The Genius of Usāmah ibn Munqidh:
aspects of Kitāb al-İ'tibār
by Usāmah ibn Munqidh

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This study adduces evidence in support of the following assertions. The Arab conquests of the 1st/7th century affected the development of both the vernacular and the formal mode of Arabic. Rhetorical theory of the 3rd/9th century and after leaves no doubt about the discrete nature of the latter. Modern linguistic theory that tries to do the same for the former is more speculative. Both forms are evident in Kitāb al-Iʿtibār by the 6th/12th century Syrian writer, Usāmah b. Munqidh. They reflect his long and varied experience as a soldier and man of letters. His use of both forms in Kitāb al-Iʿtibār is perceptibly matched to his purpose, which is to provide moral instruction by means of illustrative example. This purpose is not immediately apparent in the work, which seems to have begun as a conventional chronicle. The spoken language of the author’s time provides the medium for his anecdote. Formal rhetorical language is used to draw attention to the point of the anecdotes and thus gives structure and coherence to the writer’s recollections. His powers as a storyteller are more impressive than his subtlety as a philosopher. The range of his subject matter makes the work of lasting value as a window on the writer’s times.

This work is based on the available published work of Usāmah b. Munqidh, as well as relevant rhetorical, literary and historical writing of his time. It also uses published material relating to modern linguistic theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study will consider Kitāb al-I’tibār by the 6th/12th century Syrian writer, Usāmah b. Munqidh, from the point of view of literary skill and style. Literary skill depends on innate ability in the chosen area of operations reflected in the content and form of the literary product. Biographical detail may shed some light on this aspect. Literary style is the writer's more or less conscious application of the intrinsic features of the language in which he writes. The accretion of history may have resulted in new ways of saying something being added to the already existing modes. His choice and use of language may reflect prevailing literary fashion, itself subject to historical influences, as well, of course, as being the expression of his own personality and background. Accordingly, the study will consider certain historical factors influencing the development of the Arabic language until Usāmah's time, and their impact on the conventions of written Arabic. Then, in the light of biographical and historical findings, first the content and form, and then the language of the work, will be examined.
2. THE AUTHOR

A varied life

Both ends of Usūmah's long active life 488-584/1095-1188 were devoted to letters. He recalls how he studied grammar (nabū) under Shaykh Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Tulaytūlī "in grammar the Sībawayhi of his time", after the latter had left the Dār al-ʿIlm in Tripoli. This took place in 502/1109 when Usūmah was fourteen. Then, at the end of his life, he taught bādī', or the rhetorical science of embellishment, at the Ḥanīfī madrasah in Damascus 569-79/1174-84. He was celebrated in his time, according to al-Dhahabī, for "knowing by heart more than 20,000 verses of the poetry of the Jāhiliyyah". At the same time, he was well known as the author of a diwan of poetry, of which Saladin was especially fond. Al-Dhahabī said of him: "And he was a lion (usūmah) like his name (Usūmah), in the strength of his nāsuh ("scattering" or "prose") and his nāṣaḥ ("order" or "verse")."

His life as a warrior and hunter was almost as long. In 501/1108, at the age of thirteen, he took part in the defence of Shayzar, the seat of the Banū Muniqidh on the Orontes, against Tancred, the Frankish prince of Antioch. From 523-32/1129-38 he was in the army of the Atūbāk Zankī, and from 538-48/1144-54, while in Egypt at the Fatimid Court, he took part in enterprises against the Franks. During 546-59/1154-64 he was in the army of Nūr al-Dīn Ibn Zankī. He was as celebrated for his prowess on the battlefield as he was for his literary activity: šahd abtāl al-islām, "one of the heroes of Islam." By his own calculation, he spent seventy years hunting.

His abilities early attracted the envy of others, engendering in him a capacity for survival in times thick with intrigue. He was tested in the first instance by the jealousy of his uncle ʿIzz al-Dīn Abū ʿAlī Asākir Sultān, who had obtained the lordship of Shayzar from his elder brother, Usūmah's father. The anecdote treating of this sinister development is reported by two sources: because of the eminence of the family and Shayzar's strategic importance as a crossing-point on the river,
the quarrel was a cause célèbre. His footwork was further tried during his ten years in Egypt, when he was involved in the murder of al-ʿAdil b. al-Sallār by the latter's son-in-law ʿAbbās, and ʿAbbās' intrigues against the Caliph al-Ẓāfir. His declining years saw him in and out of favour with patrons, including Saladin, who gave Usāmah the governorship of Beirut, but then grew cold towards him, perhaps because of new information on Usāmah's relationships with the Fatimids in Egypt years before.

Literary output

It was during such fallow periods of disfavour at the end of his life that Usāmah wrote. Some of his production survives, conveying the impression of wide learning. He produced a work on rhetoric, Kitāb al-Baḍīʿ fī naqd al-shīʿr, (The Book of embellishment in the criticism of verse), consisting of a distillation of previous rhetorical work. The memory of the earthquake of 552/1157, which destroyed Shāizar and killed most of his relatives, prompted an anthology of verse and prose with lament upon ruin as their theme: Kitāb al-Manāzil waʾl-diyār, (The Book of dwellings and abodes). As curious was another work: Kitāb al-ʿAṣrāf (The Book of the staff), in which the motif of the walking-stick forms a common thread for a collection of anecdotes and verse. The Kitāb Lubāb al-ʿadāʾī, (The Quintessence of belles-lettres), is an assemblage of sacred and profane references to a variety of subjects, ranging from wills (waqāyān) to wisdom (ḥikmah). Titles of works which have been lost include Taʿrīkh al-qilāʾ waʾl-huṣūn, (History of palaces and strongholds), and Kitāb al-Navm waʾl-ahlām, (The Book of sleep and dreams), to which Usāmah refers in Kitāb al-Iʿtībār.

Kitāb al-Iʿtībār, (The Book of instruction by example) is the author's most famous work, and it was written in Damascus when Usāmah was ninety. He had fled his governorate of Beirut before the arrival of the Franks; Saladin's favour towards him had cooled. In 1880, Hartwig Derenbourg discovered fragments of the work in the Escorial in Madrid, among Arabic manuscripts.
relating to Spain and North Africa. He assembled them into order, and discovered that, with the exception of the first twenty-one sheets, the work was complete, up to and including the colophon at the end. His edition of the work was superseded by that of Philip Hitti, upon which this study is based. The copy available to the writer was a 1981 Beirut printing of the 1930 edition. The pagination of either printing, however, does not correspond.

Notes

1 Usāmah ibn Munqīdḥ, 1981, 267
2 Usāmah, 1981, Introduction, fa'
3 Al-Dhahabī in Usāmah, 1893, 103
4 Abū Shāmah, n.d., I, 97-98
5 Al-Dhahabī in Usāmah, 1893, 104
6 Al-Dhahabī in Usāmah, 1893, 103
7 Usāmah, 1981, 269
8 see below p. 12
9 Abū Shāmah, n.d., I, 112; and Ibn al-Athīr, 1876, II, part 2, 199, 200
10 Ibn al-Athīr, 1872, I, 486
11 see below p. 37
12 Usāmah, 1981, Introduction, fa'
13 Usāmah, 1953. Also partly in Usāmah, 1893, 116-146
14 Usāmah, 1965
15 Partly in Usāmah, 1893, 7-50
16 Usāmah, 1935
17 Usāmah, 1981, Introduction, 'ayn
18 Usāmah, 1981, 241
19 Usāmah, 1981, Introduction, fa'
20 Usāmah, 1886
21 Usāmah, 1981
Arabiyyah and the futūḥ

Arabiyyah, "correct language", or "the language of the Qur'ān", began as a spoken language in Arabia. There is a difference of opinion as to whether it was supra-tribal, or belonged to a particular tribe, as, for example, Quraysh claimed. On the other hand, it is generally agreed that this language, as it evolved, became supra-tribal, dominating the broad division of dialect into Eastern (Gulf) and Western (Hijāz).

As a result of the conquests in the 1st/7th century, Arabiyyah, together with the tribal bedouin dialects among which it was pre-eminent, came into contact with other Semitic languages, which had evolved differently from Arabic. The result was the emergence of modified forms of speech, characterised by simplification of the alien complexities of Arabic. The bedouin tribal dialects, which did not change their fundamental character, influenced, and were in turn influenced by, the non-Arab reaction to Arabic. They were, nevertheless, regarded as exemplifying correct speech. Meanwhile, Arabiyyah became increasingly isolated, its pure form still evolving, its difficulty protecting it, and reserving for it the role of medium of literary expression for the Arab empire. By the beginning of the 4th/10th century, it had become classic, susceptible of no more development, with an archaic beauty that eclipsed its poor cousins, the bedouin dialects.

Observers noted the symptoms of the process of modification as it happened, without necessarily forming any theory on the basis of their data. In his Kitāb al-bayān wa-'l-tahāyūn, al-Jāhiz (163-255/780-860) provides a large number of examples of solecisms (luhūn) of different sorts, but not in methodical fashion. Likewise, he observed that some sounds of foreign languages could not be rendered into Arabic. Later, al-Muqaddasi (336-80/947-80) in his Kitāb Ahsān al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqāli̇m, listed peculiarities
of language region by region.

Their observations were carried out from the point of view of 'arabiyah, divergences from which were regarded as aberrations. By contrast, a modern observer like Blau regards the forms of speech that emerged from the linguistic encounters of the futūh as vernacular tongues in their own right. The typological similarity of 'arabiyah and the bedouin tribal dialects was based on their being what Blau calls synthetic languages. They tended to express several concepts in a single word, and possessed similar systems of conjugation and declension. The Semitic languages with which they came into contact were what Blau calls analytic: they tended to use one word to express one perception, and were inclined to drop case and word endings, when these had been retained by the synthetic language. The distinct syntactic, morphological and phonetic characteristics which Blau maintains emerged as a result, he calls Middle Arabic. He further sub-divides it according to the communal affiliation of the speaker: Judaeo-Arabic, Christian Arabic and Muslim Arabic. Blau's theory would consider the non-classical Arabic elements of a literary product of northern Syria in the 6th/12th century with a view to classification in the latter category.

The development of 'ilm al-balāghah

Early orthodox Islamic attitudes discouraged the development of an Arabic science of rhetoric, that is, eloquence and elegance of language. In Sūrat al-Shū‘arā’ (the Poets), Muḥammad is warned against poets: "Those who stray follow them. Do you not see that they wander about love-struck in every valley? And that they preach what they don't practice?" The Prophet is reported to have said: iyyākum wa-saj' al-kuhhān. "Avoid ye the rhyming prose of the soothsayers or diviners." Dislike of saj' or rhymed prose was based in particular on its being the medium of the utterances of kahanah or soothsayers in pre-Islamic times. It was also an indispensable ingredient of any occasion which required eloquence: satirical competition (muhājāh), legal
arguments and genealogical claims, for example. On the other hand, the captivating power of this unmetrical poetry was entirely appropriate to the Qurʾān, which was the word of God, quite different from the ecstatic utterances of a diviner: "So announce the praises of God. For by the grace of your Lord, you are neither soothsayer, nor one possessed."

As Islam spread, the threat of the pagan past receded, and rhymed prose reasserted itself. Practical as well as political reasons lay behind a gathering of interest in literary expression. Writing had anyway been a necessary skill among the merchants of the Hijāz. It was also essential for correct maintenance of the lists of fighting men in the āmmār and was in time further extended to the administration of conquered territories. The need to assert the cultural superiority of the Arabic language and at the same time to maintain clarity of communication in the official transactions of government, resulted in an art of letter-writing, with the literary secretary (adīb) as the chief practitioner. Thus it is said of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d.132/750), the secretary of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II, that "letters began with him." There were other factors which turned the Arabs’ attention to the consideration of a science of expression. During the 2nd/8th century poets like Bashshār b. Burd (d.167/783) and Muslim b. al-Walīd, Ḥarīṣ al-ghawānī “smitten by the fair sex” (died 823), began to use rhetorical artifices on an unprecedented scale, and in a way which distinguished their language from that of the older poets. The new use of imagery was regarded as bādī’, or innovatory, for the way it rejected the subject matter of traditional poetry, which was tied to the desert roots of the Arab, and the pre-Islamic ideal of mūru’ah. The direct influence of Greek thought, via the eastern Hellenized cities, on the use of rhetorical devices by exponents of bādī’, is disputed. Its indirect influence, however, on the establishment of a science of rhetoric, is clearer. Muʿtazilite thought, under the stimulus of the Greek rationalistic process, challenged the doctrine of the eternal nature of the Qurʾān, and, instead, claimed that it was created. Those who maintained the eternal nature of the Qurʾān, held that its resultant inimitability (iʿjāz)
The problem is not that the present work was based on the more recent interpretations of the prehistoric cultures of the Southwest, but rather that the interpretations were based on the assumptions that the prehistoric cultures were of different time periods from the present. This has led to a misunderstanding of the relationships between the cultures and their environments, which in turn has led to a misinterpretation of the archaeological data.

The book, which was written by Dr. John Hodge, is a comprehensive study of the prehistoric cultures of the Southwest. Dr. Hodge has been researching these cultures for over 25 years and has published numerous articles on the subject. His work is widely respected and has been instrumental in shaping the current understanding of these cultures.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first section provides an overview of the prehistoric cultures of the Southwest, including their geographic distribution, dates, and cultural characteristics. The second section focuses on the individual cultures, providing detailed descriptions of their lifestyles, technologies, and social structures. The third section presents a synthesis of the data, discussing the major trends and patterns within the prehistoric cultures of the Southwest.

The book is an essential resource for anyone interested in the prehistory of the Southwest. It is written in a clear and accessible style, making it suitable for both academic researchers and the general public.

To purchase the book, please visit our website at www.prehistoric-southwest.com. You can also find it in most major bookstores.
the basis for the Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ of al-Qazwīnī (666-739/1268-1338). The classification was three-fold: 'ilm al-
ma‘ānī, corresponding to grammar and syntax; 'ilm al-bayān, which deals with simile, metaphor and metonymy; and 'ilm
al-badī‘, where the word badī‘ which previously alluded to
a novelty of style, is now used to denote an effect, that of
"embellishment". Since Usāmah wrote a treatise on badī‘, and
lectured in the subject, one might expect to find evidence of
its artifices in Kitāb al-I‘tibār. A copy of Usāmah’s
Kitāb al-Badī‘ ra‘ naqd al-shī‘r is not available to this
writer. In it, one would find Usāmah’s own articulation of
all the major devices of embellishment, equally applicable
in the main to prose as much as to verse. But Usāmah’s
work was in any case based on previous treatises of rhetoric.
We can therefore have recourse for theoretical exegesis to the
Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ of al-Qazwīnī which has an isnād that goes
back to Usāmah’s time and before.

Notes

2. Fück, 1955, 131
3. Fück, 1955, 102
5. Fück, 1955, 163
6. The Qur‘ān, XXVI:224-227
8. Al-Ḥarīrī, 1867, Introduction, 49
9. Qur‘ān, LII:29
11. Sellheim and Sourdel, 1976
12. Al-Ziriklī, 1954-59, IV, 60
13. Khaṣafallah, 1958
14. e.g. ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, 1954, Introduction, 3-4; Qudāmah b. Ja‘far al-Kātib al-Raghūdādī 1956,
Introduction, 30-44
15. Schaanze, 1959
16. Khaṣafallah, 1958
17. Schaade, 1959
18. Von Grünebaum, 1959
19. Fück, 1955, 123-4
20. Bonebakker, 1960
21. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938
22. Usūmah, 1955, Introduction, 26
The manuscript of Kitāb al-İ'tibar begins at the close of the battle of Qinnasrin in 531/1137. At this point, the work is in chronicle form and there would seem to be no reason for not assuming that this was also the form of the missing forty-two pages. Events are recorded in the order of their occurrence until soon after the death in 549/1154 of 'Abbās al-Afḍal Ruṣn al-Dīn, and the capture of his son by the Franks at al-Muwaylih. As Usāmah looks back over his life, it soon becomes clear that small details have stuck in his mind, as well as matters of great historical moment. He describes, for example, the unsuccessful conspiracy organised by the Fatimid caliph al-Ẓāfir in 544/1150 against his vizier al-Malik al-ʻĀdil, Sayf al-Dīn b. al-Sallār. Then follow two depictions of other events in the same day. They both concern fugitives: one is a Sudanese, party to the plot who eludes his pursuers with great energy, hurling himself from the roof of Usāmah's house in Cairo on to a tree in the courtyard. The other is a forger on the run, who enters Usāmah's house by the front door and engages him in erudite conversation. The first shakes his pursuers off; but the second is peremptorily beheaded by al-ʻĀdil. Before returning to his account of chancellery affairs, Usāmah contemplates the fugitives' different fates.

The incompatibility of Usāmah's approach with the conventional chronicle-writing of his era is evident from Abū Shāmah's treatment of Usāmah's account of the killing of al-Ẓāfir by 'Abbās in 549/1154. Abū Shāmah preserves intact Usāmah's account of the butchery, as well as his sombre comment on the day: "one of the most calamitous (ashad)" he had ever spent. But Abū Shāmah does not include Usāmah's account of an eerie incident, a footnote as it were, to the major event of the day: Amin al-Mulk, an old watchman, is found dead behind the audience room door, key in hand.
The break between Usāmah and conventional historical writing is soon complete. The account of the death of ʿAbbās is followed by the recall of an earlier period, the viziership of Ṣadiq b. al-Māghārīl, vizier of al-Zāfīr’s predecessor al-Ḥāfiz. Then Usāmah terminates the record with a brief mention of his leaving Egypt and going to Syria to the employ of the Zankid al-Malik al-ʿAṣīl Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Zankī. He announces that henceforth he will present wonders (rajāʾib) which he has witnessed and experienced in combat.

Usāmah as anecdotalist

The contrast between the Sudanese’s desperate ingress via the tree in Usāmah’s courtyard, and the forger’s unhurried arrival by conventional means is the first example of a device Usāmah frequently employs in his exposition of “wonders”. He has a sure instinct for antithesis which heightens the dramatic effect of an anecdote. It can be more or less picturesque. For example, Usāmah portrays the tableau of his triumphant return after dark bearing a dead lion, to be met by his grandmother full of foreboding about how this will excite the jealousy of his uncle, ʿIzz al-Dīn Abū ʿIṣāk Sūlṭān. More emphasis is laid on the antithesis of attitude in the (deathless) encounter between oriental pudor and western impropriety in the bath-house at al-Maʿarrah. The Frankish knight not only exposes himself; he does the same for his wife. Sālim the ḥammānī is too stunned even to take offence.

Usāmah has an eye for circumstantial detail which enhances his credibility as a chronicler. The reader is immediately struck by his care to mention (as well as his ability to remember) the names of the dramatic personae in his yarns: for example, that of the old watchman on the day of al-Zāfīr’s murder. Such details may be graphically described. We are told how the Atābak Tughdakīn tucked the ends of his robe into his belt before leaving his tent and wine to go outside and behead Robert of Saōne, his prisoner. The reason is at once simple and convincing: were it not for this precaution, the operation would be
impeded. The circumstantial detail may be abstract. An Antiochene Frank offers Abū 'l-Fath, a craftsman from Shayzar, a cure for his son's scrofula, on condition that Abū 'l-Fath will not sell the prescription to anyone else. The report of the boy's recovery is the more convincing in the light of the knowledge that the cure is protected by oath from commercial exploitation.

Characterization is used to lend depth to an anecdote. The characters may be historical, as in the case of Saladin, and, indeed, the writer himself, and portrayal of character can be conveyed through dialogue. The exchange between Saladin, who was forty years younger, and Usāmah, concerns a trifling subject: Usāmah's preparedness for battle, and, in particular, the sort of jerkin he wears. The conversation, however, conveys a powerful impression of the older man wavering between self-respect and pride, against the taut unpredictability of the warrior. This is also suggested by means of a narrative, as for example, when Saladin orders a man to be cut in half at the siege of Hīrā for daring to question a decision of his. Other, lesser characters are given life in the pages through a memorable line they are given to utter. The two brothers Banū al-Ru'ān, employed in carrying messages between Shayzar and Latakia, are spared oblivion in this way. "Alright, he's done well, but who's he boasting to now", they say of a man who has just killed a lion, and now seems to be posing motionless for an audience. Once down from the hill where they were hiding, they find that he has been killed by a scorpion in his shoe. He uses pathos to rouse the pity or sadness of the reader. An old woman, whose two sons have been killed in Saladin's siege of the castle of Māsurra in 527/1133 wonders what remains to be inflicted on her. The Franks organise a race at Tiberias between two old women who stumble through to the finish where a prize of a pig, scalped, Usāmah tells us, to remove its hair, awaits the winner.
The hikmah of Usâmah

A doxology concludes the description of the two arrivals on the day of the plot against Ibn al-Sallâr: "I extol the perfection of the Decree of Days (mugaddir al-as'âr) and the Appointer of Hours (muwaqqit al-ajnâl)." 18 Pre-determination is more closely examined in connection with the fate of Râdwân. Good qualities mixed in him: rajulan kâmilan karîman shujâ'ân kâtibân 'ârifan. But to no avail: one of his men cuts him down. As a line of Usânah's verse has it:

"Were it not for what the quills of destiny had previously written,

The fool would not obtain favour before the wise." 21

Râdwân's death, Usâmah says, provides an example (muštâbar) and a warning (wäţîz). But then he adds a caveat: "Were it not for the execution of the divine will,..." (law lâ narâdth al-mashi'âh). We must supply the apodosis: "Men might be able to take more advantage of such examples." For, the immutability of the divine will takes precedence over any exemplary role it may have. Thus it is not granted to either 'Abbâs or his son Mârir al-Dîn to take heed of the example of Râdwân. In addition, they are guilty of tyranny and ingratitude, for which they receive their just deserts.

The relationship of the divine will to God himself is touched on in an observation on miraculous escape. The Lord of Arâmiyyah, Sâyf al-Dawlah Khalaf b. Mulâ'îb al-Ashhabî, was transfixed by a spear because his attendant had failed to dress him properly for combat, but nevertheless, he recovered. Usânah observes that Sâyf al-Dawlah's escape was one of the wonders of the divine will; the wound, on the other hand, was what God was pleased to cause. The one represents a judgement on carelessness; the other a limitation on the punishment to be suffered. Usânah enquires no further into the divine plan and its implementation. Instead, he places his faith in God's eventually bringing matters to a conclusion with due mercy and kindness. As he comments on the loss of his books: "God, praised be He, recompenses according to His mercy and brings things to an end with kindness and

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Usānāh's reaction to the inscrutability of God's design takes the form of stoicism: "If fate's vicissitudes overcame my riches, stout patience on my part will defeat it." 

Praxis can make little headway against this: 

"I cannot avert what God has ordained, 
Nor can they do save what is decreed." 

Prefacing an account of how a handful of men at Sheyzar repulsed an army of Franks, he deprecates the value of organisation and planning in warfare. As his father tells him in connection with the same incident: "My boy, war runs itself." (al-ḥarb tudabbir nafsakā). 

And yet, despite these calls to negativism, few lives can have been as full of action as Usānāh's. In Kitāb al-Iḥtibār, almost as persistent as his reminders of the immutability of fate, are his regrets at old age dampening his zest for life. Old age is a central theme in his thought: 

"Oh, you can see how hoariness has dragged you,
Once dusky-templed, weak-sinewed to eventide."

The terms in which he conceives of existence are clearly those of the world of men, rather than the realm of thought. In a discussion with his teacher Ibn al-Munīrah on warfare, the sheykh maintains that courage in battle and reason are mutually exclusive. If the mind considered the dangers to which it was exposed in warfare, it would not fight. Usamah, by contrast, locates the springs of valour in a man's reasoned concern for his reputation. It does not occur to him that the self-esteem on which his argument depends is ultimately no more explicable in rational terms than is the capacity to court danger which Ibn al-Munīrah assigns to the irrational. 

Within the limits of psychology, however, his observation is acute, always coloured, of course by his values as chevalier sans peur et sans reproche. During ʿImād al-Dīn Zankī's siege of Ḥīṣn al-Ṣawr in 527/1133 a man from Aleppo called Ibn ʿAriq behaves with reckless courage. In his preface to the account, Usāmah sees a man as driven by
concern for his name, against the dictates of his fear, to

seat in battle. Physical symptoms - shuddering and a change

of colour - accompany the struggle in a soul poised for

combat.

This behaviour tends to produce attitudes at odds with

a determinist view of existence. Usāmah finds that, in spite

of the unalterable decrees of fate, resolve can achieve

surprising results. The Ismāʿīlī fortress of al-Khirbah

(al-Khuraybāh) was seized single-handedly from 'Isā al-Ḥājib,

governor to Saladin. Usāmah observes that men, once they

brace themselves to a purpose, carry it out. On the other

hand, audacity should be tempered with prudence. An attempt

to capture caravan thieves outside Damascus fails because

Usāmah's friend and patron Muʿīn al-Dīn Anar ignores

Usāmah's advice to take troops with them. In certain

situations, excessive pluck can be disadvantageous.

Metaphysical speculation might discount the value of

planning in the affairs of men; but experience finds

reason to be a human being's greatest asset. "It is

praised by ignorant and intelligent alike." (wa-huwa

mahmūd 'ind al-ʿāqil wa-ʿl-jāhil).

Homogeneity and continuity

Usāmah is concerned to pass on the fruits of his

experience. His advice may be speculative:

"Beware of the world!

Be deceived not by fleeting life!"

Or it may be more practical:

"Beware of shameless company!

Nothing causes one to repent more than the

company of evildoers!"

His instructive purpose lends homogeneity to his

presentation, in the way he repeatedly refers the reader

to aspects of his experiential philosophy and behavourism.

These references often take the form of a doxology. A

recurring theme, of course, is the immutability of destiny.

Thus, more or less the same formula that concluded the

first anecdote in the book, is found again in a comment
on a miraculous escape during the Ismā'ili attack on Shayzar in 529/1135: fa-tabāraka Allāh Muqaddir al-aqdār wa-muwaqqit al-a‘jāl wa-‘l-a‘mār. The inexplicability of the divine plan calls for another formula. After an anecdote recounting the curing of an eye affliction as the result of a blow received in an engagement, God is praised as the source: "It is possible that you may dislike something which is nevertheless good for you."  

Another way of doing this is by means of an epitome. This may concern itself with philosophical speculation, or with human behaviour. It may precede, or follow, the anecdote to which it refers. Usāmah prefaced a story of hopeless courage during a joint attack launched by the Franks and the Atabak Ṭughdākin in Shayzar in 509/1115: "If your time is up, neither courage nor strength can help you." An epitome follows the story of the seizure of Ḥisān al-Khureyshah: "Men, once they put their minds to something, will do it."  

The technique is extended especially to the second group of anecdotes at the end of the book, which deal with the hunt. Although both sections are ostensibly about notable hunters - prominent figures in Syria, Egypt and Iraq in the first, and Usāmah's father in the second - they really concern the behaviour of pursuer and pursued in the animal world, especially trained raptors and their prey. Usāmah epitomizes the point in the same way as he does for the anecdotes illustrating the behaviour of human beings. For example, the attachment of an Arab mare to its rider is contrasted with the unruliness of a birdhawn or hack. Usāmah concludes: "Hacks are more akin to a wild beast than to horses." Fate embraces all living creatures. Prefacing an account of the unexpected deaths of two birds of prey, the writer observes that animals meet their destinies (manāyī) in different ways.

Having forsaken the chronicle form for that of the illustrative anecdote, Usāmah has to find a thread upon which to string his collection, in place of the continuum provided by time. A remarkable memory recalling the events
of a long and varied life, places a good store of tales at his disposal. This means, in the first place, that he can illustrate one point with several anecdotes. It also enables him to follow one anecdote by another which, although sharing some circumstantial detail with the first, illustrates a different point. He can thus change the subject without the reader experiencing too much of a jolt. For example, the account of the siege of Ḥisn al-Ṣawr is concerned with the extremes to which a man will go to live up to his reputation. It is followed by the story of another siege by Atābak Zankī, that of Ḥiṣār al-Bāri'ah, illustrating the same point. The next story concerns the investment of Ḥiṣār; but it is Saladin who is mounting it, and the burden of the story is his cruelty. Usāmah was present at enough such military actions to be able to provide two further examples of the siege as an occasion for Saladin to display his ruthlessness: a place called Māsurra in Kūhīstān, and al-Karkhīnī near Irbil in Syria. The effect of a continuum based on the association of ideas is considerable thematic variety in a limited space without prejudice to continuity. This is apparent in the group of stories illustrating remarkable cures. Each anecdote has enough in common with the preceding one to allow the reader to pass easily from one to another. Thus, anecdotes one and two have accidental eating as their common theme; anecdotes two and three, vipers; anecdotes three and four, vinegar; anecdotes four and five, the physician Ibn Buṭlān, and so forth. A conversational tempo is lent to this process by Usāmah's frequent use of phrases like "A similar thing which happened to me was", or "Something rather similar happened to me when ...". Sometimes, he apologises for what might be considered an unsuitable illustration: the intrusion of an anecdote concerning a falcon among some examples of unexpected human cures; or too abrupt a change of subject: the progression from the story of Buraykah, a possessed woman, to that of a heroine of the Shayzar camp during an Ismā'īlī attack in 502/1109.
Notes

1. Usāmah, 1895, Introduction
2. Usāmah, 1981, 10
3. Abū Shāmah, n.d., 1, 97-98
5. Usāmah, 1981, 27
6. Ibid.
7. Usāmah, 1981, 40
8. Usāmah, 1981, 46
10. Usāmah, 1981, 175
11. Usāmah, 1981, 154
15. Usāmah, 1981, 140
16. Usāmah, 1981, 204
17. Usāmah, 1981, 38
21. Usāmah, 1953, 247
22. Usāmah, 1981, 42
23. Usāmah, 1981, 37
25. Usāmah, 1981, 45
27. Usāmah, 1953, 242, S.379
28. Usāmah, 1981, 190
29. Kīlānī, 1982, 236
30. Usāmah, 1953, 264, S.444
31. Usāmah, 1981, 109, 110
32. Usāmah, 1981, 199
33. Usāmah, 1981, 102
34. Usāmah, 1981, 195
35. Usāmah, 1981, 112
36. Usāmah, 1953, 281, s. 481
37. Usāmah, 1953, 267, s. 367
38. See above, p. 14
40. Usāmah, 1981, 97
41. Qurʾān, II: 213
42. Usāmah, 1981, 117
43. See above, p. 16
44. Usāmah, 1981, 275
45. Usāmah, 1981, 284
46. See above, p. 15
47. Usāmah, 1981, 201
48. See above, p. 15
49. Usāmah, 1981, 203
50. Usāmah, 1981, 205
52. Usāmah, 1981, 79
53. Usāmah, 1981, 158
5. ASPECTS OF KITĀB AL-ĪTIBĀR: LANGUAGE

Classical Arabic (CA) and Middle Arabic (MA)

The language as well as the innovatory form of Kitāb al-Ītibār has attracted attention. Critics have been puzzled by the discrepancy between Usāmah’s reputation as a writer of belle-lettres, and the inaccuracies, or at least departures from CA usage, to be found in the text. Möldeke offers a simple explanation of this: Usāmah was writing as he used to speak. Any inconsistencies in the blend of solecisms and correct usage he lays at the door of the copyist who added his own inaccuracies to the author’s. Landberg thought that Usāmah had dictated the work in accurate CA. A copyist was then responsible for the inaccuracies which, nevertheless, reflect the vernacular of the time.

It is from the point of view of this last aspect that Sehen approaches the question of the language of Kitāb al-Ītibār. As a proponent of the Middle Arabic school of theory, he is concerned to assemble evidence of a taxonomically distinguishable dialect. To appreciate his work fully, it is necessary to have a further look at Blau’s theory.

An analytic language assigns one concept to one word. Consequently, the inflexes, which, in a synthetic language, modify and alter the concept of a word, are alien to an analytic language. MA, Blau considers, under the influence of this characteristic, tends to dispense with case endings. Initially, the final vowels of the CA singular, sound feminine plural and the broken plural, were replaced with pausal forms. But this process of eliminating the distinction between endings was extended to case endings whose final vowels were identical, but which evinced differences in the penultimate syllable of the word. The outcome was the retention of only the oblique case in the dual and sound plural. An important consequence of the loss of case endings was the adoption of a more rigid word order, to distinguish clearly between subject and object. The tendency is towards a preverbally situated subject, rather than the CA word order of verb.
followed by subject. Another symptom of the need to
distinguish the subject of a verb by means other than the
suffix of a synthetic language, is the use of separate
personal pronouns, before or after the verb of which they are
the pronominal subject. From the point of view of the need
to distinguish the object, MA shows a tendency to use the
preposition, which Blau calls "the true analytic expedient
to distinguish objects as against subjects." The
disappearance of case endings is matched by the disappearance
of mood endings. A consequence of the resultant loss of
mood, Blau finds, is the use of the imperfect to express the
imperative. Likewise, the negative particle ma, used in CA
with the imperfect to denote the present, can be used in MA
to negate the future, in place of lam with the subjunctive.
An effect of the suppression of both case and mood endings,
combined with a phonetic tendency to alter the 'a' sound to
'i', is to submerge the differences between anna, inna and
an. The (nominal) subject after anna/inna loses its
distinguishing accusative case indicator, and the verb after
an, the inflexion which marks it as being in the subjunctive.

In addition to these differences that can be attributed
directly to a reduction of inflexion, Blau finds a category
of adjustments that reflect part of what he calls "a general
drift". It is reflected in MA, as it was much earlier in
some aspects of old Semitic languages like Hebrew and
Aramaic, while leaving CA unscathed. By contrast with its
characteristic, as a synthetic language, of assigning
several concepts to one word, CA limits a particular
syntactic structure to one particular use. For example,
an asyndetical clause in CA must have an indeterminate
antecedent; on the other hand, the relative clause of a
determinate antecedent must be introduced by a relative
pronoun. MA does not use asyndetical and syntetical relative
clauses strictly in regard to the definiteness of the
antecedent. The relative pronoun alladhib could thus
introduce a clause defining an indeterminate antecedent,
and even be used as an indeclinable subordinate conjunction
with the meaning of "because". The divergence from CA
syntax was extended in MA to the use of asyndetical co-ordinate clauses, as well as asyndetical subordinate clauses. The CA syntax of the numerals was especially exposed to the effects of the drift. Their apparent anomalies "were not protected by analogy, but often even opposed to it." The CA (and, in this case, unaltered Old Semitic) rule of designating the masculine cardinal numbers 1-10 with the feminine ending, for example, may be reversed, or, at least, inconsistently applied.

Morphological consequences of the general drift include the discarding of the CA dual of the substantive, adjective, pronoun and verb, and its replacement by the plural. As a result of the general tendency in Semitic languages to abandon the use of the passive formed by internal vowel changes, and replace it by a reflexive form, the VIIth form replaces the passive first form. The same blurring of sounds which submerges the distinction between inna and anna results in the replacement of the perfect of the IVth form of, in particular, the hollow and the doubled verb, by the first.

These categories, amongst others, were applied by Schen to his examination of the language in Kitāb al-Istibār. For, although Blau's work is based on Judaeo-Arabic, the various forms of MA - Christian Arabic, Judaeo-Arabic and Muslim Arabic - have many basic features in common.

On the one hand, Schen found a paucity of a number of non-Classical usages which Blau regarded as symptomatic of MA. The particles anma, inna and an remain distinct from one another, "thus confirming the basically CA nature of its sentence structure." The oblique case of the dual instead of the nominative occurs three times; that of the oblique sound plural in place of the nominative, four times. "It will be noticed how infrequently this typically MA feature occurs." Deviations from the CA occur; sometimes a noun is put in the plural, although the sense indicated the dual; a dual may be followed by a sound plural; a plural pronoun may refer to a dual;
and the dual may be construed with a plural verb. But Schen points out that, in view of the fact that what he calls "the disintegration of the dual" is so characteristic of MA, it is remarkable that there are so few divergences from the CA rule regarding the dual. Likewise, there are few non-CA numeral forms, "in a text abounding in numerals." Three examples of the VII form for the internal passive of the first form are noted. As it is characteristic of MA, Schen finds its rarity surprising. The preposition li is found to mark the direct object twice, when this does not precede the verb.

On the other hand, non-CA word order was evident, especially in direct speech. Here, the subject often precedes the verb. Unemphatic separate personal pronouns frequently occur with finite verbs, again especially in direct speech. The verb form ghaba (I) ("raid") recurs for aghara (IV). Another frequent divergence from CA syntactical usage is the asyndetical clause. Such clauses seem to occur more often in narrative. Asyndetical co-ordinate clauses often follow a verb of motion, with a finite verb of the same person and in the same tense, unconnected by any coordinating conjunction. Subordinate asyndetical clauses containing a finite verb follow verbs in the main clause like amara ("order") and arada ("wish"). In CA, such clauses would be introduced by the particle an, and contain a verb in the subjunctive mood. In addition, Schen finds two asyndetical relative clauses following a determinate antecedent. In CA they would be joined to the main clause by means of a relative pronoun.

Blau sees several justifications for the study of MA beyond mere linguistic study. It can tell us about the cultural setting of the Jews in their Arab environment. The relationship of MA to CA corresponds to that of Aramaic and Hebrew to the Old Semitic language; MA can therefore shed light on the evolution of Aramaic and Hebrew. As a missing link between Classical Arabic and Modern Arabic dialects, it can tell us about the history of Arabic as
a whole, as well as contribute to the proper understanding
of Modern Arabic dialects.

Since the existence of, to borrow Blau's term, Muslim
Middle Arabic, is critical to the pursuit of these aims, it
follows that it should be distinguishable from other spoken
forms of Arabic, as well, of course, as being demonstrably
characteristic of the Middle Ages. We are not, however,
here concerned with whether this has been done, or is,
indeed, even possible, beyond taking note of Schen's own
observation, that non-Muslim MA has received the bulk of
recent attention. Equally, supposing that there is a
Muslim MA, we are not here concerned with whether Schen has
conclusively proved that Kitāb al-I'tibār is an example of
it. Nevertheless, what Schen has to say about the uneven
distribution of non-Classical usages is of interest, not least
because the integrity of the concept of Muslim
Middle Arabic would seem to depend upon a satisfactory
explanation of the phenomenon.

In the first place, he attributes the prevalence of
Classical usages to the attentions of a copyist or
copyists. But, he adds, the copyist would not have
altered the syntax of the sentences. His findings on
asyndeta, indeed, accord with this. He goes on to say
that the copyist would not have altered non-Classical
usages in the dialogue to the same extent as elsewhere,
for their inclusion among the utterances of speakers would
not detract from Usāmah's literary standing.
However, the circumstances, for example, of the old
woman's remark to Saidin at Māsurra are at odds with
her correct usage of the dual nominative and the dual
pronoun. Schen notes it himself. Are we then to
understand that this and other unexpected classicisms
constitute examples of the copyist's failure to
"restrain his well-meant impulse"?

Blau deals with this sort of contradiction more
explicitly. He considers that pressure on a writer to
conform to the standards of the "language of prestige
(Classical Arabic)" causes him to refrain from using
vernacular forms, even where the latter might be more appropriate. Indeed, Blau says, medieval writers go beyond the requirements of Classical Arabic and employ hypercorrect forms. A psychological explanation of this sort, envisaging a tension between considered and instinctive modes of expression, can exist independently of any linguistic theory purporting to identify a discrete mode of speech and then associating it with a particular historical stage.

Likewise, an equally unassuming literary explanation can be accepted, without, again, necessarily endorsing any linguistic theory. Schen's own explanation of the peculiar nature of the language of Kitāb al-Ṭibār is partly literary. He is as concerned as Waldke or Landberg to explain the prevalence of non-Classical usages in the work, as compared with historical and biographical texts of the same period, especially in view of Usāmah's reputation as a man of letters. He attributes it principally to the character of the material, which places the work outside the recognized categories of literature.

It is within this sort of area, rather than that of linguistic theory, that Blau's identification of points of divergence, and Schen's application of them to the work, produce findings which in some sense accord with what has been said about the content and form of Kitāb al-Ṭibār.

The main conclusion drawn by Schen from his noting of the frequent use of asyndeta is that they are evidence of the work having been dictated: "For it is characteristic of spoken language that verbal links between clauses are liable to be dropped." This certainly accords with the continuum of the association of ideas noted above. It has the effect of taking the narrative continually forward. There are hardly any references in the work to what has already been said. This suggests a mind concerned principally with shedding memories, realised most easily through talking. At the same time, as we have seen, it is not an aimless meandering. The anecdotes quickly get to
the point and deliver it succinctly. In this connection, two further observations by Schen are significant: that the asyndeta are usually to be found in narrative, and that the asyndetical co-ordinate clauses are usually associated with verbs of motion. The effect of placing verbs together in this way is to reduce in importance any interval between the two actions described. A co-ordinating conjunction, on the other hand, creates a hiatus. To dispense with it is a useful expedient in story-telling, when it is desirable to convey a sense of swiftly unfolding events. For example, in his account of Ibn al-'Arīq's daring at the siege of Ḥiṣn al-Ṣawr, Usāmah says: jā's rajūlun ... ṭala'īn fī ṭīlikā l-ṭughrah. "A man came ... climbed through that breach."39 (An asyndetical relative clause interposes between the two verbs, in accordance with Classical Arabic usage when the antecedent is indeterminate, as here.) The advantage of brevity possessed by asyndeta is shared by the subordinate conjunction alladhi. Usāmah uses it when he concludes the account of mistaken identity in battle which nearly ended in tragedy. "I praised God ... because (alladhi) no injury befell him on account of that trust."40 The origins of alladhi in the relative pronoun are clear from its expanded meaning: "for that which happened whereby". It seems rather similar to the mā al-nāsaderiyah. Hitti equates it with the modern Syrian vernacular 3l3, meaning "because".

By contrast with co-ordinate asyndeta, subordinate asyndetical clauses occur mainly in direct speech after modal verbs. This presumably reflects spoken practice of the time. Of course, Usāmah's employment of everyday language in direct speech is a necessary component of his anecdotist's skill. For example, in the first group of stories concerning remarkable cures, a guest at a drinking party, suffering from a carbuncle, inadvertently swallows an entire plateful of raw eggs. The host refuses the demand of the other guests that he replace the eggs. Wa-`llāhi mā aš'āl he says, with the strength
of the Classical Arabic lan af'ala, "I shan't". 

(There is also omission of the direct object, which Schen finds characteristic of the text: "Such ellipses are only to be expected in a dictated narrative"). In view of the sufferer's subsequently being cured of the carbuncle, the adamant refusal has the effect of turning the hungry drinkers' deprivation into a worthwhile and even necessary sacrifice. The refusal thus points the moral. Given the circumstances of its delivery, the host's refusal would not be appropriate in anything but the spoken language of the time, whether or not Usâmah has recalled his exact words. The conclusion that mà plus the imperfect represents the vernacular way of denying the future can be drawn thus on the basis of Usâmah's intention in recounting the anecdote. Another example is less critical to the anecdote in which it occurs, but equally dependent for its (vernacular) meaning on the internal logic of the story. When Usâmah recalls an order he gave to a soldier - tasru' tu'arif ("Hurry up and inform"), the imperfect in which it is couched must reflect a common usage of the time. Their relative positions and the circumstances preclude its being the polite order or request that Classical Arabic allows in the imperfect. The impression of a routine command is strengthened by the asyndetical linking of the imperatives. At the same time, there are frequent examples of the imperative being used in direct speech. If we are to accept Schen's claim that the copyist would have left the dialogue uncorrected, then these must represent Usâmah wearing his other cap - that of the man of letters.

'Ilm al-bâdi'

The anecdotist has two main concerns. He needs to depict place and action as convincingly as possible in order to obtain the reader's confidence and as swiftly as possible, in order to maintain his interest. Use of the vernacular
can further both purposes. In the first, it lends
verisimilitude to both dialogue and description; in the
second, it invests the written word with the natural
economy of speech. Usūmah exploits both these qualities
in his use of the spoken language of his time. The
conscious moralizer, by contrast, is concerned with
epitomizing the lessons of experience. What he has to say
is axiomatic; his impact lies, not in what he has to say,
but, rather, how he says it. The language becomes an end
in itself, the words selected for their memorability as
much as for their sense. The anecdotes in Kitāb al-Iʿtibār
are demonstrably harnessed to Usūmah’s instructive purpose.
Where this is explicitly articulated, then, he is as
concerned with the form of the word as with its content.
As a theoretician himself of ʿilm al-bādiʿ, he was well
equipped to employ the science of embellishment in the
pronunciation of hikmah. 48

Nöldeke remarked on Usūmah’s use of rhymed prose in
Kitāb al-Iʿtibār. 49 Sajj falls within the category of
artifices dependent on distinctions of form for their
effect - larrā. “It is,” says al-Qazwīnī, “the acting
in concert (tawāʿū) of two clauses (fāṣilatayn) on the
basis of a common letter. This is what al-Sakkākī means
when he says that it is to proae what rhyme (qāfiyyah) is to
verse.” 50 Among the different forms of sajj he distinguishes
muṭārraf (literally “pointed”). In sajj muṭārraf, the
symmetry of the two clauses is limited to the syllable or
syllables at the end of the last word in either clause, as
dictated by the form of the rhyme. The wazn or paradigm
of the last word need not be the same. Al-Qazwīnī
gives an example of sajj muṭārraf from the Qurʾān,
Sūrah LXXI : 13 and 14:

ما لَكُمْ لَمَّا تَرْجَعُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارَمَ فَوَقَدْ
لَيْكُمْ أَطْوَارُ
("What's the matter with you? Why don't you hope for kindness from God? For he has created you, after a variety of stages of existence"). The wazn of the last word of the first fāsīlah is fa'ālan; that of the second, mīrāf. The basis of saj in the Qur'ān, of course, meant that its use elsewhere would strike a familiar note. Of the saj used in Kitāb al-İ'tibār, mūṭarruf predominates. The epitomes before and after anecdotes are usually couched in saj, as well as being in the "faultless Classical Arabic" which Schen notices. For example, the fates of beasts are neatly summed up in a preface to an anecdote:

ومنايان الحيوان مختلفة الآلوان

("of varying hue are the destinies of beasts.") The distinctive style of language complements the other functions of the epitome. As well as being an axiom, it also marks the start of an anecdote.

Another form of saj distinguished by al-Qazwīnī is saj mūṭawāzin (literally "balanced"). The symmetry of the clauses is extended beyond the rhyme to a conformity in measure of the last words of either clause. An early example of this sort of saj is the premonition of the breaking of the dam at Mārib by Ṭarīfah al-Kāhinah, wife of 'Amr b. ʿAmr Muzay'iyā, the ruler:

ما رأيت مثل اليوم قد أذهب عنى النوم رأيت فيما أصبت رأيت وفي ثوريل اعترق

("I've never seen anything like I saw today. It drove sleep from me. I saw a cloud which sent out bolts of lightening. It produced thunder for a long while, and then struck down.")

The constraint of an identical wazn makes saj mūṭawāzin less frequent than mūṭarruf in Kitāb al-İ'tibār. When it does occur, it makes for a sonorous pause to the
narrative, as in the following instance, when it prefaces the account of an Ismā'īlī attack on Shayzar:

 لو صفت القلوب من قدر الذنوب 
ولفظت إلى عالم الخروج 
علمت أن ركوب أخطار الخروج 
لا ينقض مدمن الآجال المكتوب

("Were hearts to be cleansed of the soil of their sins, and entrusted to him who knows what is to come, they would realise that to court the danger of wars does not shorten the decreed span.")

The doxology which concludes the anecdote is also couched in saj' mutawāzin. It has already been given in transliteration:

فتبكيك الله متقدر الأقدار ومؤقت الآجال والأعمار

("Blessed is God, the Ordainer of Destinies, and the Appointer of Hours and Days.")

This neatly rounds off the account.

Another rhetorical device Usāmah employs is jinās (akin to the English paronomasia, the playing on words which sound alike). Like saj', it falls within the category of lajzī. Al-Qazwīnī: "It consists of a resemblance in articulation. It is designated complete (tām) if the consonants, their number, vowelling and order, are identical. Further, if they are the same part of speech, they are called analogous (mumāthīl)." It occurs in Qur'ān: XXX: 55

ويوم تقوم الساعة يقسم المجرمون ما لبثوا

("On the day when the Hour of Reckoning will be established, sinners will swear that they haven't tarried for more than a hour.")

The word sā'ah is used in the first instance metonymically and in the second, literally. It is
otherwise one and the same word. Usāmah uses this form of paronomasia (jināṣ tāma mumāthil) in a line of his verse which he includes in a passage on old age:

("I go forth in robes of Dabīqī lingen, after the armour of war. Woe unto me and weapons!" This phrase Ritti, who translates hulal as fabrics in both instances.)

Al-Qazwīnī continues: "But, if the two words are different parts of speech, it is called (as well as complete) fulfilled (mustawfan)." He gives as an example a line from Abū Tamām:

ما مات من كرم الزمان فاته
يحيى لدى يحيى بن عبيد الله

("Whatever the liberality of the time which has perished, it lives on at Yahyā b. 'Abd Allāh's.")

Here, while the appearance of the word yahyā is the same, in the first instance it is a verb, and in the second a proper name. Usāmah uses jināṣ tāma mustawfan in a similar sort of way. He has recounted a story of how a man called Jawād gave a good account of himself during an Ismā'īlī attack on Shayzar. The story concludes with Usāmah's report of Jawād's visible deterioration, when Usāmah visits him some years later in Damascus, where Jawād is now a fodder-dealer. This prompts a reflection on old age which Usāmah prefaces with:

عمرت كجراد العلف لا الجواد الجتلاف

("I have become like Jawād the fodder-dealer and not like the generous man (jawād) who spends wastefully.")

This display of verbal dexterity is a statement by the writer that he belongs to the quadrangle, as well as to the market place. At the same time, it carries the reader smoothly across the divide between the two.
Homophony can be exploited to enhance the meaning of words. A sub-category of *jinās* is created by the use of unidentical words sharing a common root. Al-Qazwīnī gives an example, Qur'ān XXX : 43:

"Faqīm wa jibāl liddīn al-qāmūn.

("Turn towards the true religion.")

The IVth form of the root *g-w-m* means "set", whereas the adjective *qayyim* means "true" or "straight". This device is known as *al-muṭḥaq bi-l-jinās*, "that which is attached to paronomasia."66 Usāmah uses it in a prayer with which he concludes the account of noteworthy cures. He asks for good health during his remaining time, and "mercy and favour when death comes":

والرحمة والرضوان عند مرواة الراية.

The employment of *wafāh* ("death") immediately after *muwāfāh* ("arrival") constitutes what al-Qazwīnī calls *mukarrar* or "repeated", the uninterrupted sequence of words containing the elements of paronomasia. Here, the effect of the juxtaposition is to emphasise the mysteriousness of the moment of death.

Employment of rhetorical devices relying for their effect upon distinctions of meaning (*ma'nā)* lends itself to the epitomisation of more complex ideas than, for example, the immutability of fate. Usāmah uses the device of *wushākalāh*, a species of zeugma, to point the difference between the usual meaning of a word, and a restricted, figurative use. Al-Qazwīnī gives as an example Qur'ān III : 54:

무كاتو وَمَكَّرُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ المَاكِرِينَ

("The unbelievers schemed, and so did God. And God is the best of schemers.")
Makara has a different meaning when used of God, from that when used, perjoratively, of man. The purpose of the device is to inform the audience of the figurative meaning of a word, by contrasting it with the literal meaning. Usāmah uses this device when he touches on the relationship of God and the divine will:

فَكَانَتْ أسباب السلامة لما جرت بها المشيئة من الحجاب والجراح لما قدر الله سبحانه من الحجاب

("The reasons for the escape were due to the working of the marvels of destiny; the wound was because of what God, praise be to Him, had ordained by way of recompense.")

The workings of fate appear as marvels ('ajab) to man. But the causes of things are not hidden from God, so they cannot appear wonderful to him. Consequently, when the word 'ajab is attributed to God, it means his state of being pleased to do something: in this case, the infliction of a wound on the Lord of 'Afānīyyah in judgement of his attendant's carelessness. The subtlety of the device is appropriate to the fineness of the distinction between the two uses of the word 'ajab.

Antithesis is an essential ingredient of Usāmah's anecdotal. He also employs the rhetorical device of antithesis (mutābāghah or tībāq), in places where he wants to concentrate the mind of the reader on the point at issue. The subtlety of the antithesis used varies with the complexity of the idea concerned. For example, Usāmah prefixes some anecdotes illustrating the contrasts in the human and animal worlds, with a string of five pairs of contrasting adjectives describing the form such contrasts take. These are intended to do no more than convey an idea of the variety of God's creation. The antithesis becomes more complex when phrases are contrasted, a device known as muqābalah or "comparison". As an example, al-Qazwīnī gives IX: 82:
The first concept in the first phrase ("laugh") is contrasted with the first concept in the second phrase ("weep"), and likewise the second concepts in either phrase ("a little" and "a lot"). Concluding a story about the exceptional resilience of a young Frankish knight, Usâmah observes:

لا يؤخر الأجل الإحمال ولا يقدّمه الإقدام

("Drawing back no more postpones fate, than courting hazard advances it.")

The antithesis may be less obvious when a concept is contrasted, not with its precise opposite, but with the cause of the latter. The antithesis is then called sababi or dhū tasabbub. Al-Qazwīnī gives as an example Qur'ān: XLVIII: 29:

"محذود رسول الله ووالسن مفعمة أشداء على الكتاب رحماء تمبهم"

("Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. They who are with him are hard on the unbelievers, but compassionate among themselves.") Ashīdā', "severe", is contrasted with ruḥānā', "compassionate", although the precise opposite of the first is the result of the second: ala'yīnā', or "soft". Usâmah uses this sort of antithesis in a pronouncement on man's supineness before fate. Prefacing his thoughts on old age, he says:

ولا يظن ظان أن الموت يقدمه ركوب الخطر
ولا يؤخر عفة الخطر

"And no one thinks that death approaches him by riding on hardship, and death does not delay his solemnity."

35
("No one should think that courting dangers will advance death, or that excessive caution will delay it.")

Rukūb al-khāṭar ("the courting of danger") is contrasted with shiddat al-hādhr ("excessive caution"). Its exact opposite would be the consequence of excessive caution, that is, ihjām, or "holding back".

Rhymed prose evokes the Qur'ān principally by means of sound. A device which does the same through meaning is iqtibās or adaptation, whereby familiar turns of phrase from the Qur'ān or hadīth are incorporated into prose or verse, but not in direct quotation. Al-Qazwīnī says: "It is that the words contain something from the Qur'ān or hadīth, without it being indicated that it is from the Qur'ān or hadīth." Thus, introducing the list of contrasting adjectives which are a prelude to anecdotes about differences in the human and animal worlds, Usāmah says:

خلق الله عن وجل خلقه أطبارا

("God, to whom belong might and majesty, has made his creation in different sorts and conditions.")

Here, Qur'ān Surah LXXI : 14 has been adapted to Usāmah's requirements. The effect is two fold: first, it forms an immediately familiar (and unanswerable) base from which to proceed with his purpose, which is to show how living creatures differ from one another; secondly, it constitutes a display of credentials, placing the writer firmly within the tradition of Arabic letters. Usāmah can use iqtibās in this way equally of a character in his anecdotes about himself. The first of the stories about holy men is given the stamp of authenticity in this way. "Subsist only on what is lawful", the ascetic al-Baṣrī admonishes the woman who has unwittingly wrapped up some sweets in her dowry certificate, which she believes she has lost.

The use of embellishment in Kitāb al-Istibār in doxologies, axioms and reflective utterances, is
determined by the internal logic of the book. It is also used in another way which recalls the precarious political life of the time, in which ornate communication could be used to disguise the facts, or appease the powerful.

In the chronicle portion at the beginning of the book, Usāmah couches in saj' a plea he claims to have addressed to 'Abbās al-Afdal Rukn al-Dīn, to mollify the latter. 'Abbās was angry at his son, Nāṣir al-Dīn, whom he suspected of conspiring with al-Ẓāfir against him. As a result of this address, Usāmah says, "Nāṣir al-Dīn's father left him alone, and his son heeded what I'd told him." The ornateness of the address is perhaps more to conceal what was said between Usāmah and 'Abbās, rather than faithfully to record it. For two sources have Usāmah, less creditably, telling 'Abbās that the caliph was having an unnatural relationship with Nāṣir al-Dīn. This was to provoke the vizier to murder the caliph. For notables, jealous of 'Abbās' power, and Usāmah's closeness to 'Abbās, had turned the caliph against Usāmah.

The possible wrath of a living dictator was perhaps a more immediate problem than uneasy memories of dark events long ago, but a similar strategy was indicated. Usāmah delivers an ornately couched panegyric on Saladin. It follows too close upon the anecdotes about his cruelty for one not to suspect that it is a precaution against being misunderstood.

Notes

1. Brockelmann, 1898, I, 320
2. Höldeke, 1887, I, 242, and in Schen, 1972
9. Rück, 1955, 5
13. Schen, 1972, 5
14. Schen, 1972, 219
15. Schen, 1973, 93
16. Schen, 1973, 75
17. Schen, 1973, 76
22. Schen, 1973, 96
25. Schen, 1973, 90
28. Schen, 1972, 220
29. Schen, 1972, 224
30. Schen, 1972, 231, 232
31. Schen, 1972, 232
32. See above, p. 13
33. Schen, 1972, 221
34. Schen, 1972, 232
35. Blau, 1960, 310
36. Schen, 1972, 222
37. Schen, 1973, 89
38. Schen, 1973, 90
39. See above, p. 15
40. Usāmah, 1981, 81
42. Schen, 1973, 91
43. Usāmah, 1981, 235-242
44. Usāmah, 1981, 236
45. Schen, 1973, 89
46. Usāmah, 1930, 41
47. e.g. Usāmah, 1981, 128
48. See above, p.2
49. Schen, 1972, 224
50. See above, p.9
51. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 350-60
52. Ibid., 360
53. Schen, 1972, 228
54. See above, p.17 and Usāmah, 1981, 284
55. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 360
57. See above, p.17
58. Usāmah, 1981, 210
59. See above, p.17 and Usāmah, 1981, 210
60. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 349-350
62. Usāmah, 1929, 191
63. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 350
64. See above, p.17
65. Usāmah, 1981, 207. This does not cover the full meaning of the Arabic; cf. Lane, 1980, sub t-l-f, mitlāf, "a man of courage and liberality, who makes what he takes as spoil, of the property of his enemies, to supply the place of that which he consumes by expenditure to satisfy the claims of his friends".
66. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 354
68. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 354
69. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 321
70. Von Mehren, 1970, 103
71. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 321
72. See above, p.p.14-15
73. Usāmah, 1981, 67
74. Lane, 1980
75. See above, p.12
76. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 310
77. Usāmah, 1981, 134
78. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 317
79. Usāmah, 1981, 90
81. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 317
82. See above, p. 32
83. Usāmah, 1981, 211
84. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 379
85. See above, p. 34
86. Usāmah, 1981, 134
87. Usāmah, 1981, 221-229
88. Ibid., 222
89. Usāmah, 1981, 24
90. Abū 'l-Fidā', 1872, I, 30; and Ibn al-Athīr, 1872, I, 492
91. See above, p. 18
6. CONCLUSION

It is interesting to compare the minimal obtrusiveness with which Usâmah harnesses sakhîf and jazl to his theme, with other writers' styles. Recourse to jazl might be lacking altogether. Buzurg b. Shahrîyâr al-Râmîurmuzî, a mariner from the Persian Gulf, wrote his Kitâb 'Ajâ'ib al-Hind soon after 341/953. The subject of the work - the seafaring of the writer's time - is interesting enough for its unconscious vulgarity to be overlooked. Sakhîf might be deliberately introduced, as al-Ḥarîrî (446-516/1054-1122) does in the thirtieth maqâmah, where he uses the language of the underworld to enhance his picaresque setting. Alternatively, the rhetorical mode could completely dominate a writer's expression, as in the case of the secretary 'Imâd al-Dîn al-Kâtib (519-97/1125-1201), where the untidiness of war is forced into the elegance of rhyming fawâsîl. 'Imâd al-Dîn uses them for a purpose: to convey official information. But rhetoric and, in particular, the artifices of 'ilm al-badî', could become an end in themselves, as at places in the Maqâmât, where Ḥarîrî carries out orthographic tours de force of ultimately pointless brilliance.

On the one hand, Usâmah was quite aware of the difference between correct and incorrect usage: "One can distinguish in the speech of God's creatures eloquence (balâghah) from inadequacy of expression (fîyy), and correct (fasâhah) from incorrect (lakån) usage." On the other hand, he has no interest in correct official form, save in one or two places, where an old variness stirs. He is not concerned with the use of vernacular language to convey the atmosphere of a particular class or society, although he might use it to encapsulate an occasion or a relationship. His faults of grammar are sins of omission and not commission. The flow of memory will not allow him to stop and correct them. Where he does use jazl, it is to point the moral, which lends form to the content. Overtly, the book's
instructive role is its raison d'être. One wonders, however, whether it might not have been as much a pretext for the old man's rummaging.

At all events the reader is not greatly burdened with metaphysical propositions. Chenery maintains that "uniformity of type...is one of the characteristics of Arabic literature". This applies at least to the philosophical content of Kitāb al-Iḥtibār, if to nothing else. One or two themes are endlessly repeated. But the very meagerness of such fare is in a way responsible for the enduring interest of the book. For all sorts of material from Usāmah's long life, observed with such acuity and recounted so tellingly, can be used to illustrate his simple hikmah. It cuts right across the divisions to which less flexible, if more profound, literary forms confine themselves, and in so doing, provides us with a unique picture of the places and times in which he lived.

Notes:
1. Buzurq b. Shahriyār al-Rāshurnuzī, 1883-86
2. Al-Ḥarīrī, 1847-53
3. Usāmah, 1935, 328
4. See above p.37
5. See above p.27-28
6. Al-Ḥarīrī, 1867, 59
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