

Like Joseph in Beauty

Yemeni Vernacular Poetry and
Arab-Jewish Symbiosis

by

Mark S. Wagner



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2009

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	xi
List of Abbreviations	xiii
A Note on Translation	xv
Introduction	1

PART ONE

THE POETICS OF *ḤUMAYNĪ* VERSE

Chapter One: Defining the <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poem	11
Origins	11
Parts of the Poem	28
Music	30
Chapter Two: Dialect in <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poetry	33
<i>Ḥumaynī</i> and Humor	33
Code-Switching	36
The “Safinah Circle” and Heteroglossia	45
Conclusions	64

PART TWO

ḤUMAYNĪ POETRY IN THE YEMENI CULTURAL AND LITERARY LANDSCAPE

Chapter Three: A Golden Age of <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poetry	71
Formal Poetic Patronage	71
Informal Poetic Patronage	80
<i>Qāt</i> , Coffee, Tobacco, and Wine	82
Weddings	92
<i>Madhhab</i> Partisanship and <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poetry	101

Chapter Four: The Status of <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poetry	107
The Decline of Arabic Literature—Yemeni Views	107
<i>Hazl</i>	115
Composition and Collection	124
Inspiration	127
The “Safīnah Circle” and Inspiration	133
The Prestige of <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poetry	142

PART THREE

SHABAZIAN POETRY

Chapter Five: R. Sālim al-Shabazī and the <i>Shabaziyyāt</i>	147
The Life of R. Sālim al-Shabazī	147
Al-Shabazī’s Poetry: The Serri-Tobi Manuscripts	153
The Roots of the Shabazian Efflorescence	156
The Prestige Poem in Focus	172
Conclusion	192
Chapter Six: Shabazian Eroticism, Kabbalah and <i>Dor De’ah</i>	195
The Spring and the Snake	195
Esoteric Interpretation: Yahyā Qoraḥ’s Commentaries on the <i>Dīwān</i>	199
The Problem of the Exoteric Interpretation of Shabazian Poetry	212
<i>Dor De’ah</i> and Shabazian Poetry	219
Conclusion	239

PART FOUR

ḤUMAYNĪ AND MODERNITY

Chapter Seven: <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poetry and Revolution in Twentieth-Century Yemen	243
A Strange Encounter in the Poet’s Paradise	243
Popular Culture and Neo-Tribal Poetry	245
The Four Styles	247
Revolutionary <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poetry	254
Continuity in Modern <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Poetry	259

Muṭahhar al-Iryānī—the Apotheosis of <i>Ḥumaynī</i> ?	265
‘Abdallah Salām Nājī and the Popular	268
Nājī al-Ḥamīdī: Neo-Tribal Poetry at the Close of the Twentieth Century	271
Conclusions	274
Chapter Eight: Shabazī in Tel Aviv	277
Formative Yemeni Israeli Culture	277
The Yemeni and the <i>Mizraḥī</i>	280
The Poetry of Disillusionment	284
Conclusions	295
Conclusion	299
Appendix One: The Word “ <i>Ḥumaynī</i> ”	307
Appendix Two: <i>Ḥumaynī</i> Form, Structure, and Prosody	311
Appendix Three: Orthography and Prosody in ST	317
Bibliography	327
References in Arabic	327
References in Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew	330
References in European Languages	334
Index	341