

Memory, Mimesis, and the Modern: the Literary Heritage in Māmāyḥ’s Poetry

Māmāyḥ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abdallāh ar-Rūmī ad-Dimašqī (d. ca. 986 or 987/1578–9) was one of the most significant Damascan poets of the 10th/16th century.¹ His verses were sung from Damascus to Yemen, and his epigrammatic chronograms decorate many buildings founded by Ottoman governors. Little is known about his scholarly education and poetic training. However, Māmāyḥ’s poems and particularly their addressees indicate that he was a major figure in the intellectual life of Damascus, participating in its vivid and contentious literary gatherings (*mağālis*) and keeping close ties to the administrative elites of Damascus and the chief *mufṭī* in Istanbul Abū s-Su‘ūd Efendī (Turkish: Ebüssuūd Efendi, d.

¹ On his life and poetic work see also Šaraf ad-Dīn Ibn Ayyūb: *Kitab ar-rawḍ al-‘āfir*, ed. Mašhūr al-Ḥabbāzī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1441/2020), 2:944–59. For alternative vocalizations and transcriptions of his name (Māmāyḥ, Māmāy, Māmiyyah, Māmāyah, and Māmiyḥ corresponding to Mami resp. Memi, the Turkish short form for Muḥammad resp. Mehmet) see Alev Masarwa: “Māmāyḥ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abdallāh ar-Rūmī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three* (upcoming). On his life and poetic work see Brockelmann: *GAL* 2:271–2 and *GALS* 2:382; Šihāb ad-Dīn al-Ḥafāgī: *Ḥabāyā z-zawāyā fī mā fī r-riḡāl min al-baqāyā*, eds. Muḥammad Mas‘ūd Arkīn [Ergin] et al. (Damascus, Maṭbū‘āt Mağma‘ al-Luḡah al-‘Arabiyyah bi-Dimašq, 1436/2010), 192–97; al-‘Aydārūs: *An-Nūr as-sāfir ‘an aḥbār al-qarn al-‘āšir*, eds. Aḥmad Ḥālū et al. (Beirut: Dār Šādir, 2001), 396–402 and 466–7; Clifford Edmund Bosworth: “A Janissary poet of sixteenth-century Damascus”, in: *Essays in honor of Bernard Lewis. The Islamic world, classical and medieval, Ottoman and modern*, eds C. E. Bosworth et al. (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1989), 451–66; Masarwa: “Performing the Occasion: The Chronograms of Māmāyḥ ar-Rūmī”, in: *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām in the Sixteenth Century*, eds. Stephan Conermann et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlag, 2017), 177–206.

982/1574).² There are over twenty copies of Māmayh's voluminous *dīwān Rawḍat al-muštāq wa-bahġat al-ʿuṣṣāq* (Garden of the ardent yearner and the joy of the lovers) in existence, which consists of over 1,300 poems. The *dīwān* demonstrates Māmayh's excellent command of most of the classical poetic genres and his enthusiasm for more modern forms of poetry. Apart from eulogies to the prophet and the Ottoman sultans, as well as city panegyrics, Māmayh elaborates on topics like coffee, love, drugs, and music. Though fluent in Ottoman, he almost exclusively – except in his bilingual *mulammaʿ* -poems – wrote in Arabic, as he felt at home in Damascus.³

Based on the current results of the ongoing edition of Māmayh's *dīwān*, this study discusses a selection of poems in which the poet engages with the literary past by using mimetic and emulative techniques (like *taḍmīn*, *iqtibās*, and *taḥmīs* poems) but also those in which Māmayh exhibits more modern stylistic modes, forms and topics (like *ʿāṭil* verses, coffee poems, and vernacular poems).⁴ While the mimetic poems refer directly to the admired or canonized models of the past perpetuating the tradition into

² Ibn Ayyūb: *Kitab ar-rawḍ al-ʿāṭir*, 2:925–30.

³ Māmayh used different pen names (*maḥlas*). While he bragged about his Rūmī descentance, he also boasted of his homeland Syria, declaiming, esp. in his *zaġals*: (a)nā [...] *qayyim aš-Šām* (I am ... the master/bard of Syria).

⁴ 'Modern' is not necessarily the counterpart of 'classical', it is – within the system of pre-modern poetry – the continuation of it in the form of actualization (see below). As will also be emphasized, the poetic forms presented in the section 'modern' are not new at all. 'Modern' initially serves as a surrogate for the 'new' to avoid the fetishism attached to it until an adequate basis ('medium' in the following) which justifies its use is established. One could use the word 'new', as long as it does not designate the 'new' as an absolute term but as a relative one. In some cases, the term is synonymous to 'unconventional', 'playful', 'not worn-out', in others to 'contemporary', 'en vogue', or 'the literary modern'.

the poet's present, the focus of the contemporary topics in the *dīwān* is on how the poet's present was connected to the poetic and aesthetic practices of the past. By analyzing selected poems, this study offers evidence of the impressive literary and intellectual background of an initially Ottomanized and then 'Syrianized' (former soldier-) poet, as well as showing his tremendous poetic creativity in melding together the 'old' and the 'new' in his verse.

The general verdict of a decline in literature,⁵ and thus of Islamic culture over several epochs, not only ignores the mass of literary testimonies but has also led to a complete shift in responsibility (to provide evidence) to the side of the literary creators. Except for some generalizing, albeit serious judgments such as "absence of creativity and loss of vigor"⁶, the paradigm of decline is "an unexamined opinion imposed on us without proof"⁷. Subsequently, since only a comparatively small number of works from this 'period of decline' have been studied, there is still a lot of basic

⁵ See Dana Sajdi: "Decline, Its Discontents and Ottoman Cultural History: By Way of Introduction", in: *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*, eadem (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 1–40 for an overview of the decline-thesis and the scholarly efforts to dismantle the category of decline, and Manfred Sing: "The Decline of Islam and the Rise of Inḥiṭāt: The Discrete Charm of Language Games about Decadence in the 19th and 20th Centuries", in: *Inḥiṭāt – The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History*, ed. Syrinx von Hees (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2017), 1–70.

⁶ Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart: "Introduction", in: *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350–1850*, ed. by Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 1–12, here 1.

⁷ Michael Beard in his review of "Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350–1850", in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132 (2012), 486–488, here 486.

research to be done in many respects.⁸ Literary criticism has mostly avoided engagement with the literary past or even added to the paradigm of decline and thus has aided the all too superficial fetish for 'the new' in modernity. Therefore, to defy this imbalance, the use of the word is avoided in the rest of what follows as much as possible, as the uninhibited chasing of the 'new' is only a correlate for the concept of decline on the positive axis.

Māmayh's *dīwān*, besides classical poetry, is full of literary forms that are unconventional – be they 'minor' or 'inferior' literary forms. They need not be 'new' per se just to be considered of literary merit. Such an understanding ignores pre-modern literary traditions, which unfold their innovative and form-creating capacities not only through the momentum of *inventio*, but far more from the various techniques of *tractatio materiae*, among them the techniques of *memoria*, *imitatio* and *aemulatio*. Since in most cases we cannot determine the author or the exact time of creation of every 'new' literary form, caution is required when labelling something as such. New things usually arise unnoticed, as Shklovsky (1893–1984) points out: "New phenomena accumulate without being perceived, later they are perceived in a revolutionary way."⁹ In literature, this also applies to discovering the new in retrospect, since the 'new' needs a discourse or a medium in order to be grasped,¹⁰ but also a precise

⁸ However, for the period in question, *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1350–1850* can be considered a pioneering work for the reassessment of the literary history. See also bibliographical references in Fn. 11 and Fn. 13.

⁹ Viktor B. Shklovsky in Annie van den Oever: "'Ostranenie', 'The Montage of Attractions' and Early Cinema's 'Properly Irreducible Alien Quality'", in: *Ostranenie. On "Strangeness" and the Moving Image. The History, Reception, and Relevance of a Concept*, ed. eadem (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 56.

¹⁰ Tom Gunning: "Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Un-canny in Technology from the Previous Turn-of-the-Century", in:

knowledge of what preceded it. However, such a discursive platform (or a medium) does not emerge by itself. The literary history of the 16th century can only be properly grasped if its source texts are read closely and if it is embedded in the larger context of the preceding and subsequent centuries.¹¹

Regarding Māmayh's poetry as a particular case, it is therefore of interest to find out how much a janissary who had moved to Damascus could learn from the heritage of Arabic literature in order to be able to assert himself as a poet in the face of this extremely powerful tradition. Furthermore, looking at Māmayh's prospective reception, this approach enhances a better understanding of his impact on subsequent generations and how his poems have been handed down to those generations. The large number of surviving manuscripts of Māmayh's *dīwān*, their design variants, the various notes, etc., already indicate the form and frequency in which this memory work on Māmayh was carried out.

This is not the place to analyse every aspect of the impact of the Arabic literary legacy on Māmayh's compositions and vice versa, so I will only

Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition, eds. David Thorburn et al. (Cambridge [Mass.]: MIT Press, 2003), 39, 44 n. 20.

¹¹ Over the last few decades, an increasing number of promising studies on Arabic literature in the Ottoman era have been published. See also Fn. 5 and 6. Among those, dealing more specifically with Syrian poets are: Usāmah 'Anūṭī: *al-Ḥarakah al-adabiyah fī bilād aš-Šām ḥilāl al-qarn at-tāmin 'ašar* (Beirut: Lebanese University Press, 1970), based on a massive amount of manuscripts. Further the studies of Zaynab Bīrahğaklī: esp. her *al-Ḥarakah aš-ši'riyyah fī Ḥalab: fī l-qarn al-ḥādī 'ašar al-ḥiğrī* ('Ammān: Dār aḍ-Ḍiyā', 1444/2001) and more recently İbrahim Fidan: *Osmanlı Dönemi Arap Şairlerinden İbnu'n Nakib el-Huseyni* (Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, 2016), Mücahit Küçüksar: *Osmanlı Dönemi Arap Şairlerinden İbrahim Es-Sefercelani ve Şiirleri* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2017), and Yusuf Sami Samancı: *Osmanlı dönemi Arap Şairlerinden Mencek Paşa ve Şiirleri* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2017).

touch on those poems that are directly relevant to the topic of this study and will therefore use the themes of 'memory' and 'mimesis' (imitatio/aemulatio) to deal with some aspects of Māmayh's poetry that show tangible traces of the literary heritage and the artfulness with which the literary past was actualized into the poet's present. Regarding the 'modern' I will discuss the poems that exhibit more novel styles, forms, and themes and show how, in turn, they are connected to the conventions of the poetic art of the past. In this context, 'modern' is not used to point to a designated epoch, nor as a qualifying contrast, superior to conventional poetry.¹² Instead, it non-judgementally conveys the range of 'new arts' (*al-funūn al-mustahdaṭah*)¹³ of pre-modern poetry that share also formal similarities with what encompasses the *poesis artificiosa*,¹⁴ which had its heyday in the baroque literature.

The range of poetic arts displayed in Māmayh's *Dīwān* goes beyond what even later poetological manuals have subsumed under *al-funūn as-sab'a*

¹² See Fn. 4.

¹³ Among the most comprehensive studies for the 'new arts' are Bakrī Šayḥ Amīn: *Muṭāla'āt fī š-ši'r al-Mamlūkī wa-l-'Uṭmānī* (Cairo: Dār aš-Šurūq, 1972); Muḥammad Altunḡī (not al-Tunḡī): *al-Ittiḡāhāt aš-ši'riyyah fī bilād aš-Šām fī l-'aṣr al-'Uṭmānī: dirāsah* (Damascus: Ittiḡād al-Kuttāb al-'Arab, 1993) and the unpublished dissertation of 'Id Fathī 'Abd al-'Azīz: *al-Ittiḡāhāt al-adab al-'arabī fī l-qarn al-ḡādī 'aṣar al-ḡīrī* (Diss., 'Ayn Šams University: Kulliyat al-Ādāb, Cairo 1426–27/2005–6).

¹⁴ The term refers to elaborate poetic forms, meters, and to extraordinary practices in use of word order and puns. The poetic practice of *poesis artificiosa* had already been acknowledged in the literary heritage of both the ancient Greeks and Romans and in the Far and Middle East. See the introductory remarks by Agnieszka Borysowska and Barbara Milewska-Ważbińska: "Introductory Note", in: *Poesis Artificiosa. Between Theory and Practice*, ed. eadem (Frankfurt, a. M.: Peter Lang Acad. Research, 2013), 7.

(seven arts)¹⁵ and *al-funūn al-mustaḥdaṭah* (new arts). Applied to poetry, the 'new arts' denote an ever-varied set of poetic forms, meters, and techniques, distinct from the more conventional *qaṣīdah*, its *aḡrād* and diction (*fuṣṣḥā* and (semi-)vernacular). Though their number changes, the so called 'seven arts' (*al-funūn as-sab 'a*) – included in the 'new arts' – are an earlier established term for the newer prosodic genres (traditionally *muwaššah*, *zaḡal*, *mawālīyā*, *dūbayt*, *kān wa-kān*, and *qūmā*, additionally also *ḥammāq*, *bullayqah* and *silsilah*) some of which are written in *fuṣṣḥā* and others in the (semi-) vernacular.

¹⁵ See e.g., Hakan Özkan: *Geschichte des östlichen zaḡal – dialektale arabische Strophendichtung aus dem Osten der arabischen Welt von ihren Anfängen bis zum Ende der Mamlukenzeit* (Baden-Baden: Ergon-Verlag, 2020).