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Author(s): Renate Jacobi

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THE *KHAYĀL* MOTIF IN EARLY ARABIC POETRY*

by

Renate Jacobi

Saarbrücken

Anybody who takes the trouble to read and to compare literary studies on classical Arabic poetry published in the course of this century, will notice a surprising conformity of judgement. Scholars tend to be unanimous concerning three points in particular: 1. all basic features of Arabic poetry are already present in pre-Islamic verse; 2. pre-Islamic tribal poetry is the most characteristic expression of the literary genius of the Arabs; 3. medieval Arabic poetry never really changed, even if at certain times, especially in the early Abbasid period, some innovations have been added. In recent studies these views have been slightly modified, but, as far as I see, never seriously challenged. Thus Jamaledine Bencheikh in his "Poétique arabe", a brilliant and perceptive study, explains in his closing chapter that the norms of Arabic classicism were determined during the 6th and 7th century, and that later poetry, despite of some truly innovative poets among the "moderns" (*al-muḥdathūn*), completely lost contact with reality. According to him, experience is possible on the linguistic level only; reality is replaced by a poetic and linguistic inventory, "un arsenal linguistique."¹

If we turn to poetry, in order to verify this view, there is doubtless much to support it. No student of medieval Arabic literature can escape the feeling of a certain monotony. For ever and ever, it seems, the poet is roaming through the desert, discovering the ruins of an abandoned camp and weeping over his lost beloved. The same words, phrases, images, motifs and genres continue to be used, providing rich evidence of the medieval poet's conventional attitude and the ritualistic character of his verse. However, when considering the question from a theoretical point of view, there seems to be reason for some doubt. If it is true that poetry is rooted in society, expressing its values, ideas and problems, then we should expect that the important political and social changes which occurred from the 6th century till the later Middle Ages had left their traces in the poetry of successive historical periods. It is incon-

* This article is the revised and enlarged version of a paper I read at the Third Symposium on Classical Arabic Poetry, Cambridge 1985.

¹ Paris 1975, p. 258.

ceivable, for example, that the oral poetry of bedouin tribes could have any significance at all to urban Abbasid poets and their audience, except as heritage of a heroic past. If the language and the greater part of the formal and conceptual elements of pre-Islamic poetry continued to be applied under varying historical conditions, it must be assumed that they acquired new meanings, or new shades of meaning, and if there was no semantic change in the strictly lexical sense, there must be a change of function.

By reasoning along those lines, I became more and more interested in the diachronistic aspects of Arabic poetry, the curious balance of tradition and innovation to be observed throughout the classical period, and the intellectual and esthetic process of transforming the poetic heritage. It seemed to me worth while to find out how poets under changing historical conditions succeeded in expressing their thoughts and emotions, while using a poetic language, motifs and images, that apparently remained identical for centuries. If one wants to answer a complex question such as this, all depends on choosing a suitable and, at the same time, limited basis for investigation, so as to reach some results within reasonable time. Thus I decided to examine, by way of experiment, one particular motif, to analyse its structure and function, and to find out in what way exactly it retained its identity. A motif from the *nasīb*, the so-called *khayāl* or *ṭayf*, the “vision of the beloved”, seemed promising in this respect, the main reason being that it is exceedingly frequent in classical poetry, so that there is ample material for investigation. I am convinced, moreover, that love-poetry is the most suitable basis for this kind of analysis, as it reflects more than any other genre the changing attitudes, conflicts and tensions of human society. At the present time, the investigation is still in progress, but I have collected sufficient evidence from the 6th and 7th century, so as to be able to speak about the early history of the motif with some confidence. The following discussion will be limited to two related problems. My first object is to reconstruct what I believe to be the original version of the motif, and to determine the meaning of the terms *khayāl* and *ṭayf* within its context as phenomenon. Secondly, I am going to outline its later development up to the Umayyad period. In doing this I hope to show that even at a time when Arabic poetry was still based chiefly on a living oral tradition, significant changes are to be observed, which can be related to external conditions, i.e. the disintegration of tribal society.

The story of the *khayāl*, as we find it in early texts, is sufficiently known, and can be treated briefly. I only touch upon the main points: The bedouin poet and some companions on their desert journey make a halt at night. While the companions slumber peacefully, the poet stays awake, or is awakened, and perceives the image, the *khayāl* or *ṭayf*, of his beloved, whom

he knows to reside in a distant place. He wonders how she managed to cross the perilous desert, in order to reach him.

The *khayāl* is explained by medieval Arabic commentators and by modern scholars alike as a vision the poet sees in his dream. By analysing the early versions of the motif, and by comparing them to later texts, I came to a different conclusion. I think that the *khayāl* was originally conceived as a "real" apparition, if I may use a contradiction in terms, and that the concept "vision in a dream" is secondary and constitutes a later rational interpretation of the phenomenon.

Western translators of ancient Arabic verse seem not to have been aware of any problem in the texts. From translations of the motif in different languages I received the impression that the terms "phantom", "apparition", "spectre" and "vision of the dream", or in German "Gespenst", "Trugbild" and "Traumbild", are used indiscriminately, as if they were synonyms. Sir Charles J. Lyall, for instance, in the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* always gives the meaning suggested by the context. He usually translates *khayāl* and *ṭayf* by "phantom"; once he says "nightly vision" (No. VI 1), and in one verse he employs the word "wraith" (No. LXII 1). In his notes, however, Lyall follows the commentary of al-Anbārī (d. 940) and states explicitly that the *khayāl* is a vision seen in sleep. This is a contradiction, to my mind, but we cannot be surprised that Lyall and other scholars did not notice it, for already at the beginning of the 7th century, in verses of the *mukhadramūn*, poets are unaware of any inconsistency. After employing conventional formulas like: "a *khayāl* kept my eyes awake..." (*arraqa 'aynayya khayālun...*) they sometimes add without hesitation that it only appears in sleep, thus at a time, when eyes are usually closed. It is true that the concepts "phantom" or "ghost", on the one hand, and "vision of the dream" or "of the imagination", on the other, are closely related, their common denominator being that they are all immaterial and deceptive. But there is also an important contrast, which I should like to emphasize. The "phantom" or "apparition" manifests itself in the external world. It is seen as an object confronting the observer, and that is what makes it so frightening. The "vision of the dream (imagination)" is part of the subject; it manifests itself within the human mind. For this reason, the change from the first concept to the second seems to me significant with regard to the interpretation of the motif.

Unfortunately, the change of meaning in the terms *khayāl* and *ṭayf* from "phantom" to "vision of the dream" is not entirely easy to prove. As a rule, semantic change is established by demonstrating that a certain term is transferred to a context where its accepted meaning does not make sense. In other words, the contradiction resulting within the context is the evidence we need. The difficulty in the present case arises from the fact that not only the

words *khayāl* and *ṭayf* are transferred, but also part of the context to which they belong, as the same formulaic expressions continue to be applied by poets throughout the classical period. If there was a change of meaning, it has to be established by circumstantial evidence, and by more than one line of reasoning. In addition, we are faced with the thorny problem of chronology, which is of primary importance to a diachronistic study such as this. As is well known, the problem cannot be solved beyond doubt, especially with regard to the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period. For even if all the texts analysed are authentic, it is impossible to date them and to arrange them chronologically with precision. Two further aspects will be taken into consideration, therefore. One aspect is the logical sequence of the development in question; the appearance of a ghost may be interpreted as a vision seen in a dream by enlightened urban poets, whereas the reverse process is hardly conceivable. The second aspect is the proof furnished by external factors. At the end of the analysis we shall discuss the question whether the suggested development is in conformity with changes in Arabic society.

Before I attempt to reconstruct the original version of the motif, the basic lexical meaning of the two terms must be examined briefly. As for the *khayāl*, it is to be derived from *khāla*, “to think, surmise or fancy a thing” (*tawahhama ash-shayʿ*) and signifies, according to Lane (II 835c), “an incorporeal form or image”. In his further explanations, mostly quotations from Arabic lexicographers, the following basic meanings can be distinguished. The *khayāl* is anything seen like a shadow, an image in a mirror, for instance, or on water. It is also “a form imaged to one in the mind”, and it is further “a fancied image, apparition or spectre coming in sleep”; here Lane quotes, like the *Lisān* (XI 230b), a verse by al-Buḥturī alluding to the *khayāl* motif. It follows, then, that the *khayāl* is primarily a shadow-like, deceptive form seen in the external world. The second concept, “the form imaged to one in the mind”, seems to be derived from it. The last meaning must be left aside, since it forms the point under discussion.

Regarding the *ṭayf*, we are forced to move in a circle from the beginning, as the early definition apparently rests on poetry alone. It is to be connected with two related verbal roots: *ṭāfa/yaṭūfu* — “to move” or “to move around”, and *ṭāfa/yaṭīfu* with the *maṣdar ṭayf* (Lane V 1892b a. 1905c). This second root seems to be limited to poetry, taking no other subject than the “image of the beloved”. We may assume, however, that it also contains the idea of movement, for the second stem of the two roots, *ṭawwafa* and *ṭayyafa*, both mean “to move around”. The *ṭayf* is explained by lexicographers as a synonym to *khayāl* in the meaning of “apparition, spectre or imaginary form coming in sleep”. What strikes me as remarkable is the fact that nobody ever seems to have envisaged an apparition that did not come in sleep, although,

for all we know, ghosts have a habit of scaring people who are awake. As I hope to show, this is exactly what the *khayāl* does, till it becomes “domesticated”, as it were. To sum up the lexical evidence, there seems to be no doubt that the term *khayāl* basically means a shadow-like form, something to be seen, however indistinctly, in the world of phenomena. As for the *ṭayf*, whatever it may be, it must have been in the habit of moving about. All other explanations are clearly derived from the motif, as we find it in pre-Islamic and early Islamic texts, its modern interpretation being based on medieval commentators like al-Anbārī (d. 940) or al-Marzūqī (d. 1030). If I venture to suggest that they were wrong, no doubt is thrown on their learning, of course. On the contrary, just because they were so very learned and enlightened, they may have found it difficult to visualize the frame of mind of a bedouin poet in the Jāhiliyya, to whom Jinn and Ghūl were no imaginary or legendary beings, but part of his reality, to be encountered in the desert any day.

In the following reconstruction of the original motif, I am concentrating on those two points which are relevant to my argumentation, the behaviour of the *khayāl* and the way it affects the poet. But first the scene of action, time and place, and the actors must be more fully discussed.

a. The *khayāl* appears, as already stated, while the poet on his desert journey is resting at night. The desert is always mentioned, sometimes a specific name is given. Contrary to another motif of the *nasīb*, the *aṭlāl*, “the ruins of the abandoned camp”, there seems to be no vegetation of any kind; no plants or bushes, no rocks or any other objects are ever referred to. Since pre-Islamic poets are fond of detail, it is safe to assume that there is really nothing but the wide open space of the desert. There, the small group of travellers and their camels are resting, the men covered by their cloaks, while the saddles are heaped together and placed close to them. This last detail is important, for the heap of saddles is the spot where the *khayāl* habitually manifests itself. The time is often specified, with various expressions, as the second half of the night, towards morning. Some poets even stress this point by mentioning that the stars are about to disappear. Thus we have the time of night when darkness is beginning to fade and dusk is slowly setting in. The poet cannot see clearly, but the objects of his surroundings begin to be visible in their dim outline.

b. As for the characters of the narrative, there is, first of all, the male element, the poet and his companions, forming a marked contrast, as the poet is awake or wakes up at a certain moment, whereas his companions are asleep. The fact is often mentioned, and sometimes particularly emphasized. Its dramatic function, as I see it, is above all to underline the poet’s being awake. It also explains, of course, why the other travellers do not perceive the *khayāl*, and it seems further relevant as a reflection on the poet’s state of

mind. The companions are asleep, which means that they are peaceful and at ease, while the poet is in a state of mental tension. Sleep is impossible for him, or it is so light, that he is easily awakened. Thus the opposition between the poet and his fellow travellers is an important factor in the structure of the original narrative. The fact that it is abandoned in later poetry seems significant, therefore, and needs explanation.

Secondly, there is the female element, the beloved and her *khayāl*, forming an opposition as well, although of a different kind. In some texts the name of the beloved is used instead of the words *khayāl* or *ṭayf*, but their identity is always questioned at once. The relation between the beloved and her *khayāl* and the question of identity remains one of the basic structural elements of the motif throughout the classical period, although the nature of the relationship changes considerably in the course of time. In Abbasid texts one occasionally receives the impression of a split personality, the *khayāl* representing the better part of the beloved's character. In the earliest texts only external aspects are mentioned, especially at the end of the poet's narrative, when he wonders how the beloved managed to reach him. Another observation in this respect is a negative one; contrary to later usage, the original *khayāl* is hardly ever alluded to by any of the conventional epithets in praise of the beloved. Whatever the poet says about it, tends to emphasize the contrast with the beloved and is connected with the *khayāl*'s activities, our next point of discussion.

The *khayāl* is introduced, as a rule, at the beginning of the poet's recital, by a conventional phrase or formula containing a verb of action. Most of these formulas serve as key-words or mere allusions to the motif in later poetry. Thus we are told that the *khayāl* "travelled by night" (*ṭaraqa, sarā*), that it "visited" the poet (*alamma, zāra*) or that it "habitually returned by night" (*ta'awwaba*). Other statements refer to the *khayāl*'s course of action after its arrival, like *ṭāfa*—"it moved around". There are further a number of verbs describing how the *khayāl* affects the poet, the most frequent being the verb *rā'a*, which basically means "to affect (somebody's heart or mind) with fright or fear" (Lane III 1187c). I shall return to this point when discussing the poet's reactions.

As for the place, where the *khayāl* manifests itself, I have already pointed out that it has a peculiar disposition to cling to the heap of saddles near the group of travellers. The fact is referred to casually sometimes; the poet states that the *khayāl* comes *ilā arḥulinā*—"towards our saddles", or as Labīd puts it (*Dīwān* No. IV 1): *ṭāfat Usaymā'u bi-r-riḥāli*—"Usaymā' moved around our saddles". In two verses from the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* a more vivid impression is produced. The first example is a line by al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza, which I shall quote with Lyall's translation (*Muf.* LXII 1):

ṭaraqa l-khayālu wa-lā ka-laylati mudlijin
sadikan bi-arḥulinā wa-lam yata'arrajī

Darkling the wraith came flitting by—what a wonder-night!
 And it glided on where lay our saddles, but wouldn't stay.

Literally *sadikan bi-arḥulinā* means “sticking close to our saddles”. It would seem from this line that the *khayāl* behaved, on the whole, as a ghost is expected to; it comes by night, it manifests itself among the saddles, whose decorated cloth might easily be taken for a woman's dress, and when the poet wants to look more closely, it vanishes.

The second text, a line by al-Muraqqish the Younger, emphasizes the deceptive quality of the phenomenon (*Muf.* LV 4):

fa-lammā ntabahtu bi-l-khayāli wa-rā'anī
idh huwa raḥlī wa-l-bilādu tawaddaḥū

And when I started awake at the phantom, and terror grew,
 lo! 'twas but my saddle, nought else, and the country was wide and bare.

Here, the poet suddenly awakes and perceives, or so he thinks, the figure of his beloved. Far from being delighted at her presence, as later poets are, he is startled and frightened, but soon relieved when discovering that the apparition is just a saddle. Beside the *khayāl's* preference for the saddles, there are other suggestive points, its wavering movement and the fact that the poet cannot see it clearly. The first point is supported by several texts, as for example a line by the poet Suḥaym ibn 'Abd Banī Ḥaṣḥās (*Dīwān* p. 42, -3):

alamma khayālun 'ishā'an wa-ṭāfa
wa-lam yaku idh ṭāfa illā khtitāfā

A *khayāl* visited me at night and moved about,
 but when it moved about, it was only in a flash.

The verb *ikhtatafa* means literally “to go at a swift rate”. The impression of lightness and swift movement is also produced when Ṭarafa says that the *khayāl* is “not heavy” (*lam yaqir*) *Dīwān* No. V 4). The second point, the fact that the poet is unable to see the apparition clearly, is described in a passage from an undated *qaṣīda* that has been edited recently, together with other texts, from the *Muntahā ṭ-ṭalab*, a still unpublished anthology of early poetry. The poet, a certain Bayhas ibn 'Abd al-Ḥārith, first alludes to the nightly visit of his beloved 'Azza, and then adds (*Qaṣā'id nādira*, p. 74)²:

fa-nahaḍtu anḥuru mā l-khayālu fa-rā'anī
wa-l-'aynu ḡhayru ḥadīthatin bi-ḡhirārī
fa-ra'ā lahā shabahan wa-laysa bi-'ārifin
jiddan wa-laysa bi-mum'ini l-inkārī

² I owe the reference to Dr. Tilman Seidensticker (University of Gießen).

I rose, in order to see what the *khayāl* was, and it frightened me,
 while my eyes were still heavy from sleep.³
 Then he saw a likeness to her, but he was not sure,
 nor could he for certain deny it.

The poet goes on to say that the experience was similar to meeting with a Jinn, for in that case you also tend to doubt your eyes at first.

Taken together, the evidence presented so far points to the original meaning of the terms *khayāl* and *ṭayf*: a shadow-like, deceptive form, moving about. The effect it has on the poet is often expressed by the verb *rā'a*, “to frighten”, but there are also other statements indicating a negative reaction. We already know that the poet is in a state of mental tension and cannot sleep, a fact sometimes imputed to the *khayāl*'s influence. Thus al-A'shā Maymūn says (*Dīwān* No. XXVII 7):

wa-fī kulli manzilatīn bittuhā
yu'arriqu 'aynayka ahwāluhā

And at every resting place where you spend the night,
 her terrors keep your eyes awake.

Besides frightening the poet, the *khayāl* brings back memories of the past and excites former passions. Thus its function is similar to that of the “deserted camp site”; it reminds the poet of something he wants to forget. The negative influence on his mind is further suggested by verbs like *i'tara*, meaning “to befall” or “to render insane”, and by *tasaddā*, “to weigh upon”, as in the following hemistich from the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* (LVII 10): *man li-khayālin tasaddā mawhinan...*, rendered by Lyall: “Who shall aid me against a phantom that weighs upon me as an incubus in the night”. The night-mare quality of the vision could hardly be expressed more clearly.

A considerable part of the poet's narrative is taken up, as a rule, by his wondering and speculating about the beloved's nightly journey. The points frequently mentioned are the distance between the poet's resting place and her abode; the dangers and hardships, she would have to endure on the way; the rocky hills and lonely deserts, she would have to cross. He then turns to the woman herself and mentions her incapacity of enduring all those hardships, her disinclination for walking on foot, her being used to a life of ease. All this serves as a motivation of his surprise and shock at his vision. Among the poet's reflections upon the likelihood of his beloved's visit, there is one point of special interest, as it is connected with his final attitude towards the *khayāl*. In the pre-Islamic *nasīb* it is always implied, if not stated explicitly, that it was the woman who insisted on separation and “severed the bond”.

³ The translation of the hemistich is doubtful.

All the more surprising is her appearance at the poet's camp. As for his final reaction, two alternatives seem to be possible, as evidenced by the texts. He may cherish new hope by reasoning that, if the lady sends her *khayāl*, she is perhaps still in love with him. The second attitude is proud rejection, as in the often quoted verse by Ṭarafa (*Dīwān* No. XI 10):

fa-qul li-khayāli l-Ḥanzaliyyati yanqalib
ilayhā fa-innī wāṣilun ḥabla man waṣal

Tell the *khayāl* of the Ḥanzalite woman to return to her,
 for I only keep the bond of one who keeps it herself.

This is probably the original ending of the narrative, since it conforms to tribal ethics and the function of the *nasīb* in general. It also provides the necessary transition to the next part of the *qaṣīda*.

The reconstruction of the early version of the motif confirms the view that the *khayāl* was originally conceived as an apparition in the proper sense of the word, for how could the structure of the narrative and the main elements be explained otherwise? The following points seem to me conclusive: 1. the poet's being awake or awakened, and the opposition between him and his sleeping companions, 2. the *khayāl*'s appearance towards morning, in the dusk, 3. its manifesting itself among the saddles, 4. its moving swiftly, and the fact that the poet is unable to see it clearly, 5. and finally the unfortunate effect it has upon him, his feeling frightened and oppressed, and the absence of all those emotions of joy and happiness one would expect when a lover meets his beloved in a dream. The whole argumentation, as also the procedure of reconstructing the original version from different texts, is only valid, of course, within an oral tradition of the kind we are dealing with, and could not be applied to poetry of literary periods. The bedouin poet, as evidenced by the corpus of pre-Islamic verse, is not in the habit of confusing his audience by paradox or by statements that mean the opposite of what they seem to say. On the contrary, he is always very careful to make his meaning clear beyond doubt. It is impossible that he should say "I am awake", meaning "I am asleep", or that he should tell a story, as if it really happened, expecting his audience to understand that it was a dream. In fact, as soon as the *khayāl* was conceived as a vision in sleep, poets say so explicitly.

This leads us to the second issue of discussion, the later development of the motif. Although phrasing and structure of the narrative hardly seem to alter, it is evident from the texts that already about the beginning of the 7th century the terms *khayāl* and *ṭayf* must have acquired a new meaning. The *khayāl* is now generally regarded as a vision seen in sleep, its original meaning being obviously forgotten. For even if a poet begins his narrative by saying: "a *khayāl* keeps me awake", he may end up with the remark that it only appears

in sleep or in a dream. However, the negative aspect of the experience still prevails; the poet's dream is a nightmare. This nightmare quality of the *khayāl* is sometimes particularly emphasized, as evidenced by a line from the *dīwān* of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr. After referring to the *khayāl*'s nightly visit, he goes on to say (p. 113,-4):

fa-abītu muḥtaḍaran ka-annī muslamun
li-l-Jinnī rī'a fu'āduhu l-makhtūfū

And I spent the night afflicted by madness, like a man possessed by Jinn, his heart terrified, robbed of understanding.

According to the material I have collected so far, the negative aspect of the *khayāl* is to be observed till about the middle of the 7th century. It is completely abandoned in Umayyad poetry.

This, then, is the first transformation of the motif, the transition from a phantom manifesting itself in the external world, to a vision seen in a dream. It is important from a conceptual and psychological point of view, but as the *khayāl*'s visit remains a negative experience, the function of the motif as part of the *nasīb*, and its relation to tribal norms and values, does not change. About the same time, however, during the first part of the 7th century, a new development sets in, which reflects, to my mind, a new concept of love resulting from political and social changes on the Arabian Peninsula. Gradually, poets begin to display a more favourable view of the *khayāl* and its activities. They express their longing for its presence and welcome it, when it appears, as it is the only means of communicating with the beloved after separation. Occasionally, its beauty is appreciated, as in the following hemistich by al-Ḥuṭay'a, who exclaims alluding to his vision (*Dīwān* No. I 1): *yā ḥusnuhā min qawāmin mā muntaqabā*. "How beautiful is its veiled figure!" Evidently, the *khayāl*, instead of just "flitting by", has become more stable now and can be observed at leisure.

The transformation of the motif from a nightmare to a pleasant dream, fulfilling the poet's secret wishes, seems to be completed, when Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm says, referring to the beloved's visit (*Dīwān* II 2-3):

mā tamna ī yaqzā fa-qad tu'tīnahū
fī n-nawmi ḡhayra muṣarradin maḥsūbī
kāna l-munā bi-liqā'ihā fa-laqītuhā
fa-lahawtu min lahwī mri'in makdhūbī

Whatever you withhold while being awake, you sometimes grant in sleep, not grudgingly, nor calculating.
 I longed to meet her, and I did meet her,
 enjoying pleasures of a man deceived.

In these lines the compensative function of the *khayāl*, together with its

deceptive quality is fully realized and reflected upon. The idea of wishfulfillment and the notion that the *khayāl* appears as a result of the poet's longing are also implied. If we compare the text to the verse by Ka'b ibn Zuhayr just quoted, who "spent the night as if possessed by Jinn", it is hard to believe that both poets belong to the same generation, and that Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm is the elder of the two. If his verses are genuine, they are surprisingly "modern", for they indicate a total break with tribal conventions and a degree of psychological insight quite unusual before the Umayyad period.

In Umayyad poetry, the last stage of our historical survey, the *khayāl* motif is frequently applied in the *nasīb* of the panegyric *qaṣīda*, but it occurs in *ghazal* poetry as well. For our present purpose, I shall limit myself to the *nasīb*, which is composed in the traditional manner, on the whole. Thus at first sight, the structure of the narrative seems entirely conventional. The same words and formulas continue to be applied; the scene of the desert, the starlit night, the group of travellers—everything appears to be there, sometimes even more elaborately expressed than in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry. On close comparison, however, a number of changes are to be observed which support the preceding interpretation of the motif. Several elements of the original version are now abandoned, as for instance the contrast between the poet and his sleeping companions. In the Umayyad narrative the poet and his fellow travellers always form one solid group of men, all of them asleep. The explanation is obvious, I think. Since the *khayāl* visits the poet in a dream, there is no need to stress his being awake, nor is the *khayāl*'s manifestation among the saddles and the fact that the poet cannot perceive it clearly of any further significance. In its place, other elements are introduced and elaborated upon, one of them being the state of weariness and exhaustion of the travellers and their camels. Their description takes up a considerable part of the Umayyad narrative. The details mentioned in this respect are conventional, but they belong to the *raḥīl*, the poet's desert journey, and have never been inserted into the *nasīb* before. An explanation suggests itself, if we regard the panegyric *qaṣīda*, as a whole. For when the *khayāl* visits the poet, he is on his way to the *mamdūh*, the patron, to whom the final praise is dedicated, and it is to his advantage to stress the dangers and hardships he took upon himself, in order to reach him. Thus the *nasīb* is already determined in its composition by the poet's main object, praising the patron. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the *khayāl* motif is preferred by Umayyad court poets; it serves as transition to the final part of the *qaṣīda*, the *madīḥ*. Incidentally, this is an argument in favour of the often questioned unity of the *qaṣīda*.

Another point of interest in the Umayyad version is the dream itself. Poets now usually describe their meeting with the *khayāl* in great detail, dwelling on

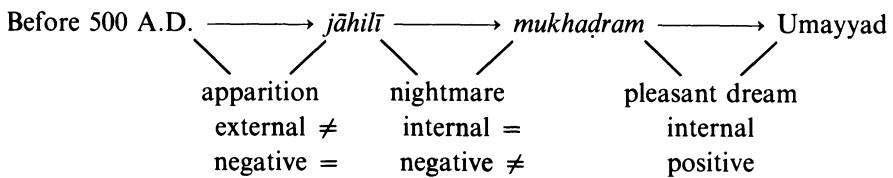
its beauty, its sweet perfume, the pleasures of love they enjoyed. The sad awakening from that happy dream and the ensuing disenchantment often ends the narrative. Two lines by Farazdaq may illustrate this point (*Dīwān* p. 589,4-5):

fa-bittu unājthā wa-aḥsibu annahā
qarībun wa-asbābu n-nufūsi tatūquhā
fa-lammā jalā 'annī l-karā wa-taqāṭa'at
ghayāyatu shawqin ghāba 'annī sudūquhā

I spent the night with her in secret conversation, believing
 her to be near me, while my heart longed for her.
 But when sleep left me, and the deception of longing
 ceased, her real person was far from me.

These closing lines are characteristic of the Umayyad version and constitute a new convention adopted and elaborated upon by later poets.

When considering the early history of the *khayāl* motif from the pre-Islamic to the Umayyad period, we are forced to conclude that it basically retained its identity. Not only words and phrases, but also the structure of the narrative, the scene of action, the characters and various other details are preserved and evidence the unbroken continuity of poetic tradition. On the other hand, it has been established that the terms *khayāl* and *ṭayf* changed their meaning, and that, as a consequence, the whole narrative was transformed and applied with a different function. Reviewing the material analysed so far, we arrive at a sequence of stages in the transformation of the motif, that seems logical and consistent, even if the stages overlap and cannot be fixed with certainty. Owing to the floating character of the poetry in question, there are always exceptions to the rule and contradictory evidence, even in the *diwān* of one and the same poet. With due reservations in mind, however, the early history of the motif might be sketched as follows:



In the Jāhiliyya, and probably before the earliest texts transmitted to us, the *khayāl* is conceived as a phenomenon confronting the observer in the external world and frightening him. Towards the beginning of the 7th century, in the generation of the *mukhaḍramūn*, it is transformed into a vision the poet sees in his dream, its negative, oppressive aspect still in evidence. This is the necessary connecting link between the first and the third version of the motif.

About the same time, a second transformation takes place. The *khayāl* loses its negative connotation; the nightmare is converted into a pleasant dream caused by wishful thinking. The last concept is maintained, with numerous variations, throughout the classical period. There is a negative aspect to the *khayāl* in Abbasid poetry as well, I admit, but that is a different question and has nothing to do with the original version.

From the preceding survey we get the impression that the motif is used as a sort of mould, into which different conceptual and emotional contents are cast, in accordance with individual or collective needs of expression. I hope to elucidate this point by interpreting the change from the negative to the positive *khayāl* with reference to external factors, that is the disintegration of tribal society.

Poetry in pre-Islamic Arabia must be regarded as a comprehensive expression of tribal life, its norms and values. Contrary to some recent studies, where the polythematic *qaṣīda* is viewed primarily as an expression of the poet's individual "vision", I am convinced that it serves, in the first place, as a stabilizing factor, a means to safeguard the tribal system, and to integrate the individual into the group. In bedouin society, problems of the individual, even his lovelife, could never be entirely private, for a member of the tribe who was absent-minded and depressed, would be unable to fulfill his social duties and might become a danger to the group. Thus the function of the *nasīb*, whose main theme is separation and loss, was chiefly to voice the emotional problems of the individual, and to offer a solution in accordance with tribal conditions and ethics. As is well-known, the beloved referred to in the *nasīb* is always a woman belonging to a neighbouring tribe, with whom the poet had an affair while the tribes were pasturing together. To have relations of this kind, was evidently approved of by the community, since the poet usually boasts of them in his self-praise. But as soon as the tribes break up their camps and depart, the lovers must separate, and the bedouin is expected to return sober-minded to the duties of the day. Faithfulness in love was not demanded of him, and to pine away in hopeless sorrow and longing, was regarded as foolish and severely blamed by his group. After the beloved "cut her bond", the bedouin hero should do the same. However, emotions do not always obey the demands of reason and social norms. The poet may try to forget, but memories of the past haunt him and threaten his peace of mind. This is the situation usually described in the *nasīb*. In the motif of the "abandoned camp site", for example, memories of the lost beloved are evoked; the poet weeps and complains, he lives through an emotional crisis, but finally recovers, turns to his camel and continues his journey. Any member of the tribe, identifying himself with the poet, lives through the same emotional experience, recovers from it and regains his mental balance, a

process which may be compared, in a certain sense, with the cathartic experience of Greek tragedies. The *khayāl*, in the original version, serves the same function as “the ruins of the abandoned camp site”; it reminds the poet of something, he in vain seeks to forget. As a consequence, his reaction is a negative one; he feels haunted and oppressed. At the end, however, he reacts as he is expected to by his group; he recovers and sends the *khayāl* back.

I think that the preceding interpretation explains the original version of the motif and provides a key to our understanding of its later development, as well, for with the dissolution of tribal society and the abolishment of its system of norms and values, represented by the bedouin hero, the negative aspect of the *khayāl* lost significance. Poets are not expected any longer to forget the beloved after separation. Instead of looking back and being haunted by memories of the past, they turn towards the future and hope for a continuation of their love-affair or for the happy conclusion of their courtship. As early as the beginning of the 7th century, both in bedouin environment and in urban centres, poets begin to proclaim a different concept of love. The conventional themes and motifs of the *nasīb* continue to be applied, but they are subtly changed and imbued with a new feeling. The problems voiced by poets in their verses during the 7th century remain essentially the same as in the pre-Islamic period, that is how to bear separation and loss, but the solutions offered are different. To remain faithful after separation is now highly approved of by society, and when lovers part, they either hope for future meetings, or resign themselves to a life of constant longing and sorrow. The ideal of the bedouin hero is replaced by that of the ‘*Udhri*’ poet, a *shahīd* in the cause of love. As a consequence, the *khayāl* acquires a new function. It is now the only means of communicating with the beloved in times of separation. It grants the favours which the beloved refused and keeps up the poet’s love and faith in her. In short, reality, often bitter and hard to endure, is compensated by a happy dream.

In conclusion, I should like to add a few remarks as to the nature of the phenomenon and the change of meaning from apparition to vision of the dream or of the imagination. There is an interesting analogy in the development of the philosophical concept *khayāl* (imagination, phantasy). W. Heinrichs in his article “*Die antike Verknüpfung von phantasia und Dichtung bei den Arabern*”, when trying to establish the early meaning of the term, pointed out that the main elements of the later philosophical meaning were already present in the original understanding of the term as a “form or image that is immaterial and deceptive. “Erforderlich war nur noch die Verlegung nach innen, in das Subjekt hinein”, as Heinrichs puts it.⁴ This is exactly what

⁴ ZDMG 1978, pp. 252-298; cf. p. 264.

happened in the transformation of the motif. From a psychological point of view, the *khayāl* could be defined as an unconscious factor of the poet's mind. In the original version of the motif, this factor is projected, like Jinn and Ghül, into the external world, a well-known process in primitive societies, and the usual way of the primitive psyche of solving its problems. The later development of the motif consists in a reversal of the process. The projection is dissolved, and the *khayāl* is placed back where it belongs, into the poet's mind.

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