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PAGNINI, Anna — *Matal e verso a confronto. Una questione di poetica araba classica alla luce di un'analisi paremiologica.* (Quaderni di Semitistica 20). Dipartimento di Linguistica, Università di Firenze, Firenze 1998. (24 cm, VII, 329). ISBN? L. 70.000.

This book deals with the comparison of early Arabic *mathal* (Arabic for 'proverb' and 'proverbial expressions') and early Arabic verse. The first part is devoted to definitions. The Arabic *mathal* may differ from our proverb. The characteristics of proverbs are investigated, as is why they are so representative to be included in verses. Opinions on proverbs by Ancient Arab critics are quoted in order to individuate the principal elements of the definition of *mathal* (Part I, 2.1). For instance, there is a classical definition by al-Nazzam (d. 845) who defines the *mathal* as containing brevity of formulation, concision, to-the-pointness and well-chosen comparison; other theoreticians claim that there are also incorrect *amthal*, i.e. when a verb is omitted or a word changed or expression modified. The wordings of the *mathal* may very well have aesthetic values, because of the relation between the idea and the efficiency of its expression. She quotes many other medieval definitions, such as those mentioned by Ibn Rashiq (d. 1063), for example, "They said: it was called *mathal* because it is always a sign (*māthil*) for the mind of somebody who is consoled by it and counselled, admonished and commanded, and the sign is in front of somebody because they say: 'Ruins that stand before him (*ṭalal māthil*)', i.e. towering up before him."

Then, proverb-like verses are mentioned from classical sources, especially in view of the closure of the verse line. The closure of the verse is seen as one of the characteristics of Arabic poetry. There has also been a debate among orientalists on the possible coherence of a whole *qaṣīda* and the molecular structure of the lines. The problem of the closure of the verse should perhaps be placed in the context of oral production as exemplified in *The Oral Tradition of Classical*

*Arabic Poetry* by Zwettler (1978). Closure is also dealt with by the Ancient Arab literary critics, who sometimes consider *enjambement* as a stylistic effect. According to Blachère, Zwettler and Bencheikh, enjambement developed more in later poetry than in pre-Islamic.

Subsequently, Part I Chapter 3 presents some medieval testimonies [that critics considered *mathal* and verse in the same perspective. The verse is quoted for one of the following reasons: obscure and rare words (*gharīb*); the same concept; the same image; the verse contains the *mathal* itself. One of the examples of classical authors who combine proverbs and verses is al-Jahiz (d. 868) in his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* and al-Askari in his *Dīwān al-Maʿānī* (d. 1005). There is also an author who brings back all the *amthal* in *Kalīla wa-Dimna* (translated into Arabic in the 8th century) to Arabic origin borrowed from poetry. The *mathal* when quoted confers elegance to prose and gives solidity to poetry, according to Zamakhshari (d. 1144). After confronting *mathal* and verse one can conclude that the well-known description of the Arabic verse as single unity and the autonomy of the verse has been reconfirmed. This study also discloses that the closure of the verse belongs to the essential characteristics of Ancient Arabic poetry, which you have to know in order to grasp its particular aesthetics. *Amthāl* found in poetry are, for instance, famous lines by Imruʿul-Qays (d. 540; “God made successful the one who asked him, and doing good is the best luggage for a man”) and by al-Nabighah (d. 604; “There is no way for a man besides God”). Famous is the anonymous proverbial verse-ending that goes *Ayyu l-rijāli al-mudhahhab?* (see p. 44, note 116, 117: “Which man is pure, i.e. without sin?”), which can be inserted after several verse beginnings. Critics such as Thaʿlab (d. 904) are interested in perfect half-verses, which can be quoted independently. Other poetry verses such as by al-Mutanabbi (d. 965) and Abuʿl-ʿAtāhiyah (d. 825) were proverbial already in medieval times.

The second introductory part is devoted to the direct analysis of the material. Pagnini goes into the question which corpus she is going to use for her research. Her choice falls on the famous *Amthal* by al-Maydani. Although Maydani died in 1124, his material is nevertheless representative of pre-Islamic times. Maydani used more than 50 reliable collections to make his collection representative (it comprises nearly 5,000 proverbs). Maydani’s alphabetical rendering has the advantage that you can find all the proverbs starting with ‘man’ (“who”) of the type “who is X=Y” under the letter *mim*; and under *lam* you can find the type of proverbs with the prefix ‘la-’ followed by the energetic verbal forms.

In the next passage the focus is on the formal description of the *mathal* (Part 2, Chapter 3.) by means of the distinction of the different structures such as *tajmīs* (paronomasia), rhyme, alliteration and *izdiwaj* (‘repetition of certain morphological schemes’), and structures of proverbs earlier identified by Dundes such as equational proverbs (“Time is money”), coordinate proverbs (“Laugh and grow fat”) and oppositional proverbs (“One swallow does not make a summer”).

Pagnini then comes up with her own Arabic examples of basic structures of proverbs and expressions: e.g. “War is deceit” (X=Y); “Advice makes him fall into suspicion” (X makes Y); “Do what is just from this moment on” (do X); “A lousy thirst” (X); “The vanity of a singer and the resourcefulness of an heretic” (X and Y); “Few water from a rich source” (X preposition Y); “A wolf, when alone, is a lion (X=Y, when Z). The last mentioned example belongs to

a series of cases, in which a condition (Z) is added. She gives an ample list of additional conditions A-I (such as condition, negation, time, ‘who’, ‘like’, doubling, etc.). In Chapter 4, she gives an ample set of examples, with an analysis of proverbs in the light of the interaction of the different structures. On pages 115-116, there are schemes showing the possibilities of XYZ in conjunction with A-I and the frequency of them. She also gives examples of binary structures in certain *amthāl*, such as “The good is habit and the bad is obstinacy”, “Many times the wise is rejected and the stupid listened to” (p. 127).

A special chapter is devoted to the interaction of the single structures, such as *Al-naḥs ‘azufun alufun* (“The soul is disinclined and passionate”), where there is an alliteration of the letter *f* enriched by the presence of the two fricative sibilants *s* and *z*; or the sentence *Bāla fādirun fa-bāla jafiru-hu* (“The wild goat pisses and his young pisses”), where there are several phonetic echoes, the repetition of the verb, and the opposition superior/inferior.

After the analysis of the *amthāl* comes the analysis of the verses (Chapter 5), and *amthāl* and verses are contrasted with each other. The corpus of verses is formed by 270 verses from the *Diwan al-Ḥamāsa*, a collection of early and pre-Islamic poetry by the poet Abu Tammam (d. 843). From this work, 234 verses are quoted from a single chapter, namely *Bab al-adab* (“Chapter of Good Manners”), while the other 37 belong to the first chapter on *Ḥamāsa* (“Bravery”). Both collections, the *Amthal* and the *Ḥamāsa*, refer to pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods and were very popular but were compiled afterwards. Pagnini’s way of analysing the verses is similar to her earlier analysis of the *amthal*. E.g. as an example of binary verse structure and repetition, she gives the following verse (my translation): “When they eat my flesh, I spare their flesh, and when they try to destroy my glory, I will build for them a glory.”<sup>6</sup>) The two hemistichs have a perfect binary structure: within each hemistich we have the opposition of a pair and the repetition of another, while the relation between the two hemistichs is synonymy. In another example we find the first hemistich with a verbal conjugated form in combination with a verbal accusative, the relation between the first and the second hemistich being confirmed by the repetition of the word *layth* (“lion”, not “wolf” as Pagnini translates it) in the expression “We walked like a lion who comes in the morning, but the lion was ferocious”.<sup>7</sup>) And to give a third example listed “X preposition Y when Z”: “In evil is salvation when doing good does not save you”.<sup>8</sup>) In this example, we find a pair of opposed words and a verbal substantive plus verbal conjugated form. In initial and final position we find the two opposites (evil/good) and in the central position the two appearances of the verb (name and verbal conjugated form). From this results a chiasmus. Pagnini also gives examples of binary verses in which the intention of the first hemistich is repeated in the second, e.g. “If I am small in the eyes of the vicious, I am great in the eyes of the good ones”.<sup>9</sup>) Sometimes the two segments of the

<sup>6</sup>) *Fa-in ya’kulu laḥmi, wafartu luḥūma-hum/ wa-in hadamu majdi, banaytu la-hum majda//.*

<sup>7</sup>) *Mashayna mishyata l-laythi/ ghada, wa-l-laythu ghadbānu//.* Pagnini translates: ‘Avanziamo come il lupo di mattina, il lupo affamato’= “The hungry wolf”.

<sup>8</sup>) *Wa-fi-l-sharri najātun hi/na la yunji-ka iḥsānu//.*

<sup>9</sup>) *Fa-in aku fi shirāri-kum qalīlan/fa-inni fi khiyāri-kumu kathīru//.*

binary phrase have a relation based on a particular remark being subsequently linked to a general remark, which is almost a proverb, e.g. "Recognize to your client his right: it is the noble man who recognizes the right of others".<sup>10)</sup> Some verses can be described in the same manner as the *amthāl* ("Do not do X, doubled") such as "Do not mix yourself in the affairs from which you are exempted/ and do not give advice except only to someone who will accept that advice".<sup>11)</sup>

As earlier, the types of verses are listed in a scheme (p. 154). The main text is followed by the corpus of *amthāl* and their translation (Appendix I); the corpus of verses and their translation (Appendix II); a survey of *amthāl* and verses in which the same proverbial expressions occur (Appendix III); and frequent word couples, sometimes two opposites, which are word groups that also crop up elsewhere (Appendix IV). The book ends with a bibliography and a summary in English.

On the whole, the book is an interesting contribution to the study of early Arabic literature and language: no-one has ever made such a detailed analysis of Ancient Arabic *amthāl* as proverbs. The formal characteristics which can be distinguished in the *mathal* indicate a general principle, namely that of repetition, especially in its binary function. This has a mechanism comparable with Greima's *question-réponse*, and Scheindlin's *anticipation-resolution* whose main tension is to give a completeness to the sentence and a sense of definite closure. We live in a time in which there is more and more interest in throwing light on the nature of the very formalistic characteristics of Semitic languages, such as Biblical Hebrew and Classical Arabic, which were more artificial constructions than living languages. Studying early Arabic verse and early Arabic *amthāl* may give us more insight into the archaic linguistic construction that literary Arabic was. Therefore, this study by Anna Pagnini should be welcomed amidst the other recent books on proverbs by Kassis<sup>12)</sup> and Sagiv/Landau<sup>13)</sup> and the book on Classical Arabic verse and metre by Frolov.<sup>14)</sup>

Amsterdam, December 2000

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~~CORRIENTE, F. — A dictionary of Andalusī Arabic (Handbuch der Orientalistik. 1. Abt., Der Nahe und der Mittlere Osten, ISSN 0169-9423; Bd. 29) Brill, Leiden, 1997. XXI, 623 p.; 25 cm. ISBN 90-04-09846-1.~~

~~This is the first ever comprehensive dictionary of Andalusian Arabic. It is rather surprising that until recently very little was known about Andalusian Arabic. The dictionaries and grammatical sketch of the Andalusian Arabic language and other literary documents of this vernacular, published earlier by Corriente, already showed us the richness of Andalusian~~

<sup>10)</sup> Wa-ʿrif li-jāri-ka ḥaqqā-hu/ wa-l-ḥaqqu yaʿrifu-hu ʿl-karīmu//.

<sup>11)</sup> lā taʿtarīḍ fi-l-amri tukfa shuʿuna-hu/ wa-la tansahna illa li-man huwa qabilu-h//.

<sup>12)</sup> Riad Aziz Kassis, *The book of Proverbs and Arabic proverbial works*, Leiden: Brill, 1999.

<sup>13)</sup> David Sagiv & and Jacob M. Landau, *Hebrew-Arabic Proverbs*, Tel-Aviv: Schocken Publishing House, 1998.

<sup>14)</sup> Dmitry Frolov, *Classical Arabic verse: history and theory of Arud*, Leiden: Brill, 2000.