

*Nineteenth-Century Women's  
Poetry in Nejd*

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**Nejd**, the central province of what is now known as Saudi Arabia, and which involves tribes as old and rooted in Arab history as Sham mar, Mutayr, Utaybah, Anazah, knew dozens of eloquent Nabatean women poets in the nineteenth century as poetry collectors. and storytellers admit. But as collectors were males, the choice was therefore gender-inflected and the result was that only a few of those dozens remain in the collective memory of Nejd. Of these very few, eight are cited here and there in books for having composed something impressive and defied the threshold of censorship. What remains of their poetry is, however, only that which has created the surprise and imposed itself on oral tradition by running on people's mouths as proverbs.

**This** paper studies some of what is left of these poets' poetry, the occasions that triggered it, the common topics treated, and

the formulaic structure of this verse.

**Vernacular** poetry in Saudit Arabia is called Nabatean poetry though poet Prince Khalid al-Faisail, one of the most popular poets of the Kingdom, admits that the term Nabatean is rather an offence to Saudi vernacular poetry as the Nabatean Arabs existed before Arabic language became spoiled by the vernacular of a melting-pot of non-Arabs (**called also Nabateans**) who lived north of Nejd.<sup>(1)</sup> What distinguishes the vernacular from classical poetry is of course primarily the bad grammar and deformed language of the vernacular. Vernacular poetry uses the same known metres used in classical poetry (**though they are often given other names to suit a particular rhythm or cadence, as the vernacular poem is often composed to be sung or memorized easily**), but keeps or develops, however, its own images, structures, and rhetoric.

**According** to historians, there were two Nabatean people (**called simply Nabat**). The first were Arabs having lived in Madinah even during Caliph Omar (**mid-seventh century**) then disappeared altogether; and these spoke classical Arabic and had therefore nothing to do with the deformed Arabic language or Arabic poetry that developed later and was called vernacular. The other Nabatean people lived later in Nejd and in southern

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(1) In a TV interview with him by IAC, Sun. 10 Feb. 2002. This is—also the opinion of Abu Abdelrahman Ibn Oqail al-Dhahiri in his Diwan alShiar al-Ammi Bihajjat Ahli Nejd (1982). Like Khaled al-Faresal, Ibn Oqail refuses, in his Introduction to his book (Diwan al-Shiar alAmmi), to call vernacular or colloquial poetry in Nejd Nabatean.

Iraq; these were a meltingpot of Arabised (to use a translation of Ibn Khaldun's 'mosta,arib') immigrants who were renowned for their solecisms. And since then anything that was vernacular was simply called Nabatean.<sup>(2)</sup>

It is believed that the vernacular poetry in Nejd is a development of Beni Helal's poetry and their one rhyme poetry (which is called Diwani poetry and dates back to the fifteenth century/ninth century Hijri) is also found nowadays in Oman and southern Egypt, in places where Beni Helal families (who left Nejd in the thirteenth century/seventh century Hijri) went. Beside its being one-rhymed and using distorted grammatical structures and adventurous expressions, old vernacular poetry in Nejd (examples of which reached the mideighteenth century/13th century Hijri) deliberately imitates Beni Helal's poetry and includes classical Arabic words.<sup>(3)</sup> The present vernacular poetry is however double-rhymed; that is, both hemistichs rhyme to suit both relaters and music composers. And as it developed in the eighteenth century (twelfth century Hijri) during the first phase of the Saudi dynasty, it is considered typically Saudi. We understand therefore Prince Khaled al-Faisal's reservations regarding calling Saudi vernacular double-

(2) See Ibn Khamees, Abdullah ibn Mohamed, 1958, *Al-Adab alShaabi Fi JazeerEt al-Arab*. Riyadh: Marabla al-Riyadh; and Abu Abderrahman ibn Aqail al-Ohahiri, 1982. *Diwan al-Shiar al-Ammi Bilahjati Ahli Nejd*. Riyadh: Dar al-Ulum Litutbaa welNeshir. Intro. Abdullah ibn Mohamed ilbn Khamees.

(3) *Diwan al-Shiar al-Ammi Bilahjati Ahli Nejd*, pp. 86-89.

rhymed poetry Nabatean.

The first to have started vernacular poetry in its old form in Nejd was a woman named after her own son (**Arar**) of whom she produced the few remembered lines. She was known as Om Arar (or **Arar's mother**, Ibn Shahwan. We don't know anything else about this mother apart from those lines, but storytellers and poetry collectors tell us that her son Arar died in 1447 (850 Hijri).<sup>(4)</sup> The lines (of the Diwani style of course) seem to have been written before Arar's birth (يوم ألسا يوم ألسا). She imagines him a hawk (شيهان) hidden in her liver. At the age of sixteen, he is not only a man of trust (تبيدي عليه السراير) but also a swordsman virgins (الغواير) vie to see him from behind windows (الغواير).

The nineteenth-century in Nejd coincides with the first and second phases of the Saudi dynasty. The century, which concerns us in this paper, was a blood-spattered one as it witnessed executions, murders, uprisings, dozens of **'emirable'** emirs and tribe chiefs, each betraying each, involvement of the Ottoman Sultans and Egyptian rulers of course in all this, and, on top of all, the increasing power of al-Rasheeds that almost

<sup>(4)</sup> See Al-Hatem, Abdulrahman ibn Khaled. 1968. *Khbar Mayatragat Mina al-Shiar al-Nabat*. Damascus: Al-Maktaba al-Ummiyya, p. 199 and Orwan al-shiar al-Amni, pp. 61-63.

لا يا زبيدي يوم أنا حامل به      لكن شيهان بكدي بحمل  
حسبت له أربع سنين مع أربع      مع طنين تبدي عليه السراير  
لكن ذاب السيف من فوق منه      جناح نسر من على الجو طائر  
ولطرك من مجلس صوب مجلس      عنه الغايرى فحنى الغواير

threatened the Saudi dynasty.<sup>(5)</sup>

In these conditions, writing poetry, even when it is panegyric **(as it may flatter one but anger others)**, was a dangerous business, let alone when women got involved in it. It is certainly for all this that their poetry remained unwritten and so much of it disappeared from people's memories **(and therefore from the Saudi collective memory)**. We don't even know these poetesses' exact dates of birth and death; sometimes only an approximate date of death or an approximate date of the occasion in which a poem was composed. And it was the sudden unexpected impression the poem, or an excerpt of it, provoked that deemed the woman poet to be remembered.

**Talking** about poet Deguees al-Solbya (ديغوي الحلبي)، a Nabatean poet from Solba tribe, Talal Othman al-Miz'al al-Said writes that her poem "**lasted but nothing is known about the poetess**." And the people remember the poem simply because of the love affair that triggered it: the poet loved a young prince from Al-Sueit of Dhafeer, but the custom prohibited that kind of bond between a prince and a classless bedouin. More than that, the loving prince's elder brother and Prince of the tribe knew of the affair and ordered the departure of the lass's family.<sup>(6)</sup>

**There** must have been dozens of such women poets in Nejd, not only the very few found here and there quoted in

<sup>(5)</sup> See the Appendix about the Saudi dynasty.

<sup>(6)</sup> Al-Said, Talal Othman al-Miz'al, *Al-Mausooa al-Nabatea al-Kamilaa*. 1974.

Kuweit: Dhiet as-Sajsal, part 1, p. 150.

storytellers' books.<sup>(7)</sup> Impressive is the custom in Saudi Arabia to harbour worthy information (**tales, family trees, poems, anecdotes**) in copybooks still jealously kept far from strange eyes. And as it is often men who keep such treasures, the choice is therefore gender-inflected and biased. But some women's striking and exciting poetic productions survived decades of oppression and neglect and imposed themselves on those who did not want them to know the light.

**Nineteenth** century women's poetry in Nejd addresses two types of men: the brave(**or kareem**) who cossets and protects his women and tribe, which is the highest form of generosity, and the coward (**or la'eem**) who does neither of the above. And it is for the first type of men that some of the poetesses heroically express cravings and desires that do not pass without impunity; passions of a particular sort.

**Ouhaisha** Al-Mishlia (who died in 1825), describes the first type of men perfectly in a poem starting "**Ouhaisha said**"

(7) Al-Suweida, Abderrahman Ibn Zeid. 1993. *Fatareet*. Riyadh: Dar alSuweida, Vol 1, 3rd ed., 1997. Vol. 2, 1996, 2nd ed., 1999. Published in 1991 (Vol. 1) and 1995 (Vol. 2), *Fatareet* ('fragments') is a collection of folk tales, poems, personal histories, and anecdotes (about 450 of them) meant, as the author explains in his Introduction to Vol. 1, "to amuse the readers," though some of his *Fatareet*, he admits, may infuriate those who do not share his taste. See also Talal Othman al-Mizal Al-Said, *Al-Mausooa af-Nabatea al-Kanuja*. Kuwait: Dhet es-Salsal.

part 1. Al-Rades, Abdullah ibn Mohamed. 1976. *Shairaf Minal Badyah*. Riyadh: Dar al-Yanuarah, Cairo: Dar al-Itihad al-Arabi, part 2. Al-Hatem, Abdullah ibn Khaled. 1968. *Khiar Ma yulfaqit Mina al-Shar al-Nabat*. Damascus: Al-Maktaba al-Umumiya. Ibn Khamees. 1977. *Mafai Shawarid al-Shaf'ii-Shaabi*.

(واقلة وحشيئة)؛ while Muweidhi bent Abi Hanaya Al-Barazia (who died around 1850), describes the second type and perfectly too.

**Weakened** after the departure of Sheikh Faiz ibn Hedhil, following a disagreement with his companions, his irrevocably weakened tribe left Hail to settle in Shammar (a tribe in the Hail region, north of Nejd and close to Iraqi borders). OuhaiSha Al-Mishlia then wrote her famous 11-line poem to exhort Sheikh Faiz to come back home.<sup>(8)</sup>

**Time** for her, she says in the poem, to become old and grow grey hair, as she sees the enemy ruining and defiling her ancestors' property. She then exhorts Sheikh Faiz, the only brave man she could think of, to return from his exile and end the injustice they are suffering from (جرأ) for that task (to bring him home); a dromedary as swift as a javelin (زجاج) and swifter than a falcon (شيهان). The dromedary would reach Sheikh Ibn Hedhil in

- (1) غرس الجرد الذي غدا وقت الاملاح
- (2) شفا العزائر والكرد عقب ما راح
- (3) تجدع يديه بالجلال تفل زجاج
- (4) تجدع يديه بالجلال تفل زجاج
- (5) أسبق من الشيهان لا تخاف طراح
- (6) تلقى على ابن هدليل كساب الاملاح
- (7) تلقى على ابن هدليل كساب الاملاح
- (8) يضوي عليه من الشمع كل مصلاح
- (9) صال الخطير منهم علينا بالارواح
- (10) التي عمر كادك على الجبل متلاح
- (11) من تخشم عزرائل الى الربع تقرب حاسمها العصالان في عطف الارواح

The lines are quoted from Jbrahim Dahim Al-Radeean's copybook,

cited in Fatafeet, Val. 1, pp. 53-54

Iraq (about 130 kms far from where she was) in no more than four nights. Sakef (the poet's native village, and soil), she tells Ibn Hedhil, is now inhabited by foreigners that delife its waters. And in the last line, she tells him where her people live. They are between Arname (عرجنة), **a mountain about 160 kms from Hail** and Ria (ريح). She insists that they are protecting their land and honour with their spears and swords and that nobody can ever reach them. It is Sakef, the weeping Sakef (سكف), that is rather required to be sought from the enemy. This last line sweeps all that might be seen or misinterpreted as a personal affair between the poet and the Sheikh. (9)

**Significant** is, however, the parallel between the dromedary and the Sheikh the poet hopes to return home and free their land. Five of the eleven lines are devoted to the dromedary. The pink dromedary, which only those the poet is proud of can ride (ركابها من عزروقي), has a great share in the Sheikh's return in the nick of time, as it were, to save his tribe and people. The dromedary's qualities that match its brave rider's qualities are reminiscent of people's belief that the brave weds the brave, the coward the coward. Important also are the metonymies that refer to or stand for Sheikh Ibn Hedhil and any other brave man. He is referred to as the wolf, during whose absence (الذئب) (والذئب), the tribe's cohesion and agreement (نشورنا ليسب) disintegrate. He is also the winner of people's praise (كساب الأمداح) (والذاعر الاحباب) (يا حصان الأطيب) and the stud all request (9).

(9) As had been the case of poetess Deguees.



**Chaisha** is moreover known for having killed, in defiance of her father and other wizards of Shammar, a sheep over each of the sixteen tombs of her tribesmen who had fought to death in defence of their tribe. When asked why there were sixteen sheep missing, she blamed them for having been oblivious of those of the tribe ( *ولا أقيم بالانصاعين دارين* ) who had sacrificed their lives for them / Of those beloved relatives ( *أهلنا وعالين* ) who had one day been hacked ( *في يوم قطف النفوس* ) (10)

On the other hand, Muweidhi bent Abi Hanaya Al-Barazia (called also Moodhi; from Metir tribe, died around 1850) seems to have had troubles believing in masculine nobility and bravery. She was the most famous Nabatean poet; not only because she was single among nineteenth century poets to have broken the tradition of keeping women's poetry secret, that is for women only, and made her poems public, but because she was flagellated for that. She visited princes, read eulogies, and appreciated their prizes, like her contemporary male poets. And because she was remarkable for her manly qualities and for being the kind of difficult uncontrollable woman, those men who fail to manage their wives were called "Muweidhi's men" ( *رجاجيل* ). She describes "Muweidhi's men" as those cowards who hide behind the mask of masculinity ( *ومندس وسط الجماعة* ): those who shake and run looking for protection when they are shouted at ( *إذا نورته راح قلبه رعاعه* )

(12)

نوما ولا أقيم بالانصاعين دارين

يا عيال يلقى بالبارية حطوسي

(10)

(13)

رعاع لأهلنا من قدم وعالين

رعاع لنا في يوم قطف النفوس

they bring you the cooking pot and the utensils (عمل نجيب القدر هو) (والمواعين لا هو يشاكيني ولا (الناس دارين (الناس دارين the firstline, then she is not scared of them.

Because of her poetry and courage, Muweidhi faced all forms of slander and was sentenced by prince Turki Ben Faisal Al-Saud (who reigned from 1834 to 1865) to be flagellated to stop composing poetry. He sent her his servant Salamah (رسالاه) to whip her. When he arrived, she told a dove she heard cooing (which Some saw as a metonymy for her own self) to beware Salamah's whip in these poignant lines: (12,

"Do not shed tears (عوي لعينك) and let Salamah discover that, if you don't want him to leave you moaning like me / May God break his bones (الله عضامه) as he has broken mine; look at the traces of his stick on my eyebrows (شوفي مضرب شو حطه بالجبين) / He said he was going back home; may God ruin your home, you the yellow-eyed man (يا أصفر العين) ."

But she resisted people's attack and bitter ridicule until they finally recognized her when they failed to stop her poems from being on all men's and women's tongues. And she had her own poetic school: facing her opponents with a downright violence

- |      |                               |                               |      |
|------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------|
| (14) | وذي لحم بس الناعم صالين       | ما هم بخالفني رجال الشحامة    | (11) |
| (15) | برعى فغصم والدم والبخارين     | أريد منس بوسط الجماعة         |      |
| (16) | يقول ياهاق الحشاوش            | إذا تزويه راح قلبه راعاه      |      |
| (17) | محل نجيب القدر هو والمواعين   | وان قلت له مات الخطب قال طاعه |      |
| (18) | لا هو يشاكيني ولا الناس دارين | ولو اضربوه مشتدة في كراعه     |      |
| (19) | علاك مطني يا حمله تزين        | عوي لعينك وان دراك سلامه      | (12) |
| (20) | شوفي مضارب شو حطه بالجبين     | كسر عضامي كسر الله عضامه      |      |
| (20) | شوفي مضارب شو حطه بالجبين     | حاني يقول مروحين عضامه        |      |

when that is inescapably necessary or treating them with a symbolic derision as was the case with what came to be known as Muweidhi's men; a school to which many other women poets after her adhered.

**This** is clear in her being very satirical, to the extent that when she was told that some youths of her tribe were dying of unrequited love, she said of lovers (راهل الهوى) said to be dying: (13),

"tell me cM what creed is your love made (ورسلون ملة هواكم) and where did you find it [love] (وين جاكم وحييتوه) I By God, if your dinner stays late and a girl (ففض الهسد) passes by, you won't recognize her."

**And** when her husband derided her being taller than him, she defended herself with these lines: (14)

"**Never** has a mare's strong build been blamed, and a short man (وقاصر البوع) finds problems nputting such mares I May God ruin your home (جعل بيتك بهيستا) if it is not already among \he ruined ones (ومن الأبيات مشلوع) I And may God forbid me havihg children from you (وصسى الصغور بيتنا ما يربى) as was the custom of the children of the tribe[.]"

'**Qasir a/-Bua'** (وقاصر البوع) or "**short man**" is the metonymy for the sexually-incompetent man.

**Requesting** God to forbid women having children from

- |      |                               |                             |      |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|
| (22) | يا الله عليك ومن حاكم وحيتوه  | ياهل الهوى ورسلون ملة هواكم | (13) |
| (23) | وبكركم غض الهسد ما عرفتوه     | وانك لو يسطي عليك عيناكم    |      |
| (24) | يوم التقا ما يركبه قاصر البوع | طول الحصب ما عذر بن كل قبا  | (14) |
| (25) | احل بيتك بين الأبيات مشلوع    | اقعد بيتك جعل بيتك بها      |      |
| (26) | عسا ما يلب على فرخ حروبع      | عسى الصغور بيتنا ما يربا    |      |

weak men is also what Haya Bent Fraj Ben Salmi Al-Temimia (from Qafar, died in 1868) does in a poem in which she damns her paternal uncles (Beni Temim) for remaining passive in front of her insolent maternal uncles (Beni Khaled from Kh'sheemat) who were taking more than their share of the water. (15) Men who cannot fight for their right deserve to be mourned by their women (16)

"My paternal uncles' water was stolen by my maternal uncles; Damn your parents ( والبن أسروكم ) if You do not kill them / Stolen by those who are draining the water sources (والصبيح الحافي), just as the Turkish soldiers did in the village [of Qafar] above ( والفضيط فوق ) / What do you think you're worth ( زوش عندكم تسمسارون ) ( nothing in you that interests women ( رياسة الحضر والطور ) / If there are not men among you able to fight for their right ( رجال مسالي ) / If there like feared lions ( سباع نجاب ) and take the double of their share ( لاطاق مطوق ) / I hope that your wives will never give you children and . that their skirts will forever be torn out ( حجب الأحياب مشقوق ) .

### And it becomes the women's (whether sisters or wives)

(15) To afford an equitable distribution of water (that became rare in the 1850s), Prince Tala1 Ibn abdallah Ibn Rashed ordered people, in 1852, to fin their roughts and water their animals or their palm-trees only when a gunshot was heard. The system, though tough and remindful of the Turks' rules (as she says in the poem), stopped water resources from being dried altogether.

- (27) والبن أسروكم أذبحوهم ولر يوق      الما غدوا به عصامي حوالي      (16)
- (28) مدل العساكر لجنه بالفضيط فوق      غدوا به اللي متعين الحالي
- (29) ترعد بكم لباسه الحضر والطور      وزش عندكم تسورن ياهل العوالي
- (30) سباع نجاب وتأخذ الطاق مطوق      إن كان ما منكم رجال مسالي
- (31) وعسى عليكم حجب الأحياب مشقوق      عسى نساكم ما نجيب العوالي

duty to either help men surmount their indecision and cowardice or find justifications for their having been rather lazy. The target behind all this is of course to forbid them being treated as cowards or being called "**Muweidhi's men**." And in the absence of a firm decision coming from 'men', women often step in to decide and protect their men from scandal, as is the case with poet Doussa Bent Mirshed Al-Shabralmi Al-Temmima when she sees her brothers divided over the case of the protection of a protegee; or Alia al-Shammaria who defends her lover's escape to Beni Sakhr, his protectors.

Doussa Bent Mirshed (**from Sumeyra, Hail, died in 1844**) was renowned for her generosity, courage, and protection of refugees. During the rule of Hjeelan ben Hamad as emir of Bur-aida in the 1780s, a group of "**wanted**" dissidents left Buraida and arrived in Sumeyra seeking the protection of the Shabarima (pl. **of Shabaranni**), the poet's people. When the emir's men came to collect the 'criminals', the poet's brothers asked to be given time to think the matter over, Seeing them split over whether they deliver those seeking protection or refuse and anger Prince Hjeelan, she said the following lines and gave the verdict: (17)

"It is clear then why the rain does not fall ( **بِسَعْفَرِ السَّحَابِ** ) even when the clouds are thick ( **وَبِعِظْرِ وَرَأَى الْغُرُثَى** ) and dark; and why Allah forbids rain! Handing over those seeking our protection

(32) وَعِظْرِ السَّحَابِ لَوْ تَزِيرُ وَلَا هَلْ (17)

(33) أَحْبَبْتُ الدَّخِيلَ وَرَأَيْتُ الْبَيْتَ مَا حَلَّ لَوْ لَاهُ يَا مَنْ حَانَ مَا انْصَانَا

(34) الْمَرْءَ الْآخَرَ يَجِبُ لِي دَلَّ مَا ضَاقَتِ الدُّنْيَا عَلَيْهِمْ حَانَانَا

(35) تَخْرُومًا بِسُؤْفَاكُمْ يَا مَلَّ لَوْ مَرَّضَتْ حَيَّ بِسَيْفِهِ حَانَا

(الدخيل وزاين البيت) had our proteges learnt of this, they would not have come (وما حمل) / Our house must defend its inviolability to save its proteges; if we do not guarantee their safety this time, people will seek protection somewhere else next time (وما ضاقت الدنيا عليهم حمانا) and this is a shame that would blenish us all I Gird yourselves with your swords (بسا مل اطل) as required of men of decision (وخزموا بسسوفكم) had Mirshid [**her father**] been alive (لو مر عند سحي) , he would have protected us with his sword (حماه) " (بسيهه حمانا) "

The last line arouses their ardour and awakens their dedication to the protection of the guest. Her brothers offered hospitality to their guests from both sides then told Hjeelan's men their refusal to hand over those under their protection as long as they were on their land. And in spite of Hjeelan's threats, the Shabarima kept their word and chose to prepare themselves for the worse.

**When** a young man of her tribe she loved (whose name was Shaish Al-Ilf Al-Shammari) quit Hail and sought Beni Sakhr to avoid a sentence by the Emir of Hail (**from al-Rasheeds**), Alia al-Shammaria (**who died in 1883**) depicted her sorrow and his courage in the first half of her famous octave as follows: (18)

"My sadness is as big as Farda mountain (كبير فردة) , **واللي** , **واللي** كبر فردة) , which stands on the left of Ghouta [town] | My heart is like an old dried

(36) والحدوي اللي كبر فردة واللي زمت باسر الغرطة (18)

(37) قلبي كما شنة حردة اللي على السرب مقروطة

(38) لا واحصي مع الحردة دحيلكم ياهل الغرطة

(39) قلبه رخص مانوي الشردة لو طقت الجهد وخطرطة

unwanted skin (دشنة) thrown on the ground (ملوطة) I For my love is with a group of men (رجع الجردة) seeking the protection (دخيلكم) of whose land is protected (ياهل الخرطومنة) I His heart is bold (ما نوى النسرودة) and he has never thought of escape (دخيلكم) even when all those in search for him arrive (مخلوطه) but he was outnumbered."

*Again, there is emphasis on the duty of those sought for protection to offer protection and never betray their proteges.*

**Abta Bent Bnia Ben Greenfs Al-Jerba** (of whom we know nothing except these lines said around 1815 when her father, one of the sheikhs of Shannmar, was killed), chooses, on the other hand, to defend her father and enumerate not only his chivalrous qualities, but also his friends' treacherous attitudes: (19)

"That her father's worn-out horse, after the long battle (من كس) of him (الاقفا والاقفال) fell and so her father fell to the enemy / She is proud (عزرات) being a horses' wolf (ذئب السبيل) / a wolf that fiethens both horses and their riders /"

**The next four lines contrast her father's generosity with his companions' treachery:**

"**Many** (يا ما عطا من كل قبا سلاله) a pure horse he offered (20)

- |      |                                |                               |      |
|------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------|
| (40) | وتقطرت من كثر الاقفا والاقفال  | جمع حياه ثم له وشاله          | (19) |
| (41) | يا نعم والله يا اهل الجبل حجال | عزرات يا ذئب السبيل حجاله     |      |
| (42) | سباقه العازرة من الجبل مشوار   | يا ما عطا من كل قبا سلاله     |      |
| (43) | وقت القسي برخص لكم غالي المال  | ويا ما شريتوا من حلواني دلالة |      |
| (44) | ويا ما لطم من درنكم كل من حال  | ويا ما نغي بالسيف من حد قاله  |      |
| (45) | ما حصل عنده عرکه تسمح الببال   | ما احد زرق رعه ولا احد ثقي له |      |

Many a man drank the best Of his coffee when that was scarce and dear (ورفت القسي) / Many a time had he [she reminds his 'friends' who escaped the battle and left him ]defended you and your wives and children with his sword (ريما نجي بالسيف من حذ)فدائه) those who harboured you evil (كل من عسال) / None of you threw his spear or advanced to deter his foes (رفي له) ; there Had not been a real fight that appeased my heart (نسمع الال) , a battle in which my father could have given his enemies a lesson in courage."

Of these eight poets studied, two expressed their passion for their absent husbands in what was considered an unprecedented insolent way. And though they were not flagellated for that, as had Muweidhi al-Barazia been for sharpness, the first was repudiated and the second treated as lunatic.

Moodhi (موضي) Bent Saad Al-Ajmya Ar-Dahlawya (from Russ, Qasem, died in 1844) witnessed the Turks' invasion of Nejd in 1816 and was renowned for poems that exhort Arab combatants from among her people to stand against the Turkish aggressors. She married Jedia Ben Hedhal (جديع بن هذال) , one of the famous sheikhs of Anazah. And as he was from the

<sup>20)</sup> Considered the best form of generosity as only kings, princes, or sheikhs can afford to offer horses. As poet Ali Ben Srihan al-Shammari says when asked to tell which was better, Abta's father Bnia or her uncle Mudlag father of her cousin and rival Selma:

يا حمة يا حايا كل حجاب يايت مطي السميات الاصاب

That is, she is a pearl nobody can beget! and a daughter of the who gives the purest of horses.



wandering nomads, while she was a town-dweller, he once followed his people for the better of their animals and spent a few months far from home. Missing him, Moodhi said the following: (21)

"Oh God who helps the estranged return home ( يا موصل غريب ; Oh God who drives ships on seas / Mother asks me to be patient ( البليدة ) but when the nomads ( البدو ) are mentioned my heart opens up ( يفتاح ) / Tell Ibn Wail ( ابن وائل ) that spring season is over ( انقضى زل ) and that it is time for him to return home if he misses me ( وده مراده ) / I softened your bed for you and filled your pillow with ostrich feather ( ريش النعام وساده ) and the belly is burning in wait for you ( والبطن لك يا فارس الخيل مسهاج ) ."

The last line angered her husband a lot and he divorced her with a poem the 'divorcing line' of which ran: (22)

"Tell her that she is divorced ( اطلاق البليدة ) whose lines run among men ( واللي قصيده بلغه كل رجال ) ."

When she heard that he regretted his deed and was planning to remarry her, she expressed her refusal in these two lines: (23)

"When he loved me ( ربيغنيه ) / loved him ( ربيغاني ) in spite of many courters ( كثير العشايق ) / And when he threw me ( رميته ) / threw him ( رميه ) as throws ( رما ) a wild cow ( رمية )" .

- |      |                               |      |                             |
|------|-------------------------------|------|-----------------------------|
| (46) | يا تجري سفن البحر فوق الامواج | (21) | يا الله يا موصل غريب بلاده  |
| (47) | وقلي يا حا طاري البدو يفتاح   |      | أني توصيني تقول البليدة     |
| (48) | القطط زل وباني الرسم اعاج     |      | قل لادن وائل كان وده مراده  |
| (49) | والبطن لك يا فارس الخيل مسهاج |      | حطيت لك ريش النعام وساده    |
| (50) | اللي قصيده بلغه كل رجال       | (22) | قل له تراها طالق الخيل معني |
| (51) | ما طمحوي عنه كثر العشايق      | (23) | جاععان يوم انه بغان بعينه   |
| (52) | رميه ورضيحي رموه العشايق      |      | واليوم يوم انه رمان رميته   |

As the rule running among men in Nejd is to punish a woman by another woman )that is, bring her a rival to humiliate her, Moodhi alDahlawia remarried twice after Jedia, to disgrace him: Sheikh Majlan Ben Fawzan of Dahamishah (from Anza) and Sheikh Msallat AIRaooji Al-Inazi.

Alia al-Shammaria, whom we have just seen above defending her lover's escape, was as ataucious and true in her expression of her desire for her lover Shaish Al-Ilj Al-Shammari **(in the second half of her octave)** as was Moodhi al-Dahlawia: (24)

"Happy is she who sleeps beside her lover ( ضامع الشوق ) on a cold night naked (كحولة) I won't care if the sword is over the neck, provided we are fulfilled ( لا صار مسسوط مسسوطه ) / When the soul is bent upon doing something ( لا مئها وردة ) / Which is pure gold way to hold it back ( ما تتعمل حامي شسوطه ) and . which is silver when they are jumbled,"

**Unfortunately**, these lines have become or run typical not only of woman's submission, but mainly of her loss of mind in a moment of weakness. The truth is that, far from meaning to express improper desire per se, the poet intends to immortalize her lover and those to whom he had escaped, meaning Beni Sakhr **(whose land she described as 'the protected land,'** **لو يقطع الرأس بالكرودة ( ياهل الحولة )** who would gratify that by keeping him safe until his return. Immortalize him, as had Antar Ibn Shaddad, Omar Ibn

(53) الله على ليله الردده من ضامع الشوق حولة (24)

(54) لو يقطع الرأس بالكرودة لا صار مسسوط مسسوطه

(55) والنفس لا منها وردة ما تتعمل حامي شوطه

(56) أي الجبهات والكرودة لا صار ما يتبها حولة

abi Rabi'a, or Majnoon Leila done their sweethearts.

**Selma Bent Freeh Al-Sulmi Al-Temimi (from Hail, lived in the beginning of the nineteenth century)** did immortalize her cousin, too, when she could not bear the news of his death and died as she spelled out the last line of her elegiac poem. The story runs that before getting married (**which often takes place after Haj**), her cousin went to perform Haj with some of his companions. But he died on his way home from Haj. Knowing her great love for him, his companions split in two groups, the first arriving without the coffin and telling her, when she met them, that he was with the second group. Their split, she foreboded, harboured unpleasant news as her love would have certainly been the first to arrive and meet her had he been safe. She screamed out these lines:(25)

"May Haram [Mekka] and its sacred water keep him off (يرفع) epidemics and what people hate /

**Where** my lover's camels (رمل صويحي) rest, forgiven is he for whom We love mourning (هويبا الحداي) / He has always been in my mind (بيالي) , but today there is no shape of him in my mind ( . ماهه في ضميري ملادي ) ."

**And** when the second group arrived with her husband's mount empty, she said the following lines and fell dead.(26)

(57) يرفع عنه ما يكرهون العبادي عسى حرم ربي من الوابل يسقيه (25)

(58) مرحوم ياللي له هويبا الحداي حجت إن رمل صويحي بركن فيه من أول ما هو بيالي ولا اطربه (59) واليوم ماهه في ضميري ملادي

"The news I have just learned (علم نفسي) about my lover (عن منزل) is monstrous (اشنع) and upsets what is left of my wounds (الوجع) I Freed are you of sins and forgiven (رحمتك) a freedom that would alleviate what the soul of my soul (روحي) is suffering from I Had he been with the living, I would have \ransomed him with my life (ورأيتي بروحي) but he was buried in a place from which there is no escape (في صحصح الفساح) and stones were placed (رسوم تلوحني) on his grave.

She accepted death with alacrity,

As far as the formulaic style and poetic craft of these poems are concerned, (27) it is worthy pointing out the following:

Most of the epithets describing heroes are drawn from animals:

يا حصان (26) enraged camel, 7), يا ذعار الأحناب (2), يا غيبة الذيب (30), يا ذيب (30) feared lions, 30), سباع غلاب (10) venerated stud, الأطلاب (41) horses' wolf, 41), يا معطي المسلمات الأصابل (41) giver of pure horses, 45), يا فارس الخيل (49) knight, 49). When they are not

(26) علم نفسي عن منزل العيون شناع نقض على الذي بقي من حروحي

(61) حطت ياتين اللاميا والأطباع حل .. يخلف عنك بأروح روحي

(62) لو هو مع الخيلين بشرى وبتباع لا أسوق به مالي ورأيتي بروحي

(63) صار إهم حطوه في صحصح الفساح وخطوا على قبره رسوم تلوحني

(27) As Albert Lord says in his *The Singer of Tales* quoting Milman Parry, "a formula is a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea." *The Singer of Tales*, New York: Atheneum, 1965, p. 4. See also Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry, Oxford, 1971; Joseph J. Duggan, *The Song of Roland: Formulaic Style and Poetic Craft*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973; and Michael Zwerler, *The Oral Tradition in Classical Oral Poetry*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978, 63-78.



(صار أقم حطوه) 63) (as in: "but" (لكن) sometimes plays the role of حطوه حطوه meaning يا غاب (if (as in: ) إذا means يا لكتهم حطوه حطوه) 47) (يا حانا (33), يا من حانا (9), (عصم بعد نشر وزنا سب (9), And as is common in the vernacular Arabic in Saudi Arabia now, يا مسا , means يا or 'يا (these are not) ماهي تكاذيب (as in: "not" or "never" ليس / ليست or 'يا did) ما عرفته (14), they do not scare me, (7), (you did not know him, 23), . ما عذر بن كل قيسا . (never a mare has been blamed for its strong build, 24), (never mounted by short men, 24), ما يلب , ما يريا , (will not bring up, play, 26), (not one of you, 30), ما منكم , (will never have children, 31), ما حل (is not admissible, 33), (ما ضاقت الدنيا (34), (had never felt unwanted while among us, 34), ما / ما أحد رزق ربه / ما حصل عنده (39), (did not plan to escape, 39), (there had never been a battle, 45), (ما طمحوق عنه (did not succeed to sow discord between us, 51), (cannot be dissuaded, 55).

I gather from the topics treated in these very few poems the very reasons why Saudi women poets in the nineteenth century had been forbidden fame and recognition. These poetesses sing the virtues of virility as the force of soul and honour; of loving and caring men who would pay the protection of their women and tribe with their lives. Wars and guerrilla wars demand courage and fearlessness in front of death. It was not the rising fanatic Wahhabism as the religious root of the Saudi rule that branded these women as the devil's disciples, as some poetry collectors contend between lines, but men's deliberate intention

to leave them behind bars. The collectors' books were the anti-logos weapon, the sword of Damocles, that failed at last to cut these women off the Saudi collective memory. They managed, in spite of slander and repudiation, to impose themselves and couch their feelings or reactions in lines that remained etched on the collective memory.

### Appendix

1st phase of the Saudi reign: Mohamed Ibn Saud (founder of the dynasty): 1745-1765; Abdelaziz ibn Mohamed (1765-1803), assassinated; Saud ibn Abdelaziz (1803-1814); Abdallah ibn Saud (1814-1818), executed in Istanbul; (his brother Mishari ibn Saud reigned after him). 2nd phase started by Turki ibn Abdallah ibn Mohamed (cousin of the previous; 1824-1834), assassinated in a family insurgence; Faisal ibn Turki (1834-1865), managed to snatch power from his enemies and regain Riyadh from them. He appointed, in 1835, Abdallah ibn Ali ibn Rasheed governor of Hail. In 1843, Faisal was forced by Egyptian Mohamed Ali's forces (that invaded Nejd to punish what they called "the fanatic Wahhabites") to abandon Riyadh to a Saudi relative (Khaled ibn Saud, then Abdallah ibn Thunayan) whose rule was soon 'Put under Egyptian (administrative) supervision. Faisal was taken to Cairo as prisoner, but managed to escape, return to Riyadh, and re-establish his government with the help of Abdallah ibn Ali ibn Rasheed. Faisal died in 1865, leaving two sons, Abdallah and Saud, (died 1974), fighting each other for succession. Meanwhile, the Ottoman troops took

Hasa; while Mohamed ibn Rasheed, governor of Hail, pretending to protect Abdallah ibn Faisal's rights, expanded his power to other parts of Arabia. When Abdallah ibn Faisal (1865-1889) died, his kingdom was rather a province inside a vast territory governed by Al-Rasheeds. Abderrahman ibn Faisal (1889-1991); in 1891, cautious and powerful Mohamed ibn Rasheed expelled Abderrahman from Riyadh and replaced him by a puppet government. Abderrahman ibn Abdallah went into exile in Kuwait. 3rd phase of Saudi reign: Abdelaziz ibn Abderhman (1901-1953) exploited the weakness of the Al-Rasheeds after the death of Mohamed ibn Rasheed in 1897, invaded Riyadh in 1902 and took it. In 1912 he created the Ikhwan movement and the hijrah camps where the Ikhwans settled. With the help of these Ikhwans, Abdelaziz seized Hail (Al-Rasheeds' bastion) in 1921 and Hedjaz in 1924-25. In 1929-30, and before declaring Arabia finally independent as Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, Abdulaziz reduced the increasing power of the Ikhwans who became his most troublesome foes when his other foes had disappeared. Having been taught that their war beside Abdelaziz was a sacred war against infidels, the Ikhwans were not pleased with Abdelaziz's refusal to expand Wahhabism to neighbouring territories under British protection. The Sabalah battle (in 1929) in which the Ikhwans were reduced to naught marked the end of the traditional history of Saudi Arabia.



## شاعرات نجد في القرن التاسع عشر

عرفت منطقة نجد في المملكة العربية السعودية — وهي المنطقة الوسطى التي تضم قبائل عريقة في التاريخ العربي كـ "بُحر" و "مطير" و "عتيبة" و "عوزة" — عشرينات المشاعرات البسيطيات في القرن التاسع عشر كما أورد ذلك المؤرخون والجمعاء . ولكنه لا كان الجمعاء ذكورا كانت يد الجمع شحيحة عندما تعلق الأمر بجمع شعر الإناث وتصح عن ذلك أن لم يذكر سوى الشيء القليل من شعرهن . من هذا الترت القليل تميّز ثمانية منهن باختراق حاجز "السّسنسرة" الذي فرضته التقاليد والوصول إلى الأسماح وخلق كنلة مستممه موالية لمن . ولكن الذي برز أو حفظ في ما ذكرن من شعر هو ما خلق المفاجأة وفرض نفسه على الموروث الشفوي وجرى على الألسن بحرى الأمثال .

تبحث هذه الورقة في ما تبقى من شعر شاعرات نجد في القرن التاسع عشر : ظروف تنظيمه والتجاور التي تطرق إليها وبناءه .





