili*
2. Ṭarafa: *Li-Khaulata aḍlālun bi-burqati Thahmadi*
3. 'Abīd b. al-Abraṣ: *Afṣara min ahlhi Malḥūbi*
4. Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā
5. 'Antara
6. Labīd
7. 'Amr b. Kulthūm
8. Al-Ḥārith b. Ḥillīzā

Ibn Abī Ṭāhir attempts an assessment of the merits of the odes. He mentions the opinion of scholars that the Seven Odes surpassed all other poems because of the many themes which they contained; they had no match.

The *qaṣīda* of Imru l-Qays contained themes superior to those of other (poets); other poets derived theirs from him and based their poems on his poetry.

The *qaṣīda* of Ṭarafa is one of the best odes written by one of the *Aṣḥāb al-wāḥida*. He closed it with the most eloquent proverb: *sa-tubdī laka l-ayyāmu mā kunta jāḥilan: wa-yā'tika bi-l-akhbāri man lam tusawwādī*. Some poets of the period of the Jāhiliyya tried to compose a poem like this, but without success.

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must be seen to enjoy far greater popularity in the early Islamic era than Koran and Ḥadīṯ”; and see Şha'ūq 1 Dāyf, *op. cit.*, 145–146.


2 The poem is not mentioned.

3 See note 4, p. 28, above.
No one in the Jähiliyya, except Dhu l-Iṣbaʿ al-ʿAdwānī, composed a poem in the metre and 'arūd of the poem of 'Abīd b. al-Abras: aqfara min ahlihi Malhūbu; this poem of Dhu l-Iṣbaʿ is more likely to be an eloquent speech than a qaṣīda.

The qaṣīda of Zuhayr has no match in its description of the war, in what he says about peace, in the manner he made reproaches and in the proverbs he used.

The qaṣīda of ‘Antara surpassed other poems by the use of descriptive passages and by expressions of bravery. Every poet borrowed from it.

The qaṣīda of Labīd is the best of his poems ('aynu shī'īhī) and contains beautiful themes. It was therefore incorporated into the collection of the odes though Labīd is not like them (i.e. he is inferior to the poets of the odes).

The qaṣīdas of ‘Amr b. Kulthūm and al-Ḥārith b. Ḥillīza are concerned with approximately the same theme, they produced fine poems, but they are not like the preceding ones (i.e. they are inferior to them).

Some people, continues Aḥmad b. Abī Tāhir, added to the Seven Odes the qaṣīda of al-Nābigha concerning the subject of apology; it is unique in this matter. As this qaṣīda is the best of al-Nābigha’s poetry, some people incorporated this poem: Yā dāra Mayyata bi-l-‘Alyā'i wa-l-Sanadi into the (collection of) Seven Odes. The author quotes a saying of Abū ‘Amr b. al-‘Alā’ stating that Zuhayr does not deserve to be a hireling of al-Nābigha, remarks however that, in his opinion, Abū ‘Amr erred.

The qaṣīda of al-Aʾshā: Waddi‘ Hurayrata inna l-rakba murtahīlī is excellently done but it stands in no relation to the afore-mentioned odes.

“General consent”, concludes Ibn Abī Tāhir, “is in accordance with what we have said” (i.e. about the eight odes, without the additional ones).

In another passage Ibn Abī Tāhir records the second list of the Seven Odes. Here only seven poems are mentioned. The order of the poems is different.

“We found the transmitters agreed upon the Seven Long Jähili Odes”, says Ibn Abī Tāhir (wa-Iladhī wajadnā ‘alayhi l-ruwāta mujtami-‘ina fī qaṣīda l-sab‘u l-ṭuwālu l-jähiliyyātū):

1 See on the metre of this qaṣīda the note of Lyall in his edition of the Diwān of ‘Abīd, Leyden 1913, 5, note I.
2 See this saying quoted: Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, op. cit., XX, 161.
3 Ibn Abī Tāhir, op. cit., f. 49a-49b.
1. Imru l-Qays: Qifā nabki
2. Zuhayr: A-min Ummi Afsā
3. Ṭārafa: Li-Khaulata aflā'un
4. 'Amr b. Kulthūm: Alā hubbī
5. 'Antara: Hal ghudara l-shu'arā'u
6. Labid: 'Afsat l-diyārū
7. Al-Ḥārith b. Ḥillīza: Adhanatnā bi-baynīhā Asmā'u

Some people, says Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, incorporated (wa-minhum man adkhala) into the collection:

1. 'Abīd: Aqbara min ahlihi Malību
2. Al-A'shā: Waddi' Hurayrata inna l-rakba mutarihū
3. Al-Nābigha: Yā dāra Mayyata bi-l-'Alyā'ī wa-l-Sanadi

"We have not found them", concludes Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, "mentioning other poems except these, composed by these first class poets in accordance with what we have mentioned about their selection" (wa-lam nazzadhum dhakaru ghayra hiidhazl-qaṣā'īz-dhii'ulii'i l-mutaqaddimina li-mā dhakarnā min ikhitīyārīhim) 1.

The ten poets of these Jāhiliyya Odes are considered by Abū 'Ubayda the excelling poets of the Jāhiliyya (wa-qāla Abū 'Ubaydata: ash'arū shu'arā'i l-jāhiliyyati 'asharatun, awwaluhum Imru l-Qaysi...etc.) 2.

The account of Ibn Abī Ṭāhir shows clearly that the collectors of the odes started almost immediately with the establishment of the Umayyad rule. The collection of Muʿāwiya contained twelve odes and was intended as an anthology for the education of his son (apparently the crown prince). The expression yurawwiḥā bnahu does not make it possible to decide whether these odes were written down or not. The anthology of Muʿāwiya contained indeed the ten poems which form the collection of the muʿallaqāt. The two additional poems were of two contemporaries: Suwayd b. Abi Kahil and Ḥassān b. Thābit. Suwayd b. Abī Kāhil was a famous poet 3 and his qaṣīda was known

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1 Ib., f. 50a; for the variants of al-mutaqaddimīn see e.g. Ibn Qutayba, op. cit., 141, "a" (al-madīdin and al-muqaddamin).
as *al-yatima* in the time of the Jāhiliyya; it contained many *hikam* and was probably therefore incorporated into the collection.

Hašsan b. Thābit was an adherent of ‘Uthmān and favoured Mu‘āwiya. The poem itself is a Jāhili one and is therefore considered a fine one.

‘Abd al-Malik reduced the number of the odes from twelve to seven. He included however among these seven odes two odes which were not contained in the selection of Mu‘āwiya: the *qaṣida* of Abū Dhu‘ayb and the *qaṣida* of Aus b. Maghrā‘, both poets who composed their poems in the period of Islam. The tendency of ‘Abd al-Malik in his incorporation of the *qaṣida* of Aus is obvious and can be gauged from the verse recited by his son Sulaymān: the Prophet is mentioned with his two Companions (i.e. Abū Bakr and ‘Umar) and ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān. ‘Alī is not mentioned. This was in perfect harmony with the Umayyad idea of the legitimacy of the Muslim government. The *qaṣida* of Abū Dhu‘ayb was included in the anthology of ‘Abd al-Malik because of its popularity: already Mu‘āwiya, according to tradition, recited verses of this *qaṣida* before his death.

The tradition about the compilation of the anthology of the Seven Odes, begun by Mu‘āwiya and concluded by ‘Abd al-Malik, fell into oblivion probably due to the fall of the Umayyad dynasty and the victory of the Abbasids. Scholars of a later period apparently were not satisfied with the selection of ‘Abd al-Malik and returned to the

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1. See the contradictory opinions of Omar A. Farrukh: *Das Bild des Frühislam in der Arabischen Dichtung – von der Hijra bis zum Tode ‘Umar’s*, Leipzig 1937, 22: 50, 98, 110 and Shauqī Dāyf: *al-Tatwwur wa-l-tajdīd fi i-shīr al-umawi*, p. 20 about whether this *qaṣida* is a Jāhili one or it is influenced by the teachings of Islam.


anthology of Mu‘awiya. They confined themselves to the Seven Jāhili Odes upon which "the scholars unanimously agreed" and which form the popular anthology of the seven *mu‘allagāt* to the present day. The odes of Suwayd b. Abī Kāhil and Ḥassān b. Thābit were eliminated. The three additional odes of the collection of Mu‘awiya (‘Abīd, al-Nābigha, al-A‘shā) were in fact incorporated in a wider anthology already in the third century of the Hijra, as attested by Ibn Abī Ṭāhir; this was the collection of the Ten Odes which is in fact transmitted even today.

The merit of Ḥammād seems to have been that he transmitted the Seven Jāhili Odes derived from the collection of Mu‘awiya and that he discarded the collection of ‘Abd al-Malik. Later literary tradition attributed the selection to Ḥammād.

In the third century these Odes gained wide acclaim and children were taught them in the *kuttāb*.

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1 Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, *op. cit.*, f. 49b.