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THE RAT AND THE SHIP'S CAPTAIN

A DIALOGUE-POEM (*MUḤĀWARA*) FROM THE GULF, WITH SOME COMMENTS ON THE
SOCIAL AND LITERARY-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE GENRE*

1. The Near Eastern debate poem

The debate- or dispute-poem is a genre of literature which was widespread throughout the ancient world[1]. A pair of combatants—sometimes human, but more often animals, related inanimate objects, abstract ideas, parts of the body, seasons, etc.—engage in a verbal duel in which each tries to demonstrate superiority over the other through a combination of argument and vituperation. Occasionally there are more than two protagonists (seasons of the year, colours), and sometimes the poet himself participates in the proceedings, setting the scene for the debate at the beginning of the poem and resolving it at the end (if its resolution is not already self-evident) by issuing a judgement in favour of one or other of the combatants, or by declaring a truce or a reconciliation. The poem may consist of a single speech by each combatant, or they may take turns.

In the literatures of the ancient and mediaeval Near East, numerous examples of debate poems occur in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hebrew, Syriac and mediaeval Arabic, covering a period of three thousand years from the second millenium BCE to the end of the first millenium AD. In Sumerian, for example, in which the oldest poems are found, there are disputes between the hoe and the plough, summer and winter, tree and reed, heron and turtle, and herdsman and farmer, to name just a few[2]. The Near Eastern examples of the genre have recently been the subject of a collection of articles edited by G. J. REININK and H. L. J. VANSTIPHOUT[3], the aim being to weigh the evidence as to whether the commonality of theme and structure on the one hand, against the diversity of linguistic

1   See W. BARTA 'Das Gespräch eines Mannes mit seinem Ba', Berlin 1969 (Ancient Egyptian); H. L. J. VANSTIPHOUT 'The Mesopotamian Debate Poems. A General Presentation (Part I) in *Acta Sumerologica* 12 (1990) pp. 271-318 (Sumerian and Akkadian); O. WIDDING & H. BEKKER-NIELSEN 'A Debate of the Body and Soul in Old Norse Literature' in *Mediaeval Studies* 21 (1959) pp. 272-289 (Old Norse); H. WALTHER 'Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters', Munich 1920 (mediaeval Latin); H. ETHE 'Über persische Tenzonen' in *Verhandlungen des 5. internationalen Orientalisten-Congresses*, Berlin 1882 pp. 48-76 (Persian); and more generally the bibliography in G. J. REININK and H. L. J. VANSTIPHOUT 'Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East', Louvain, 1991.

2   VANSTIPHOUT 1990 (n. 1) pp. 272 ff.

3   See n. 1.

expression on the other, are the result of a chain of transmission from one culture to a successor occupying the same geographical space, or whether polygenesis is a more likely explanation[4].

As far as Arabic is concerned, the discussion in REININK and VANSTIPHOUT's book focuses, perhaps inevitably, on the literature of Classical Arabic[5], although some late mediaeval and a few modern examples of debate poems are also mentioned in passing, there and elsewhere[6]. Poetic debates in Arabic in the sense meant here first appear relatively late: from the mid-10th century onwards, four centuries after the first recorded beginnings of Classical Arabic poetry. BROCK[7], however, notes that debate-poems in Syriac, the earliest examples of which date from the 4th century AD, continued to be a popular form of literature in Mesopotamia until as late as 9th century, two centuries after the Arab conquest: we have a manuscript of 'the vine and the cedar' written by one David bar Paulos during this period[8]. What may have been prose 'prototypes' of the genre occur at about the same time in Iraq in Arabic works by, or attributed to, al-Jāḥiẓ. *Pace* WAGNER, BROCK suggests that the Syriac poems may be the missing link which bridges the gap between the ancient Mesopotamian contest literature and the Arabic dispute poem. Certainly, the cultural milieu of a settled, semi-urban society, as well as the linguistic conditions in Iraq over a long period would have facilitated this kind of literary transfer. Aramaic/Syriac-Arabic bilingualism must have been widespread and have lasted for many centuries after the conquest—even now, in modern Iraq, it has not completely died out. Furthermore, the lack of any *literary* examples in Arabic before al-Jāḥiẓ does not imply

4   This is the position espoused by WAGNER with regard to the Arabic debate poem in 'Die arabische Rangstreitdichtung und ihre Einordnung in die allgemeine Literaturgeschichte' in *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Litteratur in Mainz. Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse*, Jahrgang 1962, Nr 8, Wiesbaden 1963.

5   See the four articles by MATTOCK, LEEMHUIS, HEINRICHS, and VAN GELDER in REININK and VANSTIPHOUT (n.1) pp. 135-211. See also G. J. VAN GELDER 'The Conceit of Pen and Sword: on an Arabic Literary Debate' in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32/2 (1987) pp. 329-360.

6   Examples from the 13th and 14th centuries are noted in WAGNER (n. 4) p. 449, 455: 'Damascus v. Cairo', 'Mecca v. Medina', 'Malaga v. Sale', 'apricot v. mulberry', 'sword v. lance', 'flowers v. rare plants', 'birds v. minerals'. Excerpts from some late 17th century Judaeo-Arabic vernacular examples attributed to the Jewish Yemeni poet Shalom Shibzi—'the bachelor v. the married man', 'tobacco v. coffee', 'coffee v. qat', 'San'aa v. Ta'iz' 'Aden v. Mocca'—are in W. BACHER 'Zur Rangstreit-Literatur: aus der arabischen Poesie der Juden Jemens' in *Melanges Hartwig Derenbourg*, Paris 1909, pp. 131-147. A few modern examples in Egyptian dialect were gathered by LITTMANN in Cairo in 1911-12 and published as 'Der Katzenmäusekrieg' in *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, Beiheft 75 (1950), Leipzig, pp. 241-259 ('the story of the cat and the mouse'), and 'Neuarabische Streitgedichte' in *Festschrift zur Feier des zweihundertjährigen Bestehens der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, II, 1951, pp. 36-66 ('the story of the cobbler and the Koran-teacher', 'the story of the railway-engine and the telegraph-wire and the rebukes they exchanged', and 'the story of the telephone and telegraph'). Two more modern Egyptian examples ('water-melon v. date', 'cream v. honey') can be found in U. BOURIANT 'Chansons populaires arabes en dialecte du Caire', Paris, Leroux, 1893, pp. 20-25, 159-160 (Arabic pagination) (reproduced in M. Q. AL-BAQLI 'Adab al-Darāwīsh', Cairo, 1970, pp. 200-207.)

7   S. BROCK 'The Dispute Poem: from Sumer to Syriac' in *Bayn al-Nahrayn* 7 No 28 (1979) pp. 417-426 (Arabic pagination).

8   BROCK (n. 7) p. 418. BROCK notes that as late as 1882 the genre was still popular enough among Christian communities for examples to be translated into modern Syriac.

that the genre may not have existed as an element in *popular* (oral) culture. Its long history shows the protean nature of the genre, and the multifarious functions it seems to have taken on at different times in different cultures—as a vehicle of popular wisdom, as a moralising or didactic instrument, as a species of religious dialectic—suggests that it may have oscillated between the sphere of 'low' (i.e. unrecorded) and 'high' (= i.e. literate and recorded) culture. Whilst we cannot of course *prove* the corollary of this, viz. that the debate-poem's disappearance from the literature of one culture and its reappearance in a later one is consistent with the hypothesis of an unbroken line of transmission, the opposite hypothesis, of widespread polygenesis, appears unnecessarily overstated, and seems to fly in the face of the non-literary evidence of centuries of smooth transition from culture to another in Mesopotamia and its dependent areas. We return to the linguistic situation in north-eastern Arabia/ southern Iraq, and the ancient and modern connections it may have had with the diffusion of the debate-poem in coastal Arabia, in section 3. below.

What of the modern period? So far, I have been unable to find any debate-poems written in Modern Standard Arabic, and there are only a few published examples in the vernaculars of the 'heartland' areas of the Arab world[9]. However, as was pointed out above, this does not necessarily mean that modern debate poems in dialect are rare there; it may simply reflect the widely-held belief that vernacular poetry is not—or was not until recently—worthy of publication or even serious study. Certainly, the debate-poem remains a living part of the dialectal poetic tradition in the more culturally conservative area of coastal Arabia. Here, in form and even social function, the debate-poem bears a strong resemblance to its ancient Mesopotamian forerunner. In two locally published *dīwān*s of vernacular poetry purchased recently in the Gulf, I found eleven examples of debate-poems by four Baḥraini poets and one Omani, all apparently composed between the 1930's and 1950's[10]. Among his Ḥaḍrami texts, gathered in the 40's, SERJEANT has four examples[11]. One example of the genre also crops up—unusually—in a recent collection of Sinai Bedouin poetry[12]. However, I have so far been unable to discover any vernacular examples from Iraq. This is surprising because the genre existed in all the predecessor languages of Mesopotamia and might have been expected to pass into the Iraqi vernaculars, either directly from Syriac or via Cl.A.; and as will be illustrated, Iraqi (in some cases specifically southern Iraqi) lexical and syntactic elements occur frequently in the language of the Baḥraini debate-poems which are not found in the composers' non-

9 See n. 6 for references.

10 Sheikh M. A. AL-NĀṢIRI (ed.), *Tanfīh al-Khawāṭir wa Salwat al-Qāṭin wa l-Musāfir*, 2nd edition, Bahrain 1972; S. M. AL-GHAYLĀNĪ, *Al-Adab ash-Shaʿbī fī Balad ash-Shirāʿ. Dīwān ash-Shāʿir Saʿīd ʿAbdullāh Walad Wazīr*, Cairo 1985. The 1st edition of AL-NĀṢIRI seems to have been published in 1955. We learn from AL-GHAYLĀNI's introduction that Walad Wazīr was born in the Omani port of Ṣūr in 1323/1905.

11 R. B. SERJEANT 'Prose and Poetry from Ḥaḍramawt', Taylor's Foreign Press, London, 1951. See poems No 1 ('grains and fruits'), No 5 ('tea and coffee'), No 23 (women's skin colours: 'the green and the white and the yellow'), No 31 ('the stove and the mosque-lamp').

12 'An Argument with a Broken Leg' in C. BAILEY 'Bedouin Poetry from Sinai and the Negev', Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, pp. 176-180, recorded in 1970.

poetic dialect. This point is taken up below, and suggests direct Iraqi influence, if not Iraqi origin for the poems. In the meantime, the search for modern Iraqi Arabic examples of the genre continues[13].

2. *Debate poems in the Gulf*

In the Gulf, the dispute genre is usually subdivided into *munāḏara*'debate' and *muḥāwara* 'dialogue'. In the poems I have examined, the former term denotes a debate between two non-human combatants, in which the poet acts as arbiter (as in many of the non-Arabic examples found in ancient Mesopotamia), and the latter a conversation between the poet himself or another rational being and some non-human interlocutor, animate or inanimate. In the *munāḏara*, the poet sets the (generally stylised) scene: he is drowsing in his bed, unable to sleep, when suddenly the two combatants appear before him and start to speak, appealing to him to listen and arbitrate. The argument, with charge and counter-charge then proceeds, and the poet finally concludes the dispute, either by awarding victory to one of the disputants, or by reconciling them. In poem 1 below, for example, oil is declared the victor over pearl-fishing, as of course it already observably was in reality, while in poem 3 the poet declares a draw and ends the poem with a section of eight lines headed *iṣ-ṣulḥ wa z-zawāj* 'truce and marriage'. The *muḥāwara* usually has only two participants, one of which is the poet (poems 9,10,11)[14]. There is no vaunting of merits, but rather an attempt to resolve a dispute through reason and negotiation (e.g. in poem 9: should the poet patch an old and much loved overcoat, or replace it with a new one?). The range of subjects of the debate-poems which occur in the two collections can be appreciated from their titles:

munāḏarāt

From Baḥrain:

1. *il-ghōṣ wa manābiʿ in-nifṭ* by ʿAṭīya b. ʿAlī[15]
'pearling and oil-wells' (131 lines)
2. *il-gahwa wa t-titin* by ʿAbdul-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥajj Rāshid
'coffee and tobacco' (85 lines)

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[13] Modern Iraqi examples in Neo-Aramaic certainly exist, e.g. 'the robber and the cherub' in F. A. PEN-NACCHIETTI 'Il ladrone e il cherubino: dramma liturgico cristiano orientale in siriaco e neoaramaico', Silvio Zamorani editore, Torino, 1993. The three versions of the poem he gives are all adapted translations from a Classical Syriac dialogue poem which is still in liturgcal use in Iraq (S. BROCK). YAURE gives an anonymous Christian neo-Aramaic example of the genre from Urmia, Kurdistan ('the tea-kettle and the boys'), published in a newspaper for American Aramaic-speaking émigrés, *Koḵba*, in November 1909 (L. YAURE 'A Poem in the Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Urmia', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 26 (1957), pp. 73-87.

[14] A poem similar to poem 10, but in the Syrian dialect, can be found in E. LITTMANN 'Neuarabische Volkspoesie' in *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse*, Band V Nr 3, Berlin 1902, pp. 70-74, with the title *quṣṣit il-barġūṯ* (translated on pp. 146-48), in the form of an argument between the poet and the flea.

[15] The text and an annotated translation of this long and interesting poem is in preparation for publication in the *Journal of Arabic Literature*.

3. *il-gahwa wa l-chāy* by ʿAbdullāh b. Ḥusayn al-Qārī
'coffee and tea' (66 lines)
4. *bēn il-alwān* by ʿAbdullāh b. Ḥusayn al-Qārī
'between the colours (of silk cloth)' (56 lines)
5. *ish-shitā wa ṣ-ṣēf* by Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Nāṣirī
'winter and summer' (153 lines)

From Oman:
6. *il-falaḥ wa t-tamr* by Saʿīd b. ʿAbdullāh Walad Wazīr
'the date-stone and the date' (52 lines)
7. *ish-shitā wa ṣ-ṣēf* by Saʿīd b. ʿAbdullāh Walad Wazīr
'winter and summer' (26 lines)

muḥāwarāt

From Baḥrain:
8. *fār wa nōkhadhā jālbūt* by ʿAṭīya b. ʿAlī
'a rat and a ship's captain' (37 lines)
9. *bisht maʿa ṣāhbah* by ʿAbdul-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥajj Rāshid
'a coat and its owner' (47 lines)
10. *baʿūḍa wa l-muʾallif* by Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Nāṣirī
'a mosquito and the writer' (83 lines)

From Oman:
11. *bēn ash-shāʿir wa l-masjid il-kibīr fī ṣūr* by Saʿīd b. ʿAbdullāh Walad Wazīr
'between the poet and the large mosque in Ṣūr' (164 lines)

It is obvious from their titles that these poems are the product of a *ḥaḍar* environment. Like the debate-poems of ancient Mesopotamia, they deal, often in whimsical fashion, with the everyday concerns of the farmer, the tradesman, the sea-farer and the settled population generally. In subject-matter and tone, they are as far removed as it is possible to be from the formalised Bedouin vernacular genres of narrative, panegyric, descriptive and lyric poetry which still thrive in neighbouring central Arabia[16]. Though the primary objective is to entertain, there is often a hidden, sometimes an overt moral. Poem 10, a debate between the poet and a mosquito, ends with this couplet:

u wāḍiḥ hal-mathal ḥallī yiḍribūnah	'There's a saying often quoted, the truth of which is plain,
rabbik bil-ʿaṣa ma yiṣīb madyūnah	God chastises the guilty but not with stick or cane,
yibʿath lah ʾadhall makhlūq bi ʿyūnah	He sends them a creature that's beneath their disdain,
bih ydhallilah yʿarrifah ib miqdārah	To abase them and teach them their pride's all in vain'

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16 See, e.g., S. A. ṢOWAYĀN 'Nabaṭī Poetry: the Oral Poetry of Arabia', Berkeley, University of California Press 1985, H. PALVA 'Artistic Colloquial Arabic: Traditional Narratives and Poems from al-Balqā' (Jordan)', *Studia Orientalia* 69, Helsinki 1992, P. M. KURPERSHOEK 'Oral Poetry and Narratives from Central Arabia, I: The Poetry of ad-Dindān, a Bedouin Bard in Southern Najd', Leiden, Brill, 1994.

There is often an historical *occasio litigandi* for the dispute. Poem 1, between oil-wells and the pearling industry, was written in 1353/1935, at a time of economic and social upheaval in Baḥrain—three years after the discovery of oil and the influx of American Christians, and five years after the pearl-industry had begun to decline as a result of the discovery in Japan of a method for culturing pearls artificially. Both these events provide ammunition for the protagonists in the debate. This poem is the perfect example of the use of the genre to provide an extended and amusing commentary on contemporary social change. In poem 5, the debate between winter and summer, we learn from a brief introduction that the spur to composition was the unusually hot summer weather of 1370/1950, and the privations which the population had had to endure without benefit of air-conditioning. On the other hand, Poem 6, the debate between the date-stone and the date, and composed in 1357/1938, was apparently occasioned by a trivial personal incident. The poet, who earned his living as a trader, was accused by his fellow merchants travelling on an Omani cargo vessel of wasting money in Basra by buying date-stones (a form of animal fodder) instead of dates. When the boat arrived back in Muscat, the other merchants discovered that the price of animal fodder had risen, while the price of dates had dropped: while they made a loss, the poet made a profit, occasioning his poem. But, as in poem 10, the poet concludes the protagonists' vaunting of merits and the reciprocal denigration with a perorartion of his own on a moral theme, this time the vanity of material things: 'Khosraw and all his towering palaces were destroyed, Death is a certainty and all life is in vain, Good works are all that will count in the grave, Wealth and nobility of birth are worthless in the hereafter', etc.' Poem 11 is in the form of a conversation between the poet and the main mosque in his home-town of Sur. The mosque describes the extensive repair-work it needs and complains bitterly about the stinginess of the worshippers for not contributing.

Other poems, such as No 2 and 3, have no real event or situation as their point of departure, but are rather vehicles for the poet's ingenuity, whereby the antithetical qualities of humdrum objects and activities are humorously rehearsed. But even here there is usually a discernible social, even political, context. The crudely vituperative element—in poem 3, for example, coffee addresses tea as *bōl il-'ajājīl wa g̲h̲asāl il-fanājīl* 'calves' piss and washing-up water'—is often used to allude to the (from the local listener's standpoint) negative connotations of the 'outsider' communities from which the combatants originate, or the negative qualities which these communities and the objects representing them superficially share. Unlike inner Arabia, the Gulf is a cultural and ethnic melting pot which has always had strong links with communities outside. So, in poems 2 and 3, tobacco (masculine gender in Arabic), which is grown in Oman, is described by coffee as 'an upstart Omani vagrant' (*'umānī tāyih mit'addī aṭwārah*); tea (masc.), which is not grown in Arabia, is 'son of the Persians, an unwelcome guest from Iran' (*ibn il-'a'ājim hallī lifā min īrān*) whose Persian speech is mockingly imitated; while coffee (fem.), presumably because of its colour when roasted, is dismissed by tea as 'a black female slave who has not been freed' (*yā sōda, 'abdah mintī ma'tūga*), and by tobacco as 'a Singapore slut and a Malabar tart' (*bint is-sing̲h̲afūra wa gaḥbat in-nībār*).

These slanderous epithets all allude to the social and economic scene of the Gulf of fifty or more years ago. Until the change of regime in Oman in 1970, there were indeed many poor Omanis employed as itinerant labourers in Baḥrain and the rest of the northern Gulf[17]. Traditionally, too, despite strong and long-standing influences from across the Gulf, there has never been much love lost between the Baḥrainis and the Persians, whose government maintained a territorial claim on Baḥrain until 1971: hence the appropriacy of the 'unwelcome guest' jibe aimed at tea. The labelling of coffee as a 'black slave' plays on the prejudice about skin-colour which Baḥrainis openly displayed until a few years ago, when it was common to refuse a bride as unsuitable simply on the grounds that she was a few shades too dark. The reference to prostitutes from Malabar and Singapore, whose services Baḥrain's seafaring community would no doubt have enjoyed, is appropriate because coffee beans were imported from the Malabar coast, and cardomom pods, whose crushed seeds (*ḥabb il-ḥēl*) are used to flavour coffee in the Gulf, were brought from S.E. Asia.

3. The Mesopotamian connection

The Baḥraini poems, our main focus in the rest of this paper, were all composed by local Shī'īs[18]. This is clear from the poets' names and the places from which they come (stated in the introduction to each poem). Their Shī'ism is also evident in routine references to the Prophet's cousin 'Alī in the religious *envois* which conclude some of the poems. However, the language in which they are written seems to be a dialectal koinè not identifiable with any actual Baḥraini dialect[19]. While this koinè contains many words which would be recognised by all likely to hear or read the poems as 'common-core' Baḥraini, it avoids high-frequency morphological and lexical features associated with the Baḥraini Shī'a and substitutes ones which are used by the Baḥraini Sunnīs and other Gulf Arabs more generally[20]. Moreover, all the poems show strong Muslim Iraqi

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17 There seems to be a double-entendre here: in the context, *mit'addi aṭwārah* can be interpreted as meaning 'vaunting himself above his station' or 'going outside his (normal) (sc. geographical) limits', i.e. Oman.

18 The Baḥraini Sunnīs, who have their own vernacular poetic tradition, dominated by 'Abdurraḥmān al-Rafī', do not seem to compose this kind of poetry.

19 Sunnī-Shī'ī differences, and differences within the Shī'ī communities of Baḥrain are described in, *inter alia*, C. D. HOLES 'Baḥraini dialect: Sectarian Differences and the Sedentary/ Nomadic Split' in *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 10 (1983) pp. 7-38, and C. D. HOLES 'Baḥraini Dialects: Sectarian differences exemplified through texts' in *Zeitschrift fur arabische Linguistik* 13 (1984) pp. 27-67.

20 Three morphological examples: (i) the 2nd f. sing. suffix -*sh*, (the Sunnīs and the rest of the northern Gulf, as well as southern Iraq, has -*ch*); (ii) the 2nd person independent pronouns *intīn* and *intūn* (the Sunnīs and the rest of the Gulf have *intī* and *intū*; (iii) 2nd f.sing. and com. pl. perfect tense forms of the *katabtīn* and *katabtūn* type (instead of *kitabtī, kitabtū* which are similarly general in the Gulf outside the Baḥraini Shī'ī community). The first of these features is very ancient: it is found in most sedentary Arabic-speaking communities in southern Arabia, as well as in the Modern South Arabian languages and the languages of Ethiopia (for an historical explanation of its occurrence in Shī'ī Baḥraini, see C. D. HOLES '*Kashkasha* and the fronting and affrication of the velar stops revisited: a contribution to the historical phonology of the peninsular Arabian dialects' in A. KAYE (ed.) 'Semitic Studies in Honor of Wolf Leslau', 1991, Vol. I pp. 652-678); some of the other features have parallels in Iraqi Aramaic dialects of the second half of the first millenium (G. KHAN, personal communication).

dialectal influence, lexically, morphologically and syntactically[21].

The avoidance of specifically local Shīʿī linguistic forms probably stems from a feeling that they are stigmatised by non-Shīʿīs[22], and would be inappropriate in an artistic work; the Iraqi elements undoubtedly reflect the close connections of the Baḥraini Shīʿa (the so-called *Baḥārna*) with southern Iraq. Until the tightening of international borders in recent decades, the Shīʿa of southern Iraq, Khūzistān, Ḥasa and Baḥrain formed a religio-cultural community to which the theoretical borders drawn on maps had little practical relevance[23]. I was told by *Baḥārna* in the 1970's that, during the early part of this century, when the *Baḥārna* suffered much at the hands of the tribal henchmen of the ruling *Āl-Khalīfa*, there was a common saying *li-mḥammara mawjūda* 'Muḥammara is (still) there!' Al-Muḥammara is the Arabic name for the city of Khorramshahr a few miles to the south-east of Basra on the Iranian side of the Shaṭṭ al-ʿArab. Its population is entirely Shīʿī and much of it is Arabic-speaking. The *Baḥārna* always felt they could escape to this bolt-hole whenever life got too oppressive under the *Āl-Khalīfa*. Many stayed, with the result that there is still a large *Baḥārna* colony living there. The *Baḥārna* also regularly visit the Shīʿī shrines at Najaf and Kerbela on pilgrimage (termed *ziyāra* 'visit'). These cities are not just the Shīʿī religious centres from which, year-in, year-out, the *Baḥārna* invite professional religious reciters (*qurrāʾ*) to their 'funeral houses' (*mawātim*) in Baḥrain for the ʿĀshūrāʾ commemorations of al-Ḥusayn's death, but they are also the regional cultural and literary capitals of Gulf Shīʿism. The Iraqi influence on the contemporary poetic koinè of the *Baḥārna* poets, and its absence from their everyday speech, is probably to be explained by this long-standing religio-cultural nexus. It is noticeable that similar debate-poems from neigh-

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21   Most if not all of these Muslim Iraqi features are absent from normal Baḥraini Shīʿī speech. Three typical examples are *bāwaʿ* 'he saw'; the use of *fadd* as an indefinite article in phrases such as *fadd lēla* 'one night'; and the *-nn-* element infixed between finite imperfect verbs and pronoun enclitics, as in *azawwijannich* 'I marry you'. The *-nn-* in the last example is a specifically southern Iraqi feature (B. INGHAM 'Urban and Rural Arabic in Khuzistan' *BSOAS* 36 (1973) p. 548) not found in other parts of Iraq. An *-nn-* infix does occur in Oman and in all Baḥraini Shīʿī dialects, but separates the active participle from an object pronoun suffix. *-nn-* with the suffixed imperfect does not occur in non-poetic dialectal speech in Baḥrain, but does (sporadically) in Oman. See the language notes to the poem for other Iraqi influences.

22   Individual Shīʿīs often deny that they ever use certain linguistic forms (see n. 20) which observation shows are typically Shīʿī; tape-recordings of these informants' own unguarded speech show that they use these forms all the time, at least with co-religionists! This level of inconsistency between the way informants claim to speak and the way they actually do is not found to anything like the same degree among the Sunnīs with regard to *their* stereotypical forms. It indicates a degree of insecurity on the part of the Shi'a which stems from an awareness that Shīʿī speech forms are stigmatised when used outside a wholly Shīʿī domestic environment. The Shīʿa are sometimes referred to by Sunnīs as *awlād al-ʿafar* 'The people who say *ʿafar* (= 'perhaps, I think')'. This mocks the Shīʿī pronunciation of *th* as *f*, and in a word which no other Baḥrainis outside their community uses anyway (but which occurs in Iraq as *athāri*).

23   Al-Nāṣirī's collection contains 47 poems in all, divided into 14 genres. All the poems appear to be by Shīʿīs: about half are attributed to Baḥrainis, and the rest (though none of the *munāḍarāt* / *muḥāwarāt*) to poets from Shīʿī towns in southern Iraq or Khūzistān (Khorramshahr, Bahmānshahr, al-Qaṣaba and Kerbela), with one by the Shīʿī doyen of Iraqi popular verse, ʿAbbūd al-Karkhī of Baghdad. There is one poem from the town of al-Qaṭīf in the Ḥasa province of eastern Saudi Arabia, another major centre of Shīʿī population.

bouring Oman, which are not the work of Shīʿa, show no Iraqi influence.

It would seem, then, that the *munāḍara / muḥāwara* composed in the Gulf in the middle part of this century was a vernacular poetic genre typical of settled coastal populations, rather than of the Bedouin of inner Arabia. 'Settled population' in the context of Baḥraini social history means the *Baḥārna*. Though of course they are 'settled' in a modern socio-economic sense, the Baḥraini Sunnīs (the so-called *ʿArab*) have only been in Baḥrain for about 200 years—a short period in our overall timescale. Emotionally, and to some degree objectively, their culture, and certainly their dialect, still harks back to their Bedouin homeland in Najd. The origins of the *Baḥārna*, the topic to which we now turn, are less clear, but may have relevance to the question of the diffusion of the debate-poem in the Gulf area.

On the basis of a review of the Arabic sources, AL-TĀJIR suggests the *Baḥārna* emerged from a melting pot of diverse tribal elements which originated in the Tihāmah and eastern Arabia[24], dismissing the idea, rehearsed by SERJEANT[25] that the *Baḥārna* 'are descended from the original population of Christians (Aramaeans?), Jews and Majūs inhabiting the island and cultivated coastal provinces of eastern Arabia at the time of the Arab conquest'. Yet he offers no alternative suggestion as to who might have inhabited Baḥrain in the centuries immediately before the Islamic conquests, what language(s) they might have used, and with whom outside Baḥrain they might have had cultural links. POTTS' recent study of the Arabian Gulf in antiquity[26] has given some tentative answers to these questions. Bringing together recent archaeological, epigraphic and toponymic evidence, as well as material from an array of Arabic, Greek, and Syriac philological, literary and ecclesiatical sources, Potts shows that ancient Baḥrain (i.e. present-day Baḥrain and the coast of north-eastern Arabia) was heavily Christianised and must have been multilingual for at least three centuries before the coming of Islam. As well as the Old Arabic dialects, Aramaic, Syriac and Persian were all in use for one purpose or another: Aramaic as a spoken and literary language[27], Syriac as the written language of the church, and possibly of Christian liturgy[28] and Persian as a widely spoken vernacular among ordinary members of the Christian population[29]. Nestorian synods were held in the bishopric of Masmāhīj (= Samāhīj, the name of a *Baḥārna* village on Muḥarraq island in present-day Baḥrain) in 410 and 576; another *Baḥārna* village, Dēr (< Syriac

24 M. A. AL-TĀJIR 'Language and Linguistic Origins in al-Baḥrain', London, KPI, pp. 15-26. He cites a local oral tradition (p. 24 — I also heard this myself from ʿAlī Ibrāhīm Hārūn, a Jamrī), that the inhabitants of the village of Banī Jamra are indentifiable with the *Jamārāt* mentioned in A. R. KAḤḤĀLA *Muʿjam Qabāʾil al-ʿArab*, Damascus, 1949, Vol I p. 203, a tribe which migrated from the Yemen at the dawn of Islam. J. C. WILKINSON 'The Imamate Tradition of Oman', Cambridge, C.U.P. pp. 73, 76-77 gives a reasonably detailed picture of the large-scale Yemeni migration to Oman via 'the northern route' (central Arabia and the Gulf coast) between the 1st century AD and the coming of Islam.

25 R. B. SERJEANT 'Fisher-folk and fish-traps in al-Baḥrain', *BSOAS* 31 (1968) p. 488.

26 D. T. POTTS 'The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity. Vol. I: From Prehistory to the Fall of the Achaemenid Empire. Vol. II: From Alexander the Great to the Coming of Islam', Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990.

27 POTTS, (n. 26), Vol II, pp. 221, 223-224, 227-228.

28 POTTS, (n. 26), Vol II, pp. 221, 244.

29 POTTS, (n. 26), Vol II, pp. 244-245.

dayr 'monastery'), a few miles to the west of Samāhīj/Masmāhīj, is almost certainly the site of one of the numerous Nestorian monasteries known to have existed in the area[30]. BEAUCAMP and ROBIN[31] note that, in a letter from the patriarch Išoʿyahb I to the Bishop of Dayrīn (on the coast of Arabia opposite Baḥrain), written between 581 and 585, and answering a number of questions on aspects of Christian liturgy, sacrements, moral problems, etc., there is a reference to the difficulty of pearl-divers in observing 'the day of rest'. As they point out: '...ce passage montre surtout que le christianisme s'était répandu chez les habitants autochtones de l'île dans les catégories les plus modestes'[32]. There is evidence of a continuing Christian presence until as late as the 15th century[33].

The relevance of this is that long before the formation of the religio-cultural community of Arabic-speaking Shīʿa which today unites most of southern Iraq, Khūzistān, Ḥasa, and modern Baḥrain, there was a similar religio-cultural unity of Christian Aramaic and Syriac-speakers in the same geographical areas which lasted three centuries or more[34]. Could it be that the vernacular debate-poetry of the *Baḥārna* of this century, who are, *pace* AL-TĀJIR, without doubt Shīʿī converts descended from this ancient settled Christian/Arab coastal population, continues the Syriac tradition, shown by BROCK to have flourished in Mesopotamia from the 4th until at least the 9th century AD? For the moment, the evidence, if evidence it is, is purely circumstantial; and for want of examples of the popular or literary culture of the area for the pre- and immediately post-Islamic period, whether in Arabic or Syriac, the question is never likely to be answered. But if the idea of early transmission and long-term preservation sounds far-fetched, a relevant parallel exists nearby. The 'archaic' oral poetry of some contemporary Najdi poets harks back, in all major respects—thematic, prosodic and even linguistic[35]—to a Bedouin (= Classical Arabic) poetic tradition more than a thousand years old. Is it unreasonable to

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[30] POTTS, (n. 26), Vol II, pp. 124-125, 150.

[31] J. BEAUCAMP & C. ROBIN 'L'évêché nestorien de Masmāhīǧ dans l'Archipel d'al-Baḥrayn' in D. POTTS (ed.) 'Dilmun: New Studies in the Archaeology and Early History of Baḥrain', Berlin, Dietrich Heiner Verlag, 1983, pp. 171-196.

[32] BEAUCAMP & ROBIN (n. 31), p.181.

[33] POTTS, (n. 26), Vol II, p. 221.

[34] POTTS, (n. 26), Vol II, pp. 353-354 is worth quoting at length on this point: '...as an integrating force, it was Nestorian Christianity that eventually brought the inhabitants of eastern Arabia, Mesopotamia and south-western Iran into what were arguably the closest relations they had ever experienced. Administered by the metropolitan of Rev-Ardashir, while challenging the ultimate authority of the *catholicos* in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, the Christian populations of Be<u>th</u> Qaṭrāye [= north-eastern Arabia in the Syriac ecclesiastical sources] and Be<u>th</u> Mazunāye [= Oman] were large, perhaps even dominant in this region until the Islamic conquest...To the extent that it exerted a unifying influence on the region's population, Nestorian Christianity may have unwittingly helped to lay the groundwork for the conversion of the area to Islam, which, although beset by a certain amount of divisive sectarianism, has unquestionably helped to maintain the unity of the area...'. It is also of some interest that Al-Nāṣirī's collection is published by a Baḥraini printing house called *Maktabat al-Māḥūza, māḥūza* being the old Syriac name of the five 'royal towns' of southern Iraq which subsequently became known as al-Madaʾin (see J. M. FIEY 'Topographie Chrétienne de Mahozé' in *Communautés syriaques en Iran et Irak des origines à 1552*, Variorum Reprints, London 1979). Intriguingly, the name *māḥūz* (the Aramaic noun minus its suffixed definite article?) turns up as a Baḥraini toponym: it is originally the name of a Shīʿī village, now a suburb of Manāma.

[35] KURPERSHOEK, (n. 16), pp. 4-28.

speculate that a literary continuity of the same longevity could lie behind the uncanny similarities of the modern Baḥraini Arabic debate-poems to their ancient Syriac fore-runners? Obviously, the modern Iraqi linguistic influence on *Baḥārna* debate-poetry does not preclude the possibility of much earlier literary links between Baḥrain and Mesopotamia, which POTTS' work implies probably existed.

4. The Rat and the Ship's Captain

An example of the *muḥāwāra*, the dispute sub-genre, is presented below. A ship's captain—possibly of a pearling dhow—complains about the damage being done to his livelihood by the activities of a rat, who has been gnawing at sacks of rice kept in the ship's store and bursting them open. The poet expresses his sympathy and commands that the rat be brought before him, whereupon he warns him about his conduct. An argument between the rat and the captain ensues, the rat pleading his innocence, even claiming that he stood guard over the boat during the winter when it was laid up on the shore, and while the crew were asleep; all he got in return, he claims, was a headache from the noise of the shipwrights as they prepared the boat for launching in the summer. The captain accuses the rat of ruining his business and tells the rat to leave. When he refuses, claiming people would think him stupid to do so, considering all the advantages life on the boat offers, the captain, his crew, and his family push the boat into the sea, deliberately capsizing it, and thereby drowning the rat. The captain's problem has been solved. What the rat didn't realise, the poem implies, was that he depended upon the captain's good will, which he abused. The poem seems to be an illustration of the Baḥraini proverb *ila chift rafījik ḥalu, lā tāklah marra waḥda*: 'If you think your friend is nice, don't eat him all at once' (= 'Don't take advantage of a generous person by being too greedy'). Within the simple frame of the dialogue there is a good deal of local colour: the description of how the boat is prepared for launch, complete with local technical terminology, and of how it is pulled, with much noisy ritual, from its laid-up state into the sea. The deliberate capsizing and bailing out of wooden boats before the start of the summer pearling season—the ploy which kills the rat—was the normal way of minimising leaks by making the planking expand. Much of the listener/reader's pleasure is simply in the rehearsal of these well-known maritime rituals of Baḥrain's pre-oil era[36].

The rhyme scheme in this, and most of the other Baḥraini *muḥāwarāt* and *munā-ḏarāt* is the same: after an opening line in which both hemistiches have the theme-rhyme x x, the rest of the poem proceeds a a a x, b b b x, c c c x, etc.[37] Rather than attempt to imitate this, I have translated the poem into rhyming couplets, and tried to convey something of the humorous tone of the original by giving the protagonists Lancashire accents.

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36 Though pearling went into a terminal decline in the 40's and 50's, finally ceasing altogether in 1969, ex-divers still regularly meet at special clubs (*dār* pl. *dūr* 'house') which seem to exist for the sole purpose of providing them with the opportunity to reminisce about the days when Baḥrain's economy depended on the pearl-trade, and to sing pearling songs and tell pearling anecdotes. I recorded several hours of such material in a *dār* in Ḥālat Bu Māhir, Muḥarraq Island, in 1977.

37 LITTMANN's *muḥāwara* from Syria between the poet and the flea (n. 14) has the same rhyme scheme.

Muḥāwarat fār wa nōkhadhā jālbūt
Conversation between a rat and a ship's captain
by
ʿAṭīya b. ʿAlī (Banī Jamra, Baḥrain)

ḥasbālik idyāyah?
Dost think I'm mouse?!

1   *yigūl aḥmad "inrīd nbiththth il-ḥikāyah*
     u ʿala l-fār il-khabīth inqaddim ishkāyah
     Says Ahmad: "Listen 'ere you folk, I want to have a chat,
     I've got a small complaint to air about this bloomin' rat.

2   *ya_khalq allah digūlū shu l-fikir wi r-rāy*
     chinnah l-fār fi l-maḥmal sharīk wiyyāy!
     I'd like to hear your views as well—go on, don't mince your words,
     Rat thinks 'e owns 'alf t'boat wi' me (or, like as not, two-thirds)!

3   *ṣāyir ṭūl hal-gēdha n-naghal balwāy*
     mā ʿidkum ḥad yiftī ib hal-wilāyah?"
     Rat's buggered me about, 'e 'as, played up all summer long,
     Can't someone in this blessed town please put to rights 'is wrong?"

4   *kisar galbī u gilt lah "gūm, jīb il-fār*
     khall yijlis igbālī l-miʿtadī l-ghaddār
     The captain's words, they broke my 'eart, "Fetch Rat right now!", I said,
     "And make 'im sit here facing me, the treach'rous quadruped!

5   *yitʾaddab aw ashʿal wāldah bi n-nār*
     lō yiṭlaʿ imsammir bi awwal il-māyah"
     If 'e won't mend 'is ways, by gum, I'll set fire to 'is tail,
     When t'sea comes rushing into t'bilge, 'n' 'e runs out all pale!"

6   *ḥaddarū l-fār kubr il-kalb yiṭṭaffar*
     sallam, gilt "minnak khāb hal-manḏar!
     They brought Rat in, 'e leapt about, a Labrador in size,
     "'Ow do!" said 'e, "This sight," said I, "is not one for sore eyes!

7   *kam iktāb mazzaqtah u kam daftar*
     il_ḥatfik yā mudammagh gāṣid ʿināyah
     'Ow many books, and sailors' logs, on purpose torn to bits?
     Thou'rt heading for a sticky end, thou'st only 'alf thy wits!

8 *shū lak yā rijis fi jālbūt in-nās*
   ḥatta intā ib rāsik yā khabīth ikhyās!
   This jolly-boat belongs to folk, not rats, thou lump of dirt,
   Thy ugly mug defiles this place, thou nasty little squirt!

9 *shughlik dōm wiyya n-nās shughl inḥās*
   niṣf il-ʿēsh killah iyrūḥ safāyah"
   Folk always curse thy handiwork, it brings 'em nowt but grief,
   'Alf their rice (and 'alf its price) is lost through thy front teeth!"

il-fār
the rat

10 *gāl "anā ṭlaʿt immin il-kharāyib jāy*
    shift il-jālbūt ihnāk gurb il-māy
    "From out o' t'ruined 'ouse," said Rat, "to t'sea I made my way,
    I spied the boat laid up on t'shore, right near the ocean spray.

11 *bīhā sikant waḥdī mākū aḥad wiyyāy*
    shitwa ib ṭūlhā maḥḥad ḥachā wiyyāyah
    So in that boat I set up 'ome, though no-one came to chat,
    Those winter months, all on my own—I never chewed the fat!

12 *u galālīf il_lifōnī dawwakhū rāsī*
    u min dagg il-maṭārig ḍāqat anfāsī
    Then shipwrights came—unwelcome guests—and made my poor 'ead spin,
    I 'ardly 'ad a minute's peace from all their 'ammers' din.

13 *sākit khāyif uwgaʿ lī ib galb qāsī*
    abad mā yistaḥūn ishlōn laghghāyah
    Silent, scared, and 'ard of 'eart, the Captain chanced on me,
    'Is men—'ad they no shame at all?—just chattered on carefree!

14 *u jābū ṣill u anā lābid u ṣabbūhā*
    u tālī bi l-baḥar fizʿū u dhabbūhā
    While I 'id, they brought some oil which onto t'boat they tipped,
    Then, singing, pulled 'er down the beach till into t'sea she slipped.

15 *rūḥī ib kithir mā ydibchūn ṭallaʿūhā*
    ahummā ʿālū u anā mʿadhdhab bilā sāyah
    With all their chasing to and fro, they drove me up the wall,
    'Twas them, not me that started it - poor me'd done nowt at all!

16   *aghātī lō simaʿt ish sawwaw min iṭrād*
      naṣabū digal, ḥaṭṭū tanki w iʿtād
      If you'd just 'eard, my noble sir, the way they charged around—
      Fixed mast, brought tank, tied anchor-rope (and lots more, I'll be bound)!

17   *lākin wannasōnī, ḥamalū lī z-zād*
      fīhā u kil wakit fārik ʿala kfāyah
      To 'umour me, they brought some grub and put it in the store,
      So all the while I stuffed myself, till I could eat no more!

18   *u hassā sh_jirimtī ḥatta yiṭalʿūnnī*
      bētī u maskanī minnah yshirdūnnī
      But now they want to chuck me out - what crime did I commit?
      My 'ouse and 'ome I've got to leave, they say "Get out of it!"

19   *ṭūl il-lēl anā anṭur ʿāmī ʿyūnī*
      u humma_nyām mā wāḥid lah iwʿāyah"
      Through all t'dark nights I stayed on watch, till my poor eyes grew dim,
      While I stood guard for them, I swear, the lazy sods slept in!"

                         in-nōkhadhā
                         the captain

20   *gāl aḥmad "diwall! ish jāybik līya*
      bi l-bindār kam baṭṭēt jūnīya
      "What's brought thee 'ere ?" the Captain said, "Just pack thy bags and quit!
      My store was choc-a-bloc wi' rice—now every sack thou'st split!

21   *mā tidri ib hal-wakit sittaʿsh rubbīya*
      liʿibt bīnā u lā ḏallat līnā ḥlāyah
      Dost thou not know that t'price these days 'as reached sixteen Ruppees?!
      Thou'st messed up all our careful plans—bang goes our life of ease!

22   *hdūmī tgarraḍat killaha wi ṣ-ṣudērī*
      iṭlaʿ min jālbūtī u rūḥ ʿid ghērī
      My clouts 'ave all got teeth marks in, my jacket's gnawed right through,
      Get off my boat, go on, buzz off, find som'at else to chew!

23   *rūḥ aʿla s-syāf ilzam lik hwērī*
      tamaskan bīhā kān itdūr irḍāyah"
      Look, why not take a stroll on t' beach? Thou'rt bound to find canoes,
      If pleasing me is thy desire, well, test a few, then choose!"

il-fār
the rat

24 *gāl "ishlōn akhallī mkān bīh il-māy*
    bārid u l-akil u atkhayyar aʿla hawāy
    "Why leave a place like this?" said Rat, "My belly I can fill,
    Drink water cold, eat t'food from t'hold, and pick t'best bits at will!

25 *nōb il-ʿesh nōb ish-shakkar nōb il-chāy*
    balkat ʿugub hāy ndūg ḥalwāyah
    Sometimes rice, sometimes tea, sometimes sugar sweet,
    P'raps a bit o' pudding too, a really tasty treat!

26 *lō aṭlaʿ w akhallī l-jālbūt il-yōm*
    kān yiṣīr ʿid kill il-khalq maʿlūm
    Were I to leave thy jolly-boat, jump ship upon a whim,
    Why, all o' t'town would know for sure that I was pretty dim.

27 *jahlī u yiṣaḥḥ min rāsī l-ʿagil maʿdūm*
    u aṣbaḥ bēn kil il-ʿālam iḥkāyah
    By heck, they'd not be wrong, 'n' all, if they thought I'd gone nuts,
    I'd be a laughing-stock to folk—there'd be no ifs or buts!

28 *tiṭalliʿni ghaṣub min bētī l-maʿmūr*
    shlī bi l-ghuraf u sh ḥājtī bi d-dūr?
    Thou'rt forcing me, when I don't want, to leave my cosy nest,
    Two-up two-down's just not my thing, arm-chairs and all the rest.

29 *mitwannis imkayyif mā ʿalayya gṣūr*
    tikharkhish lī b ṭaraf, ḥasbālik idyāyah?
    I want for nowt at all, dost see? I'm 'appy in my 'ouse,
    No use to shake palm-fronds at me—I'm Rat!—Dost think I'm mouse?!

30 *arīd albad wa finnkum kān shiftūnī*
    intā u jazwāk dūrū min tṣīdūnnī
    And now I'm off to 'ide myself; if you've got eyes to see,
    Just try and track me down, you lot: t'whole damn'd crew and thee!

31 *ib nār u nifṭ bēn in-nās ḥirgūnī*
    u lā_rīd immin aḥad dhimmah u lā ḥmāyah"
    If you catch me, before folk's eyes, pour oil upon my 'ead,
    I don't want care from 'uman kind—just burn me till I'm dead!"

32   *u bi l-bindār ṭabb u zādat afʿālah*
      ḥatta l-ʿēsh baṭṭ akyāsah u ḥālah
      With these words, Rat bounded off, and leapt back into t'store,
      Straight into t'sacks 'e sank 'is teeth, and scattered t'rice on t'floor!

33   *u aḥmad yintikhī bi jazwāh u ʿiyālah*
      u shabb nār il-ḥamāsah wi ndhahal rāyah
      So Ahmad called 'is crew for 'elp, 'is kids 'e asked them too,
      'E really fired 'em up, he did, but still he'd ne'er a clue!

                            in-nōkhadhā
                            the captain

34   *gallihum "niṭalliʿ l-aḥmāl wi nshīlah!"*
      u gharrigū l-jālbūt ib jānib ishīlah
      'E said: "Right lads, take out the sacks, till sacks there are no more!"
      And that job done, they sank the boat, right near the village shore.

35   *"ish tubgā baʿad ʿind il-fār min ḥilāh?*
      arāwīh il-fiʿl u yishūf li-swāyah!"
      "I wonder what's up Ratty's sleeve, what clever tricks 'e'll play,
      By heck I'll show him, that I will, I'll make the blighter pay!"

36   *dār il-fār mā shāf il-akal bīhā*
      u ḏall yihūm bi awwalhā u tālīhā
      Rat found no food, although Rat searched as only Rat knew how,
      'E scoured that boat from bow to stern, from t'blunt end to the prow.

37   *lēn il-māy ḥawwal min ʿawālīhā*
      u fiṭis dākhil il-khinn u fall il-ḥikāyah
      Then down she went, and in the 'old, the waves submerged poor Rat,
      No epilogues: Rat popped 'is clogs! 'E drowned, 'n' that was that!

Language notes

Abbreviations

E   =   W. ERWIN, A short reference grammar of Iraqi Arabic. Georgetown 1963.
EADS   =   T. M. JOHNSTONE, Eastern Arabian dialect studies. Oxford 1967.
GD   =   LE COMTE DE LANDBERG, Glossaire Daṯînois. Leiden 1920-42.
H   =   J. G. HAVA, al-Farāʾid al-Durrīya. Beirut 1951.
HJ   =   H. YULE and A. C. BURNELL, Hobson-Jobson: a glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian
            words and phrases. Routledge and Kegan Paul 1985 (first pub. 1886).
JH   =   JALĀL AL-ḤANAFĪ, Muʿjam al-ʾAlfāḏ al-Kuwaytīya. Baghdad 1964.
J&M   =   T. M. JOHNSTONE and J. MUIR, »Some nautical terms in the Kuwaiti dialect of Arabic.«
            BSOAS 27, 1964, pp. 299-330.
L   =   E. W. LANE, Arabic-English Lexicon. Islamic Texts Society, 1984.
NAGI   =   B. MEISSNER, Neuarabische Geschichten aus dem Iraq. Leipzig 1903.
NAGeI   =   B. MEISSNER, Neuarabische Gedichte aus dem Iraq. *Mitteilungen des Seminars für*
            orientalischen Sprachen zu Berlin, VI, 1903, pp. 57-125.
W&B   =   D. R. WOODHEAD and W. BEENE, A Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic: Arabic-English. George-
            town 1967.

*

The numbers refer to the verses.

> The title:
>
> *fār*: 'rat'. In Baḥrain the word is used for both rats and mice.
> *nōkhadhā*: ship's captain. This word is used throughout the Gulf (< Pers. *nā-*
> *khudā* with the same meaning (EADS 57)).
> *ḥasbālik idyāya?* lit. 'Do you think I'm a chicken ?' (i.e. easily frightened). For *y*
> < *j* in Baḥrain, see C. D. HOLES »Phonological variation in Baḥraini Arabic: the [j]
> and [y] allophones of /j/.« *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 4, 1980, pp. 72-
> 89.

1   *inrīd* 'we want': an Iraqi form. Baḥraini equivalent forms would be *nabghī*,
    nabbī, nabghā or *nabbā,* the latter two being specifically *Baḥārna* (= local
    Shīʿī) forms.

2   *ya khalq*: a southern Iraqi, and in a Baḥraini context, specifically *Baḥārna* turn of
    phrase. Cf. NAGedI 90: *ya khalg* 'O Welt'.
    digūlū 'Do say!': the *d(i)-* prefix is an intensifier, more often used in Iraq than in
    Baḥrain, where it is heard in a few *Baḥārna* villages (see E 140 for its use in
    Baghdadi).

3   *yiftī*: lit. 'give a legal opinion'

4   *khall*: 'let!', the masc. sing. imperative of *khallā*. See EADS 9.
    igbāl: 'in front of'. An Iraqi form, still used but considered rather old-fashioned in
    village *Baḥārna* dialects, in which *giddām* is normal in this sense.

5   *wāldah* 'his father' is not to be understood literally but as a variant of the use of

abūh 'his father' in the common frame *al'an abūh, hal...!* 'Damn this ...!' e.g. *al'an abūh hash-shughul!* 'Damn this job!' (lit. 'I curse its father, this job'). The phrase in the poem thus means something like 'I'll set fire to that damned rat'.

6   *sammar*: 'to disappear, to up and go' in all Bahraini dialects.

7   *il_hatfik = ilā hatfik* 'to your death'. A 'poetic' expression.

     mudammagh: an Iraqi word. *dammagh* = 'to brain s'one' (W&B 165)

8   *jālbūt* (pl. *jawālbīt*): 'jollyboat', a small cargo vessel. The word is probably derived from the Anglo-Indian *gallevat* (HJ 361-2).

9   *shughul inhās*: lit. 'ill-omened work'.

     'ēsh means 'rice' throughout the Gulf.

     killah 'always'.

     iyrūh safāyah 'it goes to waste'. Compare Cl.A. *safā* 'to blow and scatter (dust)' and GD 1947 for S. Yemen.

11   *mākū* 'there isn't (any)': a Kuwaiti/ Iraqi expression, not normally used in Bahrain.

     shitwa 'winter': apparently an Iraqi form (the Bahraini equivalent, in all dialects, is *ishte*).

12   *galālīf* (sg. *gallāf*) 'shipwrights'. Used throughout the Gulf.

     lifā 'to descend unexpectedly on s'one's home'. Cf Cl.A. *lafā* 'to frequent (a house)'(H 692). In Bahrain *lāfī* means 'unwelcome guest', and the Form II *laffā* 'to take s'one in, give refuge to s'one' (e.g. after a disaster of any kind).

13   *laghā* 'to talk nonsense'. *laghghāy* is the intensive adjective.

14   *sill*: fish-oil smeared on boats as a wood preservative before putting to sea (JH 220). *widach* is also used with the same meaning.

     labad: 'to hide oneself'. Cf GD 2608-9 for S. Yemen, NAGI 141 for S. Iraq.

     fiza': 'to help'. In the Gulf, this verb specifically refers to the teams of helpers (*fāzi'* pl. *faz'a*) who used to pull pearling dhows into the sea at the start of the season, chanting rhythmically to encourage each other. Cf the Cl.A. meaning 'to demand aid or succour'(L 2393).

15   *talla'ū rūhī*: lit. 'they drove out my spirit' = 'they got on my nerves'.

     ydibchūn: lit. 'they dance about'.

     'āl: 'to be the cause of a dispute, fight', as in the phrase *minhu l-'āyil* 'who started it (the fight)?'

     bilā sāyah: Bahrainis themselves differed about the precise meaning of this phrase. The interpretation adopted in the translation is 'without having done anything (wrong)', i.e. cognate with the Cl.A. nomina vicis *sāya*, for which LANE provides two possible derivations, one from *sā'a* (L 1458) 'a thing that caused displeasure' and one from *sawwā* (L 1480) (which in Bahrain simply means 'to do') 'an evil speech against s'one'. The sense would then be that the rat was being punished (*m'adhdhab*) although the shipwrights were the instigators and the rat had done nothing to occasion what he saw as an attack. Alternatively, the phrase could be read as meaning that there was nothing the rat could do to counter them, i.e. *sāya = hīla*, as in line 35 (this was the meaning given by a Bahraini from a neighbouring village).

16 *aghātī*: an Iraqi expression. The rat is addressing the poet.
    (i)ṭrād: verbal noun from *ṭarad* 'to rush around'.
    i'tad (or *'atād* or *'itād*): 'anchor-cable' (J&M 315).

17 *wannas*: 'to humour, entertain' (cf. Cl.A *'annas*: 'to tame').
    zād: 'provisions (esp. for a voyage)'.
    kil wakit (spelt so in the Arabic text) 'always' is Iraqi; the usual Baḥraini equivalent is *killah*, as in line 9. Note also the Iraqi form *hal-wakit* 'now' in line 20.

18 *hassā* 'now': another Iraqi expression. The Baḥraini equivalent is *al-ḥīn* or *hal-ḥazza*.
    jirimtī < jarīmatī 'my crime'.

19 lit. 'I was watching all night, wearing out my eyes'. *'āmī* is the active participle of *'imā* 'to blunt, dim'.

20 *diwall*: for *d(i)-* see note on line 2. *wall* is the masc. imperative of *wallā* 'to go away', cf. *khall* in line 4.
    bindār: 'store (of a boat)' (J&M 302).
    baṭṭ: 'to split open'. In Baḥraini one also encounters from the same root *inbaṭṭ* 'to be split open (as result of a blow)', *tabaṭṭaṭ* 'to burst open (flower, bud)'.
    jūnīya (pl. *jawānī*) 'sack', in Baḥrain usually for rice. Cf English 'gunny (bag)', both words derived from Anglo-Indian (HJ 403).

23 *hwērī*: 'small dug-out canoe', diminutive of *hūrī* (< Urdu according to Johnstone (EADS 57).

25 *nōb* (or *nōba*) 'once, a time'. This is more usual among the *Baḥārna* than *marra*.

29 *mitwannis* and *imkayyif* both = 'having fun, a good time'
    mā 'alayya gṣūr 'not lacking anything'.
    kharkhash: 'to rattle, rustle, jingle (change in one's pocket, etc.). *ṭaraf* 'tip' is understood here to refer to the tip of a piece of *sa'af* = 'dried palm-frond' (the construction material which used to be used in Baḥrain to make the *barastaj* = 'palm-branch hut'). By shaking it, the captain is trying to scare the rat.

30 *finnkum*: *finn* + pron. 'I dare X to...! / Just let X...!'. An Iraqi expression (W&B 361).
    jazwā: 'ship's crew' throughout the Gulf.
    min tṣīdūnnī: 'When you catch me...'. The main clause is the first hemistich of verse 31: 'burn me with fire and oil...'.

33 *intakhā*: 'to call loudly to s'one for help'. Cf GD 2755 'pousser le cri de guerre, proférer les exclamations de bravoure'. Also Form VI *tanākhā* 'to encourage each other (by singing)', said of a pearling crew when engaged in hard work, such as rowing a heavy boat out to deep water.
    indhahal rāyah: 'he was at a loss, didn't know which way to turn'.

34 *ishīlah*: place name, part of the *Baḥārna* village of Dēr on Muḥarraq Island, Baḥrain.

35 *li-swāyah*: lit. 'the deed'. *swāya* is a nomina vicis < *siwā(t)* 'doing', one of the

verbal nouns (the more usual one is *tiswā(t)*) < *sawwā* 'to do'. Cf. the note on *sāya* above. The sense is that the captain will show the rat who is boss.

36   *ḥām (u)*: 'to wander around'.

37   *ḥawwal min ʿawālīhā*: lit. 'descended from its upper parts'.

       fiṭis: 'to die, croak one's last'. Similar in its use and contemptuous tone to Fr. *crever*.

       <u>kh</u>*inn*: 'hold (of a ship)' (J&M 307).

       fall: 'to finish up, come to an end, be taken care of'. Cf. W&B 360.