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Voices from the time of "in-between": A clash of two worlds in the poetry and akhbār of three mukhaḍram poets

It has become common place to label the postmodern world of globalization, hybridity, and mass migration as the time of a life "in-between". The "in-between" existence is, however, not characteristic only of the present time. Each time when one ideology replaced another and mixed, as a result of geographical displacement or temporal succession, a generation was trapped in an existence on the threshold. *Khaḍrama*, the transitional period between the *Jāhilīya* and Islam, was such a time: it witnessed the abrupt substitution of one world-view for another. Naturally, such a transition could not do without acts of defiance. However, the voices of those living "in-between" were often covered by later generations who took upon themselves the task to polish the past. Although later compilers appreciated the poetic aesthetics of the past, at times they did not find it fitting to the spirit of their world and needed to make the necessary adjustments. This paper attempts both to listen carefully to the poetic voices from the time of *Khaḍrama* and to deconstruct the processes of accommodation from later periods. More specifically, this paper discusses three *mukhaḍram* poets and the reception and re-interpretation of their poetry by the early Islamic audience.

Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* records a tension on two levels: within the poetry itself and between the poetry and the accompanying *akhbār.* On the first level, a close reading of the poetry of Abū Khirāsh al-Hudhalī, Abū Miḥjan al-Thaqafī and Suḥaym, the slave of the Banū al-Ḥasḥās, suggests that this poetry was still rooted in the pre-Islamic system of values and as such it clashed with the new Islamic ethos. The poets, however, were aware of the changes taking place in their society, which created tensions identifiable in their poetry. For instance, *ṣuʿlūk* poet, Abū Khirāsh, compares the effect of Islam to chains encircling one's neck. The *tashbīb* poet, Suḥaym, does not attack Islam directly, but through his poetry defies the core of its norms of morality. Finally, the famous poet of wine, Abū Miḥjan, does both: he defies the Islamic prohibition of wine and laments from time to time the restrictive nature of Islam. This paper examines their direct and indirect poetical revolts against the norms of the new era.

On the second level, the biographical *akhbār* of the poets do not always correspond to the ethos of their poetry. This paper assumes that such poets and poetry must have posed a challenge for the Islamic commentators. Poetry was seen as a major vehicle for moral education and as such we can expect that the commentators' account of it was not entirely disinterested. Therefore this tension can be explained by the endeavor of later compilers to rectify the defiant poets and accommodate their poetry within the corpus of *adab*. Although they integrated such unruly poetry in their collections they could not let it lead people on the wrong path. So, they conjured up (hi)stories of the poets' lives, which would serve as a warning for future generations. Thus, this paper also examines the different ways in which later Muslim compilers attempted to reconcile the poetry of *Khaḍrama* with Islamic ethos.

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