ELEGY AND NASĪB IN THE ANCIENT ARABIC QAṢĪDA: THE UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF AN ELEGY BY IBN MUQBIL

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Abstract

This article analyses the functions of the uniquely non-traditional structure of an elegy composed by the mukhaḍram poet, Ibn Muqbil, following the assassination of the third Muslim caliph, 'Uthmān b. Affān. The poem begins with the elegiac verses, then ends with a description of several, to some degree, erotic love affairs. Classical Arab scholars condemned this structure, in which the song of love follows the weeping over a killed religious authority. In the present article, the poem is analysed then two interpretations of the function of this structure are given: firstly, it provides the poem with an allegorical expression for Ibn Muqbil’s yearning for the lost pre-Islamic life which was destroyed after the birth of Islam; secondly, it is a means of catharsis directed to a specific audience which was less passionate about the death of the caliph.

One of the most interesting elegiac poems in Arabic was composed by the mukhaḍram (i.e. one whose life extended from the pre-Islamic era to after Islam), Ibn Muqbil (d. ca. 70/689–90).1 This is an elegy composed for the third Muslim caliph 'Uthmān b. Affān (re. 23–35/644–56). The poem is notable for its unique structure. It starts with the elegiac verses and is followed by a description of two or three love affairs with several sexual allusions. The mixture of an amatory section (or nasīb to use the Arabic term)2 and elegy is not new.

1 It is poem no. 3 in his diwān, of ṭawīl meter and rhyming with -b. Ibn Muqbil, Diwān Ibn Muqbil, ed. 'I. Ḥasan (Beirut and Aleppo, 1995), 30–6.
2 I refer to the nasīb in its broader sense which is ‘an amatory theme’ found in the polythematic qaṣīda, and not strictly what was defined by some classical critics and modern scholars as the ‘amatory prelude that opens the polythematic qaṣīda’. Regarding the two definitions of the term see R. Jacobi, ‘nasīb’ EI², electronic version, 7: 978.
A UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF AN ELEGY BY IBN MUQBIL

It is known through some — albeit rare — pre-Islamic and early Islamic odes. Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 463/1071) explains why most poets refrain from mixing the two themes: ‘A poet who composes an elegy is supposed to be sad and to concentrate on the calamity that has taken place. He should not think of love affairs at the same moment’.3

Perhaps the article by Renate Jacobi, written in 1997, is still the most important study of this type of poetry. She discusses two major types of these elegies: the first is the tripartite elegy in which the poem starts with the nasīb, followed by the camel-section and ending with elegiac verses. Such a form of elegy was established at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries CE mainly by al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī (d. 604 CE). Al-Nābigha attempted to endow the elegy, which was considered less prestigious than the traditional qaṣīda, with a higher status by providing it with the same structure as the traditional qaṣīda. The latter is a tripartite poem starting with the love theme, which is followed by the camel-section, and ends with another theme — normally praise or satire — but not with elegiac verses. The second kind of elegy was a bipartite poem which has the same structure as mentioned above, but without the camel-section. This type began also in the same period — i.e. at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries CE. Abū Dhu‘ayb al-Hudhalī (d. 27/648) composed several texts in such a form. The poet links the two themes in one of two main ways: (1) He compares his sadness at losing the beloved with his great grief stemming from the death of the eulogized person. Both parting from the beloved and parting from the recently deceased are the source of his grief. (2) The poet attempts to recover from his sad love affairs by recalling a more lamentable situation: the death of the eulogized person. Since the poet was able to overcome his sadness because of the death, he should then be able to control his feelings because of the loss of his beloved, which is a lesser matter than the first.4 In these two ways, the poet succeeds in explaining to his audience how he could describe a love affair in a poem that deals with death. In both types of elegies, the love affair here is chaste and sad, and is found at the beginning of the elegy. The case of the poem of Ibn Muqbil is different; its structure

is reversed: the elegiac verses open the poem, then the love affair closes it. Ibn Rashiq criticized this ode: ‘Ibn Muqbil, because of the roughness of his Bedouin nature, wept over ‘Uthmān in an elegant poem in which he expressed his feelings; then he turned to the love theme. Presenting the love theme at the beginning of an elegy — as other poets did — is better than closing the elegy with the love affair as this rude person (jilf; i.e. Ibn Muqbil) did; although he was a skilful poet’. More astonishing is that, as mentioned above, the love affair is replete with erotic allusions, and this contradicts the love affairs in the texts discussed by Jacobi.

In the following pages, the two themes in the poem by Ibn Muqbil are interpreted; then two explanations for this non-traditional structure are given. But first, it is important to highlight one of the most striking features characterizing Ibn Muqbil’s biography as well as his literary output. As a jāhilī, Ibn Muqbil was known for a love affair with his father’s widow — something which was accepted in the jāhiliyya and was called zawāj al-maqt (‘the hated marriage’). After the rise of Islam, he was forced to get divorced. This saddened him and was perhaps one of the main reasons — if not the main reason — for harbouring some anger against Islam. In a very famous verse, he likens the Muslims to sand grouses coming to a water trough, destroying the trough then moving to another water source. At the same time, Ibn Muqbil continued to express, directly and indirectly, his longing for the pre-Islamic life, an issue which was studied in depth by Jaroslav Stetkevych. This anger against Islam and the longing for the jāhiliyya will guide the interpretations below.

**Theme 1: The Elegiac Verses**

The theme is dealt with in verses 1–27 and can be divided into the following paragraphs: (a) a description of the ruined dwellings of

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5 Jilf in E. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge 1984), 2: 444, means ‘rude in disposition or in make; coarse, or churlish; […] the person so termed is empty, without intellect; […] applied to a Desert-Arab, or to an Arab or it is so applied as though meaning […] not having assumed the gentle and soft habits of the people of the towns or villages […]; or stupid, foolish, or unsound in intellect’.


the Quraysh tribe (vv. 1–3); (b) a severe criticism of the Muslim virtues (vv. 4–6); (c) a call for revenge (v. 7); (d) praising ʽUthmān and weeping because of his assassination (vv. 8–18); (e) another, more detailed, call for revenge (vv. 19–27). Here is a translation of the verses followed by a commentary:

1

Batīhān was emptied of Quraysh; Yathrib also. As well as Minā — the place where the pilgrims used to put down the saddles of their camels. Al-Muḥaṣṣab was emptied too.

2

Then ʽUsfān. However, troops of horsemen do visit the mountain path in ʽUsfān every night.

3

Naʽf Wadā’,9 al-Ṣifāḥ, and Mecca all are empty. They include nothing but blood and men of war.10

4

How sorrowful I am for the companions of Ibn Kurayz who gathered with others and hastened to fight.

5

How sorrowful I am for those qualities that have been revealed to them. Everyone who experienced them lost his forbearance;

9 In the poem, it is vocalized Niʃ Wadā’. However, in Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, Mu’jam al-buldān2 (Beirut 1995) 5:293, it is Naʃ wadā’.

10 I suggest reading the last word in the verse as miḥrab and not maḥrab. The first means a ‘man of war’ or a ‘vehement or courageous man in war’. See Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2: 540. The second word does not exist in classical Arabic lexicons. The editor of Ibn Muqbil’s dīwān states that he failed to find this word in lexicons; however, he suggests the following meaning: ‘a place in which wars occurred’. See Tamīm b. Ubayy b. Muqbil, Dīwān Ibn Muqbil, ed. ʽIzzat Ḥasan (Beirut and Aleppo, 1995), footnote 3, p. 31.
A UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF AN ELEGY BY IBN MUQBIL

Qualities that are rejected by wise people, and whose consequences none could foresee except a man of integrity.

Let the family of ʽUthmān — for as long as their family line lasts — cry for him with unshathed and sharpened swords.

Let them cry for the best of mankind. A man who was betrayed by the destructive calamities of Time.

His enemies surrounded him: One who acted injuriously (bāghīn). A non-kinsman who refrained from giving help. And another one, an envious relative, who incited against the caliph.

He was left, killed for no sin. How beloved was that killed person who was slain by a sword.

He is killed; he is happy, and a believer. The souls of his enemies will suffer.

11 The verb baghā means 'he acted wrongfully, injuriously, or tyrannically towards men [...] and sought to annoy them or hurt them'. Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1: 231. For a profounder interpretation of the idea of baghy see W. Oller, ʽal-Ḥārith ibn Zālim and the Trope of Baghy in the Ayyām al-ʻArab, in P.F. Kennedy (ed.), On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature (Wiesbaden, 2005), 233–59.

12 The word muṭayyab means 'perfumed' and also 'purified'. See Ibn Muqbil, Diwan, footnote 11, p. 31. The first meaning assumes perhaps that the martyrs smell very sweetly after the resurrection. ʽAmmār b. ʽYāsir (d. 37/657), the Prophet’s companion, was called al-tayyib al-muṭayyab by Muhammad, a phrase translated by Isaac Hasson as 'the purified pure’. See his entry ‘ʽAmmār b. ʽYāsir’, EI, electronic version.
A UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF AN ELEGY BY IBN MUQBIL

Lament — after his death — the bonds of Islam and of justice. Lament them! Calamities have befallen the people.

Lament the son of 'Affān — the imām — for those poor people in the times when the lightning becomes rainless.

Lament what remains of forbearance and of good judgement and of generosity. Lament the shelter of the wan orphans who suffer the drought-stricken years and who long for milk.

Lament the refuge for those who were stricken by cold. In it they found their desired rain. When years of drought destroyed their property, 'Uthmān was their father and their mother.

He had wells for those whose bodies shrank due to poverty. Within its walls, the poor and the hungry sought refuge.

It is astonishing how fate brought him down. What happened to him, the son of 'Affan, is indeed astonishing.

13 Imām can be translated as ‘a leader, a master’ or ‘the supreme leader of the Muslims’. See H. Halm, ‘Imām’, EI², electronic version. It can be translated also as ‘a caliph’, see Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1: 91.

14 Rain here has a positive connotation.

15 The ‘wells’ or ‘water holes’ (mawārid) here is a metaphor which indicates ‘the supplements’ that 'Uthmān used to provide for the hungry and poor people. These supplements are likened to a water source which quenches the metaphorical thirst of the needy people.

16 The word muʿaṣṣab literally means ‘one having his waist bound round in consequence of hunger’, see Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 5: 2060.
A UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF AN ELEGY BY IBN MUQBIL

18 فَلَمْ يَرَ رَأِي مِثْلَ ٌعُثْمَانَ هَالِكًوَمَنْ تَعَطَّاهُ يَشْجُبُ
Nobody has ever seen a person like ʽUthmān who perished at such as the hands of his killers.

19 فَلا وَأَلَ النَّاعِي البَعِيِدُ مِنَ الأَذَىوَلا أَفْلَتَ القَتْلَ القَرِي،بُ العَلَيْ المُؤَلَّبُ
May the non-kinsman who announced his death never find refuge from harm and may the kinsman who incited against him never be safe from being killed!

20 وَإِلاَّ يُبْكَ الأَقْرَبُ بِعَوْلَةٍفِرَاقَهُ يَوْمًا وَيَنْدُبُـ
If the relatives will not wail because of their separation from ʽUthmān; and will not lament him,

21 وَإِنَّا سَنَبْكِي،هُ بِجُرْدٍ كَأَنَّهَاضِرَاءٌ دَعَأْهَا مِـــــنْ سَلُوقَ مُكَلِّبُ
Then we will mourn him with our short-haired horses which look like hounds incited by a hunter from Salūq.17

22 وَمَوْتٍ كَظِـلِّ اللَّيْـنَشَاشِي،يَحْدُوهُنَّ نَبْـعٌ وَتَأْلَبُ
We will mourn him with a death looking like the shadow of the night. Its arrival to the enemies will be witnessed by arrows driven forth by the nab‘ and ta’lab trees.18

23 وَذِي عَسَـلاَنٍ لَمْ تُهَضَّـمْ كُعُوبُهُكَمَا خَـبَذِئْلُ الرَّدْهَةِ المُتَأَوِّبُ
And with a spear, the head of which is unbroken. Looking like a wolf of the rocks running at night towards the water courses.

17 Salūq is a town in Yemen or a town or a district on the border of Armenia. It was famous for its hunting dogs. See Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon. 4: 1411.
18 The verse includes an analogy based on a metaphor. The arrows fired by the bows are compared to a herd of camels driven by the hādī, the camel driver who incites and encourages them to run fast by singing to them. The bows are like the hādī, they produce a sound when the spear is thrown, and this is as though they were firing the arrows by singing to them in order to reach the enemies as fast as possible. The nab‘ and ta’lab are two types of tree from which the bows are made. The verse includes another analogy based on metaphor. Death is compared to a camel which goes to the water courses. The arrows are the witnesses of the arrival of death to the water. Through the arrows, death attacks the enemies on the battlefield.
19 The radha is a hollow in a rock or in the mountain in which water stagnates. See Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʽarab (Beirut, 1414 3h), 13: 491.
A UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF AN ELEGY BY IBN MUQBIL

And by smiting the enemy with a sword at the time when the old and powerful he-camel/horse\textsuperscript{20} runs with its rider until the night. The sheath of its penis starts to dangle.

And also by a man whose hair has turned black and white through long war with the young beardless men, until today, when his head has turned wholly white.

He studied the Qur'an with them. His soul demanded that he achieve the 'trusted virtue'. He took pains to achieve it.

We will mourn him with helmets made of pure iron and covered with curved nails. The Mashrafite swords hate the taste of these helmets.\textsuperscript{21}

The elegy opens with the description of the abandoned abodes (the *aṭlāl*), not of a certain beloved as the traditional Arabic *qāṣīda* normally begins, but of the Quraysh tribe [vv. 1–3]. Very few poets — especially at the beginning of Islam — transferred this motif from

\textsuperscript{20} It is not clear whether Ibn Muqbil describes a camel or a horse. The word *ʽawd* is usually used to describe ‘a camel old, or advanced in age, but retaining remains of strength, or one old, or advanced in age, and well trained, and accustomed to be ridden’. The word *mudhakkī* is used mostly to describe ‘a horse of full age and of complete strength’. See Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 5: 2190; 3: 972. In any case, Ibn Muqbil describes a beast used in the battlefield. It is a horse which has camel-like features (it is as strong as the old camel) or a camel which has horse-like features (it is as fast as the running horse). The warriors continue to fight until the night. The dangling of the beast’s penis may be a periphrasis (*kināya*) for the horse/camel feeling sexual desire during the fighting. Perhaps this makes it more vehement. It might be a metaphorical desire to show that the beast desired to rape the enemies.

\textsuperscript{21} Mashrifite swords are trusted swords made in the *mashārif*, i.e. certain towns or villages in Syria or Yemen. See F.W. Schwarzlose, *Die Waffen der alten Araber aus ihren Dichtern dargestellt* (Leipzig, 1886), 131. The verse includes an analogy based on a metaphor: the swords of the enemies are likened to people who do not like the taste of their food; the taste of the helmet, i.e. the swords cannot penetrate the helmets. Such a metaphor is used by other poets. See Abū Bakr ʽAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-balāgha*, ed. Mahmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo and Jeddah, no date), 54.
love poetry to elegies: these are the dwellings in which the dead person used to live. Renate Jacobi concluded that the description of the aṭlāl at the beginning of the elegy is a stylistic innovation of the new marthiyya (‘the new elegy’). This innovation was one way to give the marthiyya a more sophisticated position by making its structure and themes similar to those of the traditional polythematic qaṣida.  

Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 54/674), for example, starts an elegy for the prophet Muḥammad by describing Medina – the city where the prophet lived between 1–11/622–32 and where he passed away: the prophet’s traces (rasm) in this city have become effaced. In another poem, the same poet describes the abodes of the Muslims who were killed in the Battle of Badr (in 2/624); they were ruined as their residents moved to dwell in a higher place: Paradise. Pre-Islamic traces of the use of ruined dwellings in elegies can also be found in the poetry of al-Khansā’ (d. 24/645): she hints at her brother Ṣakhr’s dwelling-place which was abandoned after his death.  

Ibn Muqbil uses the same style. However, he does not address, as Ḥassān and al-Khansā’ did, only the place where the dead person lived or where he was killed (i.e. Medina). Rather, he enumerates eight places which — according to his own paraphrasing — became ‘empty of the whole Quraysh tribe’ [v. 1]. All these locations were essential places for Islam: (1) Mecca, the original village in which Islam was born; (2) Medina, in which Islam flourished after the migration of the Prophet and his followers in 1/622; and six other places between Mecca and Medina: (3) Baṭiḥān; (4) Minā; (5) al-Muḥaṣṣab; (6) ‘Usfān, (7) Na’f Wadā’ and (8) al-Ṣifāḥ. Minā is a valley east of Mecca. Travellers from Mecca descend into the valley by a hill path called ‘Aqaba which became famous in connection with Muḥammad’s negotiations with the people of Medina. Every spot in the valley is covered with tents in which pilgrims spend the night. Al-Muḥaṣṣab is the place where stones are thrown at the devil. It is a plain, situated between Mecca and Minā. Al-Muḥaṣṣab is the name of the three stopping-places in the valley of Minā, where pilgrims returning from ‘Arafāt during the pilgrimage partake in the ritual throwing of stones. ‘Usfān is the name of several places close to Mecca. One of these is on the way from Mecca to Medina where
the prophet Muhammad waged a battle against the Liḥyān tribe (a branch of Hudhayl) in 5/627.26 Naʾf Wadāʾ is a place near Naʾmān, the latter being a wadi belonging to the Hudhayl tribe, south of Mecca, which was also attacked by the prophet Muhammad.27 Al-Ṣifāḥ is a place in Mecca.28 These eight places are important Muslim places. Some of them are associated with the ḥajj (‘the annual pilgrimage ceremony’), others with some battles fought by the prophet Muhammad, and others with Muḥammad’s negotiations with the citizens of Medina.

Portraying these essential ‘Islamic’ abodes as being emptied of the Quraysh tribe is hyperbole. It aims to describe the great loss that the Quraysh faced — and will continue to face — after the assassination of their caliph. It is not only ʿUthmān who died: it is as though the whole Quraysh tribe, the mother of the Muslim tribes, has been effaced. This tribe became and will continue to become weakened, debased and humiliated. The hyperbole includes also a hidden reproach for the Qurayshites themselves. It might refer to the near past, those days in which some Muslims expressed their revolutionary thoughts against ʿUthmān. During these moments, the Quraysh tribe was silent; it was as though it did not exist. The Quraysh refused to offer ʿUthmān the aid that he needed. This theme will be expressed later in vv. 9, 19–20.

It is reasonable to assume that the description of the aṭlāl in this poem includes a hidden incitement to avenge the assassination of ʿUthmān. By humiliating the Quraysh, Ibn Muqbil encourages them to resist, to take revenge for the harm done to their leader. This theme of revenge — which is as Suzanne Stetkevych has already shown, a very important theme in elegies29 — will be expressed more directly in the next verses. In v. 3, last verse of the aṭlāl section, Ibn Muqbil states that in these abodes there are only men of war and blood. Apparently he is alluding to the blood of ʿUthmān and at the same time to the blood of his killers which should be shed in revenge.

After the description of the aṭlāl, Ibn Muqbil refers in vv. 4–6 to Ibn Kurayz. This is ‘Abdallāh b. ʿĀmir b. Kurayz (d. 59/679), a close

27 Ibid., 5: 293.
relative of 'Uthmān (apparently his maternal cousin). In the year 29/650, 'Uthmān appointed him as the governor of Basra and the Persian provinces. According to al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), when the Muslims revolted against 'Uthmān in Medina, the caliph sent a message to Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, his cousin and the ruler of Syria, and later the first Umayyad caliph (re. 41–60/661–80) and asked for his help. Mu‘āwiya refused to send the Syrian warriors to Medina. Then 'Uthmān addressed Yazīd b. Asad b. Kurz al-Bajali al-Qasrī — one of the companions of the prophet Muḥammad — who hurried with Syrian warriors to Medina. At the same time, 'Uthmān asked the help of Ibn Kurayz in Basra. He also gathered some troops and sent them under the leadership of a certain Mujāshifi b. Masfūd to rescue the caliph. Unfortunately, both sides heard about the assassination of 'Uthmān shortly before reaching Medina. After 'Uthmān’s assassination, Ibn Kurayz was removed from his post by the fourth caliph 'Ali b. Abī Ṭalib (re. 35–40/656–61). Together with ‘Ā’isha (d. 58/678), Ṭalḥa (killed in 36/656) and al-Zubayr (killed in 36/656), he sought to avenge 'Uthmān. With the help of his companions in Basra, Ibn Kurayz began preparing the area for war. After the Battle of the Camel in 36/656, he supported Mu‘āwiya against ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭalib.

In this poem, Ibn Muqbil refers to the troops sent by Ibn Kurayz to help 'Uthmān. He also alludes to other troops — apparently the Syrian warriors — who hurried to help the caliph (al-na‘fīr, v. 4, lit. ‘people hastening to war’). Since there is no direct mention of the Battle of the Camel, it seems that the present poem was composed before that battle and a very short time after ‘Uthmān’s death, more precisely between the end of 35/June 656, the date of the assassination, and Jumādā II 36/November–December 656, the date of the Battle of the Camel. Ibn Muqbil expresses his sorrow for the ‘attributes’ that these troops discovered [v. 6]. The attributes are not mentioned in the poem, but it is not unlikely that they were those of Muslim society. It is mainly the rift between Muslims which

31 Abū Ja‘far Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk (Beirut 1387 Ah), 4: 368–9.
caused them to become enemies rather than brothers. Then it is the readiness of Muslims to harbour enmity against their leader. And more important, it is their readiness to harm this leader. These are attributes of rivalry and enmity which will lead, as expressed in v. 19, to a real threat against the Muslim community.

It is also impossible to deny an additional interpretation of the ‘attributes’ which Ibn Muqbil condemns: these are of the close relatives of ʽUthmān; i.e. some of the attributes of the Qurayshites who refrained from helping their leader. Such a negative decision made by some of the Quraysh would lead to harmful consequences for them. As expressed above, they would be humiliated as never before.

Verse no. 7 includes the first direct call for revenge. Ibn Muqbil asks ‘the family of ʽUthmān’ for a metaphorical ‘crying’. It is not crying with tears, but with ‘sharpened and unsheathed swords’. ‘The family of ʽUthmān’ may be understood in its narrower meaning as his close relatives: his sons, cousins and descendants. However, it might also include the extended family of the caliph, that is, the Umayyad branch of the Quraysh and every other Qurayshite who supported him. The call for revenge might be seen as contradicting the content of the previous verses (vv. 4–6). Here, Ibn Muqbil condemns the divided Muslim society and predicts a bitter future for them. He asks Muslims to kill Muslims in order to avenge the death of the caliph. It seems that preventing a future war in Muslim society is impossible. Since such a war, or a riot, was started by the murder of the caliph, some righteous groups of Muslims — namely the supporters of ʽUthmān — must avenge and control society in order to bring peace to the community. Without such an action, the enemies of the caliph would govern, and this would lead to more damage, perhaps to endless riots.

In verse 9, Ibn Muqbil lists three different enemies: (1) Those who acted injuriously; these are apparently the persons who committed the assassination. (2) The non-kinsmen who refrained from giving help. There may have been some Muslims in Medina or outside it who had a passive attitude: they made no attempt to prevent the assassination. (3) Relatives who envied ʽUthmān and who incited against him. It is doubtful whether Ibn Muqbil refers to Muʻāwiya who refrained from sending Syrian troops to Medina. Possibly he means ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭālib, who was attacked for not giving the caliph the assistance that he needed.35 The attributes mentioned above may find some clarification in

this verse (no. 9). They are the attributes of these three elements which all together led to, directly and indirectly, the removal of ʽUthmān. If ʽAlī is alluded to in this verse, it is possible to see a message forwarded to the Umayyads to revolt against ʽAlī and, consequently, this poem may predict the political events of the next five years in which ʽAlī would be removed from his post and the Umayyads would dominate the caliphate for the next ninety years.

The antithesis in v. 11 between ʽUthmān who is described as ‘happy’ as opposed to his enemies whose souls are ‘suffering’, refers to the afterlife: the caliph will be rewarded by God while his enemies will be punished. The punishment of the enemies may also refer to the immediate future. The society will — or should — punish them. Here too, one senses a call for revenge. ʽUthmān is considered by Ibn Muqbil as a martyr [v. 11], an imām [v. 13], ‘the bond of Islam and of justice’, [v. 12], and also ‘what remains of forbearance, of good judgement and of generosity’ [v. 14]. It is as though Ibn Muqbil is predicting the destiny and the situation of Muslim society: Islam will be torn by the passing of ʽUthmān (this recalls the aṭlāl in the first three verses which became empty of the Quraysh). Moreover, no forbearance and no good judgement will remain.

The call for revenge is expressed almost directly in vv. 19–27. First, the relative who incited against ʽUthmān will be killed [v. 19]. Secondly, Ibn Muqbil asserts that we will avenge the death of ʽUthmān. Here he uses some bloody and frightening similes and metaphors to express this desire for revenge. They will fight with fast war horses which are likened to hunting hounds running very speedily [v. 21]. They will avenge with quivering spears which are compared to wolves running at night to reach the water sources [v. 23]; and also with their swords and with their camels (or horses) who have penises moving rapidly on the battlefield. These verses aim to heighten the danger facing the enemies. The fighting will be very rapid, just like the movement of the hounds, wolves and horses. In addition, the enemies will be harmed like prey attacked by hounds and wolves. They will also suffer shame and pain just as though they were females penetrated by the great phallus of a huge beast. The revenge is expressed more strongly in v. 22, where we will send the enemies a death which is likened to the shadow of night. It will cover and reach all the assassins of the caliph. The arrows will witness the arrival of such a death to the enemies. The old man described in vv. 25 and 26 seems to be a learner (perhaps also a teacher?) of the Qur’ān. His exact identity is not revealed in the poem. He might be Ibn Muqbil himself, already growing grey, but now (because of ʽUthmān’s death) is wholly grey.
In the past he used to be a warrior; he is well experienced in war. Participating in brutal war has caused his hair to turn white, while the death of the caliph made his hair wholly white. The *murd* (‘the young beardless men’) may be the disciples with whom he studied the Qur’ān. It is now time to gain the most trustful attribute which his soul always — without avail — wished to achieve. It seems that this attribute is nothing but martyrdom (*shahāda*) which is praised on several occasions in the Qur’ān and which the old warrior had not achieved in his previous battles. The description of this man, as well as the previous description of the weapon, is considered a direct threat to the enemies: a tough war will be waged against them. The warriors do not expect to come back alive from this battle and this makes their fighting harsher and more bitter.

The question remains: Who is referred to in the use of the pronoun in the first person plural, the *we*, in these verses? The answer may refer to all the supporters of ‘Uthmān, including the aforementioned Ibn Kurayz, ‘Ā’isha, Ŷālha, al-Zubayr, the Umayyads in general and, perhaps, Mu‘āwiya although he refused to give his help. Expressing all these supporters via the pronoun, *we*, shows that Ibn Muqbil considers himself a member of this group. The question of whether he was a genuine, trustworthy member or whether using *we* was an act of hypocrisy, is difficult to answer definitively.

To sum up, almost throughout the elegiac section, an indirect as well as a direct incitement against the killers of ‘Uthmān is expressed. Ibn Muqbil calls for war between the ‘Uthmānīs and their enemies. One of the battles — the Battle of the Camel — occurred several months after this poem was composed. Whether Ibn Muqbil, through the present literary text, provided one of the incentives that triggered Muslims to wage such a battle is not known. However, one can say that without doubt this poem reflected very clearly the political situation of Muslim society in the short period that followed the murder of the third Muslim caliph.

**Theme 2: The Love Affair/s (*Nasib*)**

The poem ends with fourteen love verses. In my opinion, these verses include reference to two or three different love affairs. The first is obviously expressed in vv. 28–9 but the name of the beloved is not mentioned. The second, in vv. 30–4, is an affair with a woman called Arnab. The third is with a woman from ‘Abs and is depicted from verse 35 to the end of the poem. It is possible that the two latter affairs both deal with one beloved: Arnab might be the same woman
from the ‘Abs tribe. However, as will be shown later, Ibn Muqbil implies that he is dealing with two different women. Composing a love poem which addresses more than one beloved is a known phenomenon in ancient Arabic poetry.³⁶

First Love Affair

The women, who prepared for their departure until the sun had almost set, could not make me forget those slain of Quraysh;

The women surrounding a singer who was able to console someone in love.

If he intends to join those who ride the steeds of sin, he will be the best.³⁷

Second Love Affair

Leave this! Arnab tied her lover’s rope to one of the branches of death and killing.³⁸

She is one of the slim-bellied women with an elegant gait.³⁹ You see her earrings; their beads hanging perilously high over a dangerous rock.⁴⁰


³⁷ ‘Riding the camels to the enjoyments of life or — in other words — for the sins’ is an analogy based on a metaphor used by other poets. See ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, Asrār al-balāgha, 49. The singer is able to overcome his fellows in consuming these youthful enjoyments. The second hemistich can be also translated as: ‘If he intends to join those who ride the steeds of sin, I will join too’.

³⁸ The word shiʿāb, pl. of shiʿb, means ‘a tree branch’ or ‘a cleft in the mountain’. See Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 4: 1556. The phrase shiʿāb al-qatl (‘the killing’s branch/cleft’) is a metaphor. It means the branch/cleft that causes death. Arnab tied a metaphorical noose in order to execute her lover.

³⁹ Maydān means ‘a woman who inclines her body from side to side’, see Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 7: 2746. It is an elegant gait for which the beloved woman was praised.

⁴⁰ The mahdūka (lit. ‘killing’) is an epithet used normally for the desert. It is ‘the desert that kills its travellers’. See Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿarab, 5: 393. I suppose that
A UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF AN ELEGY BY IBN MUQBIL

She is languid in standing up.\(^41\) It is as though the musk beneath her underclothes were mixed with reddish ambergris.

That smell was like the common lavender of ʽĀlij, brought at night by a gentle north wind.\(^42\) Nay, she is more fragrant!

The north wind blew lightly over the lavender early in the morning; after a night in which the sand tracks sought the help of cold and hoar frost.\(^43\) The cold that forces the travellers to bend against the wind.

Third Love Affair

the desert is not meant here, but a rock. Describing a slippery dangerous rock is used by ancient poets; see for example v. 24, poem no. 2, \(\textit{tawīl}\), rhyme letter \(b\), by Abū Dhu’ayb al-Hudhali, in Abū Sa’id al-Sukkari, \textit{Kitāb Sharh asb ār al-hudhaliyyīn}, ed. ‘Abd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāj (Cairo, 1965), 1: 53. The \textit{mahlaka} in Ibn Muqbil is a metaphor that aims to describe the long and soft neck of the beloved, over which her earrings hang.

\(^{41}\) \textit{Anāt} means ‘a woman in whom there is a languor on the occasion of rising, or standing up; and a gentle, or grave, deportment in whom there is a languor impeding her from rising’. The word also means ‘a woman blessed, prospered, or abounding in good; and a forbearing, gentle, grave, staid, calm, and compliant, or agreeing with another in mind or opinion’. See Lane, \textit{An Arabic-English Lexicon}, 1: 119.


\(^{43}\) The verb \textit{istaˈāna} (‘to seek help’) is used metaphorically. The sand tracts where the lavender grew asked the help of the cold and hoar frost at night. It is as though the sand tracts asked the night to bring to it cold and moisture in order to keep the lavender green. Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) explains the phrase as ‘the sand tracts became compacted together because of the moisture of that night’. See Abū l-Qāsim Jārallāh Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī, \textit{Asās al-balāgha}, ed. Muḥammad ʽAwād Mur’īb (Beirut, 1998), 1: 687.
Do you remember a woman of the `Abs tribe? Between her and me stands Sanīḥ; and also a sand hill of the Baʽūḍa desert. And Kutmā and Duwwār. Their peaks – hidden except for their crests – look like a herd of wild cows.

She kindled a fire on Daʽīda. Between that place and me there are lowlands with alien acacias and the Capparis decidua trees. An oryx grazes there. It looks like a Bedouin tent, tied with two ropes.

In the early morning, the oryx moves from place to place like a Berber [horse]. Its stomach contained the fresh Polycarpea repens plants. His body was wet.

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44 Sanīḥ is the name of a mountain, al-Baʽūḍa is a watering place in Najd in the region of the Asad tribe, or a watering place in the desert. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawi, Muʽjam al-buldān, 3: 269; 1: 455.

45 Kutmā and Duwwār are the names of two mountains. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawi, Muʽjam al-buldān, 4: 436; 2: 479.

46 The word ghawārib, pl. of ghārib, means ‘the mountain’s western side’. It also means ‘the highest part of anything’. See Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 6: 2244. The second meaning is more likely in this verse since the ‘peaks of the mountains’ are described.

47 Al-Zamakhsharī explains that the mountain peaks were white because of snow; that is why they were likened to wild cows, animals with white bodies. See Abū l-Qāsim Jārallāh Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī, al-Jibāl wa-l-amkina wa-l-miyāh, ed. Aḥmad ʽAbd al-Tawwāb ʽAwaḍ (Cairo, 1999), 282.

48 Daʽīda is mentioned only as ‘a place’. See ʽAbd al-Mu’min b. ʽAbd al-Ḥaqq Ṣafiyy al-Dīn al-Baghdādī, Marāṣid al-iṭṭilāʽ ʽalā asmā' al-amkina wa-l-biqāʽ (Beirut, 1412 AH), 2: 873.

49 The tandub tree (or the Capparis decidua) is described by Lane as ‘a certain tree of al-Ḥijāz, it grows large, having white and thick branches […] from which are cut tent poles’. Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 8: 2805.

50 Dhabb al-riyād is an epithet for the oryx. It literally means ‘the one that goes to and fro, not remaining in one place’. The oryx is so called because it pastures going to and fro, or because its females pasture with it, going to and fro. See Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 3: 952.


52 The word barbarī (‘Berber’) is used by al-ʽAjjāj (d. 90/708) to describe a Berber horse.
The ‘sons of the east wind’\textsuperscript{53} descended over the oryx’s back like pearls, perforated, shining on a string.

It is a white oryx. The females that recently gave birth continue to smell its body like virgins smelling a relative. The oryx begets noble descendants.

Verse no. 28 is basically the transition from the elegiac part to the \textit{nasib}. Here, Ibn Muqbil states that although he was affected by the departure of his beloved, this did not cause him to forget ‘the killed people of Quraysh’; namely, the assassinated caliph. Ibn Rashīq mentions another version: \textit{wa-lam tunsīn qatlā Qurayshīn za’ā’inan}. The word \textit{za’ā’inan} (‘departed women’) is in the accusative and the phrase is translated as ‘the killed people of Quraysh did not make me forget the departed women’.\textsuperscript{54} This version triggered the anger of Ibn Rashīq who described Ibn Muqbil as \textit{jilf} (‘rude’) as mentioned at the beginning of this article. It is as though the separation from his beloved is more important and more heart-breaking than the murder of ‘Uthmān. In saying this, Ibn Muqbil basically refutes the warm feelings he planted in his audience and this was, to Ibn Rashīq, unacceptable. This poem is not often quoted in classical sources and it is impossible to decide definitely which of the two versions, that of the \textit{dīwān} in the nominative, or Ibn Rashīq’s version in the accusative, is the original.\textsuperscript{55} However, the latter seems to have been the original, which was changed to suit the sensibilities of pious Muslims. It is unlikely that a change in the other direction, from ‘acceptable’ to ‘provocative’, could have taken place. The version with \textit{za’ā’inun} would have been logical if the \textit{nasib} had come before the elegy on ‘Uthmān, just as poets often say at the end of the \textit{nasib}: ‘Now let us move on from the love affair and turn to more serious things’. But here the \textit{nasib} follows and the poet probably meant to say: ‘I agree that the murder of ‘Uthmān is undoubtedly very sad; nevertheless, I still remember my love affairs’.

\textsuperscript{53} This is a metaphor indicating ‘the raindrops accompanied that wind’. See Ibn Muqbil, \textit{Dīwān}, footnote 40, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibn Rashīq, \textit{al-‘Umda}, 2: 152.

The first love affair reveals a mixture of two opposing feelings: the sadness of the lover vs. the joyfulness of the beloved’s tribe during the preparation for departure. The lover watches the preparation process for a long time, until it was completed by sunset. Watching the beloved’s departure (or her preparation for departure) is a recurrent theme in ancient Arabic poetry and it reveals how the lover was affected; thus he could not leave the beloved unless her tribe was totally absent. In Ibn Muqbil’s poem, while the tribe prepares its camels for departure, it seems that the women gathered together around a certain very talented singer and listened to his love songs [v. 29]. Normally, the preparation for departure is indicated by the description of the camels and the howdahs while they are being prepared for moving. However, Ibn Muqbil chooses a totally different motif: he describes the moments of entertainment created by the singer for the women of the tribe. The singer might be no more than the ḥādī (‘the camel driver’) who will entertain the whole tribe throughout its journey. It is worth noting that the image of the ḥādī appeared in the elegiac part of the poem: in verse no. 22, where the spears were driven by their metaphorical ḥādī; i.e. the bow (nashāshību yahdūhun nab‘un wa-ta’labu [‘Arrows driven forth by the nab‘ and ta’lab trees’]). The ḥādī in the elegy aims to help the supporters of ʽUthmān to avenge the caliph’s blood and thus to relieve their feelings of agony. In the nasīb, the ḥādī has a different function: he entertains the women; however, this saddens the poet. He causes a metaphorical killing of the protagonist, while he is going to bring a metaphorical life to the same protagonist who considers himself a supporter of ʽUthmān. The appearance of the ḥādī in the two sections of the poem with contradictory indications links the two sections. It helps us to read the nasīb in light of the elegiac verses and vice versa. This is the first link among others which will be analysed below.

The phrase fa-da‘ dhā (‘leave this’) at the beginning of v. 30 is a traditional transitional phrase that poets used in order to inform the

56 See, for example, A. Hussein, The Lightning-Scene in Ancient Arabic Poetry: Function, Narration, and Idiosyncrasy in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Poetry (Wiesbaden, 2009), cf. 40, 69–9.

audience that they are moving to another subject which is not closely related to the first one. The poem then describes the affair of Arnab. The transitional phrase confirms that the affair of Arnab is not the same as the beloved mentioned in vv. 28–9. The editor of the diwân mistakenly translates the name Arnab literally (meaning ‘rabbit’) and he concludes that the beloved is likened here to this animal. Comparing the beloved to a rabbit does not exist in ancient Arabic poetry. However, giving ‘Arnab’ as a woman’s name is used. The great sorrow and affection she caused her lover is expressed in v. 30 via an analogy based on a metaphor in which Arnab is likened to an executioner who ties an imaginary rope to a certain mountain cliff or to a high branch of a tree, and hangs the lover. It is worth noting that the expression of sorrow through an image of execution is taken from the first section in the poem. Both ʽUthmān and Ibn Muqbil have been murdered: ʽUthmān by members of his Muslim community, Ibn Muqbil by the hands of his own beloved. The theme of the killing reappears in v. 31. Here, Arnab’s beautiful body is described. Her long neck is suggested through the word 

mahlaka (lit. ‘a place of peril’) which apparently indicates ‘a high, dangerous, and slippery rock’. Anyone ascending such a rock slips and faces death. This rock recalls the dangerous rocks mentioned in the poetry of Sā’ida b. Ju’ayya (a mukhadram, no date of death is given) and Abū Dhu’ayb. In their poetry, the beloved’s saliva is likened to honey which the bees prepare on the top of a rocky and slippery mountain. Anyone attempting to collect the honey faces death. In brief, this is an allegorical description of the danger the lover faces before he tastes the saliva of his beloved. Likening Arnab’s neck to a mahlaka does not only aim to reveal the physical appearance of her neck: white, smooth and long; it also aims to express the dangers the lover faced in order to see her neck and perhaps to taste it. It is not unlikely that the

59 Ibn Muqbil, Diwân, footnote 30, p. 34.
60 See the descriptions mentioned in I. Lichtenstädter, ‘Das Nasib der altarabischen Qasid’, Islamica 5 (1932), cf. 41–8, 53–4.
61 See, for example, Abū ʽAbdallāh Muṣ’ab b. Ṭabārī, Nasab Qurayshī, ed. É. Lévi-Provençal (Cairo, no date given), 18, 147, 251.
simile hints at secret — probably intimate — encounters between the two lovers. Such encounters exposed her lover’s life to danger from her family. Besides, the lover faces an additional risk: the beauty of her neck affects the lover and it exposes him to a form of ecstasy which is very similar to a metaphorical ‘death’. Here too, the ‘killing’ motif reappears in the nasib and brings us back to the first part of the poem. It is very interesting that Ibn Muqbil uses the verb tadhabdhab (‘dangling’ [v. 31]) to describe the earrings which were moving to and fro on that ‘rocky’ neck. This is the same verb used in the elegiac section to describe the camel/horse used in war [v. 24]. This time, the phallus of the beast is dangling on the battlefield. In the elegy there is an expression of a sexual desire amidst the expressions of fighting. In the nasib there is an expression of killing and death intervening in sexual feelings. This is a further connection between the two sections of the poem.

Sexuality is also expressed in v. 32. The lover describes the fragrance of the beloved’s body which he smells beneath her underclothes. This verse hints that the lover, at least in his imagination, is well acquainted with the most secret parts of Arnab’s body. Ibn Muqbil is deeply affected by that smell: he thus adds another two verses (33–4) to describe it by likening it to the fragrance of the common lavender.

As mentioned previously, it is impossible to decide whether in v. 35 Ibn Muqbil is embarking upon a third love affair or, possibly, is continuing the second liaison. Describing two love affairs in the same poem exists in ancient Arabic poetry. Mentioning three love affairs or more is also found in this genre.63 Since vv. 35 – 41 describe an affair which is different from those in the previous verses it is possible that they are dealing with a third, quite different, affair.

Here, Ibn Muqbil describes the considerable distance which separates the lover and a woman from the ‘Abs tribe [vv. 35–6]. In verse 37, the lover imagines that his beloved is ascending a mountain peak where she kindles a fire. Kindling the fire by the beloved is also a motif found in ancient Arabic poetry. The poet normally imagines that his beloved kindles the fire, hoping that her lover will see it and come to visit her.64 Between the ‘Absi beloved and the lover there are separate lowlands, as well as the mountain and deserts mentioned in

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64 The mu‘allaqa of al-Hārith b. Ḥilliza (d. 570 CE) includes such a scene. See vv. 6–8 in al-Husayn b. Ahmad al-Zawzani, Sharh al-mu‘allaqāt al-sab‘ (Beirut, 1972), 191–2.
v. 35–6 — in which alien acacias were growing. The word ‘alien’ (gharīb) is a metaphor with two indications: it hints, firstly, at the fact that acacias do not often grow in these places and were therefore considered strangers. At the same time, the metaphor can be considered an additional link to the first part of the poem and can be read in accordance with that elegiac theme. It might reflect Ibn Muqbil’s own feelings. He suffers from a sense of strangeness, alienation, even of exile, in the new Muslim community. He feels lonely and as an outsider, mainly in that society whose religious leader has been killed by Muslims. I will refer to this issue later.

The loneliness is also hinted at in the closing part of the poem (vv. 38–41). The land that separates the lover from the ’Absi woman contains not only the acacias, but also a lonely oryx that lives together with its females apparently far from the large herd. The oryx is compared to a Bedouin tent which is fastened to the ground with two ropes [v. 38]. This simile explains two aspects of the oryx: it has a small, lean, body as if it were a small tent with its two ropes (bigger tents need more ropes to be fastened). Secondly, it describes the oryx which is standing alert, exercising great caution. It moves its head and body diagonally forwards, while its two hind legs push backwards. This is a stance in which the oryx attempts to watch the horizon and listen for any sound which may predict a surprise attack by a hunter. If this interpretation of the simile was really intended by Ibn Muqbil, then the oryx is seen to be in a state of fear and danger. The allegorical mention of the oryx scene is found in ancient Arabic poetry. Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) hints that there are two different uses of such a scene. In the traditional tripartite poem, which normally ends with praise, the oryx is mentioned in order to indicate the speed of the protagonist’s camel. The camel is thus likened to an oryx fleeing from its hunters. Here, the wild animal always succeeds in fleeing and surviving. The second use of the oryx scene lies in elegies (one can add ‘those composed especially by the poets of Hudhayl’). The oryx is used to express the unavoidable and irrevocable nature of death. The end of the oryx is always death. According to al- Jāḥiẓ,

65 See this explanation in al-Bakrī, Mu’jam mā sta’jam, 3: 851.
66 A similar image, however, describing the onager and not the oryx, is used by Abū Dhu’ayb al-Hudhali, see Hussein, al-Shahāl wa-al-madāmūn, 251. See v. no. 4, poem no. 3, baṣṭī, rhyme letter d, in Abū Sa’īd al-Sukkarī, Kitāb Sharḥ Ash’ār al-Hudhaliyyīn, 1: 57. Regarding the description of the caution of the scared oryx in poetry see Abū ‘Uthmān Amr b. Bahr al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn (Beirut 1423 AH), 2: 197–8.
the oryx scene serves the main theme of the poem. Moreover, one can notice a clearer allegorical use of this scene in some poems. In the *mu'allaga* of al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, for example, the relationship between the oryx and the hounds can be interpreted as an allegorical link to the relationship between the poet and those persons in the court of al-Nu'mān III, the king of al-Ḥīra (re. 580–602 CE), who delivered poor speeches and corrupted the relationship between the poet and the king. The last scene in the poem, the Euphrates scene, can also be interpreted as an allegory for the relationship between the king and the poet.68 It was shown above that also in the poetry of Hudhayl, the honey scene is interpreted allegorically. In addition, it was shown at the outset of this article, particularly by Jaroslav Stetkevych, that Ibn Muqbil himself was one of the poets who used allegory in order to express various topics. It is not strange, therefore, to see in the loneliness of the oryx in Ibn Muqbil’s present poem a reflection of the loneliness of the poet himself because he could not engage with the new Muslim community.

The poem ends with a sexual scene of the oryx. It is described as an animal that brings forth only noble sons (*munjib*). Its females continue to smell its body. The simile brings the animal into the human world: the females are likened to virgins smelling one of their relatives. The virgins are lewd and by these means try to gratify their sexual desire. This verse brings the reader back to the last verses in the second love affair, where the lover used to enjoy the smell of Arnab’s body.

### The Function of this Bipartite Structure: Elegiac Verses Followed by *Nasib*

The main elements in the *nasib* can be summarized in the following: the existence of several love affairs; the expression of sadness vs. joy (in the first affair); the expression of loneliness and the feeling of alienation; of remoteness; and the expression of sexuality. It was shown above that Ibn Muqbil absorbed some of the descriptions in the *nasib* from the elegiac theme.

One can make a further claim. This specific *nasib* by Ibn Muqbil is not totally traditional. This lack of traditionalism emerges in several ways: (1) The structure of the poem in which the *nasib* closes the

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poem instead of opening it; (2) the description of the women surrounding the singer during preparations for their departure — to my knowledge, this motif is unique in Ibn Muqbil; and (3) ending the nasīb with the oryx scene. Such a scene is normally positioned in the middle of the qaṣīda, usually in the camel-section. In Ibn Muqbil, the oryx scene is found in the nasīb. It closes it and, at the same time, it closes the poem. Placing the oryx scene at the end of the poem is done in order to give this specific scene a greater significance, more than that in the traditional poem.

The main motifs in the core of this scene are the same as those mentioned above: the loneliness, the danger, the remoteness and separation (the oryx is found in a remote place that separates the two lovers), the Bedouin atmosphere (which is likened to a Bedouin tent), and the sexuality. Consequently, the significance of this scene should be sought in the light of these motifs. It is quite possible that Ibn Muqbil closes the poem with the oryx scene in order to intensify these specific issues. The poem ends with negative feelings including those of loneliness, danger and separation. In light of this, the oryx scene might be considered a further allegory for Ibn Muqbil’s situation. There is some similarity between the oryx and Ibn Muqbil, the poet who suffered from the killing of ʿUthmān, and the rift in the new Muslim community, and also — as Jaroslav Stetkevych pointed out — the poet who could not be totally engaged with this new community and was constantly longing for the beautiful life of the pre-Islamic era which no longer existed. Like the oryx, he felt lonely, horrified, and remote. He was remote not only from his beloveds but from the pleasant life of the jāhiliyya. His three beloveds may refer to love affairs which he experienced before Islam. Longing for them and feeling as though he were killed because of being separated from them basically reflect his feeling of longing and sadness because of his separation from the jāhili life. Such a feeling in Ibn Muqbil is intensified by the first part of the poem: experiencing the murder of a Muslim leader by members of the Muslim society. Ibn Muqbil feels uneasy with this situation; he feels as if he were in exile in his homeland. This situation explains vv. 5–6: the Muslim community which is condemned for its qualities which reduces the wise man’s forbearance. Ibn Muqbil feels that he does not belong to it. He has become a stranger, an alien, like the foreign acacias which were not growing in their native lands. He is likened to the oryx which lives only in a very small herd. The motifs of killing and death mentioned in vv. 30 and 31 link the nasīb to the first part of the poem and at the same time may be interpreted symbolically: the case of Ibn
Muqbil is not so different from that of ʽUthmān: both have been killed by their own society. ʽUthmān was killed physically, but Ibn Muqbil died metaphorically and psychologically. It seems, therefore, that allegory in the qaṣīda of Ibn Muqbil is the main function of the nasīb and it stands behind placing this part as a closure for the poem. The inclusion of the two words ʿā'idhāt (‘the females that recently gave birth’) and munjib (‘the oryx that begets noble descendants’) may be seen as positives amidst the negativity that pervades the whole poem. The oryx, despite its fear and loneliness, is able to sire descendants, noble ones. In so doing, it might change its own destiny: the oryx might enlarge its family and dispel its own isolation. The same might be applicable to Ibn Muqbil: he might have a glimpse of hope either for regaining the lost, sweet, jāhilī life, or at least changing the current bitter situation of the Muslim community.

Besides allegory, it is possible to consider a further function of the non-traditional structure of the poem. The nasīb might be seen as a cathartic attempt to sweep away the negative emotions the poet caused his audience to feel during the recitation of the first part of the poem. As shown in this article, the elegy of ʽUthmān is very bloody and harsh. It includes a condemnation of the Muslim society which led to the killing of the caliph; and it includes horrible thoughts about the Quraysh tribe. It contains a harsh incitement against the killers of the caliph and incorporates a call for a brutal war that the ʽUthmānīs should wage in order to protect Muslim society from its Muslim enemies. These motifs of blood and war are very strong and heavily weigh upon the audience’s senses. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) considered the nasīb as the most attractive theme which the poets used in order to attract and, to some degree, to entertain their audiences. When the nasīb follows the elegy, as composed by Ibn Muqbil, this might relieve the gloomy thoughts and feelings caused by the elegiac verses. It might also explain why Ibn Muqbil chose to include more than one affair in the same poem. It is a powerful attempt to dispel the negative emotions of war mentioned previously.

The question remains: why should Ibn Muqbil do this? Why should he try to persuade his audience to forget the bitter incitement that he himself created in the first part of the poem? This question might be answered if we had a more precise knowledge of the identity of Ibn Muqbil’s audience. It is well known that some ancient Arabic

poems used to be recited on more than one occasion and to more than one audience. During these recitations, poets used to vary their poems by changing some words or by deleting some verses or adding others. It is possible, therefore, that Ibn Muqbil composed his poem in two different forms for two different audiences. The first form contained only the elegy, which was directed to 'Uthmān’s adherents. Ibn Muqbil shows them that he is no less supportive of 'Uthmān than anyone else. He is affected by the murder of the caliph just as they were. That is why he used the pronoun we in verses 21–7 in which the call for war was made. One wonders whether Ibn Muqbil recited the second part of the poem to this specific audience. It is quite plausible that he did not. Rather, this part was probably addressed to another audience, one which might contain other Arabs whose relationship to 'Uthmān — and perhaps to Islam in general — was less defined than that of the first audience. For these listeners, Ibn Muqbil recited the first part of the poem, then he may have attempted to lighten the descriptions of blood and war by reciting the nasīb section. This audience, which it is assumed knew Ibn Muqbil better than any other people, may have perceived the allegorical function in the nasīb: they may have sensed the poet’s feelings of alienation and loneliness and his longing for the remote jāhilī life which no longer existed.

Conclusion

The poem under discussion has three main aims: the first is an obvious external one which is to eulogize the murdered Muslim caliph, a eulogy which includes a condemnation of some sections of the new Muslim society; it is also an incitement to avenge the caliph’s blood. It is not known whether Ibn Muqbil’s feelings in this part were sincere — something which is doubted by Goldziher. The second and third aims are more internal and more interpretive. One is an allegorical expression of the true feelings and thoughts of the poet concerning the new and regrettable life of Islam versus the old happy life of the jāhilīyya. By narrating the beautiful — almost erotic


— but lost love affairs of the past, Ibn Muqbil basically hints at the happy experiences he had enjoyed within the pre-Islamic community. Such an allegorical manifestation is not unknown in the poetry of Ibn Muqbil. His diwan includes several allegorical references to his attitude regarding life in the two eras. The third aim refers to the relationship between poetry and its audience. The poem has a cathartic function which is achieved by the nasib, mainly by placing it as a closure for the poem. The poem might have been recited to two different audiences: the supporters of ʽUthmān who were addressed in the first section; and another audience less closely related to the issue of ʽUthmān, to whom Ibn Muqbil recited his whole poem including the second section. The catharsis was transmitted to the second audience. Ibn Muqbil would never have succeeded in achieving the last two aims if he had built his poem differently. Any change in the placement of the elegy and the nasib would have weakened the poem’s main targets. This leads to a more important conclusion: the specific but rare and unique structure of Ibn Muqbil’s poem was not chosen arbitrarily, but rather very carefully. The structure reflects the great artistic skill of Ibn Muqbil as a poet who courageously rebelled against traditional canons in order to deliver his poem to his audience in the most effective way. By composing the elegy with its present structure, Ibn Muqbil revealed his skill as a very sophisticated artist but not, of course, as a jilf as Ibn Rashīq mistakenly assumed.

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