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Introduction

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

8 See Alexiou, ‘Ploys of Performance’.

9 See Alexiou, ‘The Poverty of Ecr̄iture’ (Alexiou rightly calls attention to the irony of Prodromos’s complaint, seeing that paper was a rather expensive commodity). On ‘Gelehrtenelend’ in this and other Byzantine texts, see A. Dyck, ‘Ptochoprodromos, “Ἀνάθεμαν τὰ γράμματα” and Related Texts’.
superiors and the abbot and is a satire of Byzantine monastic life and its pecking order. As such it does not concern us here, but the narrative passages and the slapstick humour that characterize poems one, three and four are noteworthy, because they are typical of many Arabic begging poems, too, where they also serve to entertain the audience. The disadvantages of the craft of literature, the unsaleability of letters and the deplorable condition of the learned are common themes of Arabic begging and complaint verse as well.

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

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

\(^{10}\) Begging and complaint poems are also prominent in the work of the thirteenth-century French poet Rutebeuf, which is however thematically more varied: see J. Dufournet, *Rutebeuf: 1. Poèmes de l’Infortune et poèmes de la Croisade*. On the growth of begging poetry in Europe in the late medieval period, cf. K.J. Holzknecht, *Literary Patronage in the Middle Ages*. 
seeks to win the sympathy of the addressee by brazenly abasing and abandoning himself to his mercy. Very often self-abasement resulted in self-ridicule and jest – at times even grotesquely uncouth humour – as a means to alleviate the discomfiture and importunacy of begging. Hence, apart from self-pity and whine, self-ridicule and buffoonery increasingly emerged as characteristic modes of begging poems. The sheer avowal of one’s need, its advertisement and exaggeration run counter to social norms in the subsequent centuries as well. Because with the exception of some trends of Sufi thought, the dominant view was that poverty was an ill and that the poor should conceal their condition, bear it patiently and avoid begging. This is why barefaced plaints of that sort are also absent from Abbasid court poetry, which upheld and perpetuated the heroic ideals propagated by early Arab poets. Even so, major Abbasid panegyrists, too, often intimated material anxiety, but did so in vague and general terms, railing at the stinginess of their contemporaries and the moral decadence of their times. What is more, they cast their grievances in the mould of traditional motifs of self-praise and thus managed to preserve a façade of grandeur and propriety essential to ceremonial poetry. Writers on poetics, on the other hand, who worded and dictated the norms of poetic expression, strongly advised against making overt petitions, if they bothered at all to touch on this issue, and prescribed that poets should allude to their needs only vaguely and obliquely.

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

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

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

13 See G.J. van Gelder, ‘The Apposite Request: A Small Chapter in Persian and Arabic Rhetoric’. For an earlier text, see, e.g., the short chapter on al-Iqtḍāʿ wa-l-istinjāz (= ‘to make a request / demand one’s due and to ask for the fulfilment of a promise’) in Ibn Rašīq’s (390-463/1000-71) Umdat 2:127-8; cf. his comments on the dignified posture that a poet must hold, at the beginning of his chapter on Adāb al-šār (‘Good manners / Erudition of poets’), ibid 1:131. Compare al-Qalqašandī’s (756-821/1355-1418) advice to secretaries concerning prose petitions and complaints about one’s situation: šakwā should be vaguely phrased and kept short, Šubh al-šār 6:321, 9:173-81 (these passages are largely extracts from an eleventh-century work, the Mawadd al-bayān of the Fatimid secretary Aḥī b. Ḥalaf).
The emphasis on the description of the requested gift, as is typical of such petitions, is normally absent from begging poems. Such 'request poems' will not be considered here.\textsuperscript{14} Praise of one's patron sometimes occurs in begging verse, too, but, again, the stress that the poet lays on his own need and woes and the distinctly beggarly tone as a rule demarcate begging from panegyrical poems quite clearly.\textsuperscript{15}

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

\textsuperscript{14} Several request poems are discussed in a different context in J. Sharlet, 'The Thought That Counts: Gift Exchange Poetry by Kushājim, al-Ṣanawbarī and al-Ṣarī al-Raffā'.
\textsuperscript{15} Obviously, there also exist borderline cases, whereas particular poems can be linked to a variety of genres depending on one's approach and viewpoint.
\textsuperscript{16} On 'secretary poets', see J.E. Bencheikh, 'Les secrétaires poètes et animateurs de cénacles aux IIe et IIIe siècles de l’Hégire'; Ḥ. al-ʿAllāq, Šuʿaʾ al-kuttāb fī l-ʿirāq fī l-qarn aṭ-ṭāliq al-ḥijrī.
\textsuperscript{17} As Sh. Toorawa has shown ( Ibn ʿAbī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture), since the ninth century a whole range of professional activities opened up before littérateurs and scholars who opted to live independently, i.e. outside the caliphal court and 'the patronal economy' in general, thanks to the spread and growth of 'writerly and book culture'. Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfür (204-80/819-93) typifies such 'outsiders'; cf. idem, ' Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfür versus al-Jāḥiẓ, or: Defining the Ḍīb'.

\textsuperscript{18} These categories cover more or less those poets whom I. Najjār termed ‘poètes mineurs’ (see B. Najjar, La mémoire rassemblée: Poètes arabes ‘mineurs’ des IIe/VIIIe et IIIe/IXe siècles or mansīyūn, i.e. ‘forgotten’ (see the Arabic version of that study, which serves as an introduction, vol. 1, to his anthology of early Abbasid ‘minor poets’ SuʿārīABB ASHD MANSIYUN – ŠM in what follows). The vacillation in the terminology used by this scholar shows how difficult it is to pinpoint and concisely characterize these poets. Typically, their lives and work are poorly documented in the sources. When I refer to them as ‘minor’ or ‘lesser’ in what follows, I do not imply any derogatory judgment of their art.
On the one hand, a highbrow mode which consisted in inveighing generally against the decline of mores and the widespread lack of munificence, but which clearly insinuated that the poet faced financial difficulties; this was the path chosen by major panegyrists – Abū Tammām (d. 231/845), al-Buḥturī (206-84/821-97), al-Mutanabbī (303-54/915-65) and their ilk – and all other poets who were anxious to preserve a dignified posture, including most secretary poets. By contrast, a lowbrow mode was adopted by those who did not bother to keep a decorous pose or who deliberately chose to give it up; these poets worded their plaints in shrill tones and depicted their supposed misery in all its graphic details. This basic dichotomy is discernible and discussed in all three chapters of the present study, but having dealt with Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī elsewhere – the two being the real creators of the highbrow mode of šakwā – here I concentrate on lesser poets and do not consider major panegyrists; moreover, my emphasis lies on lowbrow rather than on highbrow šakwā. Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 391/1001) and Ibn Quzmān (d. 555/1160), whose begging and complaint verse are the focus of Chapters Two and Three, were indeed major figures of classical Arabic poetry, but although they were both very well connected in the Establishment of their times, they opted to relinquish the etiquette of ceremonial verse. Besides, Ibn Quzmān composed the bulk of his poetry in the vernacular (Andalusi Arabic), which was a further outright affront to that etiquette. Culturally, however, his poetry belongs to the sphere of classical Arabic belles-lettres and thus I feel justified to include him in this study.

Given the informal and unpretentious character of begging and complaint verse, its breach with societal and poetic norms as well as its humorousness and entertaining qualities, it is possible that much of it was lost in the course of time either because of a reluctance to preserve and hand it down, or simply because of lack of care for its preservation. Nevertheless, the available material, which is scattered in numerous anthologies, dīwāns, biographical dictionaries and adab encyclopedias, is very substantial and could not be treated exhaustively here. Instead, I focus on a limited number of poets and a sample of poems, which I present in chronological order so as to let the most salient generic features and themes and their development through time emerge clearly from the exposition. Still, I have not attempted to give a continuous chronology of the genres’ evolvement, but rather discuss specific cross-sections of it. Due to the great individuality of begging and complaint poems and the diversity and unconventionality of their structures, I chose not to organize the book...
thematically, so as to avoid dismembering the poems under discussion. To highlight their structural peculiarities, I mostly cite whole poems – or what has been preserved of them – rather than excerpts. My approach is text-oriented, which explains the frequent and extensive poetic quotations; indeed, parts of the book read as a commented anthology. Given the relative obscurity of the two genres and the little scholarly attention devoted to them so far, abundant citations are all the more necessary; not only in order to evidence the amleness and diversity of the textual material, but also to highlight and make recognizable recurrent themes and motifs as well as generic conventions, modalities and strategies. Given that the few modern scholars who have dealt with these texts mostly take the poets’ claims at face value, it is important to demonstrate the stereotypical character of these grievances. My comments and analysis, however, only address aspects and features of the poems that are relevant to the present subject matter, which means that they are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, I focus on those genre-typical traits and modalities that enabled and indeed prescribed the reception of these poems as begging and complaint verse. In the case of begging poems, in particular, my aim is to demonstrate how they differ from panegyric poetry and spotlight their thematic and modal peculiarities, which preclude their reading and reception as eulogistic verse. As I hope to show, failure to recognize these peculiarities and the conventional character of the poets’ claims and protests has led to several misconceptions about the real-life circumstances of these poets, their relationships to their patrons and, more generally, the status of littérateurs and scholars and the state of literature in medieval Arab societies.

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

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

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20 According to indigenous lexicographers, the original meaning of *šakw* was ‘the opening of the small skin for water or milk called *šakwa* and showing what is in it’; metaphorically this meant ‘to open one’s heart, reveal one’s true condition’, like the phrases *baṯaṯtu lahū mā ʿ ī wʿ āʾī* or *na aḍtu lahū mā ʿ ī jābī*: see Lane, 1589; LA [š-k-w]; E. al-Mufti, *Shakwā in Arabic Poetry During the ʿAbbāsid Period*, 26-36; Z. aš-Šahrī, aš-Šakwā fi ʿ ī ṣ-ṣīr al-ʿArabi ḫattā nihāyat al-qarn qṭ-jāī ḥīrī, 8-10.

21 On the use of *šakw* as a technical term in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā’s (d. 322/934) *ʿIyā ṣ-ʿabās d Pe  od*, see my ‘Šakwā and ʿamm az-zamān’, 100-1 (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā mentions *šakw* as a theme of the polythematic ode, not as a genre); on its use in the *Yatīma*, see here 2.1, esp. notes 3-5. More generally on its use in adab literature since the early 10th century, see al-Mufti, *Shakwā*, 37-51 (in some cases noted by al-Mufti the word is used in its common, i.e. broader meaning, not as a technical term). Another expression used as a technical term to denote poetic plaints about one’s times and contemporaries is *đamm az-zamān* (‘the blame of the time’, see my *Šakwā and đamm az-zamān*, passim). To give a few later examples: *Šakw* was still used in its specific sense (*šakw* [ṣī] al-ḥāl) in al-Qalqasandi’s passages referred to above, note 13; in al-Burd al-muwāsdā *fi ṣināʿat al-inšā* by Mūsā b. Hasan al-Mawṣilī (d. 699/1300), 132-3; in a chapter heading in the thematically arranged anthology of al-Mutanabbī’s poetry made by Ibn Fahd (d. 725/1325 – see G. Schoeler, ‘The Genres of Classical Arabic Poetry’, 34-5); in a chapter heading of the thematically arranged *Dīwān* of Saḥī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī (ca. 677-749/1278-1348 – see Schoeler, *ibid*, 37).

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