STREET-ARABS, SATIRE, AND THE STATUS OF POETRY

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Children' s verse in Classical Arabic literature, though not abundant, exists in several forms. Goldziher published an article in 1879 on 'Jugend- und Strassenpoesie in Kairo'[1], about children's verse and language in his own days as well as in the time of aš-Širbīnī (11th/17th century). The few pages that he wrote on lullabies and cradle-songs ('Altarabische Wiegen- und Schlummerlieder', 1888)[2] were followed up in more recent studies, notably Enno Littmann's 'Kinderlieder und Kindersprache im heutigen Ägypten' (1935)[3], Wiebke Walther's 'Altarabische Kindertanzreime' (1968)[4] and Aḥmad Abū Saʿd, *Aġānī tarqīs al-aṭfāl ʿinda l-ʿarab* (1974)[5]. But there is another sort of poetry for children, or at least enjoyed by them.

There are quite a number of stories where young children, *ṣibyān*, play a part in the spread of poetry, usually invective or satirical[6]. The poet Abū š-Šamaqmaq (d. c. 190/806) is said to have exploited this and

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[1] *ZDMG* 33 (1879) 608-30, reprinted in Ignaz Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von Joseph Desomogyi, Hildesheim 1967-73, ii, 49-70.

[2] *WKZM* 2 (1888) 164-67, reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften* ii, 322-25.

[3] Enno Littmann, 'Kinderlieder und Kindersprache im heutigen Ägypten', *Mémoires de l'Institut Français*, t. lxviii (*Mélanges Maspero*, vol. iii) Le Caire, 1935, pp. 207-40.

[4] Wiebke Walther, 'Altarabische Kindertanzreime', in *Studia orientalia in memoriam Caroli Brockelmann*, hrsg. von Manfred Fleischhammer, Halle, 1968 (= Wissensch. Zeitschr. der Martin Luther-Universität, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe, Heft 2/3, Jhrg. 17, 1968), pp. 217-33.

[5] Aḥmad Abū Saʿd, *Aġānī tarqīṣ al-aṭfāl ʿinda l-ʿArab*, Beirut, 1974 [not seen].

[6] Although *ṣaby* is often defined in classical dictionaries as '[a boy] that has not yet been weaned', it usually denotes a child between the age of a *ṭifl* ('toddler') and that of a *ġulām* or 'adolescent'.

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to have blackmailed both Baššār Ibn Burd and Marwān Ibn Abū Ḥafṣa. When Abū š-Šamaqmaq recites his epigram ending in ... *Baššāru yā Baššāru yā bna z-zāniyah*, Baššār jumps up and gives him 200 dirhams, saying, 'Don't let the children hear it'[7]! In another story Abū š-Šamaqmaq says to Baššār, 'I heard the children recite:

Hallilīnah hallilīnah *ṭaʿna qiṯṯātin li-tīnah*
Inna Baššāra bna Burdin *tīsun -aʿmā fī safīnah*

Hallelujah, hallelujah, a cucumber pricking a fig!
Baššār, son of Burd, is a billy-goat in a boat.

(According to al-Ǧāḥiẓ this last expression denotes a very stupid person)[8]. Baššār again pays 200 dirhams and says, *Lā takun rāwiyat aṣ-ṣibyān*! 'Please do not teach your verses to the children'[9]! The same expression, *lā takun rāwiyat aṣ-ṣibyān*, is used by Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa speaking to Abū š-Šamaqmaq, on the occasion of another scurrilous epigram (Marwān, though, pays only two dirhams, or ten in another version)[10]. Diʿbil (d. c. 860) paid a thousand dirhams (five would have been ample, according to his friends) in order to silence a poet of doggerel who had made two obscene lines on him that were certain to be popular among the common people and children, *al-ʿāmma wa-ṣ-ṣibyān*. He paid in vain, for 'they became widely known and the rabble, the lower classes and slaves loudly declaimed them'[11].

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[7] Abū l-Faraǧ al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī*, Cairo, 1928-74, iii, 194 f.

[8] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, Cairo, 1965-69, ii, 150, v, 457.

[9] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* iii, 195, al-Ḫaṭīb al-Baġdādī, *Tārīḫ Baġdād*, Cairo, 1931, xiii, 146, ar-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ*, Cairo, 1287, i, 55. The translation of the exclamation *hallilīna* (not found elsewhere) may not be wholly correct. The cucumber and the fig refer to homosexual practice (which is, probably, why *Tārīḫ Baġdād* has a different, not indecent, version of the first line). Note the elision of the *hamz* of *aʿmā*.

[10] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* x, 79.

[11] Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt aš-šuʿarāʾ*, ed. ʿAbdassattār Farrāǧ, Cairo, 1968, p. 265; cf. ar-Rāġib, *Muḥāḍarāt* i, 55.

Sometimes the children call out only snatches of verse, a few words of a line. In this manner they pester a certain doctor called Nuṣayr, with an expression from an epigram by al-Ḥusayn Ibn aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk[12]. Children force an administrator in ar-Rayy to give up his post by repeating a few words from an epigram on an unfortunate accident: 'the fault came from a fart', *min aḍ-ḍarṭi ǧā'a l-ġalaṭ*[13]. Ḥālid b. Yazīd al-Kātib is pursued by boys shouting *Yā Ḥālid yā bārid*, Hey Hālid, you daft one!', after lines by Abū Tammām[14]. In edition of the *Aġānī* one reads, after these lines, *fa-ʿalimahā ṣ-ṣibyānu*, 'the children got to know them'; another version[15] has *fa-ʿallamahā ṣ-ṣibyāna*' he taught them to the children' a reading that is entirely possible. Diʿbil, mentioned before as a victim, was himself not wholly innocent of this practice. He had a quarrel with Abū Saʿd al-Maḫzūmī, who made a poem against him that was only known to the learned people in town. Abū Saʿd complained:

> What can I do? I make good poetry that is recited by nobody, and he makes bad verse that is recited... He has taught it to the school-children, to people on the street and the lower classes. Now wherever I go I hear this gibberish from the rabble. Some of them know me and blame me, others do not know me but let me hear it because it is so easy on the tongue[16].

The epigram in question is certainly one that would appeal to boys: an easy, short metre, colloquialisms, grotesque comparisons and obscenities. Diʿbil himself is reported to have said: 'I got some nuts, called the children and gave them some. Then I told them, "Shout to him:

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[12] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* vii, 214.

[13] al-Bayhaqī, *al-Maḥāsin wa-l-masāwi'*, Beirut, 1970, p. 252; cf. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, Cairo, 1948-53, iii, 455.

[14] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* xx, 280; cf. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt* 405 (not mentioning the verse ascribed to Abū Tammām). The lines are not found in the *Dīwān* of Abū Tammām.

[15] Yāqūt, *Muʿǧam al-udabā'*, Cairo, 1936-38, xi, 49 f.

[16] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* xx, 166, 167.

Abū Sa'd, old bag [apparently a nickname], who whores with his sister and his wife

Yā Abā Sa'din Qawṣarah zāniya l-uḫti wa-l-mar'ah)"[17].

Di'bil knew of course that the lines were merely doggerel: 'I only made some silly verses on him, such as children and slave girls play with.' Someone objects: 'you should not do that. The man has hurt you. Now get even with him by means of a similar reply. This nonsense that you are so proud of will miscarry and you will be disgraced forever'[18]. But Di'bil's reputation does not seem to have suffered from his occasional indulging in vulgarity.

The incidents mentioned so far all date from early Abbasid times. This does not mean that children played no part before that period. Shortly before the coming of Islam, for instance, the three brothers aš-Šammāḫ, Muzarrid and Ǧaz', when children, *ṣibyān*, successfully prevent their mother's second marriage by means of a few *raǧaz* lines[19]. But here we have talented youths making their own verse for their own purpose, not a band of obnoxious boys shouting obscenities just for the fun of it. Ḥassān Ibn Ṯābit was perhaps the first poet to exploit schoolchildren in this way: it is said that he ordered someone to write down an invective epigram and hand it to the schoolchildren, *ṣibyān al-kuttāb*[20].

In the anecdotes dating from Abbasid times other categories are often mentioned together with such children: the rabble, the lower classes, slaves and slave girls, water carriers, muleteers. In earlier periods these same categories are rarely mentioned in similar contexts, although of course there were slaves, water carriers and children. I think we may

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[17] *Ibid.*, xx, 174. According to the version in Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Ṭabaqāt* pp. 296 f. Di'bil gives raisins and *nabaq* ('lotus-fruits').

[18] *al-Aġānī* xx, 175 f.

[19] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-t-tabyīn*, ed. 'Abdassalām Muḥammad Hārūn, Cairo, 1968, iv, 34 f.

[20] Ḥassān Ibn Ṯābit, *Dīwān*, ed. Sayyid Ḥanafī Ḥasanayn, Cairo, 1974, p. 179.

say that in pre-Islamic tribal society there were no higher and lower classes, only individuals or clans with higher or lower status. After the conquests this situation changed, but it took some time for these 'lower classes' to appear in anecdotes about poetry; after all, many of them must have had an imperfect knowledge of the Arabic poetic language, Arabic being their second language. Ibn Mufarriġ, who died c. 69/688, himself an Arab, replied with a few lines in Persian when boys shouted at him in Persian while he was paraded through the streets of Basra in a rather humiliating fashion[21]. By this time, however, also the Arab population of the garrison cities was clearly divided into an elite group, the *ḫāṣṣa*, and the *ʿāmma* or common people[22].

Among the earliest of the anecdotes under consideration is the one about Ǧarīr and al-Aḫṭal, somewhere in the middle of the Omayyad period. al-Aḫṭal was rather proud of his own line, the best invective line known to him:

> People who, when the approaching guests make their dogs bark,
> say to their mother, 'Piss on the fire'[23]!

However, says al-Aḫṭal, the line was known only to connoisseurs of poetry, whereas a line by his rival Ǧarīr was recited by 'every water carrier or slave girl'. The line in question was:

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[21] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* xviii, 264; cf. al-Ǧāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān* i, 143. Ru'ba Ibn al-ʿAǧǧāǧ (d. 145/762) is pestered by children in Basra who shout *yā mardum, yā mardum*! (*al-Aġānī* xx, 352); I suppose Persian *mardum* 'man' is meant. Children sing a line in Persian against Asad b. ʿAbdallāh in 108/726-7: 'From Ḫuttal he came / he was put to shame'. (aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīḫ*, VII, Cairo 1966, p. 43; cf. the variants pp. 44 and 119.)

[22] See Michael G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, Princeton, N.J., 1984, p. 258.

[23] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* viii, 318. The line is often quoted and discussed, see e.g. al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, ed. W. Wright, Leipzig, 1894-92, p. 734, al-Ḥātimī, *Ḥilyat al-muḥāḍara*, ed. Ǧaʿfar al-Kattānī, Baghdad, 1979, i, 349, Ibn Rašīq, *al-ʿUmda* ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi d-Dīn ʿAbdalḥamīd, Cairo, 1955, ii, 175, 181 (respectively, in the chapter on *hiǧāʾ* and, together with al-Aḫṭal's complaint, in a section on *sayrūrat aš-šiʿr* 'the currency of poetry').

> The Taġlibite, saying 'Ahem!' while expecting hospitality [or, as most people interpret it, 'when his hospitality is expected'], scratches his arse and quotes proverbs [i.e. mumbles some platitudes][24].

al-Aḫṭal seems to regret this state of affairs; indeed, to be popular, even with the populace, was a sign of superiority. When Ǧarīr is informed that his other great rival al-Farazdaq is more popular with the elite and the learned, *ḫawāṣṣ an-nās wa-ʿulamāʾuhum*, but he himself rather with the common people, *ʿāmmat an-nās wa-dahmāʾuhum*, he is pleased: 'I have won'[25]! When al-ʿAǧǧāǧ and Abū Nuḫayla, two *raǧaz* poets, hold a slanging match, someone is about to chase away the children that have gathered. But al-ʿAǧǧāǧ insists on their presence: 'Leave them; they will decide who wins and will pass it on, (*yuġallibūn wa-yuballiġūn*)[26].

Popularity among the masses is a good thing according to many poets and critics. Ibn al-Muʿtazz, poet and critic, was himself from the highest possible circle, being an Abbasid prince. But in his book on poets he remarks, more than anyone else in such works, on the popularity of poets among the *ʿāmma* or *ḫāṣṣa* or both[27]. One particular line, he says, is recited in every market place or street, which only happens to a line 'when its meaning is good, its diction sweet and easy on the tongue'[28]. He admires another line in spite of its 'silly' diction; but, he

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[24] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* viii, 318 and many other places; see e.g. al-Marzubānī, *al-Muwaššaḥ*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Baǧāwī, Cairo, 1965, p. 224, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd* v, 273, 301, vi, 187, Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-aḫbār*, Cairo, 1925-30, i, 283, al-Hātimī, *Ḥilya* i, 346, Ibn Rašīq, *al-ʿUmda* ii, 181, al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil* p. 322.

[25] aṣ-Ṣūlī, *Aḫbār Abī Tammām*, ed. Ḫalīl Maḥmūd ʿAsākir *et al.*, Cairo, 1937, p. 219. Rather confusingly, Ibn Daʾb (d. 171/787) pronounces al-Farazdaq to be *ašaru ʿāmmatan* and Ǧarīr *ašaru ḫāṣṣatan* (al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* viii, 5), which seems to mean the opposite.

[26] Ibn Qutayba, *aš-Šiʿr*, p. 602.

[27] See Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Ṭabaqāt*, pp. 78, 88, 125, 130, 131, 150, 165, 241, 322, 416.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

explains, the poet made it so intentionally, so that the common people and children would recite it[29].

One of the merits of poetry, says Abū Hilāl al-ᶜAskarī, is its currency among people; 'nothing is more current than good poetry'[30]. Yet after two pages he qualifies this: the status of poetry is diminished by its abundance and the fact that everyone practises it, including the common people and the lower orders[31].

Some great poets were esteemed by the critics and the masses alike. 'When I was in Basra', says a contemporary of Baššār,

> there was not an amorous man or woman who did not recite some of Baššār's poetry, nor a professional wailing woman or female singer who did not earn money with it, nor any noble person who did not respect him and fear his wicked tongue[32].

But not everyone agreed that such popularity was always a good thing. Marwān b. Abī Ḥafṣa seems to be of this opinion when, asked to name the best poet of his time, he answered: 'Our best poet is the one with the widest circulation, *aš-ʿarunā asyarunā'*, meaning Rabīᶜa ar-Raqqī[33]. However, Ibn al-Muᶜtazz tells us that some poems by Rabīᶜa ar-Raqqī were recited 'everywhere on earth among the elite – for Rabīᶜa's poetry was rarely found in the hands of the common people'[34].

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[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Abū Hilāl al-ᶜAskarī, *aṣ-Ṣināᶜatayn*, ed. ᶜAlī Muḥammad al-Bağāwī and Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo, 1971, p. 143.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 145; cf. Ḍiyā' ad-Dīn Ibn al-Aṯīr, *al-Ǧāmiᶜ al-kabīr*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ǧawād and Ǧamīl Saᶜīd, Baghdad, 1956, p. 75: prose is superior to poetry, because the latter is often produced by those who have no conscious knowledge of the rules of composition, such as *as-sūqa wa-l-ᶜāmma min arbāb al-ḥiraf wa-ṣ-ṣanā'iᶜ*. According to Ibn al-Aṯīr, those poems are often successful; yet it is obvious that he and other critics and anthologists gave but scant attention to them (one thinks of illiterate poets such as al-Ḥubzaruzzī or al-Ḥabbāz al-Baladī, who are mentioned in aṯ-Ṯaᶜālibī's *Yatīmat ad-dahr*).

[32] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* iii, 149.

[33] *Ibid.*, xvi, 254.

[34] Ibn al-Muᶜtazz, *Ṭabaqāt*, p. 165.

So for Marwān the common people did not count at all, and he was not the only one. As a matter of fact, the term 'common people' usually *al-ʿāmma* or *al-ʿawāmm*, could include surprisingly many. Used in court circles it could denote anyone not belonging to court circles, but those that we would call 'the lower classes' are sometimes thought to be too low to be considered at all. In *ar-Risāla al-ʿaḏrā'*, a ninth-century treatise on the art of the *kātib*, the lowest of the eight classes that are enumerated are those of the scholars and the educated. The rest, merchants, market-people and such, do not matter[35]. To Ḫālid b. Ṣafwān there are three classes: scholars, orators or preachers, and educated people, *udabā'*; as for the dregs that remain, they only raise the prices, throng the market-places and pollute the water[36]. When you hear me speak of the common people, *al-ʿawāmm'*, says al-Ǧāḥiẓ,

> I do not mean peasants, the vulgar herd, artisans and vendors; nor do I mean the Kurds in the mountains or the island dwellers in the seas... The common people of our religion, our language, our *adab* and our morals, are the class whose intellects and morals are above these people but do not reach the level of our elite[37].

With these remarks al-Ǧāḥiẓ comments on an essay by Bišr Ibn al-Muʿtamir on oratory and its stylistics, where it is stressed that one's style should be adapted to one's audience, depending on whether one addresses the *ʿāmma* or the *ḫāṣṣa*. Whatever al-Ǧāḥiẓ means by *al-ʿāmma*, it appears from several of his works that his opinion of them is rather low[38]; an attitude shared by many writers and poets. An early instance

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[35] Ibn al-Mudabbir, *al-Risāla al-ʿaḏrā*, ed. Zakī Mubārak, Cairo, 1931, pp. 10 f.; cf. *Rasā'il al-bulaġā'*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAli, Cairo, 1954, pp. 229 f., Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd* iv, 180 f.

[36] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd* ii, 293.

[37] al-Ǧāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān* i, 137.

[38] See for instance his *Risāla fī nafy al-tašbīh*, in *Rasā'il al-Ǧāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbdassalām Muḥammad Hārūn, Cairo, 1964-79, i, 283 ff., or his *Maqālat al-ʿUṯmāniyya*, in *Rasā'il* iv, 33, 36-43. For more on the lower classes vs the elite, see the article by M. A. J. Beg, 'al-Ḫāṣṣa wa-'l-ʿāmma' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Jan-Olav Blichfeldt,

is provided by two well-known Omayyad poets, al-Kumayt b. Zayd and aṭ-Ṭirimmāḥ, both good friends in spite of their opposed allegiances, for one was a Shiite and the other a Ḫāriǧite. When asked how this could be, they answered, 'We both dislike the common people'[39]. It seems obvious to me that their dislike is not based on religion or politics, but on culture and education. They both belong to the urban literate and literary elite; al-Kumayt's poetry is old-style desert poetry but he, a schoolteacher, had only second-hand knowledge of the desert.

It was in their time, during the Omayyad period, that an important urban literary elite was formed, which grew in the course of the eighth century and which cultivated the traditional poetic idiom. It became more and more difficult for a poet, using this idiom, to please both the elite and the masses with one and the same poem. When he managed to do this, it was a matter to be noted; when he did not, he could try to please the illiterate only, which was also a matter to be noted, if he was a famous poet. But then he would not be employing the old idiom but the diction, themes and metres of the 'modern' poetry of Abbasid times. Most of the great 'modern' poets, such as Baššār, Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturī and Ibn ar-Rūmī, used the elevated style as well as the low and vulgar idiom; the latter mostly for invective poetry of course, although Abū l-ʿAtāhiya deliberately employed a low style for the poems on *zuhd* or 'renunciation [of worldliness]' that made him famous. He is said to have told an admirer:

> Poetry ought to be like that of the early great poets or like that of Baššār and Ibn Harma. If it is not, then the right thing to do is to make one's diction so that the masses will understand it, like my own poetry; especially my poems on *zuhd*[40].

'Khāṣṣa and ʿāmma: On slogans, concepts and social settings in Islamic history', *Orientalia Suecana* 38-39 (1989-90) 14-20.

[39] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* xvii, 2.

[40] *Ibid.*, iv, 70. Compare ibid. iv, 94 f.: Salm al-Ḫāsir says to Abū l-ʿAtāhiya, 'You have made a good [poem], but for the fact that the wording is vulgar (*sūqiyya*)'. Abū l-ʿAtāhiya replies, 'By God, what makes you dislike it is precisely what makes me like it'.

Similarly, Baššār defended his little poem on Rabāba, who has 'ten hens and a cock with a good voice'. For she, he said to a critic, admires this even more than you admire the *Muʿallaqa* of Imra' al-Qays[41]: An anonymous poet said :

I shall make *hiǧāʾ* on you, if I live to do it, in poetry that isn't worth twopence [even] if they correct its faults.

They say it's bad. But it is enough for me that they call it bad and that it is recited[42].

In early Abbasid times it was still possible for a poet to be both esteemed by the elite and truly popular among all layers of society, although not as a rule with the same poems. As for later periods, I find a curious lack of information. Anthologies and works of criticism keep repeating the old anecdotes about lines being recited by boys and the lower classes, but hardly any new ones are added. Of course this may reflect the concerns of the anthologists and critics; perhaps things went on much as before. But one suspects that the dearth of such anecdotes is an indication that from about the tenth century there was a widening gap between the literate elite and the illiterate, of whom we do not know much; a gap based on the increasing divergence between the literary and the spoken language, as studied in particular by Johann Fück in his *ʿArabīya*[43].

Early Abbasid poetry is full of colloquialisms; Abū Nuwās for instance, or Baššār's verses for Rabāba which Fück thought should be read without *iʿrāb*[44]. They are found less often in the so-called neoclassical poets, although Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturī and Ibn ar-Rūmī wrote numerous lines that could still appeal to children and the illiterate, both

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[41] al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aġānī* iii, 163, al-Marzubānī, *al-Muwaššaḥ*, p. 388.

[42] aṣ-Ṣūlī, *Aḫbār Abī Tammām*, p. 28, al-Marzubānī, *al-Muwaššaḥ*, p. 575.

[43] Johann Fück, *ʿArabīya. Untersuchungen zur arabischen Sprach- und Stilgeschichte*, Berlin, 1950, French translation (by Claude Denizeau): *ʿArabīya. Recherches sur l'histoire de la langue et du style arabe*, Paris, 1955.

[44] Fück, *ʿArabīya* (French translation) p. 84.

by virtue of their diction and their themes. In his monograph of Ibn ar-Rūmī, Said Boustany suggested the possibility that some epigrams were in fact made by the poet primarily with children in mind[45]. But there are no accompanying anecdotes to confirm this. It is tempting to think that lines with silly jokes, crude obscenities, colloquialisms or metrical irregularities were meant to be enjoyed and recited by a juvenile or lower class audience; however, there is abundant evidence that the literate elite itself occasionally indulged in precisely these things wholly among themselves.

The lower classes, it is true, could serve to inspire the poet in these matters, as in the notorious case of Ibn al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ in the second half of the tenth century. He learned his art of pornographic and scatological verse by listening, notebook at hand, to the people on the roofs of the taverns next to his father's house[46]. Yet he was a respected man of some standing, who as a *muḥtasib* was even charged with the supervision of public moral behaviour in Baghdad for a time. Later, in the 14th century, a manual of *ḥisbā* enjoins schoolteachers to keep the *ḍīwān* of Ibn al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ away from their pupils, which proves that they liked it[47]. But there is no reason to suppose that Ibn al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ composed his poems for them or for the common people.

Even the poets known to us who composed poems in a language resembling the spoken tongue belonged to the elite, as a general rule. The earliest known *zaǧals* and similar non-classical forms date from the time when these forms became acceptable among the educated. It is well possible that more or less similar forms existed before among the illiterate, but the texts and the names of the poets are not recorded.

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[45] Said Boustany, *Ibn ar-Rūmī: sa vie et son oeuvre*, i, Beirut, 1967, p. 328.

[46] aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-Wafayāt*, Wiesbaden, 1962-, xii, 333 f.

[47] Ibn al-Uḫuwwa, *Maʿālim al-qurba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba*, ed. by R. Levy, London, 1938, p. 172, Engl. abstract, p. 60.

After the great conquests of early Islamic times, Classical Arabic poetry was never truly popular, in the sense of known to and appreciated by all layers of society, except for the odd line or short epigram, usually of the jesting kind, *hazl*, which had a lower status than *ǧidd*. It is a conclusion that is hardly surprising, but it may serve to counterbalance overenthusiastic statements on the importance of poetry for the Arabs. In pre-Islamic times things were different, but even here one should be careful not to exaggerate. Is it really true that, whenever someone in a clan turned out to be poetically gifted, other clans came to congratulate, meals were prepared, women played the lute, men and boys rejoiced together, all as if there were a wedding? This is what Ibn Rašīq wants us to believe; he is quoted by as-Suyūṭī, Wilhelm Ahlwardt, Sir Charles Lyall, R. A. Nicholson and probably others[48]. Ibn Rašīq, writing in the eleventh century, gives no sources or references for these remarkable customs. Perhaps he, esteemed poet and critic, wrote during a bout of wishful thinking, regretfully recalling the days when the status of the poet was higher, but his poetry popular among young and old, high and low.

[48] Ibn Rašīq, *al-ʿUmda* i, 65, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Ǧād al-Mawlā et al., Cairo, s.d., ii, 473, Wilhelm Ahlwardt, *Ueber Poesie und Poetik der Araber*, Gotha, 1856, p. 3, Charles J. Lyall, *Translations of ancient Arabian poetry, chiefly Pre-islamic*, London, 1885, p. 17, Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, repr. Cambridge, 1966. p. 71.