

1. Introduction

1.1. The Material

On one of my early field study trips to the Middle East, I spent June and July of 1965 in Syria and Jordan recording local dialects of Arabic. At the end of July, only two days before leaving Jordan, I came with my wife to the little Christian village of Şāfūṭ in the northern outskirts of Şwēliḥ, about 17 km northwest of ‘Ammān, in the district of the Balqa (al-Balqā’). When getting out of the bus in the village, we were welcomed by a Latin priest, Father Bişāra Şwēḥāt (Bishara Shweihat, d. 1981), who was previously unknown to us but had happened to take the same bus from Şwēliḥ, and now invited us to his little chapel. In the course of the conversation Father Bişāra learned that the aim of the visit was to meet villagers of different ages and to record samples of local dialectal speech. He spontaneously promised to help me, left the house, and only a few minutes later came back with a good neighbour of his, Yūsif Ṭarīf (Abu Kamāl), whom he introduced as a *şā‘ir*, poet and singer of poetry.¹ To be sure, Yūsif Ṭarīf did not fall short of my expectations, but after having a cup of coffee, he without delay started telling stories and reciting poems. The performance was broken off only for dinner, and thereupon we moved to Yūsif Ṭarīf’s little house and continued recording there. At sunrise next morning, Yūsif Ṭarīf was busy again telling stories, and although some time was spent in order to listen to the recordings, by noon I did not have any tape left. In the afternoon we took farewell of the bard’s family and Father Bişāra, and promised to come back at the first opportunity to record more. Unfortunately, that opportunity never came. Two months later I received a letter from Yūsif Ṭarīf’s eldest son Kamāl Yūsif Ṭarīf and learnt that his father had passed away.

I recorded from Yūsif Ṭarīf 19 narratives; on the whole, the technical quality of the recordings is relatively good. All but one of the narratives are followed by a poem; I published this exceptional narrative in 1970 as *Studia Orientalia* 43:1 (Balgāwi Arabic 3. Texts from Şāfūṭ, text a. In the present collection it is included as text XV, in a transcription which is harmonized to the rest of the texts). Among the remaining 18 stories 14 are published here, arranged according to the original sequence. Most of the poems were recited; only those of text I and text III were chanted. The narrator was known as a skilful player of the *rabāba*, the one-stringed Bedouin fiddle, but at the time of the recording he did not have an instrument.

In the absence of the narrator I had to resort to his closest relatives in order to get the recordings properly explained. Thus, his sons Kamāl Yūsif Ṭarīf (Abu Yūsif) and Adīb Yūsif Ṭarīf (Abu Māğid) undertook to write down the texts in Arabic characters from the tapes in January 1970 and in October-November 1976. This text proved to be

¹ JARGY, *Sung Poetry*, p. 185f., describes the *şā‘ir* as "at once poet, rhapsodist, singer, and musician, sometimes even composer" who "receives this inheritance as a sacred trust from a master who precedes him" and who "may add his own creative and adaptational talent, but only if he does not transgress the oral tradition which was given to him."

very useful when I compared my transcriptions with what they had written down. They also explained to me several difficult passages. I feel very much obliged to them for all the generous help and the magnificent hospitality I enjoyed during the eight weeks which I lived in their homes in 1976, 1977, 1979, and 1981. Fortunately, Yūsif Ṭarīf's cousin Sim'ān Ṭurfān (Abu Salāme, b. 1898, still living in 1992), also living at Šāfūt, was familiar with the stories and poems and willing to help me. In the autumn of 1976 I spent about fifteen days in his home, where he listened through the recordings and readily gave me explanations and glosses. I keep the sessions with the old and wise Abu Salāme in grateful memory. One of the poems (text XIII) was also explained to me by Nōfa Frēḥa, Yūsif Ṭarīf's widow, at her new home in el-Karak in October 1976.

1.2. The Narrator

Yūsif Ṭarīf Bdēwi (1903-65) belonged to the clan of el-Maxāmre, who owned lands both at l-Fḥēš and Šāfūt. According to his relatives, he attended the Greek Orthodox school (Dēr ir-Rūm) at l-Fḥēš for 5 or 6 years; he was married about the year 1925 and moved from l-Fḥēš to Šāfūt about 1929-30.² At the age of about 30 years he started memorizing poems systematically: he used to write down the poems he heard, and having learned them by heart, he burnt the papers. The most important source for the poems and narratives was said to have been a sā'ir from es-Salt, Ḥēdar by name. Yūsif Ṭarīf also became trained in playing on the *rabāba*. The mastery of this instrument implied constant practice, and he was often seen sitting alone outside his little house, playing and humming. As a story-teller and reciter of poetry he became well known widely outside his own village. In family gatherings he was a very popular performer; in the evenings his house often was so crowded that the children hardly found a place to sleep, and once a year a special evening entertainment was arranged in a tent pitched in the vineyard of the family in the northern outskirts of the village, a place with a magnificent view towards the mountains of 'Aḡlūn.

Yūsif Ṭarīf was a tall and slender man with a keen look; among the villagers, his tallness was proverbial ("min ṭūl Yūsif Ṭarīf"). He had a good sense of humour, and he took pleasure in playing with children. The number of poems memorized by him is unknown, but his own guess was two hundred. Most of these poems can be dated to the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century, but the repertory also included several poems composed by the famous poet and warrior Nimr Ibn 'Adwān.³ One of the poems sung by Yūsif Ṭarīf not published here is an elegy by Nimr, consisting of 11 lines and beginning *gum ya glām u-šidd naḍw ifazfaz*, a more complete version (20 lines) of which was recently published by AL-'UZAYZI.⁴

² See Balgāwi 3, text b. The family hailed originally from es-Salt, PEAKE, Jordan, p. 176.

³ Poems by Nimr (about 1746-1822/3) were collected as early as in 1845 at al-Ġōf by my Finnish fellow countryman WALLIN and published in ZDMG 6 (the two first poems). Later on, Nimr's poems have been published, e.g., by SOCIN, Diwan I, nos. 47, 54, 55 (?), and 56 (?), LITTMANN, Volkspoesie (4 poems), SPOER, Nimr, ZDMG 66 (4 poems), SPOER&HADDAD, Nimr, ZS 7 and 9 (20 poems), SALMĀN, Šarqī al-'Urdunn, pp. 57-60, 'ABDALLĀH BIN XAMIS, al-'Adab al-ša'bi, p. 107, AL-BARGŪṬI, al-'Aḡānī, pp. 288-317, and AL-'UZAYZI, Nimr, a whole monograph.

1.3. The Scope of the Study

In spite of the historical character of a majority of the present narratives, they are not published because of their eventual value as historical documents but rather as examples of the popular narrative art as it flourished in the Balqa until 1960s and 1970s. These narratives, called *sālife* (pl. *sawālif/suwālif*), function as prose introductions in which the historical background of the poems recited or chanted after them is explained. The more remote the story is in time and place, the longer story is needed in order to introduce the setting for the audience, especially if a great number of personal and local names are included in the poem. Since the average modern reader of these narratives needs much more background information, historical facts as well as names of persons and localities are in the present publication—when possible—explained in footnotes to the transcriptions, but it has not been my aim to discuss the historical correctness of the contents.

As far as the poems are concerned, I have tried to transcribe them exactly as they were recited by Yūsif Ṭarīf, in order to use them as authentic examples of Bedouin poetry (the so-called Nabaṭi⁵ poetry) such as it has been and still is recited and sung in the Balqa by both Bedouin and settlers, without aiming at reconstruction of original wordings or trying to find the most well-preserved versions of the poems. Occasionally a few lines from other versions recorded or published elsewhere are transcribed for comparison, to illustrate the nature of variation between versions memorized by individual reciters.

Although the structure of Nabaṭi poetry to no slight degree is formulaic, its reciters do not make use of the same techniques as singers of epics, who often compose during the performance; on the contrary, they have in mind an idea of a fixed original form which they try to memorize. However, in the course of time the original form is unavoidably transformed into innumerable versions: some lines are omitted, the order of lines is changed, the wording is altered, the phonetic realization of certain phonemes is changed, and the syllable structure as well as some morphological features may be changed. Because the poems are chiefly transmitted orally, the original difference between written and oral compositions tends to decrease step by step. A reciter well versed in Nabaṭi poetry has a large repertory of poetic words and formulas, which he, if necessary, can resort to when memorizing and reciting a poem.

Even if much of the fixed original form is lost and the poems circulate in multifarious versions, the poems are as a matter of principle not anonymous. In the poems recited by Yūsif Ṭarīf, authors are occasionally mentioned in the introductory narratives: I Mēṭa, 'Omēr's wife, from the tribe of aḡ-Ḍēgam, II an unnamed girl from the Šammar, III Ibn Mazyad's mother from the Šammar, IV Ibn Māni⁴ from Neḡd, V an unnamed man from the Šarārāt, VI an unnamed man from the Htēm, VII Mḥammad

⁴ AL-ʿUZAYZI, Nimr, pp. 182-185; this poem was not recited but only sung by Yūsif Ṭarīf, and because he found it phonetically very amusing, he could not always refrain from laughing, which renders an exact transcription difficult.

⁵ In the Balqa the Northern and Central Arabian term Nabaṭi poetry is not commonly used but still relatively well known. These poems are most often referred to simply by the term *gaṣīde*.

Ibn Ġēī from the Šammar of al-Gašīm, VIII an unnamed Transjordanian Druze, IX Msallam eš-Šōbaki from the Balqa, X Ġaṭyān al-Ġānim from the Balgāwi tribe al-‘Aġārma, XI Ibn Ġadīr from the Bani Ḥasan, XII anonymous, XIII ‘Aṭuwi al-Maġāli, XIV Abu l-Xazrag (fiction).

The present poems and their narratives belong to a tradition which has its roots in Bedouin culture. A number of the poems are creations of Bedouin living in the Balqa or in the adjacent areas, but several of them belong to a repertory of Nabaṭi poems coming from different parts of Northern Arabia and circulating in a large area. Even though neither the narrator nor his audience were Bedouin, the stylistic ideal of the narratives, too, is the oral narrative style of the Bedouin and, consequently, a language form of Bedouin type. Since the vernacular dialect of the present narrator was Salṭi—a sedentary dialect which shares many linguistic traits with the neighbouring Bedouin tribes—it is interesting to see which linguistic features of Bedouin dialects he uses in order to Bedouinize his narration. A short chapter will be devoted below to a systematic analysis of this stylistic ambition. In a similar way, some traits of the language of the poems will be analyzed. As yet there is no systematic description of the Salṭi dialect which could be referred to; therefore the Salṭi forms given here without reference are based upon material of my own, which I hope to be able to publish in the form of a short monograph or an extensive article in a near future.

A chapter will also be devoted to alternative ways of analyzing the metrical patterns of the poems and a discussion of their phonetic implications.

1.4. The Transcription

The only economical way to publish narratives and poems of the present kind with sufficient linguistic accuracy is to use a systematic transcription. From the linguistic point of view, publishing texts in Arabic script is in fact far less informative. The transcription chosen for this collection is sub-phonemic: it indicates vowel quantities phonetically but consonant quantities morpho-phonemically, in order to preserve morphological and lexical transparency without causing misunderstanding as to their phonetic realization.

The consonant phonemes are transcribed as follows, in the Arabic alphabetical order:

- ʾ a voiceless glottal stop, in the dialect non-phonemic
- b* a voiced bilabial stop
- t* a voiceless alveolar stop
- ṭ* a voiceless interdental spirant
- ǧ* a voiced palatal spirant
- ḥ* a voiceless pharyngeal spirant
- x* a voiceless velar spirant
- d* a voiced alveolar stop
- ḏ* a voiced interdental spirant
- r* an alveolar tremulant continuant
- z* a voiced alveolar spirant

- s* a voiceless alveolar spirant
š a voiceless palato-alveolar spirant
ʂ a voiceless alveolar spirant, 'emphatic'
ɟ a voiced interdental spirant, "emphatic", historical reflex of both *ḡād* and *zā'*
t̤ a voiceless alveolar stop, 'emphatic'
ʕ a voiced pharyngeal spirant
g̤ a voiced velar spirant
f a voiceless labiodental spirant
g a voiced velar stop (affricated variant *g̤*, a voiced palatal spirant)
k a voiceless velar stop (affricated variant *č*, a voiceless palatal spirant = [tʃ])
l an alveolar lateral continuant
m a bilabial nasal continuant
n an alveolar nasal continuant
h a voiceless glottal spirant
w a bilabial semivowel
y a palatal semivowel

The 'emphasis', **tafxīm** (pharyngealization or velarization), has not been marked except in the primary emphatics *ʂ*, *t̤*, and *ɟ*. The syllabic realizations of the semivowels *w* and *y*—usually between two consonants—are transcribed as *u* and *i* respectively.⁶ The glottal stop ʔ, in spite of its non-phonemic status, is transcribed when heard, though it must be admitted that this is often arbitrary.

The vowel system is here described as consisting of three short (*a*, *i*, *u*) and five long (*ā*, *ī*, *ū*, *ē*, *ō*) vowel phonemes. However, the vowel length has been transcribed phonetically. The allophones of /a/ and /ā/ vary between [ā] and [æ], and those of /i/ between [i] and [ə]. Occasionally, ə occurs in the transcription, always as a symbol for a non-phonemic central vowel, in poems sometimes used for metrical reasons. The front allomorph of the singular feminine marker in nouns is transcribed as -e, i.e., as if it were a phonetically shortened allophone of /ē/, which most often is a reflex of an older /ay/. The pronominal suffix for the 3rd p. sing. masc. -o is a parallel case. The e of the feminine morpheme originally is the front allophone of /a/, and the o of the pronominal suffix has originally been an allophone of /u/, lowered in an unstressed closed syllable (/Cuh/).⁷ Both morphemes are here sometimes pronounced with a following /h/, which may be attributed to Bedouinizing tendency, but often it can rather be considered as a pausal phenomenon. Usually it is relatively weak and therefore transcribed with a small superscript ^{-h}, e.g. **karramū^h**.

⁶ In this case a phonetic transcription of consonant phonemes is preferred, in order to avoid the impression that the semivowels here are pronounced consonantly and therefore imply an anaptyctic vowel. Thus, when the phoneme /w/ in /ʔazwtah/ is preceded by an anaptyxis, it is transcribed phonetically **ʔzūtah** IV 22c, and, similarly, /hagwti/ is transcribed **hāgūtī** VI 7a, XII 19b, XIII 13d, whereas /lahytō/ is transcribed **lāhito** IV 12. This transcription leaves no uncertainty about the actual length of the vowel, as the phonemic transcription of the semivowel does.

⁷ Thus PALVA, 'Aḡārma, p. 28, following GARBELL, Remarks, p. 315, against CANTINEAU, Le pronom suffixe. JASTROW, "Une question embarrassante", discusses the question in more detail and comes to the conclusion that /-o/ goes back to /-uh/, p. 173f.

When necessary, the stressed syllable is indicated by an acute on its vowel (V̇). Breath groups are separated by dashes (—), and suspended utterances are marked by three dots (...). Punctuation marks are as a rule omitted, but the question mark is used, as the interrogative accent (pitch) is the only means to mark interrogation when the interrogative clause does not contain an interrogative pronoun or adverb. Questions and comments by the listeners are indicated by [square brackets]. Omissions of a few words are indicated by ***. These passages (II 26, XIV 32) were not heard clearly enough to be transcribed.

The transcription of quotations from other sources has been standardized to follow a consistent system when no risk of misinterpretation exists. In a few cases, very complicated transcriptions have been simplified.

1.5. Division of the texts and references to the texts

In order to improve readability, the texts have been divided into short sections, which have been numbered for the purpose of reference. The division is more or less arbitrary, but often it reflects the rhythm of the narration. In references to poetic sections, the lines have been indicated with the letters *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*. In the linguistic analysis of the prosaic sections it is often important to point out which forms occur in direct discourse. These are indicated with the capital letter D after the number of the section, e.g. *ma-bī ‘aša* II 11D.