

Nefeli Papoutsakis

Classical Arabic Begging Poetry and *Šakwā*, 8th-12th Centuries

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Nefeli Papoutsakis
Münster, May 2017

Note on the Transliteration

I follow the transliteration system of the DMG, but use 'j' instead of 'ǧ'. I do not indicate *hamza* at the beginning of words; I transliterate *īy* and *ūw* instead of *iyy* and *uww*.

Introduction

Given the renewed interest in beggars in medieval Islam, their literature and their representation in pre-modern Arabic literary sources,¹ I should like to start by stressing that this study is about literary mendicancy and more specifically about ‘begging poems’, not about beggars and their poetry. Secondly, it is about poets’ grievances (*šakāwā*, sing. *šakwā*) over their circumstances and what is known in German as ‘Gelehrtenelend’, that is to say, ‘the misery of the men of letters’. Such complaints are common in begging verse but they also exist independently (sheer ‘complaint poetry’²). The term ‘begging poetry’ occurs mostly in studies of European literatures, where it has been used rather loosely to describe various petitions in verse addressed to a patron. What such implicit or explicit petitions mostly have in common is that the poet poses as poor, dispirited and in need of support.³ This pose was not uncommon in late antique Greek and Latin poetry.⁴ In their explicitness, however, the classical Arabic poems discussed in this book are most akin to twelfth-century Latin and Byzantine begging poems, namely the begging poems of the Goliards, especially the Archpoet (d. after 1170) and Hugh Primas (d. ca. 1160),⁵ and of the Byzantine poet Theodoros Prodromos (d. ca. 1166),

1 See, e.g., ‘A. Ḥarb, *Mawsū‘at adab al-muhtālīn* (2008); K. Hirschler, ‘Konformität und Randständigkeit: Bettler im vormodernen Nahen Osten’ (2008); A. al-Ḥusayn, *Adab al-kudya fī l-‘aṣr al-‘Abbāsī: Dirāsa fī adab aš-šahhādīn wa-l-mutasawwīlīn* (2011); Th. Herzog, ‘Figuren der Bettler’ (2011), and his forthcoming Habilitationsschrift (*Mitleid und Spott: Der Diskurs über die Armen in der arabisch-islamischen Kultur* – not seen by me). [For full bibliographical details see the Bibliography.]

2 Both this term and *šakwā* are used here restrictively to denote complaints about poverty and related matters only: see more below.

3 To name only a few studies in which the term appears already in the title: R. Merkelbach, ‘Bettelgedichte (Theokrit, Simonides und Walther von der Vogelweide)’ (1952), primarily on Theocritus’ *Idyll* 16; N. Eliason, ‘*Deor*: A Begging Poem?’ (1969), on the Old English poem *Deor*; D. Henderson, *The Medieval English Begging Poem*, (2008) on the Old English poems *Deor* and *Widsith*, and on Chaucer, Lydgate, Hoccleve; M. Kulhánková, ‘Vaganten im Byzanz, Prodromoi im Westen: Parallelektüre von byzantinischer und lateinischer Betteldichtung des 12. Jahrhunderts’ (2010), on twelfth-century Goliardic and Byzantine begging poems.

4 See K. Gutzwiller, ‘Charites or Hiero: Theocritus’ *Idyll* 16’, 216-7, and the bibliography she gives in note 13 on poverty as a theme of Hellenistic poetry; W.D. Furley, ‘Apollo Humbled: Phoenix’ Koronisma in Its Hellenistic Literary Setting’; on Martial, see J.P. Sullivan, *Martial: The Unexpected Classic*, 26-8, and R. Saller, ‘Martial on Patronage and Literature’; on Juvenal’s complaints about the state of the learned in Rome (Satire 7), see J. Adamietz, *Die römische Satire*, 265-8; on the fourth-century epigrammatist Palladas of Alexandria, who forcefully complained about his profession as a grammarian, see R. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, 327-9 and index, and the *Greek Anthology*, nos. 9,169, 9,171, 9,173-175, 11,302-303.

5 See F. Adcock (transl. and ed.), *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet*.

also known as Ptochoprodromos, that is 'Poor Prodromos'.⁶ What distinguishes these twelfth-century begging poems from other texts described as such is the attitude and style of the petitioner. For not only do they focus on the poet's plea, but also hyperbolically dramatize his dire position. The poet exaggerates and shamelessly advertises his need in self-pitying, whining tones, with a view to arousing the patron's compassion. He may generally complain about the sad predicament of the man of letters and seek to move as well as entertain the addressee by recounting his misadventures, as does Poor Prodromos, or deplore his acute indigence and stress his urgent need for the object of his plea, for instance a coat or, forthrightly put, provisions and money, as is often the case with the two medieval Latin poets.

The four Ptochoprodromic poems were composed in vernacular Greek and, apart from the opening appeals to the Emperor for support, they differ greatly in their contents.⁷ In the first poem Prodromos narrates his droll quarrels with his conceited and socially superior wife, who abuses him and denies him food for not bringing home the bacon, and tells of the tricks he uses – including his disguise as a beggar – so that he can get some food in his own house.⁸ The disadvantage of literature relative to other crafts is the main theme of poem three: the poet regrets his father's advice to him to study so as to succeed in life, and anathematizes letters. He compares his present situation as a scholar to that of the shoemaker, the tailor, the baker and other craftsmen and traders, who all have things to eat, whereas his purse, trunk and cupboard contain nothing but pieces of paper.⁹ As in the first poem, on a visit to his father's house he is prevented from partaking of the meal, as he did not contribute to the expenses. He only manages to sneak some food there thanks to a fortuitous incident. Poem two is a petition for a salary increase corroborated by a long catalogue of the many things which Prodromos needs to sustain his allegedly large household – a family of thirteen. The fourth poem narrates the woes of a poor monk abused and starved by his

6 The identification of Ptochoprodromos, the author of these poems, with Theodoros Prodromos is not undisputed. Most vocal against it is H. Eideneier: see his introduction to *Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung*; for the opposite view, see, e.g., R. Beaton, 'The Rhetoric of Poverty: The Lives and Opinions of Theodore Prodromos'; M. Alexiou, 'The Poverty of Écriture and the Craft of Writing: Towards a Reappraisal of the Prodromic Poems', esp. 32-5; *eadem*, 'Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochoprodromic Poems', esp. 105-9. On the Ptochoprodromic poems see also the more recent articles of Kulhánková given in the Bibliography.

7 Poem I addresses John II (r. 1118-43), poems III and IV Manuel I (r. 1143-80) Comneni, respectively. Poem II addresses a 'Sebastokrator', which was a title borne by several members of the Comneni family. The numbering of the poems here is as in Eideneier's edition.

8 See Alexiou, 'Ploys of Performance'.

9 See Alexiou, 'The Poverty of Écriture' (Alexiou rightly calls attention to the irony of Prodromos's complaint, seeing that paper was a rather expensive commodity). On 'Gelehrtenelend' in this and other Byzantine texts, see A. Dyck, 'Ptochoprodromos, "Ἀνάθεμα τὰ γράμματα" and Related Texts'.

superiors and the abbot and is a satire of Byzantine monastic life and its pecking order. As such it does not concern us here, but the narrative passages and the slapstick humour that characterize poems one, three and four are noteworthy, because they are typical of many Arabic begging poems, too, where they also serve to entertain the audience. The disadvantages of the craft of literature, the unsaleability of letters and the deplorable condition of the learned are common themes of Arabic begging and complaint verse as well.

The Goliardic poems, on the other hand, are interesting because of the graphic and exaggerated depictions of the poet's frailty and need. In most of his surviving poems and regardless of what their main import was (usually a eulogy of his patron, Rainald of Dassel, Archchancellor to Frederick Barbarossa), the Archpoet rounds off with a dramatic yet overtly humorous appeal for support claiming that he is starved and destitute, dressed in rags and shivering with cold, sick and feverish or about to die. Although not as beggarly as the Archpoet, Primas, too, often refers to his old age and infirmity and insinuates that he is low on cash. Most relevant are his 'cloak-poems' (pieces in which he dramatizes the shabbiness of his cloak, which also lacks a lining and hence does not protect him from the cold, implicitly or explicitly censuring the person who presented him with it), of which there are parallels in the Arabic tradition.¹⁰

In spite of the wealth and diversity of the available material, classical Arabic begging and complaint poetry were unconventional, 'off-centre' genres, which fact explains the little scholarly attention paid to them – with the exception of the Arabic studies mentioned below. Glaring complaints about poverty and wretchedness were first aired in Umayyad times (41-132/661-750), but grew more frequent in the early Abbasid era. Such grievances constitute the core theme of begging poetry and occur throughout the Abbasid period (132-656/750-1258) and beyond. Vivid pictures of destitution (starved families, cramped and ramshackle houses, tattered clothes, squalor, etc.), self-pitying plaints about the merciless and decadent times, bad luck, the meanness and benightedness of one's milieu and the undeserved misery and unprosperousness of the men of letters – all these topics grew around the focal theme of the poverty-stricken poet and were skilfully exploited and fleshed out in classical Arabic begging and complaint verse. Nevertheless, whining and grieving over one's circumstances blatantly contradicted the modes and conventions of early Arabic poetry (sixth – mid-eighth centuries) with its heroic stance and manly defiance of adversities and the precariousness of the human condition. Instead of taking up challenges and embarking in perilous undertakings to secure one's livelihood and provide for others, the new poetic persona whinges and moans over his predicament and

10 Begging and complaint poems are also prominent in the work of the thirteenth-century French poet Rutebeuf, which is however thematically more varied: see J. Dufournet, *Rutebeuf: I. Poèmes de l'Infortune et poèmes de la Croisade*. On the growth of begging poetry in Europe in the late medieval period, cf. K.J. Holzknicht, *Literary Patronage in the Middle Ages*.

seeks to win the sympathy of the addressee by brazenly abasing and abandoning himself to his mercy. Very often self-abasement resulted in self-ridicule and jest – at times even grotesquely uncouth humour – as a means to alleviate the discomfiture and importunacy of begging. Hence, apart from self-pity and whine, self-ridicule and buffoonery increasingly emerged as characteristic modes of begging poems. The sheer avowal of one's need, its advertisement and exaggeration run counter to social norms in the subsequent centuries as well. Because with the exception of some trends of Sufi thought, the dominant view was that poverty was an ill and that the poor should conceal their condition, bear it patiently and avoid begging.¹¹ This is why barefaced complaints of that sort are also absent from Abbasid court poetry, which upheld and perpetuated the heroic ideals propagated by early Arab poets. Even so, major Abbasid panegyrists, too, often intimated material anxiety, but did so in vague and general terms, railing at the stinginess of their contemporaries and the moral decadence of their times. What is more, they cast their grievances in the mould of traditional motifs of self-praise and thus managed to preserve a façade of grandeur and propriety essential to ceremonial poetry.¹² Writers on poetics, on the other hand, who worded and dictated the norms of poetic expression, strongly advised against making overt petitions, if they bothered at all to touch on this issue, and prescribed that poets should allude to their needs only vaguely and obliquely.¹³

To be sure, apart from begging poems, there exist countless 'request poems' in which there is no whine or complaint, nor self-pity or self-abasement and self-ridicule. These are upright petitions for some item or favour (the objects of such pleas range from wine and foodstuff to horses and clothing, to allowances and tax-exemptions) and capitalize on the petitioner's merit and special ties to the addressee, on whom they seldom fail to pour praise. Nevertheless, they typically concentrate on the poet's plea, which trait differentiates them from praise poetry

11 See A. Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam*, 8-31, esp. 24 (referring to Ibn al-Jawzī's *Talbīs Iblīs*, 175-6, where poverty is described as an 'illness'), 41-50; Herzog's studies cited in note 1, and his 'Composition and Worldview of Some Bourgeois and Petit-Bourgeois Mamluk *Ādab*-Encyclopedias'.

12 For instance, they 'gloried' in patiently bearing Time's adversities or in their constant yet failed endeavours to overcome them, as opposed to early Arab poets who commonly boasted about their success in overcoming them: see my 'Šakwā and *ḍamm az-zamān* in Abū Tammām and Buḥturī'.

13 See G.J. van Gelder, 'The Apposite Request: A Small Chapter in Persian and Arabic Rhetoric'. For an earlier text, see, e.g., the short chapter on *al-l-iqtidā' wa-l-istinjāz* (= 'to make a request / demand one's due and to ask for the fulfilment of a promise') in Ibn Rašīq's (390-463/1000-71) *ʿUmda* 2:127-8; cf. his comments on the dignified posture that a poet must hold, at the beginning of his chapter on *Ādāb aš-šāʿir* ('Good manners / Erudition of poets'), *ibid* 1:131. Compare al-Qalqašandī's (756-821/1355-1418) advice to secretaries concerning prose petitions and complaints about one's situation: *šakwā* should be vaguely phrased and kept short, *ṣubḥ al-ašā* 6:321, 9:173-81 (these passages are largely extracts from an eleventh-century work, the *Mawadd al-bayān* of the Fatimid secretary 'Alī b. Ḥalaf).

proper. The emphasis on the description of the requested gift, as is typical of such petitions, is normally absent from begging poems. Such 'request poems' will not be considered here.¹⁴ Praise of one's patron sometimes occurs in begging verse, too, but, again, the stress that the poet lays on his own need and woes and the distinctly beggarly tone as a rule demarcate begging from panegyric poems quite clearly.¹⁵

As said above, the heroic ideals endorsed and propagated in early Arabic verse were also championed in Abbasid ceremonial poetry and major court poets, who earned their living from this craft, abstained from posing as paupers both in eulogies addressed to caliphs and in those addressing lesser patrons. 'Secretary poets', that is to say, those employed in various administrative posts and whose income did not come from poetry exclusively, to a certain extent conformed with the rules of propriety and normally also voiced their complaints in general terms.¹⁶ Nevertheless, they were freer to experiment with genres and themes that were beyond the pale of ceremonial poetry and contravened the ideals propagated in it. Even more so, those wits who were maintained as boon companions or entertainers, or poets who had only occasional or no contacts at all with the court and the political elite allowed themselves to indulge in barefaced beggary, exaggerating their condition for comic effect, so as to entertain their patrons.¹⁷ It comes as no surprise that begging and complaint verse thrived especially among the last categories of poets: secretary poets, boon companions, entertainers and 'outsiders'.¹⁸ This is of course an oversimplified picture of Abbasid poetic realities, but it accounts for the existence of two distinct dominant modes of airing complaints:

14 Several request poems are discussed in a different context in J. Sharlet, 'The Thought That Counts: Gift Exchange Poetry by Kushājīm, al-Ṣanawbarī and al-Sarī al-Raffā'.

15 Obviously, there also exist borderline cases, whereas particular poems can be linked to a variety of genres depending on one's approach and viewpoint.

16 On 'secretary poets', see J.E. Bencheikh, 'Les secrétaires poètes et animateurs de cénacles aux IIe et IIIe siècles de l'Hégire'; Ḥ. al-'Allāq, *Šu'arā' al-kuttāb fī l-'Irāq fī l-qarn at-tālīṭ al-hijrī*.

17 As Sh. Toorawa has shown (*Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture*), since the ninth century a whole range of professional activities opened up before *littérateurs* and scholars who opted to live independently, i.e. outside the caliphal court and 'the patronal economy' in general, thanks to the spread and growth of 'writerly and book culture'. Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr (204-80/819-93) typifies such 'outsiders'; cf. *idem*, 'Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr versus al-Jāhīz, or: Defining the *Adīb*'.

On patronage, the social background and the standing of poets in general, see *EI2*, 'Shā'ir, 1.B. From the 'Abbāsīd Period to the *Nahḍa*' (T. Bauer).

18 These categories cover more or less those poets whom I. Najjār termed 'poètes mineurs' (see B. Najar, *La mémoire rassemblée: Poètes arabes 'mineurs' des IIe/VIIIe et IIIe/IXe siècles*) or *mansīyūn*, i.e. 'forgotten' (see the Arabic version of that study, which serves as an introduction, vol. 1, to his anthology of early Abbasid 'minor poets' *Šu'arā' 'Abbāsīyūn mansīyūn – ŠAM* in what follows). The vacillation in the terminology used by this scholar shows how difficult it is to pinpoint and concisely characterize these poets. Typically, their lives and work are poorly documented in the sources. When I refer to them as 'minor' or 'lesser' in what follows, I do not imply any derogatory judgment of their art.

On the one hand, a highbrow mode which consisted in inveighing generally against the decline of mores and the widespread lack of munificence, but which clearly insinuated that the poet faced financial difficulties; this was the path chosen by major panegyrists – Abū Tammām (d. 231/845), al-Buḥturī (206-84/821-97), al-Mutanabbī (303-54/915-65) and their ilk – and all other poets who were anxious to preserve a dignified posture, including most secretary poets. By contrast, a lowbrow mode was adopted by those who did not bother to keep a decorous pose or who deliberately chose to give it up; these poets worded their complaints in shrill tones and depicted their supposed misery in all its graphic details. This basic dichotomy is discernible and discussed in all three chapters of the present study, but having dealt with Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī elsewhere – the two being the real creators of the highbrow mode of *ṣakwā* – here I concentrate on lesser poets and do not consider major panegyrists; moreover, my emphasis lies on lowbrow rather than on highbrow *ṣakwā*.¹⁹ Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 391/1001) and Ibn Quzmān (d. 555/1160), whose begging and complaint verse are the focus of Chapters Two and Three, were indeed major figures of classical Arabic poetry, but although they were both very well connected in the Establishment of their times, they opted to relinquish the etiquette of ceremonial verse. Besides, Ibn Quzmān composed the bulk of his poetry in the vernacular (Andalusi Arabic), which was a further outright affront to that etiquette. Culturally, however, his poetry belongs to the sphere of classical Arabic belles-lettres and thus I feel justified to include him in this study.

Given the informal and unpretentious character of begging and complaint verse, its breach with societal and poetic norms as well as its humorousness and entertaining qualities, it is possible that much of it was lost in the course of time either because of a reluctance to preserve and hand it down, or simply because of lack of care for its preservation. Nevertheless, the available material, which is scattered in numerous anthologies, *dīwāns*, biographical dictionaries and *adab* encyclopedias, is very substantial and could not be treated exhaustively here. Instead, I focus on a limited number of poets and a sample of poems, which I present in chronological order so as to let the most salient generic features and themes and their development through time emerge clearly from the exposition. Still, I have not attempted to give a continuous chronology of the genres' evolution, but rather discuss specific cross-sections of it. Due to the great individuality of begging and complaint poems and the diversity and unconventionality of their structures, I chose not to organize the book

19 My '*Ṣakwā* and *ḡamm az-zamān*' complements the present study and must therefore be consulted for a more thorough exposition of highbrow *ṣakwā* and its first phase of growth. Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī set the example for the following generations of poets who wished to intimate material anxiety but were reluctant to breach the rules of propriety. *Ṣakwā* is a very important theme in al-Mutanabbī as well: see Aḥmad al-'Arfaj, *Ši'r aš-ṣakwā 'inda l-Mutanabbī*, M.A. thesis presented at the Faculty of Arabic Language of the University of Umm al-Qurā in 1999, esp. 40-62; R. Blachère, *Un poète arabe*, 58-65.

thematically, so as to avoid dismembering the poems under discussion. To highlight their structural peculiarities, I mostly cite whole poems – or what has been preserved of them – rather than excerpts. My approach is text-oriented, which explains the frequent and extensive poetic quotations; indeed, parts of the book read as a commented anthology. Given the relative obscurity of the two genres and the little scholarly attention devoted to them so far, abundant citations are all the more necessary; not only in order to evidence the amplex and diversity of the textual material, but also to highlight and make recognizable recurrent themes and motifs as well as generic conventions, modalities and strategies. Given that the few modern scholars who have dealt with these texts mostly take the poets' claims at face value, it is important to demonstrate the stereotypical character of these grievances. My comments and analysis, however, only address aspects and features of the poems that are relevant to the present subject matter, which means that they are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, I focus on those genre-typical traits and modalities that enabled and indeed prescribed the reception of these poems as begging and complaint verse. In the case of begging poems, in particular, my aim is to demonstrate how they differ from panegyric poetry and spotlight their thematic and modal peculiarities, which preclude their reading and reception as eulogistic verse. As I hope to show, failure to recognize these peculiarities and the conventional character of the poets' claims and protests has led to several misconceptions about the real-life circumstances of these poets, their relationships to their patrons and, more generally, the status of *littérateurs* and scholars and the state of literature in medieval Arab societies.

All three chapters basically centre on the work of one (Chapters Two and Three) or a few (Chapter One) very important poets and treat in less detail a group of other poets germane to the chapter's focus and time period. Chapter One deals with the first phase of growth of begging and complaint poetry and is the most diverse in terms of the number of poets treated in more depth. It discusses the first specimens of this verse as it developed at the hands of Kufan and Basran poets of the eighth and early ninth centuries and then looks more cursorily at its spread among secretary poets, caliphal boon companions and entertainers of the ninth and early tenth centuries. Chapter Two discusses the bloom of begging poetry and *šakwā* in the Buyid period (mid-tenth – mid-eleventh century), focusing on the poets anthologized in aṭ-Ṭaʿālibī's (350-429/961-1038) *Yatīmat ad-dahr* and especially on Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, who is the most important exponent of classical Arabic begging and complaint poetry. Chapter Three traces the development of these genres in al-Andalus in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, centring on the begging poetry of Ibn Quzmān, the most prominent Andalusian poet in this domain. At the end of Chapter Three, I retrospectively discuss 'adventurous begging poems', a distinct category of such poems, in which Ibn Quzmān excelled but whose beginnings date back to Abū Dulāma (d. 161/778). In the Epilogue, I briefly touch on the evolution of begging and complaint poetry in the Muslim East

in the twelfth century and close by drawing conclusions from the previous chapters.

I should now like to turn to the Arabic terminology that was used to describe these kinds of poetry and which betrays the poets' and their audiences' awareness of the generic identity of the texts under study. The available evidence suggests that since the early tenth century the word *šakwā* (= 'complaint')²⁰ had been used as a *technical* term, that is to say in specialist writings about poetry, to denote, in the first place, complaints about one's times and contemporaries or about one's financial predicament, these being the commonest themes of poetic grievances.²¹ To be sure, while this specific use of the term persisted in later centuries, some medieval authors employed the word more broadly, as in common usage, to signify the most diverse kinds of complaints made in verse (or prose, for that matter), in addition to general complaints about Time/Fate or the times, one's milieu and contemporaries, and specific grievances about one's poverty: namely, complaints about old age, ill health, the pangs of love, homesickness, injustice and ill-treatment suffered at the hands of the authorities, or about sham friends and unfeeling relatives – to name but a few other themes of poetic grievances, some of which occur already in early Arabic poetry.²² Therefore, the few modern Arab

20 According to indigenous lexicographers, the original meaning of *šakw* was 'the opening of the small skin for water or milk called *šakwa* and showing what is in it'; metaphorically this meant 'to open one's heart, reveal one's true condition', like the phrases *baṭaṭtu lahū mā fī wī'ā'i* or *nafaṭtu lahū mā fī jirābi*: see Lane, 1589; LA [š-k-w]; E. al-Mufti, *Šakwā in Arabic Poetry During the 'Abbāsid Period*, 26-36; Z. aš-Šahrī, *aš-Šakwā fī š-šī'r al-'Arabī ḥattā nihāyat al-qarn aṭ-ṭāliṭ al-hijrī*, 8-10.

21 On the use of *šakwā* as a technical term in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's (d. 322/934) *'Iyār aš-šī'r*, see my '*Šakwā and ḍamm az-zamān*', 100-1 (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā mentions *šakwā* as a theme of the polythematic ode, not as a genre); on its use in the *Yatīma*, see here 2.1, esp. notes 3-5. More generally on its use in *adab* literature since the early 10th century, see al-Mufti, *Šakwā*, 37-51 (in some cases noted by al-Mufti the word is used in its common, i.e. broader meaning, not as a technical term). Another expression used as a technical term to denote poetic complaints about one's times and contemporaries is *ḍamm az-zamān* ('the blame of the time', see my '*Šakwā and ḍamm az-zamān*', *passim*). To give a few later examples: *Šakwā* was still used in its specific sense (*šakwā* [sū] *al-hāl*) in al-Qalqašandī's passages referred to above, note 13; in *al-Burd al-muwaššā fī šinā'at al-inšā'* by Mūsā b. Ḥasan al-Mawṣilī (d. 699/1300), 132-3; in a chapter heading in the thematically arranged anthology of al-Mutanabbī's poetry made by Ibn Fahd (d. 725/1325 – see G. Schoeler, 'The Genres of Classical Arabic Poetry', 34-5); in a chapter heading of the thematically arranged *Dīwān* of Šafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī (ca. 677-749/1278-1348 – see Schoeler, *ibid*, 37).

22 As can be seen from the contents of the *Šakwā* chapter of his thematically arranged anthology *Jamharat al-Islām*, aš-Šayzarī (d. after 622/1225), for example, understood the term very broadly. That chapter includes texts airing various kinds of grievances (e.g. the complaint of an imprisoned poet about his negligent son; a poet's grievances over the plagiarization of his verses by his enemies, a poet's bitter complaint to his patron that he neglected him, etc., apart from complaints about the times and about poverty).

The above remarks concern the *technical* usage of the word only.

scholars who have studied this genre in detail take the term *šakwā* in its broadest sense and survey all its major topics.²³ In the present study, however, I shall only discuss complaints about one's circumstances as well as general grievances about one's times and milieu (the stinginess and boorishness of one's coevals, the disregard of letters and the learned, the misery of *littérateurs*, etc.) inasmuch as they imply dissatisfaction with one's lot and financial predicament, to the exclusion of all other kinds of complaints. Consequently, I use the terms *šakwā* and 'complaint poetry' in a restricted sense, to refer only to the kinds of grievances examined here.

As Gregor Schoeler has shown, several 'historical genres' of classical Arabic poetry were overlooked by contemporary literary theorists, who 'allow[ed] economy to prevail in their classifications' of poetry and 'want[ed] only to name the most important or more widespread kinds' or 'only to name main or primary categories, from which the other kinds can be deduced'. Moreover, since early Arabic poems were often polythematic, scholars who theorized about 'kinds' (*funūn*) of poetry mostly focused on fragments (thematic units), not whole poems, and thought in terms of themes rather than genres. Nevertheless, historical genres were given consideration by those *dīwān* redactors who chose to classify the poets' collected works thematically and who therefore 'had to grapple with complete poems'; consequently, their 'thematic' classifications correspond to modern generic ones.²⁴ *Šakwā* was one of those 'modern' genres (i.e. genres that first appeared in Umayyad and Abbasid times), of which classical Arabic literary theorists hardly ever took notice, but whose existence is amply documented in the sources, both *dīwāns* and literary anthologies. The recurrent use of terms such as *šakwā*, *šakwā (sū) al-ḥāl*, *šakwā/ḍamm az-zamān (wa-ahlihī)*, etc., in classical Arabic anthologies since the late tenth century testifies to contemporary awareness of the existence of the genre.

23 On the growth of this poetic genre, see the two detailed studies by al-Mufti and aš-Šahrī cited above (note 20), as well as al-'Arfaǧ's thesis on al-Mutanabbī. For earlier studies in Arabic see al-Mufti, 10; aš-Šahrī, 4. On the 'Complaint about the Times', see F. Rosenthal, "Sweeter Than Hope": *Complaint and Hope in Medieval Islam*, 1-58. Rosenthal discussed some other interesting aspects of this theme, such as the belief in a constant decline of the times and mores (seemingly a form of cultural pessimism), or the inappropriateness of complaining about Time since God is the real agent behind its workings, but failed to appreciate its importance for the present subject matter: see my '*Šakwā* and *ḍamm az-zamān*', 98-9.

24 See his article 'The Genres of Classical Arabic Poetry: Classifications of Poetic Themes and Poems by Pre-Modern Critics and Redactors of *Dīwāns*' (2011), which is a completely revised and updated English version of his earlier study 'Die Einteilung der Dichtung bei den Arabern' (1973). Schoeler did not consider thematically arranged anthologies, which are another important source evidencing contemporary awareness of the existence of historical genres not discussed by literary theorists. Nevertheless, thematically arranged anthologies often cite fragments rather than whole poems, which fact complicates the evaluation of the evidence they offer.

‘Begging poetry’, on the other hand, is less conspicuously categorized as a genre in contemporary sources. This is because it was indeed a less widespread genre than *šakwā*, which in its highbrow mode was cultivated very widely and grew extremely popular in the Buyid era, in particular. Nonetheless, it appears that by the late tenth century the word *kudya* (=‘begging, beggary’)²⁵ was not solely applied to true beggary but also to literary mendicancy and indeed to begging poems as have been defined above.²⁶ This usage of the word evidently arose gradually, because already since the ninth century poets had started likening their craft to beggary or styling themselves ‘beggars’ or were abusively dubbed thus by others.²⁷ Such statements were of course implicit complaints about their alleged low status and lack of respectability and persisted in later times as well. It was precisely against the background of statements and complaints of this sort that al-Aḥnaf al-‘Ukbarī (ca. 301-85/914-95), an Iraqi astrologer and poet and one of the most important exponents of classical Arabic complaint poetry,²⁸ conceived the idea of playfully identifying with professional beggars and composed an ode vaunting about his adherence to that ‘guild’, thus giving birth to the mini-genre of the *Sāsānīyāt*.²⁹ It comes as no surprise that Abū Dulaf al-Ḥazrajī, the very next poet

25 On the long debate on the word’s etymology (whether it is derived from Persian *gadā*, ‘beggar’, or from the Arabic root [kdw/y], whose basic meaning is ‘solidness, unyieldingness’) see Ḥarb, *Mawsū‘at adab al-muḥtālīn*, 27-39; C.E. Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld*, 1:40, 2:244; cf. WKAS 1:89.

26 On the use of the word *kudya* in the *Yatīma*, a most important witness for these additional significations, see 2.1, esp. note 6, and 2.2, p. 102. On *kudya* for ‘literary mendicancy’, see also *Rasā’il al-Badī al-Hamaḍānī*, 49, 161; on *kudya* and *šihāda* for ‘begging mode / beggarly style’, see, e.g., Ibn ‘Abbād’s words cited in at-Tawḥīdī’s *Aḥlāq al-wazīrayn*, 495.

27 On poets’ describing their craft as ‘beggary’, see 1.5, a couplet cited after note 176; 2.2.2, note 128. On a poet being branded as ‘beggar’, see 1.5, note 154; cf. *Aḡānī* 13:253, an abusive triplet by Ibn al-Mu‘aḍḍal on Abū Tammām. Such implicit complaints persisted in later times: see, e.g., *al-Wāfi* 13:34 (v. 5 of an ode by the eleventh-century Iraqi poet Ibn al-Habbārīya addressed to his friend, the poet al-Bārī ad-Dabbās, cf. *Wafayāt* 2:182, note 1); a witty couplet by the twelfth-century Egyptian poet Abū l-Ḡamr al-Isnāwī (d. 544/1150) in *Ḥarīda* 15:158 and another by Ibn Nubāta al-Miṣrī (686-768/1287-1366) in *al-Wāfi* 1:330; they both equate poetry with ‘beggary’ (*kudya*, *šihāda*); cf. Epilogue, notes 16 (no. 161) and 25 (no. 294).

28 On al-Aḥnaf al-‘Ukbarī see GAS 2:566; Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld*, 67-9 and index; al-Muftī, *Shakwā*, 164-73; Ḥarb, *Mawsū‘a*, 179-84; al-Husayn, *Adab al-kudya*, 92-102, 252-4 (his poetry is cited throughout this book, esp. 130-82); *idem*, ‘Al-Aḥnaf al-‘Ukbarī’. See also my forthcoming articles ‘Al-Aḥnaf al-‘Ukbarī: His Life and His *Sāsānī* Poems’ and ‘Al-Aḥnaf al-‘Ukbarī: Major Themes of his Complaint Poetry (*Shakwā*)’.

29 On the *Sāsānīyāt*, see Bosworth’s aforementioned study and my forthcoming paper on al-Aḥnaf’s ‘*Sāsānī* poems’. In those odes poets identified with beggars and various charlatans and tricksters, namely with the Banū Sāsān, as such low-lifers were collectively named in medieval Islam, and described their ruses and vagabond life using their special jargon. The first volume of Bosworth’s study is devoted to the Banū Sāsān and their argot; the second volume is an edition, translation and detailed commentary of the *Sāsānīyāt* of Abū Dulaf al-Ḥazrajī (ca. mid-4th/10th cent.) and Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī. On the Banū Sāsān, see also Bosworth’s more recent article in *Elr*; *El2* ‘Mukaddī’ (Ch. Pellat).

to compose a *Sāsānīya*, included poets in his list of specialisms of professional beggars.³⁰ More important than the use of the word *kudya* to signify 'literary mendicancy' or the 'beggarly mode' in the Arabic sources of the Buyid era and beyond, however, is al-Ṭa'ālibī's use of it for beggarly petitions (see 2.1, note 6, and 2.2, p. 102), too, because it betrays an awareness of the existence of such poems and their specific features and qualities – a fact also borne out by contemporary responses to them. It also shows that by using the term 'begging poetry' for the subject matter of this study I do not impose an extraneous category on the Arabic material.³¹

As opposed to *šakwā*, the usage of the term *kudya* in modern Arabic literary studies is very problematic. Šawqī Ḍayf (1910-2005), for instance, who was a very influential author, applies it to 'literary mendicancy', but in a rather confusing manner. Speaking about Ibn al-Ḥajjāj he comments that 'there is a lot of *kudya*, i.e. literary mendicancy, in his poems and he always publicizes his poverty and need', and adds that Ibn al-Ḥajjāj only did so for the sake of fun and entertainment, since he was making good money.³² On the other hand, discussing al-Aḥnaf al-'Ukbarī and Abū Dulaf al-Ḥazrajī,³³ he notes that they belonged to a class of poets styled 'kudya poets', who, according to him, were vagrants and earned their living by 'kudya, i.e. literary mendicancy' (sic). Ḍayf further compares 'kudya poets' to nineteenth-century Egyptian *adabātīs* (or *udabātīs*),³⁴ adding that they identified with the 'Banū Sāsān' or 'Sāsānīyūn', which is how professional beggars and tricksters were widely known in medieval Islam. Ḍayf may be right in his surmise that there existed vagrant poets whose lifestyle was akin to that of the Banū Sāsān, but apparently the two groups were not identical (as I understand it, *adabātīs* were

Centring as they do on extolling the various categories and tricks of beggars and conmen, the *Sāsānīyāt* have nothing to do with begging poetry as understood here and therefore will not be discussed in the present study. Nevertheless, al-Aḥnaf's frequent identification with beggars shows that this mini-genre arose from complaint poetry.

30 On al-Ḥazrajī see Bosworth, *Medieval Islamic Underworld*, *passim* and esp. 1:48-79; Elr 'Abū Dolaf al-Yanbu'ī (R.W. Bulliet); GAS 2:645; Ḥarb, *Mawsū'a*, 213-301; al-Ḥusayn, *Adab al-kudya*, *passim* and esp. 102-16. Poets are mentioned in v. 108 of al-Ḥazrajī's *Sāsānīya*: see Bosworth, *ibid*, 2:206.

31 The term has been previously used by G. Schoeler (EI2, 'Zadjal') and E. al-Mufti (*Shakwā*, 16-7, 236).

32 'Aṣr ad-duwal wa-l-imārāt, 405: *takṭuru fī aš'ārihī l-kudyatu aw-i š-šihādatu l-adabīya, fa-huwa yuḳṭiru min bayāni faqrihī wa-hājatihī... wa-kullu dālika du'ābatun wa-fukāha... fa-qad kānat-i d-danānīru wa-d-darāhimu tansakibu 'alayhi min kullī jānib*. Cf. his comments on Ibn Sukkara (d. 385/995), *ibid*, 403, about whom he says that he imitated the ways of 'kudya poets' (*šu'arā' al-kudya*: more on this designation below) for comic effect.

33 *Ibid*, 428-9 and 636-40 respectively.

34 On *adabātīs* or *udabātīs* (popular street performers) see F. al-Kūfī, 'al-Udabatīya nawāh li-l-masraḥ aš-ša'bī al-hazlī'; L. Herrera, 'The Soul of a Nation' – 'Abdallah Nadim and Educational Reform in Egypt (1845-1896)', 4, and the reference given there, note 9. Notably Ḍayf discusses both al-'Ukbarī and al-Ḥazrajī in sections of his work on 'folk poets' (*šu'arā' ša'bīyūn*), which to my mind is wrong; cf. his *aš-Šī'r wa-ṭawābī'uhū š-ša'bīya*, 152-5.

not viewed as beggars or tricksters). What is more, al-Aḥnaf was certainly not such a vagrant poet. As I have mentioned above, his identification with the Banū Sāsān in some of his poems was nothing but a literary claim serving to underline his supposedly precarious existence.³⁵ His *Dīwān*, published in 1999, is not easily accessible and it only became available to me after I had finished working on the present study. Therefore, and despite his being one of the most important exponents of tenth-century Arabic complaint verse, I could only discuss his poetry and his claim that he belonged to the Banū Sāsān in two separate papers, to which readers are referred for details on his life and work.³⁶ Abū Dulaf al-Ḥazraǧī, too, was no vagrant poet in Ḍayf's sense neither was he a 'Sāsānī', even though he was well acquainted with that milieu and its jargon as his *Sāsānīya* demonstrates. To compare the craft of literature to beggary seems to have become a fashion in Buyid times, when prose writers joined the chorus of complaint.³⁷ Hence, when aṭ-Ta'ālībī and later anthologists speak of a poet's skill in *kuḍya* (as aṭ-Ta'ālībī does concerning al-Ḥazraǧī) one should not immediately conclude that they refer to

35 The few surviving notes on him, except for that of the *Yatīma*, suggest that he was a respected littérateur. Al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baǧdādī (*Ta'rīḥ Baǧdād* 14:247-8) dubs him a *muta'addib*, *šā'ir* (littérateur and poet) and *munajjim* (astrologer or astronomer, this evidently being his profession), whereas in a poem he cites, al-Aḥnaf calls himself 'an *adīb*, poet and philosopher' and deplores the fact that he had to beg (I believe he means 'literary mendicancy') because of his bad luck. Ibn Abī Ya'lā (*Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* 3:262-3) mentions him in his note on the great Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Baṭṭa (304-87/917-99), who was his friend and fellow-townsmen (they both came from 'Ukbarā, hence the *nisba* al-'Ukbarī), and quotes a poetic exchange between the two men that attests to their close relationship and the great respect they had for one another. It is highly unlikely that Ibn Baṭṭa would have addressed such verses to a beggar. Cf. Ibn al-'Imād, *Šaḍarāt aḍ-ḍaḥab* 4:465 (year 387). Ibn al-Jawzī, who devotes him a short note in the *Muntaẓam* (14:380-1), calls him an *adīb* and witty poet (*šā'ir malīḥ*) and cites some verses of his (cf. Ibn Kaṭīr, *al-Bidāya* 15:462-3; Ibn Taǧrībīrdī, *an-Nujūm az-zāhira* 4:174 – all three sources, year 385). In all these sources, there is no mention of his having anything to do with real beggary. This is why I believe that Ibn 'Abbād's and aṭ-Ta'ālībī's comments on him in *Yatīma* 3:137 (that he was 'the poet of the beggars and their wit', 'unrivalled among the Banū Sāsān') are either misguided or simply refer to his being the first to have composed a *Sāsānīya* and to have used the *Sāsānī* argot in his poetry. Not unlike al-Ḥazraǧī, al-Aḥnaf may have had connections to the underworld but he did not belong to it. As that milieu intrigued Ibn 'Abbād, he possibly advertised his knowledge of it in order to attract the vizier's attention and impress him.

36 *Dīwān al-Aḥnaf al-'Ukbarī*, ed. Sulṭān b. Sa'd as-Sulṭān, Riyadh: [publisher not identified] 1999 (not recorded in CAPP). The *Dīwān* comprises 838 odes, short poems and excerpts representing several genres of classical Arabic poetry, not solely begging and complaint verse: see al-Ḥusayn, 98, 252-3. In addition, there exists an M.A. thesis entitled 'Šī'r aš-šakwā fī Dīwān al-Aḥnaf al-'Ukbarī: Dirāsa Naṣṣiya', presented at the Kulīyat al-Ādāb of the University of Zaqāzīq by Aḥmad Rifā'ī in 2010 (see the Bibliography). For my forthcoming papers, see the Bibliography.

37 The phenomenon of literary mendicancy evidently inspired al-Badī al-Hamaḍānī (358-98/968-1008) to compose his famous *Maqāmāt*: see 2.1.2, p. 97 and note 93. His beggar-hero stands for contemporary littérateurs.

true beggary or that the poet was a vagrant in Ḍayf's sense.³⁸ Similar claims made by poets from other cultures should make us suspicious of Arabic littérateurs' identification with beggars and vagrants.³⁹ In sum, the main problem with Ḍayf's use of the term is that he applies it both to Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, to denote literary mendicancy as is widely understood today, and to the postulated class of vagrant poets, whom he clumsily identifies with the Banū Sāsān, that is, professional beggars and rogues.

Turning to more recent and specialized studies, I should like to call attention to 'Abdalhādī Ḥarb's unsystematic use of the term and more generally to his failure, or rather unwillingness, to distinguish between true beggary and literary mendicancy. His *Mawsū'at adab al-muḥtālīn* ('Encyclopaedia of Conmen Literature') is a comprehensive monograph on beggary – not on 'Conmen Literature' as the title has it – and its representation in Arabic literature from early Islamic to early modern times.⁴⁰ Hence, he deals extensively with al-Jāḥiẓ's reports about beggars and rogues (pp. 103-48), the Banū Sāsān and al-Ḥazrajī's *Sāsāniya* (pp. 151-7, 213-301), as well as with the *maqāmāt* genre (pp. 341-704), themes which have been the subject of several earlier studies and to which he hardly adds anything new. A valuable contribution is his systematic discussion of anecdotes about begging Bedouins, whose prose or poetic pleas were keenly written down by philologists because of their linguistic interest (pp. 77-102). Apart from al-Ḥazrajī, under the heading '*Šu'arā' Sāsān*' ('Poets of [the Banū] Sāsān' – sic) he discusses Abū š-Šamaqmaq, Abū Fir'awn as-Sāsī, al-Aḥnaf al-'Ukbarī, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Ibn Sukkara (pp. 151-211),⁴¹ and in a section entitled '*al-Kudya fī l-mustawā r-rafi'*' (pp. 303-26) he discusses poetry as a professional activity (*takassub*) along the lines of al-Ḥayyāt's and Jundī's earlier studies,⁴² styling it 'Beggary at a High Level'. In the last part of his book, '*al-Kudya fī l-adab aš-ša'bī*' ('*Kudya* in Popular Literature', pp. 705-77), he deals with the later centuries, from the Mamluk era to the early modern times, and offers useful information on the persistence of begging poetry in that period, but his reluctance to deal with dialectal poetry limits the scope and benefit of his survey. Although not insensible to the humorousness of begging poetry as a genre, overall he takes the poets' complaints at face value, which is true of other Arab

38 Cf. note 48 below.

39 Note, for instance, P. Dronke's remarks on the Goliards, *The Medieval Lyric*, 21: 'The wide range of Latin lyrics with profane, topical, satirical or amatory themes [...] were principally composed, as far as we have evidence, not by a ragged band of bohemians ('the wandering scholars', 'the goliards') but by hard-working, intellectually distinguished professional men'. On Hellenistic Greek poets' comparing or equating their craft to (ritual) begging, see Merkelbach's and Furley's studies cited in notes 3-4 above.

40 I am grateful to Maurice Pomerantz for bringing this book to my attention.

41 Apart from al-Aḥnaf, these poets will be discussed in Chapters One and Two.

42 See the Bibliography. Both authors are dismissive of poetry composed for money and deplore the fact that this was a general phenomenon in pre-modern times.

scholars, too.⁴³ But the main problem with this study, as I see it, is the author's all too broad understanding of beggary, which made him lump together poetry as a profession, begging verse, and literature on professional beggars, conmen and rogues. Clearly, it was not his intention to study begging poetry as understood here; therefore, his treatment of such verse is superficial and unsystematic.

Aḥmad al-Ḥusayn's *Adab al-kudya fi l-'aṣr al-'Abbāsī* ('Kudya Literature in Abbasid Times') is narrower in scope, because for this author *kudya* is primarily beggary, not literary mendicancy.⁴⁴ Even though he too lumps together literature on beggars and rogues with the literature that they themselves purportedly produced, he distinguishes between poets who reportedly were real beggars and poets who composed in the begging mode. Thus, under the heading 'Poets who imitated beggary' (*šū'arā' ta'attarū bi-l-kudya*, pp. 121-6) he briefly refers to Abū l-'Aynā', Ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Ibn Sukkara as representative cases, and also names Abū š-Šamaqmaq.⁴⁵ In the section titled '*Kudya* Poets' (pp. 87-121), he discusses supposedly real beggars, including al-'Ukbarī, al-Ḥazraǵī, as-Sūsī and Aḥmad b. Maḥdī al-Ḥītī,⁴⁶ whose inclusion in this group is, as said, decidedly mistaken. Anxious to increase their small number, in most cases he takes poetic claims literally or stretches and overinterprets the available evidence. Hence, he also mentions al-Aqṭa' al-Kūfī, a rogue associated with aṣ-Ṣāhib Ibn 'Abbād but not a poet,⁴⁷ or a certain Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Ḥītī, whom aṣ-Ṣafadī describes as 'a poet who begged through poetry' (*šā'irun-i jīṭadā bi-š-šī'ri*),⁴⁸ which phrase certainly does not

43 See, e.g., aṣ-Šahrī's study on *šakwā*, *passim*, or the introduction to S. Dabbāg's *Adab al-mu'dimīn*; this is also why Ḥ. 'Aṭwān included Abū š-Šamaqmaq in his study *aṣ-Šū'arā' aṣ-ša'ālik fi l-'aṣr al-'Abbāsī al-awwal*, in which he deals with several categories of outlaws, thieves and spongers (*ayyārūn, šuṭṭār, tuḥayliyyūn*). Ḥarb (*ibid*, 73, 211), for instance, seems to believe in the existence of 'the haplessness of belles-letters', on which concept see 1.5.

44 I am grateful to Kristina Richardson for bringing this book to my attention. Very occasionally, al-Ḥusayn employs *kudya* to denote literary mendicancy: see, e.g., 134, his comment on Abū l-'Aynā'.

45 Nevertheless, he often quotes Abū š-Šamaqmaq when he discusses the 'Themes of the Poetry of Beggars' (*agrād šī'r al-mukaddīn*): e.g., 129, 132, 140-1, 147, 154, 182; on p. 166 he cites Ibn al-Ḥajjāj.

46 On Abū 'Abdallāh as-Sūsī, another Buyid poet who playfully claimed to have joined the ranks of tricksters and beggars because of his poverty, see *Yatīma* 3:495-6; Bosworth, 69-72; al-Ḥusayn, 117-9. A certain Aḥmad b. Maḥdī al-Ḥītī tried to outdo as-Sūsī composing an 840-verse long ode, of which only two lines survive: see *al-Wāfi* 8:198 and al-Ḥusayn, 119 (his name is there erroneously given as Aḥmad b. Muḥammad).

47 That he completed a verse started by Ibn 'Abbād (*Aḥlāq al-wazīrayn*, 186) does not make him a poet. Neither were Ibn Faṣṣā and al-Hā'im (al-Ḥusayn, 121) poets: the verses which al-Ḥusayn, 159, ascribes to Ibn Faṣṣā are by Ibn 'Abbād: see *Aḥlāq al-wazīrayn*, 215; the obscure al-Hā'im was simply a transmitter of poetry and had nothing to do with begging: see *Iršād*, 2284-5. Finally, Abū l-Yanbaǵī (*ibid*, 121) was not a beggar: see *Ṭabaqāt*, 130-32; *al-Wāfi* 16:663-5. Likewise, to include al-Ḥazraǵī's geographical *risālas* to 'Prose Literature by Beggars' (*ibid*, 204-14) is patently wrong. In al-Ḥusayn's understanding 'Prose Literature by Beggars' is, primarily, the sermons and stories narrated by popular preachers (*ḥuṭṭāb* and *quṣṣāṣ*).

48 *Al-Wāfi* 1:296. Aṣ-Ṣafadī uses the expression *ijṭadā bi-š-šī'r* repeatedly; see, e.g., *al-Wāfi* 27:103

mean that he was a beggar. Another such case is al-Muṭahhar al-Baṣrī.⁴⁹ The only poets in this group who are known to have truly practised beggary are Abū Fir‘awn as-Sāsī (see 1.4) and Abū l-Muḥaffaf, a weirdo who lived at Baghdad in al-Ma‘mūn’s time and used to go around the city riding on a donkey, accompanied by his slave-girl, reciting humorous poems in praise of bread and stopping by persons of authority, merchants and craftsmen, who gave him small things such as a coin, a piece of bread or a loaf.⁵⁰ But apparently these two poets, too, were no destitute vagrants.⁵¹ I do not mean to say that no beggars existed who composed poetry, but evidently as al-Ḥusayn himself comments (pp. 87-8) such poetry was hardly ever recorded, unless this was done anonymously as in the case of begging Bedouins.

In short, these three authors’ confusion of true beggary with literary mendicancy and their failure to recognize the fictionality of poetic grievances could not but lead to mistaken inferences about the real-life circumstances of the complaining poets and the intent of their poetry.

For reasons that I have explained above (note 29), the *Sāsānīyāt* do not belong to the subject matter of this study and shall not be discussed here. From the two poets who are known to have practised beggary I shall only look at Abū Fir‘awn as-Sāsī, who is interesting to compare with his contemporary and fellow-townsmen Abū š-Šamaqmaq, a much better-known poet (Chapter One).

As I became acquainted with the books of Ḥarb and al-Ḥusayn at an advanced stage of my research, I have only profited from them in matters of detail. By contrast, I am deeply indebted to the scholarship of Ibrāhīm Najjār and to his study and anthology of early Abbasid ‘minor poets’ *Šu‘arā’ ‘Abbāsīyūn mansīyūn*, especially volume 2:3, in which the theme of poverty is most prominent and which stirred my interest in the topic of this book. Well aware of the humorous and entertaining qualities of begging poems, Najjār calls attention to the fictitiousness of the poets’ assertions. He also rightly credits ‘minor’ poets with introducing

(on the thirteenth-century poet an-Naṣīr b. Aḥmad al-Ḥammāmī); *Nakt al-himyān*, 89, and *al-Wāfi* 6:100-1, on Ibrāhīm b. Maḥāsīn aḍ-Ḍarīr (d. 575/1180); these passages make clear that what aṣ-Ṣafadī meant was literary mendicancy. Cf. *Ḥarīda* 6:451, where ‘Imād ad-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī says of Ibn Ḥarrāz: *majīdun ḡayru mujtadin, mā naẓama qaṭṭu li-jtidā’, wa-lā ṭalabi ḥibā’, fa-qad aḡnathu l-qanā’atu ‘ani l-qunū’*; al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ aṭ-ṭib* 6:264 (quoting Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb’s comments on the Andalusian poet Ibn Bāq): *ḡabara zamānan min ‘umriḥi muḥārāfan li-l-fāqa, yu’ālīju bi-l-adabi l-kudya* (i.e. ‘he exercised beggary through literature’, which can only mean literary mendicancy). *ljtidā’* is another term used by modern Arab scholars to denote ‘literary mendicancy’, see, e.g., ‘A.J. aṭ-Ṭāhir, *aṣ-Šīr al-‘Arabī fī l-‘Irāq wa-bilād al-‘Ajam fī l-‘aṣr as-Saljūqī*, 365, or M.Z. Sallām, *al-Adab fī l-‘aṣr al-Ayyūbī*, 316.

49 See 2.1, note 6.

50 See *Waraqqa*, 114-6; az-Zamaḥṣarī, *Rabī’ al-abrār* 3:244-5.

51 It is worth noting that Abū l-Muḥaffaf owned a slave-girl and that when the two went around begging each rode on a different donkey; by contrast, many poets deplored their want of a mount (see 1.3, 1.5). Reportedly, Abū Fir‘awn was unable to refrain from begging even though he earned well.

several new themes to Abbasid poetry.⁵² His work, Sālim Dabbāḡ's useful yet unsophisticated *Adab al-mu'dimīn*⁵³ and the studies of al-Mufti and aš-Šahrī on *šakwā* have helped me identify the most important poets in this domain. Reading through their work, I soon realized that, despite being marginal genres of classical Arabic literature, begging and complaint poetry deserve to be more thoroughly and systematically studied. Because of the great thematic affinity of the two genres, I believe it is sensible to study them in parallel.

In the following I endeavour to present, in broad lines, the historic development of these genres from their beginnings to the late twelfth century; I highlight the role of certain poets or groups of poets in this process, survey their basic strategies and map the various topoi and themes that recur in the texts. This being a text-oriented and not an author-oriented study, I do not treat the poets' biographies in any detail. Nevertheless, and although this is a literary study and not a study of social history, the subject itself begs some comments on the poets' financial situation and social status, since this is what they complained about. I only discuss such information as is available regarding the poets whose work I look at in more depth. Given the broad chronological and geographical compass of the book, it is obviously impossible to generalize about the circumstances of the various poets cited here. It is nevertheless common knowledge that in mediaeval Muslim societies, literary talent and erudition guaranteed and boosted social advancement and that the standing of *littérateurs* and scholars was well above that of the common people. Intellectuals were viewed as an 'adjunct' of the upper social classes, with which they interacted and socialized and by which they were sponsored and maintained. Even though their circumstances varied over space and time and despite the fact that more research is needed before a clearer picture of the material conditions of average intellectuals in medieval Islam emerges, we know for sure that they generally enjoyed great respect and appreciation across the various social strata.⁵⁴ This is additional evidence that their grumbles about the disregard of letters, the demotion of the learned and the supposed decline of mores and culture, as became common in the ninth century, should not be taken literally. Notably, the centuries covered here are generally viewed as the heyday of medieval Islamic civilization and scholarship.⁵⁵ The stereotypicality of the poets' complaints will, I hope, become evident in what follows.

⁵² See his brief Introduction to that volume, 15-17.

⁵³ See the Bibliography; this is a brief collection of excerpts of poetry and prose on poverty, arranged thematically, without any comments.

⁵⁴ See the references given in the Epilogue, notes 38 and 41.

⁵⁵ This does not mean that the following centuries were a period of decline, as the orientalist discourse had it. I only mean to say that the cultural efflorescence of the period under study, which is undisputed, discredits the poets' moans about the decline of letters and culture.

Technicalities

With the exception of the pieces included in the Appendix (see below), the poems cited in this study are given in prose translation only; no attempt has been made to imitate the verse form of the originals. For the Arabic originals one should consult the editions referred to in the footnotes (most of these editions or other searchable, i.e. indexed editions of the works I cite are nowadays available online). M.M. Qumayḥa's edition of *Yatīmat ad-dahr* is inferior to that by Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn 'Abdalḥamīd (Cairo 1956) and has many typographical mistakes, but I nevertheless refer to it because the 'Abdalḥamīd edition was not always available to me; the Qumayḥa edition includes the *Yatīma*'s sequel, *Tatimmat al-Yatīma*, to which I refer as '*Yatīma* 5:' (a misnomer for the sake of brevity in the footnotes). So as not to encumber the footnotes, however, I mostly *tacitly* follow the correct readings of the 'Abdalḥamīd edition. As said above, I focus on a limited number of poets (Abū Dulāma, Abū š-Šamaqmaq, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Ibn Quzmān), but numerous others are quoted and dealt with in less depth. I do not give exhaustive references and information about all these poets nor have I traced their cited poems – mostly epigrams – in the vast *adab* literature systematically. Regardless of what the title of a poet's collected works is, I refer to it as '*Dīwān*' – for full bibliographical details see the Bibliography under the poet's name.

The Appendix ('Select Arabic Texts') comprises the originals of a small number of poems translated and discussed in the study, namely the long poems of Ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Ibn Quzmān, whose *Dīwāns* are difficult to access; excluded are two overlong pieces, poems by Ibn al-Ḥajjāj that are cited in the *Yatīma*, as well as all short poems and excerpts. The Arabic originals are given in the order as the translations appear in the study. All poems whose original is found in the Appendix are preceded by a number indicating their place there.

