ADAB AS SOCIAL CURRENCY
THE SURVIVAL OF THE *QAṢĪDA* IN MEDIEVAL SICILY[*]

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Abstract

This article explores the resilience of the *qaṣīda* as social currency in the Kalbid and Norman periods of Sicily. It demonstrates how the Kalbid emirs incorporated the sociopoietic function of the Arabic ode—its capacity to create bonds of social exchange based on a shared ethos—in their programme to foster cohesion at a court potentially endangered by social, confessional and ethnic rivalries. It subsequently shows how the *qaṣīda* carried out a comparable function at the Norman court of Roger II, where Arabic poets once again resorted to the language and lore of the *qaṣīda* in order to craft a neutral space of interaction for Muslims and Christians at court.

Key Words

Arabic literature, Muslim Sicily, Norman Sicily, *habitus, qaṣīda,* Italian literature.

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The Classical Arabic ode (*qaṣīda*) remained at the forefront of Sicilian literary expression throughout the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. This was a time of immense political turmoil for the island. Three successive events overturned its political status-quo: the Fatimid revolution, which ended the Aghlabid control of the island; the Sicilian *fitna*[1] that followed the collapse of the Kalbid emirate;[2]

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[1] 'Civil war', I use the term as it appears in poetic collections and biographical dictionaries, for example *Tartīb al-Madārik* and *al-Kharīḍa.* See Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Muʿjam al-ʿUlamāʾ wa al-shuʿarāʾ al-Ṣiqilliyyīn*, Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994, pp. 98, 159. On this term see also: Annliese Nef, 'La Fitna Sicilienne: Une Fitna Inachevée?', *Médiévales* 60 (2011), pp. 103–116.

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and the Norman conquest that annihilated the Sicilian *Taifa* kingdoms.[3] These upheavals had major repercussions on the Sicilian social landscape. Agents with diverging interests, moved by different confessional, ethnic and political affiliations, rose to positions of prominence and contributed to the ongoing processes of cultural and political history.

The present article addresses one main question: how did the *qaṣīda* survive these dramatic upheavals and the resulting changes in social and political milieux, whilst retaining its value as social currency?[4] In other words, how did the classical Arabic ode carry out its traditional function of a 'token in a ritualised social exchange',[5] in societies where ethnic, confessional and political rifts would ostensibly jeopardise traditional social exchanges?

Building my argument with reference to recent scholarship,[6] I maintain that the Kalbid emirs and their bureaucratic apparatus fostered, through the reproduction of the canonical forms of the *qaṣīda*, a non-normative code of behaviour which granted social cohesion in a fragmented and profoundly heterogeneous society. This code, best understood in terms of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*,[7] was later revived and impulsed by Arabic poets working in Norman Sicily. With their verse, the Arabic poets of Norman Sicily promoted a courtly *habitus* encoded in the Arabic ode, in order to overcome social rifts and religious rivalries within their own society.

Both at the fraying edges of *Dār al-Isām* and at the precarious boundaries of Christianity, the classical Arabic ode resisted as a *koine* by which confessional, ethnic and political divisions could be bypassed. Poets at both the Muslim Kalbid

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[2] The Kalbid Emirs ruled Sicily from the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh century. They were formally appointed by the Fatimids, but gained, progressively, a *de facto* autonomous rule.

[3] After the collapse of the Kalbid emirate, Muslim Sicily was split in local municipalities each ruled by a warlord (*qāʾid*). Historians refer to these smaller kingdoms as *ṭawāʾif* (s. *ṭayfa*) a term also used for the Andalusian party-kingdoms of post-Umayyad Iberia. The term has entered contemporary scholarship through Spanish historiography, where the Arabic *ṭawāʾif* became *los Reinos de Taifas.*

[4] 'Social currency' here refers to the means by which agents position themselves in the literary field and affect change. I borrow the term from Bourdieu's theory of social capital in an attempt to nuance the definition of the *qaṣīda* as 'an object in ritual exchange', given by Stetkevych. See, in particular: Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy,* Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002.

[5] Ibid., pp. 18–19, 182–183.

[6] The central argument of this article is owed largely to Erez Naaman's findings. See Erez Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court: Cultural Life Under al-Ṣāḥib ibn ʿAbbād*, London: Routdlege, 2016. For the poetry of the Kalbids I often referred to William Granara, 'Rethinking Muslim Sicily's Golden Age: Poetry and Patronage at the Fatimid Kalbid Court', *Alifbā studi arabo islamici e mediterranei* 22 (2008) [= Antonino Pellitteri (ed.), *I Fatimidi e il Mediterraneo, Atti del Convegno (3-6 dicembre 2008),* Palermo: Accademia Libica in Italia–Università degli Studi di Palermo, 2008], pp. 95–108.

[7] Granara, 'Rethinking Muslim Sicily's Golden Age', p. 108.

and at the Christian Norman courts used the *qaṣīda* to fashion and reify the court as an agglomerating social space. The *qaṣīda*'s value as social currency is thus 'transversal': that is to say, capable of intersecting ethnic, confessional and political boundaries. In what follows, I show how actors in the literary field capitalised on this transversal value in order to foster social configurations that bridged *internal otherness*[8] in the Emirate and Kingdom of Sicily.

I[9]

1. I see them stand up for departure, camels laden with beautiful maidens
    like full moons arising, rocking on their backs, as they move forward,

2. If they looked to the one they journey towards,
    they'd disregard the maidens's countenances

3. And rush on, the desert as their mount
    as they are mounts for the desert

4. Caring for nothing but poetry
    whose springs are the mouths of the bards

5. Trample on the waters, shunning them
    as if the chant of camel-drivers quenched their thirst

6. I say to my mount, when she stops exhausted,
    her hooves obeying my shouts of incitation

7. I will dismount only in rich pastures,
    by the cold, sweet waters of the Euphrates

8. In the land of Mudāfiʿ, protector of my hopes
    slayer of the years of drought.

We know precious little about the author of these lines,[10] the Sicilian prince Jaʿfar ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Kalbī. Fragments of his poems, ten in total, have come down to us by way of the medieval anthology penned by Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ (d. 1121), *al-Durra al-Khaṭīra fī Shuʿarāʾ al-Jazīra*[11] (The Precious Pearl on the Poets of the Island). We can assume that Jaʿfar flourished on Sicilian ground sometime between the end of the tenth and the first half of the eleventh century. He was of royal lineage: his family, the Kalbids, ruled the island from the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh

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8   See Anna A. Akasoy, 'Al-Andalus in Exile: Identity and diversity in Islamic intellectual history', in Matthias M. Tischler and Alexander Fidora, *Christlicher Norden-Muslimischer Süden Ansprüche und Wirklichkeiten von Christen, Juden und Muslimen auf der Iberischen Halbinsel im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter*, Münster: Aschendorff, 2001, pp. 329–343.

9   Arabic text from ʿAbbās, *Muʿjam al-ʿUlamāʾ*, pp. 30–31. English translation mine.

10 The eight lines are extracted from a longer poem, 14 lines in total in Ibn Bassām's *Kharīda.*

11 The book has been culled and edited by Bashīr al-Bakūsh: Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ, Abū al-Qāsim ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar al-Saʿdī, *Al-Durra al-Khaṭīra fī shuʿarāʾ al-Jazīra,* ed. Bashīr al-Bakūsh, Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1995.

century. Under their guidance, Muslim Sicily attained a high degree of autonomy, a period of rare political stability and an unparalleled cultural flourishing. These accomplishments are reflected in the accounts of Medieval Arab historians, who unanimously praise the Kalbid emirs's individual and collective merits.[12]

Patrons of poets and scholars and often competent poets themselves, the Kalbids attracted to their court in Palermo the finest minds from all over Sicily and North Africa. It was during the century or so of their rulership that Palermo orbited firmly, both culturally and politically, within the Arabo-Islamic polity. It appears from the shards of poetry in our hands that its court spoke the language of Qayrawan and Baghdad and moulded its verses on those of the great poets of the past. Sicilian Arabic poets at the Kalbid court appear to have clung staunchly to a 'classicist' poetics. Gaʿfar's ode is a case in point. The poem is dedicated to Mudāfiʿ ibn Rashīd ibn Rāfiʿ al-Hilālī,[13] the Emir of Gàbes, a city on the southern coast of modern-day Tunisia.

As he addressed his correspondent, Jaʿfar opted for an archaising style in both language and structure. In the first line he deploys a powerful motif of the pre-Islamic ode, the ẓaʿn, i.e. the departure of the poet's beloved with the other women of her tribe.[14] Many a great qaṣīda opened with this image. Imrūʾ 'l-Qays, ʿAntara, al-Aʿshā and other totemic figures of the pre-Islamic parnassus all employed this theme to begin their odes.

Line two contains the takhalluṣ, or disengagement, from the nasīb. The line has the two main functions. On the one hand it introduces the next section of the ode, the raḥīl (desert-journey). The poet's infatuation for the 'beautiful maidens' (jamāl) is singularly transferred to the mounts, who would divert their gaze from their riders to behold the poet's patron and rush towards the latter (l. 3). On the other hand, line two condenses the paradigmatic shift from a focus on a longing for the beloved to a focus on a longing for the recipient's acceptance. I say 'condensing', as such a shift towards the recipient is customarily obtained progressively, through the development of the raḥīl, while here the poet obtains it in the brief space of one line.[15] The appearance of the poem's recipient at the

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[12] See for example: Abū al-Fidāʾ, al-Mukhtār fī Akhbār al-Bashar in Michele Amari (ed.), Biblioteca arabo-sicula [= BAS], Torino–Roma: Loescher, 1881, vol. II, pp. 89–96; Al-Nuwayrī, Nihāyat al-Arab fī funūn al-Adab, in Amari (ed.), BAS, vol. II, p. 137; Ibn Khaldūn, Kitāb al-ʿIbar, in Amari (ed.), BAS, vol. II, p. 197; Ibn Khallikān, Kitāb ʿUyūn al-Anbāʾ, in Amari (ed.), BAS, vol. II, pp. 527–528.

[13] ʿAbbās, Muʿjam al-ʿUlamāʾ, p. 31.

[14] See Michael A. Sells, 'Guises of the Ghūl', in Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych (ed.), Reorientations/Arabic and Persian Poetry, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 130–164.

[15] This is exemplified in Ibn Qutayba's oft-quoted summary of the Arabic ode: 'when the poet had assured himself of an attentive hearing, he followed up his advantage and set forth his claim: he went to complain of fatigue and want of sleep and travelling by night and the noonday heat, and how his camel had been reduced to leanness. And when, after representing all the

very beginning of this short ode suits its epistolary nature: the intimate communication between the poet and his addressee is on the forefront. Line four is the poem's conceptual pivot: Jaʿfar extols the nature of the relationship between him and his addressee, a relationship based on poetry (*shiʿr*, l. 4), its codes and its aesthetics. The desert-journey and the poet's mount come to symbolise the very ode travelling from Jaʿfar to Mudāfiʿ. It is poetry that spurs the poet's mount onwards in its journey, and in poetry that poet and recipient are united. The line thus encapsulates the role of this ode as an 'object in a ritual exchange',[16] aimed at establishing bonds of political allegiance between the poet and his recipient. What is less clear is the nature of the power relation between Jaʿfar and Mudāfiʿ. Was the Kalbid prince seeking shelter in Gàbes, perhaps as he prepared to leave Sicily? Or rather, was the poem a ritualised exchange among peers? Did it open a longer petition or a diplomatic letter?

Unfortunately, the scant biographical sources from *al-Durra al-Khaṭīra* do not provide us with an answer to any of these queries. Yet, beyond the details of the case, what is remarkable is how this line encapsulates the essence of poetic patronage as a ritualised exchange regulated by non-normative structures. By mentioning poetry as a bonding element between composed and recipient, Jaʿfar reaffirms the ode's sociopoietic value: he and his North African recipient share in a common identity built on the normalised language of the qaṣīda and its lore. Line 5 reinforces this idea: poetry—here the *rajaz*[17] of the camel-driver—metaphorically replaces water in sustaining the poet's mount in the desert-crossing. Line 6 operates the *takhalluṣ* to the final section of the ode, the praise of the ode's recipient, shifting the focus on the poetic persona with the introduction of the first person. Line 7 evokes the element of water, traditionally associated with the patron's liberality in rewarding the poet. Subsequently, in line 8, the bond of patronage between the poet and the recipient is sanctioned, as the addressee is mentioned explicitly as a 'slayer of the years of drought'.

The ode's thematic organisation is a textbook case: a short *nasīb* (amatory preface, l. 2), a *takhalluṣ* (disengagement from the ode's introduction, l. 2), leading to a *raḥīl* (desert-journey, ll. 3–6), and a second *takhalluṣ* (l. 7), leading to the praise of the ode's recipient in line 8. Jaʿfar borrowed directly from pre-Islamic imagery and *badī*- Mutanabbian phrasing (particularly in line 3). In this, his poetics exhibits the landmark qualities of Sicilian Arabic poetry which have been

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discomfort and danger of his journey he knew that he had fully justified his hope and expectation to receive his full meed... he entered upon the panegyric and incited him (i.e. his patron) to reward' (Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb ash-shiʿr wa-sh-shuʿarāʾ*, trans. in Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907, pp. 77–78).

[16] See Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, p. 277.

[17] *Rajaz* is one of the metres of Arabic poetry; it does not belong, formally, to *qaṣīd* metres and was commonly used for prophecies, invocations and in the chanting of camel-drivers.

observed by William Granara. Granara interpreted the traditionalist quality of Sicilian Arabic poetry as 'the reflection of a frontier mentality that sought identity in being in the main, being more Arab, more Islamic, more orthodox, more Mālikī, more conventional than the freethinking urban centres of Córdoba, Cairo, and Baghdad'.[18] In the tenth century the ẓaʿn, along with the other motifs of the pre-Islamic ode, was still widely reproduced by poets both in the East and the West, Jaʿfar's lines being a case in point.

But the prince's choice should not be dismissed as a slavish adherence to the tradition. In a time when the raging literary trend prescribed poets to sing the praises of wine, relish in the greenery of manicured gardens, or indulge in describing the graces of a cup-bearer or a singing girl, the choice to revive the quaint motifs of desert poetry was anything but a given. It was, rather, a deliberate choice conveying specific meanings. By adopting the most traditional of openings and structures, the Kalbid prince positioned himself within a revered poetic tradition going back to pre-Islamic Arabia. He thus reclaimed and upheld a pedigree that—fictional as it may have been—bound him to his North African interlocutor. The Kalbids hailed originally from North Africa themselves, while their tribe, the Banū Kalb, traced its ancestral origins in southern Arabia. Prince Jaʿfar's epistle to Gàbes, with its rigorous and conservative style, encapsulates the political, cultural and emotional bond that Muslim Sicily maintained, throughout its history, with its perceived motherlands: the immanent North Africa and the chimeric Arabia.

Jaʿfar's line provide us with a preliminary example of how the lore and language of the pre-Islamic ode assumed, in Sicily, a distinct value as social currency: an agglomerating factor in a dived society. The social rifts inherent to Sicilian society during the Kalbid emirate are evident if we consider the varied components of Sicilian society in the tenth century. Firstly, Kalbid Sicily was a frontier land: the Muslims, even at the peak of their military prowess and political influence, had troubles in keeping the totality of the island under control. The towns of the North East such as Taormina and Rometta were contested territory. Closer to the Italian mainland and mostly Christian, their people looked hopefully towards Byzantium. They were in a state of constant rebellion or outright independence. On the other hand, amicable contacts with local Christians and Jews were habitual. The tenth century traveller Ibn Ḥawqal, during his sojourn on the island, was appalled to find out that Sicilian Muslim and Christian peasants intermarried and, in a blatant neglect of all precepts of

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[18] William Granara, 'Ibn Ḥamdīs and the Poetry of Nostalgia', in María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells (eds), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: The Literature of al-Andalus*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 401.

religion, raised their sons as Muslims and their daughters as Christians.[19] Secondly, as clients of the Fatimid Caliphs (an embattled *shīʿa* dynasty), the Kalbids were faced with the ominous task of ruling over a predominantly Sunnī Mālikī population. Sicily had risen in revolt against the Fatimids a number of times. In 913, the island rebelled and proclaimed allegiance to the Sunnī Caliphate of Baghdad. Then again, in 937 the Berbers of Agrigento led a major revolt against the Fatimid governor of Sicily, forging an alliance with Constantinople. The rebellion degenerated into an all-out war pitting Sicilian Muslims against their leaders in North Africa and the Fatimids against the Byzantines. The Fatimids eventually prevailed thanks mainly to the ruthless acts of repression carried out by their general Khalīl ibn Aḥmad. Khalīl restored the Fatimid grip over the capital, Palermo, razing part of the old city and building the fortress of *al-Khāliṣa*, (translatable as 'the Perfected One') a de facto city within the city.

These rebellions in Sicily exasperated the kind of social rifts that Anna Akasoy explored in her study of *internal otherness* in Muslim Societies.[20] The Sicilian social landscape in the second half of the tenth century saw a Mālikī Sunnī majority—elite classes, landed gentry, peasants and city dwellers—ruled by a Shīʿa minority backed by reiterated, ruthless military interventions from North Africa. To these two main elements we should add the Jewish population, as well as a Christian majority in the easternmost Sicilian towns, a disenfranchised[21] rural population, the destabilising presence of disgruntled *kharijites*, and an atavistic rivalry between Berber and Arab settlers.[22] It was in such a situation of social fragmentation, ethnic and confessional rivalry that Ḥasan al-Kalbī, the first Kalbid governor of Sicily, was dispatched to Palermo. Before him, a long list of North-African-appointed rulers had had to bear the brunt of the local population's resentment against fiscal and political control from the North African mainland. Many of these governors were in fact systematically ousted by popular uprisings, stoked by a growingly controlling local elite.[23] But, contrary to the foreseeable course of things, Ḥasan al-Kalbī and his successor, his son Aḥmad, proved particularly popular with the Sicilians. When, in 354/965 the Fatimids recalled Aḥmad to North Africa, a new popular uprising broke out in Palermo, this time demanding, for the first time in the history of Muslim Sicily, that the Amīr be reinstated to power. Likely as a last resort to tame the rebellion, in

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19   Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, ed. Johannes H. Kramers, 2nd ed., Boston–Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 129.
20   See n. 8.
21   If we give credit to Ibn Ḥawqal's description of Sicily's rural population, see n. 14.
22   See Granara, 'Rethinking Muslim Sicily's Golden Age', p. 101.
23   Arabic chronicles point in particular to the family of the Bānū al-Tabarī, see Ibn Khaldūn, in Amari (ed.), *BAS,* vol. II, p. 193.

359/970 the Fatimid Caliph, al-Muʿizz, sought conciliation by dispatching Aḥmad's brother, Abū 'l-Qāsim, to Sicily with an official investment to the emirate. Within thirty years, Muslim Sicily would peak politically and culturally under one of Abū 'l-Qāsim's successors, the emir Yūsuf al-Kalbī. Granara has investigated the success of the Kalbid dynasty in creating a thriving court in these less-than ideal social and political circumstances, focussing on the Kalbids' articulation of power through court literature. He argued that the Kalbid emirs fostered, through literary patronage and through the replication of the codified aesthetic of the Arabic ode, a courtly *habitus* that allowed for modes of interaction freed from the shackles of ethnic and religious affiliations.[24] It will be useful to quickly introduce Bourdieu's *habitus* before proceeding.

Bourdieu defined *habitus* as a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions, once acquired and internalised, generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'. *Habitus* 'orients' actions and inclinations without strictly determining them. It gives agents in a given literary field a 'feel for the game': a sense of what is appropriate in the circumstances and what is not.[25] *Habitus* also shapes the agents' sense of social belonging, resulting in an ingrained disposition whereby these agents tend to collocate themselves within specific social milieux. Erez Naaman, in his 2016 book, illustrates how, at court, *habitus* informed 'elite social configurations in which power relations are dimmed at times to allow models of interaction based on cultural competence.'[26]

The evidence we possess from the poetry of the Kalbid court, such as the poem examined above, reveals that Muslim Sicily's aulic society, the court in particular, resorted to the most traditional aspects of the Arabic ode to shape its *habitus.* Social affiliations were crafted and cemented around its language and lore. The Kalbids resorted to the identity-building aesthetics of the *qaṣīda* to shape a durable code of social interaction capable of bridging 'internal otherness'. Let us look at a further example: a prince of the Kalbid dynasty, Mustakhliṣ al-Dawla ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥasan al-Kalbī, writes to an unmentioned *kātib* (court secretary):

II[27]

1. The two of us are bound together by Adab, it is sacred to us, like the sacred line of ancestry

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24 See Granara, 'Rethinking Muslim Sicily's Golden Age'.

25 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, Cambridge–Malden: Polity Press, 1992, pp. 12–15.

26 Erez Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court: Cultural Life under al-Sahib ibn 'Abbad*, New York: Routledge, 2016, electronic ed., ch. 2.

27 Arabic text from ʿAbbās, *Muʿjam al-ʿUlamāʾ*, p. 234. English translation mine.

2. Run from the ones to whom your concept of art is adverse; in every work of art be safe from blame

3. And come to us, for our friendship repays with grace the hardships of the literary profession

The opening line of this fragment illustrates how modes of interaction based *habitus* dimmed power relations at court. The power relations, in this specific case, are clear: as a prince with his courtier, Mustakhliṣ al-Dawla positions himself (l. 3) as the protector and patron of the unmentioned scribe he addresses. And yet, line one remarkably reverts the usual power dynamics of literary patronage. The poem appears to be an invitation, on behalf of the prince, for the scribe to join in his court: Mustakhliṣ al-Dawla is attempting to attract the scholar to join his entourage. The message must thus establish firstly a bond of reciprocity between the prince and the scribe. Hence, in line 1, the prince extols a common lineage with his addressee, one based on *adab*. The term, well known to Arabists, needs only a brief introduction: a complex of codes and norms that shape the individual, including scholarly and linguistic competence, a command of the poetic canon, intellectual sophistication, eloquence, elegance and taste. Vadet poignantly expressed it when he stated: '*adab* is the social principle par excellence, it is [...] the ideal by which the individual asserts himself as member of a group.'[28] Line one thus fashions a sociopoietic function for *adab*, one capable of overriding even the most fundamental category of social belonging, namely blood-relations. A second point to be underscored here is the powerful intertextual charge of this first line. The line paraphrases another by Abū Tammām, which runs as follows:

III[29]

And though our ancestry divides us, we are united by Adab, which we elevated to the position of our father

The intertextuality in this first line would not be lost on the poem's recipient, a competent literary person himself. With his accomplished *sariqa*,[30] Mustakhliṣ al-Dawla is at once making a display of *ẓarf*, sophistication and elegance, and crafting a flattering invitation for the scribe. The effect is highly enhanced by the

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[28] Jean Claude Vadet, *L'Esprit courtois en Orient dans les cinq premiers siecles de l'Hegire*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1968, p. 327, see Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court*, n. 35.

[29] Abū Tammām, *Diwān,* ed. Muḥammad ʿAbduh ʿAzzām, Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1957, vol. II, p. 402.

[30] 'Theft': in Arabic poetics the term comprises different forms of quotation of a line of poetry, see Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry Ibn al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption*, New York: Routledge, 2002, electronic ed. ch. 1.

quotation of Abū Tammām's line, which bestows upon the addressee a hyperbolic association with the ʿAbbasid caliphal court.

Lines two and three condense the subtle dialectic between artistic autonomy and patronage, proclaiming the prince, in his quality of *muʾaddab*—an agent endowed with the qualities of *adab*—as the guarantor of the scribe's independence. At the same time Mustakhliṣ al-Dawla purports himself as the best-suited recipient of the *kātib*'s praise. In these two lines literary competence is foregrounded, with the competent literary agent declared to be perpetually emancipated from need.

The sociopoietic function of *adab*, extolled in this short piece, brings us back to our discussion of *habitus* at the Kalbid court. There is a natural overlapping between Bourdieu's formulation of habitus and *adab* understood as a non-normative code of polite behaviour informed by literary competence and intellectual sophistication, as phrased in Mustakhliṣ al-Dawla's poem. Such a formulation of *adab* encapsulates the notion of habitus as a transversal sociopoietic structure. If a pedigree based on *adab* is capable of replacing ancestry, understood as the fundamental structuring notion in the Arabic tribal system, then *adab* as a sociopoietic structure is capable of transcending other subordinate affiliations of ethnic and confessional nature. By fostering a courtly habitus, the Kalbids could craft their court as a cohesive social structure in which the dialectics of patronage and the sociopoietic function of the *qaṣīda* overrode the social rifts of the kingdom they were appointed to rule.

It is beyond the scope of this article to address the political significance of attracting and developing a body of notaries versed in the code of *adab*. It is, however, remarkable to observe how poetry from the Kalbid, Norman and Hohenstaufen courts testifies to the position of prominence granted to notaries in the literary field. 'Hegemony in the field of ideas and culture', as Salinari has it,[31] honed through a careful grooming of the bureaucratic caste, proved paramount for the Sicilian political programme from the Kalbid to the Hohenstaufen age.

IV[32]

1. Oh Favara of the Two Seas, you gather every blessing: a life of delight and a supernal sight

2. Your waters split into nine streams, how perfect their divided flow

3. The meeting of your Two Seas is the battleground of Love, on your Two Shores passion has encamped

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[31]   Carlo Salinari, *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, Turin: UTET, 1951, p. 11.

[32]   Arabic text from ʿAbbās, *Muʿjam al-ʿUlamāʾ*, pp. 54–55. English translation mine. I am also indebted to Karla Mallette's English version of this poem. See Karla Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100-1250*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, pp. 139–140.

4. By God, the Sea of Two Palms! it encircles a building, the mightiest of abodes.

5. It is as if its pure waters, flowing together, were melted pearls, and its calm surface was blue sappanwood

6. It is as if the branches in the garden stretched out to gaze into the deep water and smiled

7. Fish swim in the purity of its waters, and birds coo among its gardens

8. And it is as if the oranges of its island, fire ablaze, burned on branches of emerald

9. And as if the lemons had the paleness of a heartsick lover, waking, grief-stricken.

10. And the Two Palms are like Two Lovers, who had built a castle to fend off their enemies

11. Or, when suspicion arose around them, stood up tall to frighten the slanders

12. Oh two palms of the two seas of Palermo, may you be given to drink of the sustaining rain forever!

13. May you enjoy the passing of time, may all your desires be fulfilled, while misfortune sleeps

14. By God, shade and protect the People of Love! for in the security of your shade love finds protection.

15.This is the account of an eyewitness, not to be doubted, while hearsay is but trifling and delusion!

These lines were penned by a *kātib* of Roger II, al-Iṭrabanshī, possibly on the inauguration of the monarch's pleasure palace of the Favara (from the Arabic *fawwāra*: spring of fresh water).[33] The poem has been discussed by Karla Mallette in her fascinating monograph on the literature of the Norman kingdom of Sicily, and her argument will be quoted in what follows.[34] Mallette's analysis called attention to al-Iṭrabanshī's striking use of the *qaṣīda*'s lore and of Quranic imagery in crafting his praise for a Christian patron. It is indeed surprising that such a poem not only was written, but that it survived at all. The anthologist ʿImād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī, who quotes it, is careful to relentlessly invoke the curse of God upon the Normans; at times he cuts short the poems he quotes, as they are 'in praise of the infidels'.[35] And, yet, he quotes.

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[33] Ibn Ḥawqal describes two sources with this name: the small Favara (*al-fawwāra al-ṣaghīra*) and the big Favara (*al-fawwāra al-kabīra*), the latter on the edge of a mountain outside the city, the most abundant water source in Palermo. See Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, p. 123. It is likely that Roger's pleasure palace was built on one of these two sites, see the chronicle of Romuald of Salerno, n. 33.

[34] Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily*, pp. 26–27.

[35] See ʿImād al-Dīn al-Isfahānī, *Kharīḍat al-Qaṣr,* in Amari (ed.), *BAS*, vol. II, pp. 429–490.

It is the mastery of poets like al-Iṭrabanshī in redeploying the classical themes of the *qaṣīd*a, in this case particularly *waṣf* (description) and *ghazal* (love poetry), that could not fail to impress the anthologist. It is very likely that the author of the poem even found himself in a predicament in composing this ode. He was, after all, writing a poetic praise for the enemy, the Christian usurper of his ancestral homeland.

As he wrote his ode, al-Iṭrabanshī must have been painfully aware of the struggles and divisions that had undermined the Sicilian Muslim polity some decades before. These divisions rang accusingly in the many verses of Sicilian Arab poets in vituperation of the Normans, which ostensibly circulated between North Africa, Sicily, the Iberian peninsula and the East. I should like to quote but one example, extracted from the *dīwān* of Ibn Ḥamdīs, Muslim Sicily's premiere poet in exile:

V[36]

36. If my land was free, I would go to her, with a resolve that deems travelling an absolute necessity

37. But my land, how can I liberate her from the chains held by infidel usurpers?

38. Indeed, if those dogs have seized their food, it was only after our arteries had stopped pulsing.

39. How? while her people annihilated each other at the beck and call of civil strife, every wood-gatherer kindled his fire there

40. In its light their heretic views were revealed and it was as if their beliefs were all different

41. No mercy was shown on blood-relations—relatives washed their swords in each other's blood

42. Fingertips were pulled away without concern for the hand

In these lines Ibn Ḥamdīs elaborates the theme of *al-ḥanīn ilā al-waṭan*, or nostalgia for one's homeland, into an account of the contingencies of the Sicilian *fitna*, actively pushing the boundaries of genre in order to express his most immediate concerns. The dismemberment of the Sicilian Muslim social body is narrated through images of physical dismemberment and treacherous violence. In lines 40 and 41 in particular, Ibn Ḥamdīs denounces the fragmentation of social cohesion of the Sicilian polity. In these two lines we read an allusion to a sunnī/shīʿa divide that had, for over a century, laid dormant in Muslim Sicily. Ibn Ḥamdīs conjures the spectre of sectarian antagonism as the great puppeteer behind the scenes of the *fitna*. Such unequivocal accusations would have

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[36] Arabic text in Ibn Ḥamdīs, *Dīwān,* ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960, p. 31. English translation mine.

resounded strongly with the poet's audience, that included his North African patrons, the Zirids, but also the throngs of Sicilian refugees escaping the Norman invasion and his Sicilian compatriots under Norman 'captivity'.

Let us return to al-Iṭrabanshī's ode. The first rhetorical feature that jumps to the eye, particularly in the Arabic, is the poet's consistent usage of double imagery, beautifully conveyed with recurring dual nouns. As Mallette has it, 'it is pleasant to believe that Iṭrabanshī chose to fill his poem with doubled imagery in part to symbolise the dualism of Sicily's Muslim and Christian population'. If we follow Mallette's analogy, we see al-Iṭrabanshī fashioning the Norman court as an inverted battleground: a 'battleground of love' (l. 3) where the two communities, Muslims and Christians, like the clashing waters of the Favara's two seas, can come together and converge. He does so by tapping into the aesthetics of Arabic love poetry, whose lexicon and imagery dominate the ode. Mallette even suggests that with the evocative epithet *Ahl al-Hawā*, the 'People of Love', Iṭrabanshī may have in fact addressed a 'rarefied and idealized form'[37] of the Sicilian community represented at the Norman court. The epithet is commonly employed in the Arabic *nasīb* and *ghazal*—the traditional thematic loci of Arabic love poetry—to designate the poet's beloved, or more generally the female members of another tribe. But whether or not al-Iṭrabanshī did have in mind such a title for his re-imagined community, it is unequivocal that he carefully selected, for his description, highly recognisable *topoi* of Arabic love poetry (ll. 10–11). The Favara, as we know from historical accounts of the time, was Roger's own pleasure palace, a locus reserved for the king's entertainment. Romuald of Salerno describes it as follows:

> And lest this great man should at any time lack pleasures either aquatic or pastoral, he created a pleasure garden at a place which was called Favara, with many canals and streams, into which he ordered different types of fish, brought from many different regions, to be introduced. He had another beautiful and splendid palace constructed next to this pleasure garden.[38]

This description of the Favara by Romuald of Salerno follows his description of the Royal Palace and the Cappella Palatina, and one is tempted to draw an analogy between the imagery of al-Iṭrabanshī's poem and the splendid pictorial representations in the *muqarnas* ceiling of the chapel. There, floral motifs are interposed between scenes of courtly entertainment, with the king drinking wine among his courtiers, musicians and dancers. Al-Iṭrabanshī's description echoes those images of princely entertainment, through the appropriation of the lexical

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[37] Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 27.
[38] Romuald of Salerno, *Chronicon* in *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, trans. ed. Graham A. Loud, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012, p. 264.

patrimony of the the Arabic love poem, best represented in the description of the lemons as heartsick lovers (l. 9) or in the recurrent guises of 'love', *gharām* (l. 3) *ʿishq* (ll. 9–10) *hawā* (l. 14). These images all emphasize the Favara's vocation as a locus of pleasure and convivial entertainment.

Al-Iṭrabanshī's poem is also redolent with Quranic imagery, as already noted by Mallette:[39] gardens irrigated by rivers (2.25, 3.133, 9.72) with waters of unsurpassed purity (47.15) and a community of the elected bonded by fraternal love (3.195, 13.23–24, 4.69). Al-Iṭrabanshī fuses the two lexicons, the religious and the erotic, as he fashions the Favara as an idealised seat of the king's *majlis al-uns*, the entertainment session of the king and his courtiers: a cornerstone institution of the Islamic court since ʿAbbasid times. Descriptions of the idyllic settings of such *majālis* recur in the corpus of Sicilian Arabic poetry, as, for example, in the verse of Ibn Ḥamdīs. Staples of such descriptions are water imagery coupled with luxuriant vegetation, the erotic and the bacchic element.

Naaman has clarified how the success of artistic, intellectual, and leisure activities in the *majlis al-uns* depended on loosening up the hierarchic tension between patron and courtiers. ʿAbbasid treatises—grouped under the umbrella term of *Adab al-Kātib*, kinds of manuals on etiquette for courtiers—prescribed familiarity as the indispensable premise for an accomplished *majlis al-uns*: only through familiarity could the king enjoy the company of his courtiers in non-official gatherings. Power relations had to be temporarily suspended at the *majālis* in order to attain the convivial atmosphere required by these events.[40]

It is such intimate confidence and familiarity that al-Iṭrabanshī chose to emphasise in his ode, by fashioning the Favara as the idealised locus of the *majlis al-uns.* In order to do so, he tapped into the language and imagery of the many descriptions of *majālis* from the classical canon and choosing his lexicon mainly from the register of Arabic love poetry. As he projected the Favara as a locus of conviviality and leisure, the poet was also promoting the image of a court where agents embodied the behavioural codes of *adab*. The poem alludes, particularly in l. 14, to an audience of literary agents refined by the aesthetics of love and conversant with poetic art, who, by sharing in the *qaṣīda*'s code, participate in the 'construction of a culture' at the Norman court.[41] Their system of behaviour and interaction, based primarily on artistic competence and on a shared aesthetic code, overshadows confessional, ethnic and political affiliations. Thus, much in the fashion of its Kalbid predecessors, al-Iṭrabanshī taps into the sociopoietic function of the *qaṣīda* in order to craft a neutral, inclusive social space in which potential confessional rivalries were dimmed.

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[39]   Mallette, *The Kingdom of Sicily*, p. 26.
[40]   Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court*, ch. 2.
[41]   See Gadi Algazi and Rina Drory, 'L'amour à la Cour des Abbasides. Un code de competénce social', *Annales HSS* 55/6 (Nov.–Dec. 2000), pp. 1255–1282.

Al-Iṭrabanshī's lines reveal how the Arabic ode maintained its value as social currency, an 'object in a ritual exchange', at the Norman court. As opposed to the vitriol of anti-Norman 'nationalist' Arab poets, his work—aimed ostensibly as much as to the sovereign as to co-religionaries who could appreciate its subtleties—was a fundamental step towards the normalisation of the Norman experiment of social inclusiveness, and a legitimisation of its agents.

Conclusion

In this article, I attempted to show how the Kalbids and the Normans of Sicily capitalised on the sociopoietic power of the *qaṣīda* for their monarchic ambitions. Sicily's heterogeneous social landscape, that of a land on the edge of both the Muslim and the Christian polities, compelled any attempt to implement 'national' policies to be either inclusive or outright repressive. Opting for an inclusive approach, both the Kalbids and the Normans exploited the Arabic ode as a social currency that could operate transversally, crossing boundaries of religion and ethnicity. By doing this, they fostered social cohesion in a land divided by deep confessional, ethnic and political rifts. Through the language and lore of the *qaṣīda*, patrons and poets fomented a *habitus* among literary agents at court. This *habitus* informed the generative process of works that, as Mallette has it, were 'constructed of a vertiginous combination of the discrete cultures of Sicily's residents'. Ultimately, the poetry of the Kalbid and Norman age bears testament to the fact that Kalbid and Norman policies of social inclusion allowed for both states to thrive culturally, and to fully reap the benefits of a heterogeneous society.

Arabic Texts

I

١. أراها للرحيل مُثَوَّراتِ   جِمالاً بالجمالِ مُحَمَّلاتِ

٢. تتيهُ على الركائبِ في سُراها   بأقْمارٍ عليها طالعات

٣. ولو نظرتْ لمن تسري إليه   لصدَّتْ عن وجوه الغانيات

٤. وسارتْ والفلاةُ لها رِكابٌ   كما كانت رِكاباً للفلاة

٥. ولم تعلقْ بشيءٍ غير شعر   منابتُهُ بأفواه الرواة

٦. تَمرُّ على المياهِ ولم تَرِدْهَا   كأن الريَّ في رَجَزِ الحُداة

٧. أقولُ لها وقد علقتْ ذميلاً   بأخفافٍ لزجري سامعات

15

٨. سأنزلُ عنك في مرعئ خصيبٍ   وماءٍ باردٍ عذبِ الفرات

٩. بأرضٍ مُدَافعٍ مأوى الأماني   وقتّالِ السنين المجدبات

II

١. نحن كلانا يضمنا أدبّ   حُرْمَتُنا فيه حرمةُ النسبِ

٢. فعدِّ عمَّن معناكَ خالفَهُ   في كلِّ فنٍّ تسلمْ من العَتَب

٣. واجنحْ إلينا فإن أُلفتنا   تدفعْ باليُمْنِ حُرْفَةَ الأدب

III

أو يفْتَرِقْ نَسَبٌ يُؤَلف بَيْننا   أدبٌ أَقمناهُ مقامَ الوالدِ

IV

١. فوارةَ البحرين جَمَّعْتِ المنى   عيشٌ يطيب ومنظرٌ يستعظم

٢. قُسِمَتْ مياهُكِ في جداولَ تسعةٍ   يا حبذا جَرَيانها المتقسّم

٣. في ملتقى بحريك مُعْتَرَكُ الهوى   وعلى خليجيكِ الغرامُ مُخيّم

٤. لله بحرُ النخلتين وما حوى الـ   بحرُ المَشيدُ به المقامُ الأعظم

٥. وكأن ماء المَفْرَعَيْنِ وَصَفْوَهُ دُرٌّ   مذابٌ والبسيطةُ عَندَمُ

٦. وكأن أغصانَ الرياض تطاولت   ترنو إلى سَمْكِ المياه وتبسم

٧. والحوتُ يسبح في صفاءِ مياهها   والطيرُ بين رياضها يترنَّم

٨. وكأنَّ نارنجَ الجزيرة إذ زها   نارٌ على قُضُبِ الزبرجدِ تضرم

٩. وكأنما الليمونُ صفرةُ عاشقٍ   قد بات من ألَمِ النوى يتألم

١٠. والنخلتان كعاشقين استخلصا   حَذَرَ العدى حصناً منيعاً منهم

١١. أو ريبةٌ علتها فتطاولا   يتهيبان ظنونَ من يتوهم

١٢. يا نخلتي بَحْرَيْ بلرمَ سقيتا   صَوْتَ الحيا بتواصلٍ لا يُصْرَمُ

١٣. هنيئا مَرَّ لزمان ونلتما   كلَّ الأماني والحوادثُ نُوَّمُ

١٤. بالله فيئا واسترا أهلَ الهوى   فبأمنِ ظلكما الهوى يتحرم

١٥. هذا العيانُ بلا امتراءٍ إنما   سَمْعُ الكيانِ زخارفٌ تتوهم

V

٣٦. ولو أنّ أرضي حُرّةٌ لأتيتُها   بعَزْمٍ يعدُّ السيرَ ضربةَ لازب

<div dir="rtl">

من الأسرِ في أيدي العلوج الغواصب	٣٧. ولكنّ أرضي كيف لي بفكاكها
فبعد سكون للعروق الضوارب	٣٨ . لئن ظفرت تلك الكلاب بأكلها
يضرّم فيها نارَه كلُّ حاطب	٣٩ . أحينَ تفانى أهلها طوعَ فتنةٍ
مذاهبهم فيها اختلاف المذاهب	٤٠ . وأَضحت بها أهواؤهم وكأنما
تروّي سيوفاً من نَجيع أقارب	٤١ . ولم يرحم الأرحامَ منهم أقاربٌ
رواجبُ منها حانياتِ رواجب	٤٢ . وكان لهم جَذبُ الأصابع لم يكن

</div>

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