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THE CONCEPTION OF POETRY AND THE POET IN HADITH SOURCES AND ITS REFLECTIONS IN UZBEK LITERATURE

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Annotation. *The article examines the conception of poetry in Islamic sources that underlies the notion of "poetry and poethood" (she'r va shoirlik) in classical Uzbek literature. Its central question is how the apparent contradiction between the Qur'anic critique of poets in Surat al-Shu'ara and the Prophet's favourable attitude towards poetry and poet-companions was resolved in the sources, and through which criteria this resolution passed into Turkic-Uzbek poetics. Reports on poetry in the Sahih collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim are read together with Uzbek exegetical works, the Uzbek translation of the Qur'an and the commentaries of hadith scholars. The analysis shows that the sources judge poetry less by its formal features (metre and rhyme) than by three criteria: the speaker's intention, the agreement between word and deed, and the social function of speech. These criteria produced a typology dividing poetry into "wisdom" (hikma) and "misguidance" (dalala). The typology takes literary form in Rabghuzi's Qisas al-anbiya, which traces the first poem to Adam's grief, and in Sayf-i Sarayi's verse classification of poets as nightingales, crows and parrots. The article argues that the didactic orientation of classical Uzbek poetry is not merely a period taste but the outcome of an ethics of poethood inherited from these sources.*

Keywords: *poetry and poethood, hadith, Surat al-Shu'ara, wisdom (hikma), Rabghuzi, Sayf-i Sarayi, Uzbek literature.*

Note: The article is based on the second section of the first chapter of the author's Doctor of Science (DSc) dissertation "Scholarly and Artistic Interpretation of the Problems of Poetry and Poethood in Uzbek Literature (14th–15th Centuries)".

Introduction

In Uzbek literary studies, Abdurauf Fitrat was the first to use the phrase "poetry and poethood" as a distinct concept; his essay "She'r va shoirliq" (1919) placed the issue at the centre of literary theory [1, p. 178]. After Fitrat, the historical layers of the concept were studied separately, yet the Islamic sources that shaped the ethics of poethood in classical Turkic-Uzbek poetry have usually been mentioned only as a general background. Although Uzbek scholarship has produced studies on Arabic and the science of eloquence (*balagha*), the question of poetry has not been examined in depth from the standpoint of hadith. Which poems the Prophet approved and which he disapproved, which subjects he found unsuitable for verse, and in which situations he listened to poetry from his companions are questions that still await a systematic answer in Uzbek research.

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Scholarship in Turkey has laid important groundwork. İsmail Durmuş's entry "Şiir" in the *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* discusses in detail the definition of poetry in the Islamic sciences and the question of intention [2]. Mehmet Yalar has studied the social foundations of pre-Islamic (*jahiliyya*) poetry: the tribe, the social position of women and poverty [3]. These studies focus on Arabic poetry; how the criteria arising from them were carried into Turkic-Uzbek literature requires separate investigation.

The root of the word *shi'r*, *sh-'-r*, means "to know, to perceive, to be aware"; the poet (*sha'ir*) is so called because he perceives what others do not [4, entry "sh-'-r"]. This lexical meaning defines poetry as a mode of perception before it is an art of words. The hypothesis of this article is that the Islamic sources likewise approach poetry through the quality of this perception, namely the speaker's intention, his ethics and the effect of his words, rather than through form, and that Turkic-Uzbek literature built its conception of poethood on these criteria.

Methods and Methodology

The study combines the historical-comparative method with hermeneutic interpretation. The primary sources are the Uzbek annotated translation of the Qur'an by Abdulaziz Mansur [5], the Uzbek edition of al-Bukhari's *al-Jami' al-sahih* [6] and the "Book of Poetry" (*Kitab al-shi'r*) in Muslim's *Sahih* [7]. For the verses of Surat al-Shu'ara, Shaykh Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf's *Tafsiri Hilol* was used [8]. The reports were first classified as positive or negative according to their content and ruling; where they appeared to contradict one another, the method of reconciliation (*jam'*) used in hadith methodology was applied, drawing on the commentaries of al-Nawawi [9], Ibn Hajar [10] and al-Mubarakfuri [11]. For the literary comparison, Rabghuzi's *Qisas al-anbiya* [12] and Sayf-i Sarayi's *Gulistan bi't-Turki* [13] were examined.

Results and Discussion

1. Types of poets in Surat al-Shu'ara. The clearest Qur'anic statements on poets appear in verses 224–227 of Surat al-Shu'ara: "As for the poets, the deviators follow them. Do you not see that they roam in every valley, and that they say what they do not do? Except those who believe, do righteous deeds, remember God often and defend themselves after they have been wronged." Mansur explains that the poets meant in verses 225–226 are the ill-intentioned, sycophantic and lying panegyrists of that time, and recalls that there are hadiths stating that poetry is not devoid of wisdom and that poets can achieve with the pen what the sword cannot [5].

The context of revelation supports this distinction. The Meccan polytheists called the Prophet a poet and the Qur'an poetry in order to question the source of revelation; the verses answer this claim by showing that revelation and poetic inspiration are different phenomena. In Surat Yasin it is said: "We did not teach him poetry, nor is it fitting for him" (36:69). According to the report cited by Muhammad Yusuf, when the verses were revealed some poet-companions came weeping to the Prophet and said they would abandon poetry; the exception in verse 227 clarified their position. The exegete stresses that the first generation of believing poets described in this verse lived in the age of the Prophet and that Hassan ibn Thabit was their leader [8].

Thus the sura describes not a single type of poet but two opposing types. The first roams every subject according to his whims, exalts whom he praises, debases whom he dislikes and says what he does not do. The second is defined by faith, righteous action, remembrance of God and just self-defence. The criterion of distinction is not metre, rhyme or style; it is the relationship between what the poet says and how he lives.

The structure of pre-Islamic Arab society explains why this distinction mattered. According to Alikhantora Soguni, the fairs of ‘Ukaz, Majanna and Dhu’l-Majaz served as arenas of competition for Arab poets and orators, and a tribal poet’s excessive praise of his own tribe and contempt for others sometimes led to bloody conflicts [14]. By tradition, poems judged superior in eloquence were hung on the wall of the Ka‘ba, and their authors gained the title of great poet. As Yalar shows, pre-Islamic poetry was the vehicle of tribal solidarity, boasting (*fakhr*) and satire [3]. The type of poet criticised in the Qur’an is the one who turned speech into an instrument of tribal interest and personal ambition within this social order.

2. Poetry in the hadith: between wisdom and misguidance. The reports on poetry in the hadith collections fall into two groups. The first of the positive reports is the hadith transmitted from Ubayy ibn Ka‘b: “Indeed, some poetry is wisdom” [6, no. 6145]. This hadith defines poetry as a source of wisdom and ties its value to the wisdom it carries. The saying “Indeed, some eloquence is magic” expresses the power of speech over the human heart, its capacity to build or to destroy [6, no. 5146].

A second important report concerns Hassan ibn Thabit. Hassan asked Abu Hurayra whether he had heard the Prophet say: “O Hassan, answer on behalf of the Messenger of God! O God, support him with the Holy Spirit!”, and Abu Hurayra confirmed that he had [6, no. 453]. The placement of this report in al-Bukhari under the heading “reciting poetry in the mosque” is significant: poetry could be recited in the mosque, regarded as the house of God, and the poet was deemed worthy of the support of Gabriel. The Prophet’s command “answer” shows that poetry was adopted as a means of defence against the satires of the polytheists.

The report on the Khaybar campaign shows the place of poetry in communal life even more clearly. According to Salama ibn al-Akwa‘, during the journey someone asked the poet ‘Amir ibn al-Akwa‘ to recite *rajaz* verses, and ‘Amir recited his poem beginning “O God, were it not for You we would not have been guided, nor given charity, nor prayed.” The Prophet asked who the reciter was and prayed: “May God have mercy on him”; one of those present remarked that this prayer made Paradise certain for ‘Amir [6, no. 4196]. The prayer was directed not at poetry as such but at the faith and the call to solidarity that the poem carried.

Muslim records that on a journey the Prophet asked for verses of Umayya ibn Abi al-Salt to be recited, said “continue” after each line and thus listened to a hundred verses [7, no. 2255]. Al-Bukhari reports that ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar recited Abu Talib’s verse asking for rain in a time of drought [6, no. 1008]. These reports show that poetry entered everyday religious life through functions such as supplication, prayer for rain and the transmission of wisdom.

The best-known negative report is the hadith of Abu Hurayra: “That the inside of one of you be filled with pus is better than that it be filled with poetry” [6, no. 6155; 7, no. 2257]. In

another report from Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri, the Prophet, coming upon a man reciting poetry on the road, said: “Seize the devil” [7, no. 2259]. At first sight these reports seem to contradict the positive ones. The commentators reconciled them by showing that the negative ruling concerns a specific condition rather than poetry itself. According to al-Nawawi, the simile of being “filled with pus” refers to the state in which poetry overwhelms the heart and keeps a person from reciting the Qur’an, remembering God and studying the religious sciences; for one whose memory is filled with the Qur’an and hadith, knowing a little religious poetry does no harm [9]. Al-Mubarakfuri likewise notes that the expression is a simile describing poetry that turns people away from the Qur’an or contains unbelief against the Prophet [11].

3. Three criteria: intention, agreement of word and deed, and function. Read together, the reports show that the Islamic sources evaluate poetry according to three criteria. These criteria form the core of the ethics of poethood that, as this article argues, passed into classical Uzbek poetry.

The first criterion is intention. Certain rhymed and metrical utterances attributed to the Prophet, such as the *rajaz* lines spoken during the building of the mosque in Medina and the digging of the Trench, were not regarded by the hadith scholars as poetry. Ibn Hajar stresses that these words were spoken without the intention of composing poetry, so their speaker cannot be called a poet [10]. This view rests on the classical definition that “metrical and rhymed speech uttered without the intention of composing poetry is not poetry” [2]. The occasional ending of Qur’anic verses in the same letter was likewise seen not as a requirement of poetry but as a feature of fluent Arabic. In this tradition, then, what makes poetry poetry is, before form, the speaker’s will to compose it.

The second criterion is the agreement between word and deed. Verse 226 of Surat al-Shu‘ara identifies the poet’s most fundamental fault as “saying what they do not do”. In Muhammad Yusuf’s words, a poet may express wonderful meanings and counsels in his verse and yet be a person who does not follow them himself [8]. In pre-Islamic poetry, virtues such as generosity could be described as lived although they had not been; word and deed were often at odds. Islam’s principle of the unity of faith, knowledge and action carried this criterion over to poetry. In this light the harsh language of the “pus” hadith can be read as a warning to versifiers whose words and deeds do not coincide.

The third criterion is function. The poetry approved in the reports appears with specific functions: praising God and His Messenger, giving counsel, defending the faith, encouraging the community, supplication and elegy. A report from Ka‘b ibn Malik states that the Prophet said: “The believer strives with his sword and his tongue; by Him in whose hand my soul is, what you say to them in verse is more effective than shooting arrows” [15]. By contrast, poems attacking people’s lineage and honour, arousing base desires and feeding arrogance and boasting were rejected. Soguni’s account of the stance of ‘Amir ibn Tufayl, poet of the Banu ‘Amir, towards the Prophet is given as a historical example of the poet nourished by pride and envy [14].

These three criteria produce a typology that divides poetry between two poles: at one end, poetry that expresses truth and carries wisdom; at the other, poetry that praises falsehood and leads

astray. Crucially, the typology does not reject poetry as a whole. The Prophet chose to reform rather than abolish the realities of his society, and he likewise turned poetry towards what benefits the community instead of rejecting it. Compared with Plato's proposal to banish poets from the ideal state, the stance of the Islamic sources is not rejection but discipline and guidance.

4. Reflections in Uzbek literature. One of the earliest examples of the transfer of these criteria into Turkic-Uzbek literature is Nasir al-Din Burhan al-Din Rabghuzi's *Qisas al-anbiya* (1310). The work states that the first poem on earth belonged to Adam and was spoken when Cain killed his brother Abel. This elegy, given in Arabic, laments that the colour and taste of the earth have changed and that the fair face has withered, expressing deep grief for Abel [12, p. 24]. For the theory of poetry the story is highly significant: the origin of poetry is sought not in skill, boasting or tribal rivalry but in humanity's first sorrow. The Sufi saying "Pain was created before the angels" is the mystical counterpart of this view. Against the boasting and satire at the centre of pre-Islamic poetry, Rabghuzi positions poetry as an expression of mourning and truth.

The clearest example of the two types of poet in Surat al-Shu'ara turning into a literary classification is found in the following lines of Sayf-i Sarayi, a fourteenth-century poet of the Golden Horde, in his *Gulistan bi't-Turki*:

Jahon shoirlari, ey, gulshani bog',
Kimi bulbul durur so'zda, kimi zog'.
Kimi to'ti bekin chaynar shakarni,
Kimi lafzi bilan o'rtar dararni.
Kimining so'zlari mavzunu shirin,
Kimining loyiqi tashrifu tahsin.
Kimi o'zganing ash'orin menim der,
Kimi halvo kibi shalg'am cho'bin yer.
Kimi ma'niy qo'yub lafzin tuzotur,
Kimi vaznin buzub san'at kuzotur [13, p. 12].

Sarayi likens the poets of the world to the nightingale (the poet whose words are beautiful and meaningful), the crow (the poet without meaning) and the parrot (the imitator who repeats by rote, as if chewing sugar). He then lists the poet who calls another's verse "mine", the one who abandons meaning and merely polishes words, and the one who breaks the metre to show off figures of speech. This classification is the ethical criterion of the hadith sources translated into an aesthetic language: claiming another's poem violates the agreement of word and truth; sacrificing meaning to wording is speech without wisdom; breaking the metre for display is an imbalance between form and substance. Sarayi closes the classification by naming himself with humility as "the dust beneath the feet of the world's gnostics", so that humility, too, is built into the text as part of the ethics of poethood.

The same conception is echoed in Adib Ahmad Yugnaki's *Hibat al-haqayiq*, which places the warning against the "calamities of the tongue" at its centre. In these works poetry is seen as a moral domain that bears the responsibility of speech. This is one reason why classical Uzbek poetry preserved its didactic spirit for centuries: the view that "there is magic in speech and

wisdom in poetry" assigned to poetry the task not only of stirring hearts but of turning them towards goodness and right guidance.

5. Discussion. The findings show that the classical Uzbek conception of poetry rests on an ethics and function-centred idea of poethood before a form-centred poetics. Metre (*aruz*), rhyme and figures of speech are of course indispensable rules of this literature; yet the final criterion of a poem's value, as in the sources, is the wisdom it carries and the poet's fidelity to his word. This explains why, in the same literary milieu, formal perfection alone was not deemed sufficient and why the poet "without meaning" was called a crow rather than a nightingale.

The limitations of this study should also be stated. Most of the reports examined come from the *Sahih* collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim; reports found in exegetical and Arabic philological works but absent from the hadith collections were left aside. Since hadith works classify poems by subject while exegetical works usually cite them to explain rare words, the approaches of the two kinds of sources to poetry should be compared separately. How these criteria are reflected in the evaluations of poets in the Turkic-Uzbek *tazkira*s is the subject of a separate study.

Conclusion

In the Islamic sources poetry and the poet are defined through two opposing types. Verses 224–226 of Surat al-Shu'ara criticise the poet who shapes his words according to whim and interest and says what he does not do, while verse 227 exempts the poet who believes, does righteous deeds and defends a just cause. The hadiths make this distinction concrete: Hassan ibn Thabit recites poetry in the mosque with the support of the Holy Spirit, and 'Amir ibn al-Akwa' receives the Prophet's prayer of mercy, whereas the person whose heart is so filled with poetry that it turns him away from the Qur'an and remembrance is warned with a harsh simile.

Three criteria can be drawn from these reports: the speaker's intention, the agreement between word and deed, and the function of speech. They produced a typology that evaluates poetry not at the level of form but at the level of wisdom and misguidance. In Turkic-Uzbek literature the typology took literary form in two ways: Rabghuzi, tracing the first poem to Adam's grief, sought the origin of poetry in the expression of truth and sorrow; Sayf-i Sarayi, classifying poets as nightingales, crows and parrots, turned the ethical criterion into a language of aesthetic judgement.

Consequently, the didactic orientation of classical Uzbek poetry cannot be explained merely as a matter of period taste. It is the product of an ethics of poethood inherited from the Islamic sources, one that makes the poet responsible to the truth.

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