

‘AMR IBN HAWBAR AND HIS POEM ON CRUCIFIXION

Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila

Professor Manfred Ullmann has recently published an excellent monograph entitled *Das Motiv der Kreuzigung in der arabischen Poesie des Mittelalters* which contains 107 verse excerpts on the subject of crucifixion. Even this book, though, does not exhaust the theme. Leafing through Ibn al-‘Adīm’s (d. 1262) *Tadhkira* (ed. Sezgin 1992) I came across an interesting fragment which might be added here to the corpus of crucifixion passages, viz. ‘Amr ibn Hawbar al-Kalbī’s poem. The passage reads (p. 222; the verses are in *basīṭ*):

anshadanī l-Muhadhhab [Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn Shāfi‘ ibn Sālim ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥāsī at-Tanūkhī]¹ li-‘Amr ibn Hawbar fī khalīfati ‘aṣrihi wa-qad ṣalaba insānan min abyāt:

[a.] *Allāhu akbaru! bābu l-‘adli munfatihun /*
‘alā l-anāmi wa-bābu ḡ-zulmi masdūdū //

qāla fihā fī ṣifati maṣlūb:

[b.] *taraktahū yā walīya llāhi bāsiqatan /*
‘alā ṭ-tariqi ṭarīḥan ṭirfuhū ‘ūdū //

[c.] *ka’annahū shilwu kabshin wa’ l-hawā’u lahū /*
tannūru shāwiyatin wa’ l-ḡidh ‘u saffūdū //

Verses from the same poem are also to be found in Ibn al-Ḡarrāh’s *‘Amr-Buch* (Bräu 1927: 65–66), where we have a four-verse fragment:

[d.] *lammā ra’ ā n-nāsu yawma l-Kalbi yashharuhū² /*
qālū maqālan wa-ba‘du l-qawli tanfīdū //

[e.] *taḡamma ‘ū min bilādi llāhi kulluhumū /*
fa’ l-qawmu ḡam ‘un wa-fī d-dunyā ‘abādīdū //

[f.] *yaqūlu qā’ iluhum fihim li-kathratihim /*
a-yawmu Bābaka³ hādhā am huwa l-‘idū //

[c’.] *ka’annahū shilwu shātīn wa’ l-hawā’u lahū /*
tannūru shāwiyatin wa’ l-ḡidh ‘u saffūdū //

¹ The whole name is given on p. 220. Al-Muhadhhab transmits five poems to Ibn al-‘Adīm, two by a *qaḍī* of Ḥās, Abū ‘Abdallah al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥāsī at-Tanūkhī, two by our ‘Amr and one by al-Faqīh Mu‘ammil ibn ‘Anbasa al-Ma‘arrī. – The Index to Ibn al-‘Adīm (1992), compiled by Ṣ. Ḥamārneh, reads in both cases Ḥāsh, but the text marks the last consonant consistently as *ghayr mu‘ḡama*. See Yāqūt 1957, II: 205 and Smoor 1985: 140.

² Bräu vocalizes this as *yashhuruhū*, but I have been unable to find this imperfect form in the dictionaries. As will be seen, Bräu’s vocalizations are not always quite accurate.

³ Vocalized erroneously by Bräu as *bābika*.

Verse [a.] may be the first verse of the poem or, at least, of this section of the poem (see below), and [b.] obviously belongs directly before [c.]. This leaves us with the following order of verses:

1. God is great! The door of justice stands wide open
for people, and the door of injustice has been firmly closed.

*

2. When people saw how the Day of Kalb⁴ made it apparent⁵,
they said – and some sayings are truly conclusive⁶:

3. ‘They came together from all parts of God’s countries,
yes, the (enemy) people were together, but things become separated in this world⁷.’

4. One of them described their multitude:
‘Is this the Day of Bābak or is this a festival day?’

*

5. Friend of God, you left him (as) a lofty (tree)
by the side of the road, thrown aside, mounted on a pole

6. as if he were a roasted ram, the air were
the oven of the roaster and the pole were the skewer.

The poet ‘Amr ibn Hawbar is not mentioned in literary histories, and I have been unable to find other verses by him, except for 7 *ṭawīl* verses rhyming in *-aḥū* in Ibn al-Ġarrāḥ’s *‘Amr-Buch* (Bräu 1927: 66), and five *kāmil* verses rhyming in *-Vsī*, quoted in Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Tadhkira* (1992: 221), also on the authority of al-Muhadhhab (for these two poems, see Appendix). In *Tadhkira*, we are given some background information about the poet:

wa-anshadanī l-Muhadhhab al-Ḥāsī l-madhkūr li-‘Amr ibn Hawbar al-Kalbī
– wa-kāna min Kalb al-Yaman wa-kāna min Ma‘rāthā l-barīdiya min ‘amal
al-Ma‘arra – fī ba‘ḍ banī Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Alī al-Hāshimī wa-qad qabbala yadahu
wa-sa’ alahu ḥāḡatan fa-mana‘ahu īyāhā.

This passage identifies him as a Southern Arab from ‘postal Ma‘rāthā’⁸ and enables us to date him approximately. Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Alī was a companion (*ṣāḥib*) of the Caliph al-Muhtadī (d. 256/870)⁹, which would date ‘Amr roughly to the latter half of the 9th cen-

⁴ I have been unable to identify this Battle Day. As far as I know, none of the battles against Bābak was called *Yawm al-Kalb*.

⁵ Or: ‘rendered him infamous’.

⁶ *Tanfīd* is not found in the dictionaries (e.g. *Lisān al-‘Arab*, *Tāǧ al-‘Arūs*; R. Dozy (1881) gives *naffada l-ḥisāb* ‘détailler un compte’) but I take it to stand for *naffadha*.

⁷ For ‘*abādīd*, cf. Muslim ibn al-Walīd, *Dīwān* (1970) 20:84: *shattā ‘abādīdī*; al-Akḥṭal, *Dīwān* (s.a.: 100, verse 34): *shattā ‘abādīdū*; and Dhū’r-Rumma, *Dīwān* (1995) 17:2: *ṭiyāun ‘abādīdū*.

⁸ For Ma‘rāthā, see Yāqūt 1957, V: 154.

⁹ See, e.g., Ibn Ḥazm, *Ġamharat ansāb al-‘Arab* (s.a.: 22); *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, XXXVI, (Waines 1992: 93–94, 180); d. 262/876; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūǧ adh-dhahab* (1966–79: §§ 3132–3139). Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi’l-wafayāt*, XVI (1982: 265) gives 202 as his year of death, but this is obviously wrong, as Ṣāliḥ was a great-grandson of the Caliph al-Manṣūr.

tury or the early 10th century, though *ba‘d banī Šāliḥ* is naturally ambiguous and may equally well mean ‘a son of Š.’ or ‘a descendant of Š.’ The date of Ibn al-Ġarrāḥ (d. 296/908) gives us a *terminus ante quem*, and as in this work, which is arranged partially in chronological order,¹⁰ ‘Amr ibn Hawbar is given as the penultimate poet (no. 203), we shall not be much mistaken if we date him to the final decades of the third/ninth century.

As al-Muhadhdhab seems to have transmitted local traditions (the poets from whom he transmits are all from the same areas), it seems that ‘Amr was a local poet, which also explains why he did not find his way into more illustrious collections.

The crucifixion piece brings Ullmann no. 4 (esp. verses 8–11) directly to mind, a poem usually attributed to Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī,¹¹ although it has been attributed to others, too (parallels in **bold face**):

8. *mā kāna aḥsana qawla n-nāsi yawma'idhin /*
a-yawmu Bābaka hādhā am huwa l-‘idū //
 9. *ṣayyarta ḡuththatahū ḡīdan li-bāsiqatin /*
ḡardā'a wa'r-ra'su minhu mā lahū ḡīdū //
 10. *fa-āda tal‘abu hūḡu l-‘aṣīfati bihī /*
‘alā t-ṭariqi ṣalīban ṭirfuhū ‘ūdū //
 11. ***ka'annahū shilwu kabshin wa'l-hawā'u lahū /***
tannūru shāwiyatin wa'l-ḡidh‘u saffūdū //

This poem was written about the fall of Bābak in 222/837. The crucifixion of Bābak ‘muss eine Sensation gewesen sein’ (Ullmann 1995: 32; but for another possible explanation, see below, note 13), and there are at least six pieces about the event.¹² The last verse of the poem, which is identical with the sixth – and possibly last – verse of the poem of ‘Amr, circulated widely in literary works (see Ullmann 1995: 32–33).

If the scant biographical data about ‘Amr are correct, his poem was probably not written about the same event.¹³ Ibn al-‘Adīm’s informant does not seem to have known the details concerning the poem (*fī khalīfati ‘aṣrihi* – but who?) and as the reference to

¹⁰ See Bräu 1927: 19.

¹¹ Ibrāhīm had himself used parts of a verse by Muslim ibn al-Walīd, see Ullmann 1995: 35.

¹² The execution of Bābak also left inefaceable traces in place names; even a century later, there was still a place of execution called *Khashabat Bābak* (Waines 1992: 12, note 39).

¹³ Theoretically this would not be excluded, as his writing poems about Šāliḥ’s sons does not necessarily imply that they were written after Šāliḥ’s death, and if Šāliḥ was a companion of al-Muhtadī in his old days, ‘Amr could already have written in 222/837. Still, this would require more than a modicum of straining the evidence. – The question of the occasion of the poem leads to another interesting though very speculative point, a mere mental crossword. As can be seen from the references in Ullmann (1995: 32–33), usually only the last verse of the poem of Ibrāhīm is quoted in the sources, and that with differing attributions (to which we may now add ‘Amr ibn Hawbar). This and the large number of poems celebrating the crucifixion of Bābak could be explained by assuming that the poems were composed by order of the Caliph, and that the image of the crucified Bābak (last verse) was given to several poets for them to work on. This kind of procedure was by no means unknown: it occurs often in *K. al-Aghānī*, and it could be compared to the very similar case of poems celebrating the defeat of Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab (see Hämeen-Anttila 1993, especially note 11).

Yawm al-Kalb remains obscure, there is no point in speculating on the event concerned (although see also below).

Now, to the poem itself. As is made explicit by Ibn al-‘Adīm, his informant had recited a longer poem, of which the three verses quoted by Ibn al-‘Adīm are but a selection. The first verse of the fragment was probably also the first verse of the poem, as the habit of anthologists was often to give the first verse as a kind of identification tag for the poem. It would also be a suitable beginning for a poem celebrating the putting down of some rebellion by the Caliph. The rebel was obviously not identified in the fragment transmitted by al-Muhadhdhab, as Ibn al-‘Adīm could not name him.

The poem was probably composed for a ceremonial occasion, intended to be recited in the presence of the Caliph after the execution. Its first verse is grandiose, but also very impressive so that it is a pity that we do not have the whole poem, which might well have been worth reading in its totality.

The poem gains some new light when we compare it to another poem by ‘Amr ibn Hawbar, his *ghazal* in *-aḥū* (see Appendix). A comparison of this poem with Dhū’r-Rumma no. 10 shows that the *ghazal* of ‘Amr is more or less a pastiche of the poem by the famous Bedouin poet. Knowing Dhū’r-Rumma’s fame, it is hard to believe that ‘Amr could have plagiarized his poem and relied on no one being able to discover this plagiarism. It is more probable that the pastiche was done openly, as an intellectual game of composing a new poem from the materials of an older one, an exercise which is well attested in later periods.¹⁴

If this is the case with the *ghazal*, we are entitled to ask whether the crucifixion poem was also written from the materials of the poem by Ibrāhīm. As we have only two fragments of the poem by ‘Amr, the question is naturally impossible to answer definitely, but it does give us sufficient reason to ask the concomitant question of whether the poem by Ibrāhīm is complete or not. Ullmann (1995: 35–36) argues that it is, pointing to the careful composition of the fragment. On the other hand, we may now note that three out of the six preserved verses of ‘Amr are more or less constructed from the materials in Ibrāhīm’s poem, and if ‘Amr had composed this poem in the same way as he had done with his *ghazal*, one could argue that the poem by Ibrāhīm was originally longer and contained elements found in the preserved verses of ‘Amr. Naturally, this does not need to be the case: that ‘Amr wrote one poem as a pastiche does not necessary mean that he did so with the other, too, but this is a possibility worth considering. In that case, the question as to the occasion the poem was written for, should be withdrawn; there was probably no specific occasion for its writing, and the ceremonial features of the poem are but a reminiscence of the original.

One final point. As Ibn al-‘Adīm does not refer by any word to any other possible attribution of the poem or to any literary borrowing/plagiarism (*sariqa*), we may safely assume that he did not know that the last verse was a favourite of other *literati*. If this is so, his decision to select just these two verses (in addition to the first verse) from among

¹⁴ This is to be differentiated from the more subtle use of intertextual echoes which have recently been studied, e.g., by Bauer (1993).

others, is very revealing. They – or more probably the last one; the other was probably given only for the context – appealed to him directly, without his having to find recourse to manuals of poetics. The last verse with its tri-membered metaphor taken, in a rather macabre fashion, from the sphere of the kitchen (*shilw* – *tannūr* – *saffūd* = the executed criminal – weather – pole), simply appealed to his taste, as it had already appealed to others before him. Ibn al-‘Adīm was prepared to quote the verses from an obscure local poet because of their inherent aesthetic value.

APPENDIX: The other poems by ‘Amr ibn Hawbar al-Kalbī

I. *Hiğā’* of ‘*ba ‘d banī Šālīḥ ibn ‘Alī al-Hāshimī*’:

1. *lā darra darru zamānika l-mutanakkisī /
al-ğā‘ili l-adhnāba fawqa l-ar’ usī //*
2. *mā anta illā naqmatun fī na‘matin /
aw ašlu shawkin fī ḥadīqati narğisī //*
3. *yā qublata dhahabat diyā‘an fī yadin /
qadhafa l-ilāhu banānahā bi’ n-niqrisī //*
4. *min surri ‘unşuri Hāshimin ābā’ uhū /
wa-ğudūduhū wa-ka’annahū min Qubrusī //*
5. *yā Rabbi inna ghinā l-la’imi yasū’ unī /
fa-nqul ghināhu ilā l-ğawādi l-muflisī //*

1. May this topsy-turvy time of ours not thrive,
which sets the tails above the heads!
2. You are nothing but a misfortune in the middle of happiness
or a thorny root in a garden full of narcissi.
3. That kiss, how it became wasted upon a hand
the fingertips of which God has cursed with gout!
4. His fathers and grandfathers are from Hāshim’s navel string¹⁵:
he might as well be from Cyprus.
5. O Lord, it hurts me to see a base man rich:
take his riches away and give them to somebody penniless but magnanimous!

¹⁵ Being the part that is cut off from the new-born child and thrown away.

II. Ghazal (words paralleled by Dhū'r-Rumma no. 10¹⁶ in **bold face**):

1. *a-lā man li-qalbin lā yazālu ka'annahū /
falūwatu¹⁷ khaylin tastadīru wa-**tarmaḥū** //*
2. *bihī min baqāyā ḥubbi Ğumlin ḥazāzatun¹⁸ /
takādu idhā lam **yusfaḥ-i l-‘abru tadhbaḥū** //*
3. *tudhakkirunī Ğumlan ‘alā n-na’yi bānatun /
bi-kulli khalīḡin taḥtahā **yatabaṭṭaḥū** //*
4. *idhā ḥarrakathā r-rīḥu lānat qanātuhā /
wa-zalla a‘ālī ghuṣnihā **yataragḡaḥū**¹⁹ //*
5. *‘alayki **salāmu** llāhi yā bānu kullamā /
tagħannā ‘alā s-sidri **l-ḥamāmu l-muwashshaḥū** //*
6. *salāmu ḥabībin law takhallā tarīquhū /
ilayki²⁰ la-**ḡābat** naḥwaki **l-bīda**²¹ **ṣaydaḥū** //*
7. *wa-lākin kafā bi'l-‘udhri annī mukabbalun /
bi-sammin²² sarā ‘ankum yanāmu wa-**yuḡraḥū** //*

1. Oh, who could help a heart which goes on,
like a filly, galloping around, turning here and there?
2. There is still an aching remnant of love for Ğuml in my heart,
which nearly kills me when my tears do not flow.
3. Every willow growing by the side of a flowing brook
reminds me of my far-away Ğuml.
4. When the wind touches it, its supple stem bends
and its leaves keep trembling on the boughs.
5. Be greeted in the name of God, you willow,
whenever collared pigeons coo on the lotus tree,
6. be greeted by a lover whom – if he could but have his way –
a loudly braying camel²³ would carry through the wilderness toward you.
7. But it is a sufficient excuse that I am shackled
by your poison which caught me in my sleep and wounded me.

¹⁶ In Ibn Dā'ūd al-İsfahānī's *Kitāb az-Zahrah* (1932: 301–302) there is a four-verse fragment by Dhū'r-Rumma, which prefixes the following verse to 10:1+3–4: *a-min ḥadhari l-ḥiḡrāni qalbuka yaḡmaḥū / ka-anna fulūwan bayna ḥiḡnayka yarmaḥū*; the similarities of this verse with 'Amr's first verse are obvious. The collection of Ibn Dā'ūd is approximately contemporaneous with 'Amr ibn Hawbar and may well represent the form in which he knew Dhū'r-Rumma's poem.

¹⁷ Vocalized by Bräu as *fulūwatu*.

¹⁸ It might be possible to read instead *ḥarāratu*, which would be paralleled by *al-ḥarr* in 10:42 and 10:59.

¹⁹ The text of Bräu reads: 'uṣnihā (error) *yatazaḥḥaḥū*.

²⁰ Vocalized by Bräu as *ilayka*.

²¹ Vocalized by Bräu as *l-bīdu*.

²² The manuscript reads (according to Bräu): B'SM.

²³ This could also be taken as the name of the camel, Ṣaydaḥ (see note 26).

Lexical parallels in Dhū'r-Rumma no. 10:²⁴

- v. 1: < 10:39 (*yarmaḥū*).
 v. 2: < 10:3 (*taṣfaḥū*); 10:4 ('*abratun kādat... tadhbaḥū*).
 v. 3: < 10:1 ('*alā n-na'yī*); 10:2 (*mutabaṭṭiḥū*); 10:19 (*l-bāni*); 10:33 (*yatabaṭṭaḥū*).
 v. 4: < 10:43 (*yataragḡaḥū*).²⁵
 v. 5: < 10:1 (*salāmun 'alaykumā*); 10:35 (*wa'l-ḥamāmu l-muwashshaḥū*).
 v. 6: < 10:40 (*baydā'a*); 10:46 (*Ṣaydaḥū*)²⁶; 10:54 (*yaḡūbu*).
 v. 7: < 10:8 (*taḡraḥū*).

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²⁴ I have not included parallels which seem to be quite accidental (e.g. v. 1 *lā yazālu* = Dhū'r-Rumma 10:2 *lā zāla*; v. 5 *taghannā* = Dhū'r-Rumma 10:51 *taghannaytu*).

²⁵ This seems to be the correct reading (for Bräu's *yatazahḥaḥū*). In 10:14 we have *tazahḥaḥū*, which would be closer to Bräu's text.

²⁶ The name of the she-camel of Dhū'r-Rumma, mentioned also in 21:25; 42:4; 57:54.

