HASSĀN IBN THĀBIT, A TRUE MUKHAḌRAM:
A STUDY OF THE GHASSĀNID ODES OF HASSĀN IBN THĀBIT

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ABSTRACT

The seventh-century Madinan poet Ḥassān ibn Thābit is best known for his role as poet laureate of the Prophet Muḥammad. His poetry composed in defense of Muḥammad and the nascent religion of Islam has been widely studied, and it is in this context that Ḥassān appears in Arabic literary history. This dissertation argues that in addition to his role as an exemplar of poetry in the service of Islam, Ḥassān can be viewed as a true mukhaḍram. The mukhaḍramūn (singular: mukhaḍram) were a class of poets whose lives spanned both the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods. To appreciate Ḥassān’s identity as a transitional figure, the poet’s pre-Islamic compositions must be examined in greater depth. Prior to the rise of Islam, Ḥassān served as the primary court poet to the Ghassānids, a sedentary, Christian kingdom located in modern-day Syria and Jordan. This study analyzes Ḥassān’s twenty-six Ghassānid poems and fragments. Although many of the selected poems date from the pre-Islamic period, several were composed near the end of Ḥassān’s life when he nostalgically recalled his youth in the company of the Ghassānids. The method of analysis utilized in this dissertation relies on close reading and in-depth textual analysis of selected verses and poems.

This study reveals Ḥassān to be a pioneer in the urbanization of Arabic poetry and a precursor to the poets of the later ‘Abbāsid caliphate who replaced the desert imagery and motifs prevalent in pre-Islamic poetry with themes more appropriate to their urban
environments. Ħassān’s compositions demonstrate not only a familiarity with the urban landscape of the Ghassānids but also a clear disdain for the pastoral lifestyle of the Arab nomads. Ħassān’s urbanism is one illustration of his status as a mukhaḍram. This study also examines the wine lyric in Ħassān’s Ghassānid poetry. The poet’s verses in praise of wine date from both the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods and are further evidence of Ħassān’s embodiment of the mukhaḍram predicament.
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my mentor Irfan Shahîd whose encyclopedic knowledge of Arabic poetry and groundbreaking research on the Ghassânids and pre-Islamic Arabia inspired this study and guided its progress. I am indebted to the critical eye and excellent advice of Barbara Stowasser and the warm support, encouragement, and literary expertise of Amin Bonnah.

Many thanks to my colleagues and friends at Georgetown University who provided suggestions, edited drafts, and motivated me throughout the writing process, particularly Katrien Vanpee, Nancy Farley, and the staff of the department of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

I am immensely grateful to have had constant encouragement of my family. I especially thank my husband Gary for his steadfast support.
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General Notes

Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Hassan’s poetry are from Walid ‘Arafat’s 1971 edition of the Dīwān. The two-volume work utilizes previously unstudied manuscripts and is the most complete of the published dīwāns. The first volume of this edition contains the texts of the poems, including previously unpublished poems, variant readings, and limited notes. The second volume catalogs the scholia found in each of the manuscripts and ‘Arafat’s own commentary. Poem numbers cited in this study follow the numbering system found in ‘Arafat’s version. Lines of poetry will be cited as follows: poem number, verse (e.g., no. 13, v. 5). When citing scholia, commentary, or the additional material found in ‘Arafat’s second volume of the Dīwān, an abbreviated version of the standard University of Chicago citation system will be used (e.g., Dīwān, 2:200). When referring to Hassan’s body of poems in general, this study will use the lower-cased term dīwān, while the capitalized term Dīwān will refer to ‘Arafat’s edition.

All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. I have attempted to render the Arabic verses in understandable and reasonably clear English while remaining close to the Arabic text. For this reason, my translations tend towards the literal and are not true poetic renderings. My goal was to produce functional translations to further the analysis of the verses in question. No attempt has been made to replicate the musicality of the original Arabic. The Arabic texts of all translated verses are provided alongside the

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English translation, and the complete Arabic texts of all Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems and isolated verses are provided in appendices.

Transliteration of Arabic terms generally follows the American Library Association/Library of Congress (ALA-LC) system of Romanization. In keeping with the ALA-LC system, the following rules are observed:

- The definite article (al-) is always rendered as such regardless of assimilation rules and is only capitalized at the beginning of a sentence.
- An initial hamza is never represented in transliteration, while the letter ‘ayn is always represented.
- Nisba adjectives are Romanized ī and not īy (e.g., ‘Arabīya, not ‘Arabīyya).
- Transliterated Arabic terms will generally be given in pause form. Vocalic endings are retained in pronouns, demonstratives, pronominal suffixes, and certain adverbials. When an entire verse of poetry is transliterated the case endings will be included. Short phrases or isolated terms from a line of poetry will be given in pause form.
- Scholars with Arabic names that have an established or preferred English spelling will be represented as such (e.g., ‘Arafat, rather than ‘Arafāt).
- Titles of works in Arabic are transliterated and follow sentence-style capitalization. Only the first word in a title and proper names are capitalized.

The modifications to the ALA-LC system are as follows:

- The alif maqṣūra is represented ā, rather than á.
• The letter tā’ marbūṭa is not transliterated with an h, but Romanized t when it appears in a construct state (idāfa).

Transliteration System

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The series *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* by Irfan Shahīd will be abbreviated *BASIC* throughout this study. This work consists of two volumes, each of which includes two parts. Abbreviated references to these volumes will be cited as follows: volume number, part number, followed by page number. For example, “Shahīd, *BASIC*, 1.1:87” indicates volume I, part 1, page 87. All references to page numbers in the second volume of part 2 (forthcoming) correspond to the version of the manuscript available to me at the time of my research and may not correspond to the pagination of the published version.

Following the first full citation, all references to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd edition) will be abbreviated *EI*. Common Era dates (mīlāḍ) will be used throughout.
Introduction

The Mukhadramūn

The revelation of the Qur’ān in seventh-century Western Arabia set in motion a chain of events that radically altered the balance of political power in the Near East and introduced a new faith to the family of monotheistic religions. No one group captures the essence of this transformational period and its impact on the lives of individuals more vividly than the Mukhadramūn (singular: Mukhadram), a class of poets whose lives spanned both the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods. Born and raised in the pre-Islamic period (al-jāhilīya), the Mukhadramūn honed their poetic skills and established their literary reputations in that distinctive cultural milieu. Following the rise of Islam, the Mukhadramūn responded to the new religion in a variety of ways. Some greeted it with hostility and others with genuine acceptance. In many ways, their lives mirror those of their non-poet contemporaries; all struggled to redefine their identities and to play meaningful roles in this new world. The distinguishing feature of the Mukhadramūn, however, is that their processes of negotiation between old and new are preserved to this day in their poetry collections. These poems provide a permanent record of the interplay between sweeping historical change and the response of individuals to such change.

Perhaps the most well-known of the Mukhadramūn is Ḥassān ibn Thābit, an Arabian poet who, following his conversion to Islam, rose to the status of the “poet laureate” of the Prophet Muḥammad. Ḥassān’s fame is largely due to the vital role that his poetry played supporting and inspiring the early Muslim community. Ḥassān was the first among a trio of poets from the town of Madina (Yathrib) who used their verbal
artistry to defend the Prophet and the Muslim community. During this period, poetry was
viewed as a powerful tool that had the ability to inflict devastating damage on an
individual or tribe. Ḥassān’s stinging lampoons (ḥiğā’) were a fierce and greatly feared
weapon against the Meccan opposition, and the Prophet himself described these poems as
“worse than falling arrows!” Ḥassān composed poetry on many of the early events of
Islamic history, recording battles and praising the deeds of the fallen Muslims. His
soaring panegyrics and mournful elegies on the Prophet memorialized the founder of
Islam. Ḥassān not only observed but even played a crucial role in the remarkable spread
of Islam. When the tribe of Tamīm sent a delegation to visit the Prophet in Mecca,
Ḥassān was called on to recite verses against their best poet, al-Zibriqān. The Tamīmī
debillation was so impressed with his poetry, and with the skill of the Muslim orator who
had bested their orator, that they decided to accept Islam. From a literary standpoint,
Ḥassān’s compositions are revealing examples of early Islamic poetry, suggesting the
compatibility of Islam and poetry. His poems composed in the service of Islam and the
Prophet’s explicit endorsement of them are frequently cited in studies detailing the
complex relationship between Islam and poetry.

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In light of these accomplishments, it is not surprising that most scholars have chosen to concentrate their attention on Ḥassān’s Islamic-era compositions. Another factor that has encouraged the focus on his Islamic poetry is Ḥassān’s genuine acceptance of Islam. The mukhadramūn poets exhibited a wide range of levels of commitment to the new religion, and some converted only on a superficial level. An extreme case is that of al-Ḥutay’a who apostatized following the death of the Prophet and employed his poetry to support the enemies of Islam. In contrast, other mukhadramūn were influenced significantly by Islam. One such mukhadram is Labīd ibn Rabī’a, author of one of the famed suspended odes (al-mu’allaqāt). Labīd’s poetry is often deeply religious, and, according to some accounts, he is even reported to have given up poetry following the rise of Islam, saying “God has given me the sūra of the cow and the sūra of the family of ‘Imrān to take the place of poetry” (qad abdalanī Allāh bi-al-shi’r sūrat al-baqara wa-āl ‘Imrān). He is described by the early ‘Abbāsid philologist and literary scholar Ibn

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3 Some classical scholars define the term mukhadram to include only those poets whose compositions were influenced by Islam, eliminating those who did not compose much after the rise of Islam, such as the poetess al-Khansā’. For a convincing argument that all poets who lived through both periods should be considered mukhadramūn, see Yahyā Wuhayyib al-Jabbārī, Shi’r al-mukhadramūn wa-athr al-Islām fīhi (Baghdad: Matābī’ al-Irshād, 1964), 56.

4 For more on al-Ḥutay’a, see Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī, Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shu’ʿarā’, 1:104-121; and I. Goldziher, “al-Ḥutay’a,” in Encyclopaedia of Islam, ed. B. Lewis et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 3:641. From this point on, all references to the Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd ed.) will be abbreviated EI.

5 According to legend, these prize-winning “golden odes” were suspended on the wall of the ka’ba in Mecca and are still considered to be among the best poems from the jāhilīya. For suggestions on the origin of the name al-mu’allaqāt, see Charles Lyall, Translations of Ancient Arabian Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), xlv; and Reynold A. Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs (1930; repr., Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993), 101-103.

Sallām al-Jumahī as a Muslim and an honest man. Like Labīd, Ḥassān is usually categorized as a true convert. For this reason, potential anomalies and apparent paradoxes in Ḥassān’s commitment to Islam have especially fascinated researchers. For example, verses praising wine in Ḥassān’s Islamic poetry have attracted attention from modern scholars who have focused their analyses on questions related to the depth of Ḥassān’s conversion and the impact of Islamic principles on his poetry. Was he merely following established literary convention when he lauded the flavor of wine and the effects of intoxication? Did he really renounce alcohol following his conversion? Such are the central research questions that dominate many modern studies on Ḥassān. As the preeminent Muslim poet in early Islam, Ḥassān is valued first and foremost as a Muslim and as a mukhadram second. Summing up the sentiments of many contemporary researchers, one scholar commented that Ḥassān was “a mukhadram in form, but ultimately a Muslim in substance.” Ḥassān’s status as a mukhadram is noteworthy to many scholars only in that it demonstrates the transformational power of Islam. Consequently, very little scholarly attention has been devoted to Ḥassān’s life or compositions in the jāhiliya.

Yet, Ḥassān’s identity as a mukhadram cannot be appreciated fully without a careful examination of his life and poetry prior to the rise of Islam. Narrow focus on the Islamic period of Ḥassān’s life obscures his identity as a true mukhadram. Before

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addressing Ḥassān’s status as a mukhadram and his life in the jāhilīya, it is first necessary to take a closer look at the definition and etymology of the term mukhadram. The term is derived from the verb khaḍrama, whose range of meanings include “to cut off the ear of a camel,” “to mix,” and “to be wide or abundant.” Some classical scholars have surmised that the mukhaḍramūn poets were thus named because they had been cut off from unbelief to Islam (qutʿa ‘an al-kufr ilā al-Īslām),9 or because they had changed the method of cutting the ears of their camels. This second explanation is related to a Prophetic tradition (ḥadīth) in which Muḥammad encouraged his followers to change the method of cutting the ears of their camels to distinguish them from the non-Muslims. From this, some scholars concluded that one who lived in both eras was a mukhadram because he knew both ways of cutting (liʾannahu adraka al-khaḍramatayn).10 Others have suggested that the semantic association of khaḍrama with mixing implies that these individuals merged two eras, the jāhilī and the Islamic. Others link the term to the meaning “wide, abundant” by noting the extensive experience and old age of the mukhaḍramūn. In his work Kitāb al-ʿumda fī maḥāsin al-shiʿr wa-ʾādābihi wa-naqdihi, eleventh-century literary critic Ibn Rashīq quotes the grammarian Abū al-Ḥasan al-Akhfash who relates the term mukhaḍram to abundant water (māʾ khidrīm) explaining,

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“So, it follows that a man who has witnessed the jāhilīya and Islam is called a mukhadram, for he has fully experienced both periods.”

Based on al-Akhfash’s definition, Ḥassān’s significance goes beyond simply being the most famous of the mukhadramūn. He was an exemplary mukhadram because of his intimate connection to both eras. Ḥassān’s association with both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods was more than simply chronological; he actively participated in the literary life of both eras. During the pre-Islamic period, he competed in the annual poetry competitions throughout the Arabian Peninsula and interacted with the other luminaries of the jāhilī period, such as the poets al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, al-Khansā’, and al-A‘shā. Most importantly, during this stage of his life Ḥassān was the court poet of the Christian Ghassānid dynasty. Prior to the becoming the “poet laureate” of the founder of Islam, Ḥassān was the court poet for kings who were patrons of Christianity and supporters of missionary work in the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, Ḥassān’s identity as a mukhadram is heightened by his experience with two religions, in addition to his experience in two distinct historical eras.

Ḥassān’s years spent in the employ of the Ghassānids had a lasting impact on his poetry. His affectionate feelings for his former patrons did not abate after his conversion, yet this loyalty should not be viewed as detracting from his Islamic compositions. Rather, it adds to the richness and complexity that characterizes the literature of the transitional period in which he lived. Classical scholars have noted the significance of the

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different phases through which Ḥassān’s poetry passed. Basran philologist Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 825) is reported to have said, “Ḥassān was distinguished among the poets in three ways. He was the poet of the anšār during the jāhilīya, the poet of the Prophet in the days of the prophecy, and he was the poet of all of Yemen during Islam” (kāna shāʿir al-anšār fī al-jāhilīya, wa-shāʿir al-nabī ṣallā Allāh ʿalayhi wa-salam ḥāl [ayyām] al-nabwa, wa-shāʿir al-Yaman kullihā fī al-Islām). It is precisely these diverse experiences that make Ḥassān a true mukhadram and an excellent case study of the mukhadram predicament.

Ḥassan and the Ghassānids

Although the exact date of Ḥassān’s birth varies in the classical sources, the poet was at least in his fifties when the Prophet arrived in Madina in 622. How, then, had the poet of the Prophet passed the first half century of his life prior to his conversion? From around the year 600, or a few years earlier, to 614, Ḥassān was the primary court poet for the Christian Ghassānid kingdom located in the region known as al-Shām.13 As a client state of the Byzantine Empire, the Ghassānids played a critical role in the ongoing power struggle between the two imperial superpowers of the era, the Roman Byzantines and the Persian Sasanids. The two empires fought countless wars and skirmishes between the fourth and sixth centuries, and the frontier lands located between their empires were a frequent battleground. Both the Byzantines and the Sasanids employed Arab vassal states

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12 Quoted by Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-asbāb, 1:345.

13 This study will refer to the land where the Ghassānids lived and ruled as al-Shām, and this region is roughly congruous with the area that came to be known as Bilād al-Shām in the Muslim era. During the years when Ḥassān was their court poet, Ghassānid territory corresponded roughly to modern-day Syria and Jordan.
in the strategic border regions that separated the empires from the Arabian Peninsula. The Byzantines patronized the Ghassānid dynasty to defend their frontier provinces along the eastern border and to serve as a buffer between Byzantium and the Arab nomads. To the same end, the Sasanids employed the Arab Lakhmid dynasty, based at al-Ḥīra in present-day Iraq. The Ghassānids paid tribute to the Byzantine Empire and provided mobile contingents of cavalry to support the Byzantine army in the war against the Persians. In this capacity, they contributed to the military defense of the eastern borders of the Byzantine Empire. The Ghassānid kings held the title *phylarch*, local ruler, and wore the crown of a client king.

The Ghassānid kingdom was an Arabic-speaking, sedentary dynasty with capitals in Jalliq, near Damascus, and Jābiya in the Golan. The Ghassānids traced their lineage to a distant Arab migration from Yemen where they had resided in close proximity to the sophisticated and sedentary south Arabians. Recent scholarship on the Ghassānids has revealed that they were committed Monophysite Christians who contributed to an explosion in religious and secular architecture in al-Shām in the sixth century. Despite their integration into Roman/Byzantine life and culture, the Ghassānids maintained their Arab identity. Their towns were centers of literate, urban culture which attracted poets from all over the Arabian Peninsula. Arabic poetry flourished in their courts, and it was in the royal courts of the Ghassānids that Ḥassān spent much of his youth. Ḥassān traveled frequently from his birthplace in Yathrib (later known as Madina) to al-Shām where he spent long periods of time with the Ghassānids. He visited their palaces, drank wine in their taverns, stayed in their monasteries, and observed their religious
celebrations. His affection for his patrons drew on shared lineage and a strong sense of kinship. Ḥassān’s intimate relationship with the Ghassānids continued until their conquest by the Persians in 614. He may have returned to the region to visit his former haunts after the Byzantine reconquest of the region in 628, and he certainly traveled to al-Shām in his later years when he paid allegiance to the caliph Muʾāwiya.\(^{14}\)

Although Ḥassān spent roughly a decade and a half in the service of the Ghassānids, his poetry collection (dīwān) contains less than thirty poems and fragments that reflect this Ghassānid connection. The vast majority of his poems show signs of composition during the Islamic period. The scarcity of Ḥassān’s extant compositions on the Ghassānids reflects the priorities of the ‘Abbāsid-era Muslim scholars who compiled the poetry of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. These classical scholars were largely interested in recording the events of Islam, correctly perceived to be a fundamental turning point in Arab history. The importance of Ḥassān’s role as the poet of the Prophet far outweighed his earlier life in al-Shām. Beyond this lack of interest in Ḥassān’s poetry on the Ghassānids, the political and military conflict that raged between the Muslim Empire and the Byzantines during the ‘Abbāsid period is likely to have contributed to the disinclination of scholars to preserve these odes. This would have been especially true during periods when the rivalry between the two empires had assumed religious dimensions, such as during the Crusades. That the poet of the Prophet had once composed odes praising a Christian vassal state of the Byzantines may have been a matter of some embarrassment for the Muslim scholars compiling his dīwān. Even the reality

\(^{14}\) Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 16:233-234.
that Ḥassān was formerly a loyal court poet of any non-Muslim dynasty could have been viewed as a threat to the validity of his poetry on the Prophet and Islam.

Several poems and fragments attributed to Ḥassān from the jāhilī period praise the Ghassānids in the context of other topics, but no complete pre-Islamic panegyrics on the Ghassānids have been preserved. The only remaining odes devoted fully to the Ghassānids were composed at the end of Ḥassān’s life, long after the poet’s conversion to Islam. In these nostalgic odes, the elderly poet reminisces on his former patrons and fondly recalls his youthful interactions with them. Beyond being considered among his best extant poetry from a literary perspective, the poems from the period 632-661 shed light on the depth of Ḥassān’s connection to the Ghassānids. Several of these later poems are also informative from a historical point of view. Composed after the Persian conquest of al-Shām, two of these odes describe the destruction and devastation of the region and even outline the extent of the Persian military presence. Five poems in Ḥassān’s Dīwān date from this period. These late odes form an essential component of the poetry studied in this dissertation, and two of these poems are translated and analyzed in full in Part III.

If Ḥassān composed at least five poems on the Ghassānids years after their fall, it must be assumed that he had composed many more when he was in their employ. To have earned the status of “court poet” he would have composed numerous full-length panegyrics on his patrons. Evidence that Ḥassān composed many panegyrics on the Ghassānids that are now lost can be seen in several references in the classical sources. In a passage of rhymed prose composed by al-Hamadhānī in the tenth century, the author admires Ḥassān’s odes, saying “he composed beautiful odes (al-qaṣā’id al-ḥisān) on
them [the Ghassānids]. Time passes but they are new. These bones decay in the ground, but these beauties remain among mankind.”

The author’s use of the term *qasā‘id* (singular: *qasīda*) meaning “polythematic odes” here is particularly significant as it implies multiple full-length odes, rather than the shorter fragments of praise that remain today. It is unlikely that the phrase *al-qasā‘id al-hisān* would have been employed if al-Hamadhānī were referring only to the one remaining full *qasīda* devoted to the Ghassānids.

A letter by the talented ninth-century prose writer al-Jāḥiz on the topic of Christianity provides further evidence that Ḥassān composed numerous poems on the Ghassānids and that some dealt specifically with Christianity. In *Rasā‘il al-Jāḥiz*, the scholar describes the Christianity of the Ghassānid kings as being famous among the Arabs (*Naṣrānīyat al-Nu‘mān wa-mulūk Ghassān mashhūra fī al-‘Arab*). He continues, “If not for that [the fact that it was so well-known] I would prove it by citing the well-known poems (*al-ash‘ār al-ma‘rūfa*) and the accurate reports (*al-akhbār al-ṣahīha*).”

Although he does not cite the poets who composed these odes by name, it is likely that al-

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16 Poem 13 is translated and analyzed in-depth in Chapter 1, Part III. The other poems and fragments with clear Ghassānid association are not full-length *al-qasā‘id* and cannot be what al-Hamadhānī intended.

17 The al-Nu‘mān mentioned by al-Jāḥiz here is not the Ghassānid king named al-Nu‘mān, but the famous Lakhmid king who was the first of the Lakhmid royalty to adopt Christianity openly.

Jāhiẓ was referring to the poetry of Ḫassān and the other main poet of the Ghassānids, al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī. As was the case with al-Hamadhānī’s passage, it is unlikely that al-Jāhiẓ would use the phrase “well-known poems” to refer to the few poems that have been preserved to the present. These passages suggest that as late as two to three centuries after Ḫassān’s death many more of his odes may have remained in circulation. Furthermore, it appears that these qaṣā‘ā īd may have discussed extensively the Christianity of the Ghassānids.

The scarcity of extant poems on the Ghassānids and the tendency of later scholars to ignore them has had one unexpected positive result. Forgers, like the scholars, have consistently overlooked this period. As a companion of the Prophet and a pivotal figure in the early years of Islam, Ḫassān became a popular target for forged and inauthentic poetry during later periods. Falsely ascribing a poem to Ḫassān could boost a tribe’s status by emphasizing, or even inventing, a link between the tribe or an ancestor and the Prophet. In contrast, there was little motivation for forged poetry related to Ḫassān’s early life and experiences with the Ghassānids. Even the most discerning of scholars have consistently asserted the authenticity of the extant Ghassānid odes. This presents the researcher with a rare opportunity to study a group of poems whose authenticity is not in question.19

Until recently, Ḫassān’s poetry on the Ghassānids had attracted little scholarly attention. This dissertation aims to fill this lacuna in the literature by presenting a detailed

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19 The topic of authenticity and the opinions of classical and modern scholars on this issue is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, Part I.
examination of these poems. The Ghassānid odes reveal crucial aspects of Ḥassān’s multi-faceted personality, painting a more complete and complex picture of the poet. A thorough study of these poems broadens scholarly understanding of Ḥassān’s literary contribution and demands a reassessment of his role in Arabic literary history. More specifically, these poems demonstrate Ḥassān to be an accomplished wine poet, a poet of Christianity, an observer of the landscape of al-Shām, and an early pioneer in the urbanization of Arabic poetry.

Ḥassān’s Ghassānid odes include numerous verses praising and describing wine and its effects. The neglect of this aspect of Ḥassān’s compositions by both classical and modern scholars can be explained in light of the poet’s close relationship to the Prophet and his poetry in the service of Islam. Ḥassān’s verses praising wine may not have seemed consonant with his later role in the Islamic period, and thus scholars ignored them or dealt with them only to a limited extent when they appeared within other Islamic poems. Based on his poems and passages devoted to the motif of wine, Ḥassān should be considered among the ranks of the famous wine poets of the jāhilīya, such as al-A‘shā and ‘Adī ibn Zayd. Ḥassān’s literary contribution to the genre of wine poetry (khamrīya) is the subject of Chapter 4, Part II.

Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry reveals the poet’s familiarity with Christianity. Although the vast majority of his Ghassānid poems have not survived, the extant odes contain echoes of the Christian environment in which Ḥassān composed his Ghassānid poems. His verses mention daily life in the monasteries of al-Shām and religious festivities, such as Easter. Such references are of great value to historians of this region
because they provide insightful details about the social and cultural history of the
Ghassānids. As devout Monophysites, the descriptions of the Christianity practiced by
the Ghassānids are especially useful. Ḫassān’s depiction of Christian themes and topics is
addressed in Chapter 2, Part III where his most overtly Christian ode, poem 123, is
translated and analyzed in detail.

The poet’s knowledge of the geography and toponymy of al-Shām is also
apparent in his Ghassānid poems. Ḫassān mentions the towns, regions, mountains, and
villages of al-Shām. At times, he even replaces the standard toponyms of the desert that
characterize pre-Islamic poetry with place names of al-Shām. This tendency to employ
toponyms of al-Shām remains strong even in Ḫassān’s later Islamic poetry. Although
خلافSAN was born in the Hijāz and is considered to be one of the Madinan poets, he can
also be accurately described as a poet of al-Shām. This evident familiarity with the region
of al-Shām can be seen throughout this study, but it is especially highlighted in Chapter
3, Part II and in the two close readings and translations in Part III.

The final aspect of Ḫassān’s literary contribution that becomes evident through a
study of the Ghassānid poems is his identity as an urban poet. Ḫassān has been
recognized by classical scholars as one of the city poets (shu‘arā’ al-qurā), but due to his
extensive experience with the urban Ghassānids, his urbanization goes far beyond that of
other poets from the towns of the peninsula. This facet of Ḫassān’s identity forms one of
the central themes of this dissertation. This study contends that Ḫassān is a precursor to
the urban poets of the later ‘Abbāsid caliphate who replaced traditional desert themes and
motifs with ones more appropriate to their urban environments. A careful investigation of
Ḩassān’s poetry reveals his preference for villages and towns over the desert landscape of the traditional jāhili poets. Ḥassān’s compositions demonstrate not only a familiarity with the urban landscape of his patrons but also a clear disdain for the pastoral lifestyle of the Arabs nomads. These features of his poetry show him to be an early pioneer in the urbanization of Arabic poetry, a literary development traditionally associated with the ‘Abbāsid poets, such as Abū Nuwās.

Methodology

This study analyzes Ḥassān’s twenty-six extant Ghassānid poems and fragments, relying on in-depth textual analysis and close readings of selected verses and poems. At the same time, the study itself is premised on the new historicist conviction that all literature is fundamentally historical, and a literary text can only be understood if it is considered to be a product of its unique historical, political, and social context. According to Stephen Greenblatt, any form of literary criticism based on this assumption “must be conscious of its own status as interpretation and intent upon understanding literature as a part of the system of signs that constitutes a given culture; its proper goal, however difficult to realize, is a poetics of culture.”

This study merges close readings of the poetic texts with a study of the Ghassānid dynasty’s social and political history, as well as the poet’s interaction with this culture. For this reason, substantial chapters are devoted to Ghassānid history and to the poet’s

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biography. These sections are not mere background, but provide part of the essential context for the analysis and interpretation of Ḥassān’s poetry. The study’s aim throughout will be an “historicist method of contextualized interpretation.” In the analysis of the poetry itself, this study explores the themes and motifs that appear in the texts, employing in particular the terms topos to refer to a recurrent motif or literary convention and tableau to denote an especially vivid description painted in the poetry. Formal elements of the poems, lexical items, and historical and cultural references in the texts are also investigated. In addition to the poetic texts themselves, this dissertation examines the numerous stories and anecdotes in the classical sources that were included by later scholars seeking to contextualize the poems.

This study consists of three parts. Part I “Poetic Context” contains four chapters that explore the poet’s historical and social context and the environment in which his poems were composed. Chapter 1 traces the events of Ḥassān’s life from his birth and early years in Yathrib (Madina) to his death in the mid-seventh century. Classical accounts and anecdotes of his personality are examined. Next, Chapter 2 discusses the ongoing power struggle between the Byzantines and the Sasanids that dominated the Near East prior to the rise of Islam and outlines the critical role the Ghassānids played in this conflict. This historical background sets the stage for a study of Ḥassān’s literary and intellectual milieu, the Ghassānids. Chapter 3 discusses the classical and modern sources on Ḥassān and his poetry. This section includes an investigation into the accusation made

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by several classical scholars that Ḥassān’s poetry declined in quality following his conversion to Islam. Chapter 4, the concluding section of Part I, turns to the poetry itself. This section outlines the history of the recensions and editions of the dīwān and treats the problematic issue of authenticity. Finally, Ḥassān’s twenty-six Ghassānid poems are identified and the method used to categorize them as “Ghassānid” is explained.

Parts II and III are devoted to the analysis of these Ghassānid poems, but differ slightly in approach. Part II charts recurring thematic elements and formal and lexical items related to the rural/urban dichotomy that appear throughout the poems. The first chapter in Part II explores Ḥassān’s stated preference for urban over pastoral life, studying verses in which Ḥassān overtly praises sedentary life, often contrasting it to the hardship of life in the desert. Chapter 2 analyzes the poet’s use of urban terminology and argues that his selection of lexical items demonstrates a familiarity with an urban rather than desert landscape. Among the terms included for close examination are: tavern (ḥānūt), castle (qaṣr/qasṭal), temple (haykal), monastery (dayr), vineyard (karm), structure (bunyān), fortress (maʿqil), and pillar (ʿamūd and rukn). Ḥassān’s use of traditional vocabulary in new and innovative ways will also be discussed. Chapter 3 delves into Ḥassān’s treatment of the traditional amatory prelude (nasīb), especially his inversion of the topos of the abandoned encampment (aṭlāl) and his contribution to the development of the genre of poetry lamenting fallen dynasties (rīthāʾ al-mamālik). Ḥassān’s creative approach to the nasīb is shown to be further evidence of his contempt for Bedouin life. A brief comparison between Ḥassān and the ‘Abbāsid poet Abū Nuwās will be explored in terms of their treatment of Arab nomads and the desert. The final
chapter of Part II focuses on the motif of wine (*khamr*) and explores Ḫassān’s passages devoted to the praise and description of wine. The poet’s wine poems (*khamrīyāt*) form a crucial aspect of his broader urbanism and further illustrate his appreciation for the luxurious, urban lifestyle of the Ghassānids.

Part III focuses on two Ghassānid odes and examines each poem as a complete unit. The two chapters in this section are each devoted to one poem. The chapters begin with a brief background on the text, its historical context, and the circumstances surrounding its composition then progress to a translation and close reading of the poetic text. Chapter 1 is dedicated to poem 13, Ḫassān’s most famous *qasīda* on the Ghassānids, while Chapter 2 focuses on poem 123, another nostalgic poem composed at the end of the poet’s life. These poems were selected based on their literary value and their relevant themes. Through the detailed close readings of a limited selection of Ghassānid poems, it is hoped that the reader will be able to glimpse the depth of Ḫassān’s affection for his former patrons and to understand more fully the broader context for the isolated verses that are cited throughout the study.

Far from being a comprehensive analysis of all the themes and motifs in this rich body of poetry, the focus of the present study lies in two main aspects. It is the first monograph devoted solely to Ḫassān’s Ghassānid odes, and it suggests a reevaluation of the poet’s contribution to Arabic literary history. It is the aim of this study to contribute to a more complex understanding of Ḫassān’s status as a *mukhaḍram* and his role in Arabic literary history. To encourage further research on this subset of Ḫassān’s poetry,
the Arabic texts of the twenty-six Ghassānid odes are included as appendices following the conclusion of this study.
Part I: Poetic Context

Introduction to Part I

Part I strives to give the reader a sense of the context for Ḥassān’s life and his poetry. Chapter 1 briefly outlines the biography of the poet, from his early years in pre-Islamic Yathrib to his death in the mid-seventh century during the reign of the caliph Muʿāwiya. The following chapter, “Ḥassān’s Literary and Intellectual Milieu: The Ghassānids,” situates Ḥassān in the socio-political, literary, and intellectual contexts of the period. This chapter opens with a concise summary of the power politics in Arabia and the Near East on the eve of Islam. Without understanding the historical realities of the era, it is not possible to grasp the unique role played by the Ghassānids during Ḥassān’s lifetime. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the Ghassānids, Ḥassān’s patrons during the pre-Islamic period, and outlines their history, relationship to the Byzantine Empire, and commitment to Christianity. The evidence for the sedentary, and often urban, lifestyle of the Ghassānids will be paid particular attention in light of the importance of this fact for the analyses in Parts II and III.

The next two chapters of Part I, Chapters 3 and 4, trace the portrayal of Ḥassān in the classical and modern sources. First, Chapter 3, presents the challenges associated with the source material on the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, in general, and with the transmission of poetry, in particular. Then, the chapter turns to the study of oral-formulaic poetry and briefly presents the debate regarding the application of the Parry/Lord theory to ancient Arabic poetry. The chapter examines the classical and
modern sources on Ḥassān, presenting their critical opinion on his poetry. This chapter demonstrates that both classical and modern scholars have focused their attention on Ḥassān’s Islamic poetry and his role as a companion of the Prophet. Very little has been written on Hassan’s work as the court poet of the Ghassānids. Part I closes with Chapter 4, “Ḥassān, the Poetry.” This chapter discusses the transmission of Ḥassān’s poems and the history of the published editions of his dīwān. Chapter 4 also addresses the issue of authenticity within Ḥassān’s dīwān, arguing that his Ghassānid poetry may be the most authentic poetry contained in the dīwān. The various genres of poetry composed by Ḥassān are outlined, and his poems are divided into three historical periods. The chapter concludes with a definition of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry and the identification of the twenty-six Ghassānid poems which will be used as the basic texts for the analyses found in the remainder of the study.
Chapter 1: Ḫassān, the Poet: The Life of Ḫassān ibn Thābit

1.1 Ḫassān in the Jāhilī Period

The goal of this chapter is to outline briefly the known events of Ḫassān’s life and to give the reader a sense of the type of person Ḫassān was. Reconstructing the life of any historical figure who lived through the period that witnessed the rise of Islam is a daunting task, and Ḫassān is no exception. Myriad accounts and anecdotes, all of which were recorded long after the poet’s death, provide an overwhelming and frequently contradictory array of material on certain events in his life, while the sources yield virtually no information for other periods. Yet, behind all the incongruous details is a fascinating and compelling life story. It is the story of an individual who not only witnessed a dramatic historical transformation, but actively participated in the literary and social life of the jāhilī and early Islamic periods, even playing a key role in the promotion and spread of a religion that drastically altered the balance of power in the Near East and the course of world history.

Although many of the accounts narrated about Ḫassān are contradictory and may reflect later biases, much can be learned from the type of stories that were circulated about the Prophet’s poet. These accounts reflect what the transmitters and forgers estimated they could “get away with” based on Ḫassān’s actual personality. Nonetheless, it is critical to remember that to study Ḫassān is to study the creation and development of the poet’s historical persona by later scholars. A case in point, and a good starting place for this chapter, is the lifespan of the poet as reported by the later Muslim scholars. Most classical accounts on Ḫassān begin by stating that the poet’s life was divided equally
between the two historical periods in which he lived, sixty years in the *jāhilīya* and sixty in the Islamic period. Abū al-Faraj al-İsfahānī and Ibn ‘Asākir both cite sources claiming that Ḥassān was around sixty when the Prophet Muḥammad arrived in Madīna in 622. According these sources, he then immediately converted to Islam and lived for sixty more years as a Muslim.¹ These dates are best viewed as a symbolic demonstration of Ḥassān’s connection to each of the periods and proof of his status as a true *mukhadram*. The most important fact to the narrators here is Ḥassān’s identity as a transformational figure, rooted in pre-Islamic Arabia, but equally connected to the new world of Islam. This portrayal of Ḥassān as an emblem of the transformational possibilities of Islam infuses the accounts of later scholars.²

Around the year 570, Ḥassān ibn Thābit ibn al-Mundhir ibn Ḥarām ibn ‘Amr ibn Zayd Manā ibn ‘Adī ibn ‘Amr ibn Mālik ibn al-Najjār was born in Yathrib, an oasis town located in Western Arabia approximately 200 miles northwest of Mecca. Yathrib was an important agrarian center, especially famous for its date cultivation. At the time, Yathrib was a collection of settlements inhabited by several Jewish tribes and two rival Arab tribes of distant Yemeni origin, the Aws and the Khazraj. The non-Jewish tribes in Yathrib were largely pagan and their chief divinity was Manāt, the goddess of fate. Even


² More will be said of the specific sources on Ḥassān in the review of the literature in Chapter 3, Part I.
during the pre-Islamic period, however, there may have been “some movement toward monotheism.”

Hassān was born into a wealthy and well-respected family from the clan of al-Najjār within the Khazraj tribe. Hassān’s mother was al-Furay’ā bint Khālid ibn Khunays, and his father was Thābit ibn al-Mundhir. Either his father or grandfather played the role of arbiter in one of the many tribal wars between the Aws and Khazraj, an appointment that would indicate respect and leadership within the tribe. Hassān’s family was also known for displaying poetic prowess. According to al-Mubarrad, “The tribe most deeply rooted in poetry was that of Hassān. For they counted six in a row, all of them poets.” Both Hassān’s father and grandfather were poets, and his sisters Khawla and al-Fāri’a and his children Layla and ‘Abd al-Rahmān are all said to have exhibited poetic abilities. Hassān’s uncle Maslama was an orator (khatīb) at the Ghassānid court.

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4 For the verses that laud Hassān’s father or grandfather’s role in this conflict, see no. 5, v. 8 and no. 7, v. 11. Unless otherwise noted, all poetry quotations are from Walid ‘Arafat’s edition of the Diwān. See Diwān of Hassān ibn Thābit, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series, ed. Walid ‘Arafat (Hertford: Stephen Austin and Sons, 1971). The numbering of the poems used in this study follows the numbering in this edition. Poems will be cited as follows: poem number, verse (e.g., no. 13, v. 5.) When commentary or the additional material found in ‘Arafat’s second volume of the Diwān is cited, an abbreviated version of the standard Chicago system of citation will be used (e.g., Diwān, 2:200).

For two sources that claim Hassān’s grandfather al-Mundhir was the arbiter, see Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī, Tabaqāt fuḥūl al-shu’arā’, 1:216; and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Durayd, al-Ishtiqāq (n.p.: Mu’assasat al-Khānjī, 1958), 449.


Belonging to such a well-respected family would have virtually ensured Ḥassān’s good standing in his community. His position would have been enhanced by his status as a leading tribal poet and his family’s association with poetry. Poets during the jāhiliyya were valued members of the tribe who were considered to be vigorous defenders of the tribe’s honor and protectors of the tribe’s history and glorious deeds. The mystical power of poetry can be glimpsed in the following passage on the birth of a poet. The quote is attributed to the classical scholar Ibn Rashīq and is cited by al-Suyūṭī:

When there appeared a poet in a family of the Arabs, the other tribes round about would gather together to that family and wish them joy of their good luck. Feasts would be got ready, the women of the tribe would join together in bands, playing upon lutes, as they were wont to do at bridals, and the men and boys would congratulate one another; for a poet was a defense to the honour of them all, a weapon to ward off insult from their good name, and a means of perpetuating their glorious deeds and of establishing their fame for ever. And they used not to wish one another joy but for three things - the birth of a boy, the coming to light a poet, and the foaling of a noble mare.\(^8\)

During the pre-Islamic period, Ḥassān was a frequent guest at the royal court of the Ghassānid dynasty in al-Shām. At the Ghassānid court, Ḥassān encountered a more sophisticated life of entertainment and pleasure than he had previously experienced in the Ḥijāz. It is difficult to determine precisely when Ḥassān had his first interaction with the Ghassānids, but it seems he was a regular visitor at their court from about 600 until the

\(^7\) See no. 5, v. 7.

Persian conquest of al-Shām in 614.9 Muḥammad Ṭāhir Darwīsh describes Ḥassān’s time in al-Shām as follows:

In this manner, Ḥassān spent the most beautiful days of his life in this most beautiful spot of earth amidst the gardens of al-Shām with their low-hanging bunches of fruit, and on the banks of the Baradā River, and in the bosom of the grassy mountains crowned with snow, and among dwellings which God bestowed beauty on, and where the rains were generous and the vineyards densely packed.10

1.2 Classical Accounts on Ḥassān’s Personality

The classical sources contain fewer anecdotes concerning Ḥassān during the pre-Islamic period than those related to the later part of his life, and less of his poetry from this period has been preserved. Nonetheless, from these remaining compositions and the literary lore surrounding them, it is possible to isolate certain personality traits exhibited in this period that are carried over into the poet’s life as a Muslim. The most prominent traits attributed to him in these accounts are fierce tribal loyalty and sentimentality, as well as a short temper and a propensity for carousing.

Ḥassān appears to have been intensely proud of his tribe and of his identity as a Khazraji. He excelled in poetry motivated by tribal solidarity (‘aṣabīya), with the genres of boasting (fakhr) and lampoon (hijā’) dominating his extant pre-Islamic compositions. In his fakhr poems, Ḥassān extols the virtues of his clan and tribe, including their pure

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9 Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:232-3. Theodor Nöldeke suggests 610 as the year of Ḥassān’s first visit to the Ghassānids, but all the modern sources reject this as being too late for Ḥassān to claim to have spent a long time with them prior to their fall in 614. See Nöldeke, Die Ghassānischen Fürsten aus dem Hause Gafna’s, in Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin: Aus dem Jahre 1887 (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1888), 41. For arguments against 610 as the date of the first encounter with the Ghassānids, see Muḥammad Ṭāhir Darwīsh, Ḥassān ibn Thābit (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, n.d.),145-146; and Iḥsān al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān ibn Thābit, ḥayātuhu wa-shi‘ruhu (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Ḥadīth, 1965), 45.

10 Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 150.
lineage and past military victories, as well as his own poetic abilities. One typical fakhr is the following verse in which Ḥassān praises his sharp tongue and his bravery, admitting his tongue is more effective than his sword: \(^{11}\)

\[
\text{لسَبَأ وَسَبَأَيْ يَتَبَّعُونَ كَالْهُمَا}
\]

My tongue and my sword are sharp
But my tongue reaches that which my sword cannot

The genre of hijā’ was devoted to biting invectives and often brutal slander, usually directed at members of an opposing tribe or anyone who had insulted the poet. Of all the poems contained in Ḥassān’s Dīwān, over half can be classified as hijā’. \(^{12}\) It was Ḥassān’s skill in this genre that proved to be his best asset to the Prophet in the Islamic period. More will be said of the poet’s Islamic hijā’ in the following section.

Ḥassān’s strong tribal loyalty can even be seen in his relationship to the Ghassānids and in his poetry composed on the dynasty. Both the Khazraj tribe and the Ghassānids claimed Yemeni descent, and as a result of this shared lineage and common ancestors Ḥassān felt a strong kinship with the Ghassānids. Most of the commentators, both classical and modern, have emphasized that Ḥassān’s poetry praising this dynasty is inextricably linked to his fakhr poetry. By praising the Ghassānids, their wealth, splendor, and excellent lineage, he is, in essence, praising himself and his own family. Many Arab poets from different tribes flocked to the court of the Ghassānids during this period, but

\(^{11}\) No. 2, v. 2. ‘Arafat includes this poem among Ḥassān’s fakhr which is “beyond any doubt authentic.” See ‘Arafat, “A Critical Introduction to the Poetry Ascribed to Ḥassān ibn Thābit” (PhD diss., University of London, 1954), 75.

\(^{12}\) ‘Arafat, “A Critical Introduction,” 382. ‘Arafat does note that these poems are frequently short, so the total number of verses of hijā’ does not represent more than half of the total verses. See also Darwīsh’s useful charts on the genres and historical period of Ḥassān’s poetry. Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 511-519.
Hassān’s connection to his patrons appears to have gone beyond the traditional patron-poet relationship. Modern scholars argue that Hassān’s extant verses do not qualify as traditional panegyrics (madīḥ) because Hassān’s main motivation does not appear to have been money, but rather genuine affection and kinship.\footnote{Al-Naṣṣ, *Hassān*, 119-120. Al-Naṣṣ is emphatic on this point. He contends that, unlike his contemporaries al-A’ṣāh and al-Nābizāh, Hassān only frequented the Ghassānids, rather than both the Ghassānids and the Lakhmids, the Arab allies of the Persians and the rivals of the Ghassānids. The presence of nostalgic poetry in the *Dīwān* composed long after the fall of the dynasty is also cited as proof of the poet’s genuine affection for the Ghassānids. See also Darwīsh, *Hassān*, 149. For more on the debate over Hassān’s relationship with the Lakhmids, see al-Naṣṣ, *Hassān*, 55-57.}

Hassān had great confidence in his poetic abilities and in several anecdotes he insists he is “more poetic” (*ashʿar min*) than other famous literary figures of the period. The sources agree that he traveled to the annual fair at ‘Ukāz and competed in the poetry competition there. The identity of the judge of the contest and participants vary in the accounts, as do the results of the competition. In one version reported on the authority of Hassān himself, the poet al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī is the judge, and he praises Hassān over the jāhilī poetess al-Khansā’, concluding that Hassān is a “poet” (*shāʾir*) while al-Khansā’ is merely a “mourner” (*bakkāʾa*). Yet, in another account, the famous jāhilī poet al-Aʿṣāh is added to the participants, and he is judged to be the superior poet. Al-Nābigha is reported to have said to al-Khansā’, “If not for the fact that Abū Basīr [al-Aʿṣāh] recited before you, I would have said that you were the most poetic of all spirits (*jinn*) and mankind.” Heartily insulted for being judged lowest of the three, Hassān stood up
and exclaimed to al-Nābigha, a far more senior poet than the much younger Ḥassān, “By God, I am more poetic than you and your father!”  

Ḥassān’s pride was easily insulted and he was prone to angry outbursts when he felt slighted. One representative account related by Abū al-Faraj al-İṣfahānī involves Ḥassān’s wife ‘Amra, a member of the rival Aws tribe. The sources report that the couple was very much in love (wa-kāna kull wāḥid minhumā muḥibban li-ṣāḥibihi) until one day when the topic of an old tribal dispute arose. In the course of the ensuing argument, ‘Amra insulted her husband’s Khazrajī uncles and boasted of her own tribe. In a fit of rage, Ḥassān divorced her, a decision that he came to regret.

In addition to his temper and strong sense of pride, Ḥassān seems to have enjoyed taking pleasure in life. From his extant poetry composed during this period, it seems that one of Ḥassān’s favorite pastimes was drinking wine, and many of the remaining poems from the pre-Islamic period include verses praising wine (wasf al-khamr, or khamrīya). Ḥassān’s love for wine and carousing is confirmed by accounts found in the classical sources. A report in Kitāb al-aghānī recounts a night Ḥassān spent drinking at a tavern in al-Shām with al-Aʾshā. After dozing off, Ḥassān awoke to hear al-Aʾshā complaining to

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14 Abū al-Faraj al-İṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 11:6. For the version where al-Nābigha favors Ḥassān over al-Khansā’, see Abū al-Faraj al-İṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 4:167. For another account, see Muḥammad ibn ‘İmrān al-Marzubānī, al-Muwashshah, 75-78. According to al-Naṣṣ, the most important information that can be gleaned from these varying accounts is that Ḥassān was in contact with other leading poets and was an active participant in the literary life of the jāhilīya. Al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān, 38.

15 Abū al-Faraj al-İṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 3:14-18; and Dīwān, 1:307. For the possibility that ‘Amra was the same woman about whom one of Ḥassān’s rivals from the Aws tribe wrote offensive poetry in order to provoke Ḥassān, see Abū al-Faraj al-İṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 3:11.
the tavern keeper that Ḥassān was stingy (*kariha al-shaykh al-ghurm*). In response, Ḥassān waited until al-Aʿshā was asleep, then purchased all the wine in the tavern and poured it out on the ground in an extravagant attempt to prove his generosity. Beyond indicating Ḥassān’s drinking habits, this story has been cited as further evidence of Ḥassān’s strong sense of pride and short temper.

Prior to the immigration of the Muslims to Yathrib, the life of this affluent poet appears to have been largely devoted to poetry and pleasure. He owned his own *uṭum*, or fortified house, which was called Fāri‘, where he often entertained guests. He visited his Ghassānid patrons frequently, carousing with their kings and composing poetry on them. In 614, the Persian army conquered the Ghassānids and occupied al-Shām, forcing the Byzantine army with its Ghassānid contingent to retreat to Anatolia. From this date until his conversion to Islam, not much is known about Ḥassān’s activities. It is likely that he remained in Yathrib drinking wine, composing *hijā‘* against the Aws, and praising the virtues of his poetic skills and the honor of his tribe.

### 1.3 Ḥassān in the Islamic Period

In 622, the Prophet Muḥammad and his followers migrated to Yathrib (Madina) to escape persecution in Mecca, and within a short period of time a number of the

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17 Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 222; and al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān, 32.

residents of Madina converted to Islam. Ḥassān’s brother Aws is listed among the early converts in Madina, but Ḥassān may have been a more reluctant convert. He does not appear on any of the lists of early converts, nor was he assigned an immigrant brother despite his ownership of a large fortress. Ḥassān’s strong sense of tribal loyalty and his devotion to a life of pleasure may have initially been obstacles to his embrace of Islam. Darwîsh has interpreted Ḥassān’s absence from these early events and his apparent lack of interest in the new religion in this way:

As we mentioned, Ḥassān was preoccupied with the existing hatred between Aws and Khazraj, and he was distracted by the life of pleasure and hedonism to which he was addicted. He was in a beautiful dream-like slumber. In this dream, he conjured up his rich past in al-Shām in the castles of the Ghassânids. That distant past whispered to him that life was  الفكر and splendor, enjoyment and pleasure. Love of that life saturated Ḥassān’s heart to the point that he saw it as the real world. He believed that spoiling it by thinking about the unknown and seeking out trouble by taking part in a conflict, which did not concern him or his tribe, between an old and a new religion wrestling each other was a type of foolishness that people who did not understand fell into. So, he turned his back on them all and kept to himself and to that life.

Ḥassān did eventually embrace Islam and began to employ his poetic skills in the service of the new religion. Following the siege of Madina, a full-scale war of words broke out between the pagan poets of Mecca and the Muslim poets of Madina. Along with two other Madinan poets, Ka’b ibn Mālik and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa, Ḥassān defended the Prophet against the verbal attacks made against him by composing ḥijā’

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19 Some sources, such as Abū al-Faraj al-Ḥisāb al-‘Aṣākir’s Kitāb al-Aghānî and Ibn ‘Aṣākir’s Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq, have claimed that Ḥassān converted immediately following the Prophet’s immigration to Madina. For evidence pointing to a later conversion date, see ‘Arafat, introduction to Dīwān, 4; and ‘Arafat, “A Critical Introduction,” 14-16.

20 Darwîsh, Ḥassān, 157-158.
directed at the enemies of the Prophet. These poems which were hurled back and forth between the opposing sides were an integral aspect of the military conflict between the Muslims and the pagans. The Prophet recognized the power of Ḥassān’s *hijā’* and is reported to have exclaimed, “What he recited on them [the Meccans] is worse than falling arrows!”

Ḥassān’s high status as the “poet of the Prophet of God” (*shā’ir rasūl Allāh*) was directly linked to his poetic prowess in composing *hijā’*. He drew on the skills he had honed during the pre-Islamic period and generally relied on *jāhilī* techniques, such as insulting an individual or tribe’s behavior in past battles, impure lineage, or even the adulterous ways of the opponent’s mother. In contrast, his fellow Muslim poet ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa focused on religious insults, such as accusing the pagans of unbelief (*kufr*). According to the classical sources, these theological attacks did not have a significant impact at the time, whereas Ḥassān’s approach was highly effective.

Not only did Muḥammad approve of and encourage Ḥassān’s defense of Islam, he explicitly told Ḥassān that the angel Gabriel (Jibrīl) would be with him as he composed, implying that even the inspiration for Ḥassān’s poetry was divine. According to a *ḥadīth* narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayra, a companion of the Prophet named al-Barā’ ibn

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22 This designation appears in many of the classical sources. For one representative example, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī‘āb fī ma‘rīfat al-ašḥāb*, 1:341.

‘Āzib, confirmed that he had heard Muḥammad say to Ḥassān, “Answer them for me and God will support you with Gabriel (rūḥ al-qudus).”24

One consequence of Ḥassān’s impressive skill in composing hijā’ and of his close relationship with the Prophet is that a number of forgeries were ascribed to him after his death. This is especially true of the hijā’ poems allegedly dating from the Islamic period, and many of the lampoons included in the dīwān betray evidence of later composition dates.25 Despite the possibility that some of these verses may not be authentic, much can be learned about Ḥassān’s personality based on the many targets of his hijā’, one of which will be examined here. Hind bint ‘Utba was the wife of Abū Sufyān, the leader of the Quraysh and the Prophet’s main opponent at the time of the battle of Uḥūd. As was expected of a woman of the Meccan aristocracy, Hind participated in the early battles between the Meccans and the Muslims by reciting inflammatory poetry (tahrīḍ) which urged the Meccans to remember their fallen tribesmen and to avenge them. Hind also engaged in ritualistic corpse mutilation on the battlefield at Uḥūd. These activities are described in graphic detail in the later accounts of Muslim scholars as atrocities representing the excess and ignorance of the jāhiliyya.26

24 Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qurashi, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (Cairo: Maktabat wa-Maṭba‘at Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Šubayh, n.d.), 7:162-163. Variations on this account occur in virtually all the classical literary sources on Hassān. For several representative examples, see Ibn Ṣallām al-Jumahī, Ṭabaqāt fuhūl al-shuʿārāʾ, 1:217; al-Mubarrad, al-Kāmil, 3:1472; and Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 4:143-144.

25 For a detailed study of the authenticity of each slanderous poem attributed to Hassān, see ‘Arafat, “A Critical Introduction,” 382-534. The topic of authenticity will be covered in Chapter 3, Part I.

26 For an analysis of Hind’s actions and their ritual significance as well as the portrayal of these actions in the later Muslim sources, see Suzanne Stetkevych, The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 199-205. For accounts of the battle of Uḥūd, see Ibn Hishām, The Life of Muhammad, 370-391; and al-Ṭabarī, History: The Foundation
According to Ibn Hishām (d. 834), the editor and compiler of the biography (ṣīra) of the Prophet, following the battle of Uhud, Ḥassān, who had apparently been watching the fighting from the safety of his fortress, was sought out by ‘Umar who told him about Hind’s activities at the battle. ‘Umar recited some of her verses for Ḥassān who then composed poetry against her. Ibn Hishām quotes only one verse of Ḥassān’s poetry. In a note, he adds that Ḥassān composed other poetry against Hind, but these poems had been excluded from the sīra because of their obscene nature (‘‘li-annahu aqdha‘a ḥīhā’). The recensions of the dīwān, however, include three poems directed at Hind. These verses revile Hind as an adulteress guilty of illicit relations with her slave. Graphic imagery is employed to develop the twin motifs of sexual impurity and illegitimacy.

This focus on Hind’s alleged promiscuity and the illegitimacy of her children suggests that these particular poems were later additions to the dīwān, probably composed during the Umayyad period by someone hoping to discredit the ruling family. All of the poems against Hind are among a group of twenty-eight poems that appear at the end of the Dīwān preceded by a note from al-Sukkarī, the scholar who transmitted Ḥassān’s poems directly from Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 860). The note reads: “This is the last of Ḥassān’s poetry dictated by Ibn Ḥabīb. The remainder I copied out of his books. He did not dictate it.” Walid ‘Arafat has suggested that this comment indicates that the

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27 Ibn Hishām, The Life of Muhammad, 386 and 756; and Dīwān, 1:385.

28 Dīwān, 2:268. For the slanderous poems on Hind attributed to Ḥassān, see poems 211, 220, and 221.
authenticity of these poems was doubted by Ibn Ḥabīb himself. Additionally, a note in the one of the manuscripts comments that these lines were composed by Ḥassān’s son, ‘Abd al-Rahmān, during the reign of Yazīd and ascribed falsely to Ḥassān. Nonetheless, the likelihood that these poems were composed after Ḥassān’s death does not imply that the poet did not compose slanderous poems against Hind; it is very likely that he did. It is telling that the forgers or later poets chose to ascribe these obscene poems to Ḥassān and not to Ka’b ibn Mālik or ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa. Ḥassān’s reputation as a poet who excelled in composing stinging hijā’ must have been a factor in their choice. And, perhaps, his personality was not viewed to be inconsistent with such poems.

Ḥassān’s life during the Islamic period was not without controversy. On several occasions, the classical sources depict Ḥassān as being drawn into squabbles related to the old tribal boundaries that Islam sought to erase. The most famous incident occurred around the year 627 when tensions within the nascent Muslim community were mounting, especially between the two major groups within the community, the anṣār and the muhājirūn. The anṣār were Madinans from the tribes of Aws and Khazraj who aided the Prophet after his immigration to their city, while the muhājirūn were kinsfolk of the Prophet and others who emigrated with him from Mecca. Many of the anṣār, including Ḥassān, felt that the muhājirūn were receiving preferential treatment, especially in the division of spoils. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, a Khazrajī and the outspoken leader of the “hypocrites” (munāfiqūn) who felt threatened by the newcomers, is reported to


30 For the note referring to no. 220, see Dīwān, 1:398.
have expressed his frustrations and complained explicitly about the Qurashī “tramps” who had become numerous and powerful. \footnote{For an account of the incident that sparked these words, see Ibn Hishām, \textit{The Life of Muhammad}, 490-492.} The exact wording of Ibn Ubayy’s complaint is echoed in a poem composed by Ḥassān in which he lashes out at the recent arrivals in Madina, especially those from the tribe of Quraysh. The opening line of poem 138 is as follows:\footnote{No. 138, v. 1.}

\[
\text{أَمَسىَ الجَلَّابِبِ الْبَلَدُ}
\]

\[
\text{وَافْتَرَى أَمَسىَ بَيْضَةَ الْبَلَدُ}
\]

The tramps have become powerful and numerous
And the son of al-Furay’a [Ḥassān] has become insignificant in the town

Notes in the scholia of the manuscripts explicitly make clear that the somewhat ambiguous term \textit{jalābīb}, in some readings \textit{jalābīs}, refers to the newcomers or strangers in Madina. This poem directly links Ḥassān to Ibn Ubayy and the growing sentiment of discontent and resentment among the \textit{ansār}.

\footnote{For the best account of this poem and the surrounding events, see ‘Arafat, “A Controversial Incident and the Related Poem in the Life of Ḥassān ibn Thābit,” \textit{Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London} 17, no. 2 (1955): 197-205.}

These tensions provide the backdrop for a major scandal in which the Prophet’s wife, ‘Ā’isha, was falsely accused of adultery. In addition to being a significant challenge to the Prophet’s mission, the controversy has been cited as a critical event in shaping Islamic concepts of male honor and its relationship to female shame.\footnote{See D. A. Spellberg, \textit{Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of ‘A’isha bint Abi Bakr} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 61-74.} According to the
traditional recounting of the event, narrated on the authority of ʿĀʾisha, while traveling with the Muslim army during a raid, ʿĀʾishah was inadvertently left behind at a campsite. The army struck camp and the caravan moved on without noticing her absence. ʿĀʾishah remained where she was until a young Muslim named Šafwān ibn al-Muʿattal al-Sulami, who had not been traveling with the army, found her there. The two attempted to catch up with the rest of the group and were forced to spend the night traveling alone together in the process. Vicious rumors immediately spread about ʿĀʾishah and the young, handsome Šafwān. Both Ibn Ubayy, who had previously been complaining about the “newcomers,” and Ḥassān are listed among those who spread rumors and accused ʿĀʾishah of adultery. Poem 138 may have been composed by Ḥassān at the end of a lengthy period of gossip about ʿĀʾishah and growing tension between the followers of the Prophet.35

After ʿĀʾishah’s innocence was confirmed by the revelation of a Qurʾānic sūra, those involved in spreading the slander, including Ḥassān, were punished. As mentioned previously, Ḥassān used to entertain his friends at his fortress Fāriʿ where they would gossip while relaxing on a carpet spread out in the courtyard of the fortress. One day when a number of the ansār were gathered there, Šafwān arrived unexpectedly and stabbed Ḥassān.36 ‘Arafat suggests that this attack was the legal punishment that Ḥassān received for his involvement in the slander. In some versions of the account, the Prophet himself encouraged Šafwān to attack. After hearing Ḥassān’s poem, Muḥammad


requested that someone deal with “the people of the carpet (اَشْحَاب الْبِسْتَاتِ) at Fārī.”

Even if Ṣafwān was not instructed to attack, he was not punished for his actions, nor did public opinion view his actions as unmerited.

After his punishment, Ḥassān was reconciled with the Prophet who awarded him several gifts, including a piece of land and a Coptic Egyptian slave named Sīrin, the sister of Muḥammad’s concubine Māriya. This event does not seem to have done any long-term damage to Ḥassān’s relationship with the Prophet; in fact, some scholars have suggested that their relationship became closer following the resolution of the scandal. Hartwig Hirschfeld notes that it was after this event that Ḥassān’s relationship with the Prophet deepened and his poetry became even more critical to the success of the new community. Based on the classical sources, Muḥammad had a genuine affection for Ḥassān and forgave him even when he did not display exemplary Muslim behavior, as in the incident described above. The Prophet’s respect for Ḥassān’s poetic ability was unparalleled, and in a number of instances Muḥammad singled Ḥassān out for special tasks, even calling on him to recite poetry from the pulpit (minbar) of the mosque in Madina. In al-Wāqidī’s Kitāb al-maghāzī, after insisting Ḥassān recite poetry from the minbar Muḥammad proclaimed, “Truly, God supports Ḥassān with Jibrīl (rūḥ al-qudus)

37 Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 4:156.


39 According to the classical commentators, Sīrin was the mother of Ḥassān’s son ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. See Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Istī’āb ʿfi maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb, 348.

40 Hartwig Hirschfeld, introduction to The Dīwān of Ḥassān B. Thābit, ed. Hartwig Hirschfeld (Leiden: Brill, 1910), 5. ‘Arafat has even suggested that it was around this time that Ḥassān determined to accept Islam fully. He contends that this incident coincided with the increased need for a skilled poet to respond to the attacks of the Qurashī poets. See ‘Arafat, “A Controversial Incident,” 203.
as long as he defends his Prophet.” The account closes with the statement that on that day the Prophet and the Muslims were delighted with the poetry of Ḥassān. ⁴¹

Ḥassān did not participate in the battles of the period, either due to old age, an unknown disease, or cowardice. ⁴² Yet, he composed poetry on critical Muslim battles, including one of his most famous odes on the conquest of Mecca in 630. ⁴³ Ḥassān also mourned the Muslim martyrs and lauded the heroes of each battle in verse. He encouraged the Muslims by commending their victories on the battlefield, inciting them against their polytheist rivals, and mocking the enemies of Islam. Some scholars have emphasized the significance of his role as “minister of Islamic propaganda” in proclaiming and spreading the new faith. ⁴⁴

After the conquest of Mecca, the need for hijā’ diminished to a large extent, as many of the targets of Ḥassān’s hijā’ converted to Islam. Ḥassān continued to play a key role in the conversion of various tribes who sent delegations to the Prophet around 630/631. In the case of the Tamīm delegation, the tribe’s best poets and orators came to Madina to compete with the Muslims in fakhr poetry and oratory. The Prophet called on

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⁴³ For more on this specific poem, see Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 194-195; and ‘Arifat, “Hassan b. Thabit, Diwan, No. 1: The Historical Background to a Composite Poem,” Journal of Semitic Studies 15, no. 2 (1970): 88-97. For the poem itself, see no. 1.

⁴⁴ Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 180.
 Hassan to recite poetry against their best poet al-Zibriq. According to the classical accounts, the Tamimi delegation was so impressed with the poem that they immediately converted to Islam.45

1.4 Hassan After the Death of the Prophet

The death of Muhammed in 632 was a crushing blow for Hassan that inspired him to compose the following mournful lines of lament (rithâ').46

By God, no woman has conceived and born
One like the apostle, the prophet of mercy and the guide

Nor has there walked on the surface of the earth
One more faithful to the protection of a neighbor or to a promise

Than he who was the light that shone on us
Blessed in his deeds, just, and rightly guided

Hassan receded from public life after 632, composing poetry only rarely and appearing infrequently in the accounts of Muslim historians and scholars. Not only had


46 No. 132, v. 2-4. For Guillaume’s translation of these lines, see Ibn Hishâm, The Life of Muhammed, 690.
he lost his status as poet laureate, but he “lost his moorings and was isolated and marginalized.”

During the period of the “rightly-guided caliphs” (al-khulafā’ al-rāshidūn) from 632 to 661, the role of poetry diminished and came to be viewed with suspicion. In one incident related in the hadīth literature, Ḥassān was reprimanded by ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph, for reciting poetry in the mosque. Ḥassān defensively responded that he had recited poetry there when someone far greater than ‘Umar was present and reminded the caliph that the Prophet had said that his poetry was inspired by Gabriel (Jibrīl).

Another indication of his diminished importance can be seen in the following account found in both Kitāb al-aghānī and Kitāb al-‘umda. One day, al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām, one of the first converts to Islam, was walking by a group of ansār to whom Ḥassān was reciting poetry, but no one was listening. Al-‘Awwām rebuked them and stated that the Prophet himself used to listen to Ḥassān and that they should never be too busy to listen to his poetry.

Ḥassān’s loyalty to his friends and his tribe remained strong even at the end of his life. According to al-Ṭabarānī, throughout his old age Ḥassān was a committed supporter of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, the third caliph. Ḥassān’s close connection to ‘Uthmān is considered to be a result of the fact that when the muhājirūn first immigrated to Madina each immigrant was paired with a Madinan “adoptive” brother, and ‘Uthmān was assigned to

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47 Shahīd BASIC, 2.2:454 (forthcoming).

48 Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qurashī, Sahīh Muslim, 7:162-3. This version of the hadīth is narrated on the authority of Abū Hūrayra. See also Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī 4:143-144; and Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq, 2:132-134.

Hassān’s brother Aws. Before ‘Uthmān’s murder in 656, Hassān is reported to have traveled with ‘Alī and other members of muḥājirūn and anṣār to try to convince the Egyptian rebels not to attack ‘Uthmān. Later, Ḥassān is listed among the few anṣār who were late in acknowledging ‘Alī to be the new caliph following ‘Uthmān’s death.⁵⁰

According to Kitāb al-aghānī, Ḥassān, along with the poet Ka‘b ibn Mālik and al-Nu‘mān ibn al-Bashīr, another anṣārī, met with ‘Alī and questioned him directly about the murder of ‘Uthmān. ‘Alī replied that ‘Uthmān had erred by acting selfishly, they had been wrong to be overly anxious, and that only God knew the truth. Ḥassān and his companions left unsatisfied with this answer and traveled directly to Mu‘āwiya in Damascus who rewarded them handsomely, giving Ḥassān one thousand dinars.⁵¹

Ḥassān’s sentimental side seems to have become more prominent in this later period of his life. The classical sources contain numerous reports of Ḥassān’s intensified affection and nostalgia for the Ghassānids. When he and his son, ‘Abd al-Rahmān, would attend gatherings where Ḥassān’s poetry on the Ghassānid was being performed, the elderly poet, who had lost his sight and become partially paralyzed, was reported to weep uncontrollably.⁵² The poet’s wistful reminiscence of the days of his youth moved him to

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compose several of his most poignant odes on the Ghassānids, two of which are translated and examined in depth in Part III.

It is possible that these bouts of melancholy and longing were inspired by the poet’s visit to al-Shām to meet with Mu‘āwiya where he would have seen the ruined palaces of his former patrons. Ḥassān’s affections for the Ghassānids may have been rekindled as a result of his interaction with the exiled Ghassānid king, Jabala ibn al-Ayham. Some accounts allege that Jabala, who led the Ghassānid troops against the Muslims at the battle of Yarmūk, converted to Islam then reverted to Christianity and fled to Constantinople when he discovered the extent of the egalitarian principles of Islam. Although other sources explicitly deny the conversion, many classical authors narrate an account of an envoy of the Muslim caliph being sent to Jabala in Constantinople.\footnote{On Jabala and his alleged apostasy and his interactions with Ḥassān, see Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:157-173. In some of the Kitāb al-aghānī accounts the caliph is said to be Mu‘āwiya, rather than ‘Umar.} According to Kitāb al-aghānī, an envoy of ‘Umar was sent to the Byzantine capital to convince Jabala to return to Islam. The exiled king refused to reconsider his decision, but he entertained the messenger and impressed him with his lavish lifestyle. While listening to Ḥassān’s poetry performed by singing slave girls, Jabala described to the envoy the Ghassānid locales mentioned in the odes, then inquired about his former poet. Upon hearing that the aged Ḥassān had lost his sight, Jabala entrusted the messenger with a large monetary gift and fine robes of silk brocade for the poet. When the messenger returned and told the caliph about Jabala’s gift for Ḥassān, ‘Umar sent for the blind poet:

So, he came, led by his guide. When he drew close he greeted him and said, “Oh Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, truly I sense the breezes of the house of Jafna [the
Ghassānids] ‘Umar said, “God desires to bless you and raise you up through him, in spite of him [Jabala]. He has brought you assistance.” Then he left while Hassan recited some verses (in praise of Jabala).… A man in ‘Umar’s presence said, “Are you reminiscing on a tribe of kings that was destroyed and annihilated by God?!” Ḥassān said, “Who is (that) man?” He said, “Muzanī.” Hassan said, “By God, if not for the fact that the ancestors in your tribe were with the Prophet, I would wring your neck!” Ḥassān said, “What did my bosom friend offer me and what did he say to you?” He [the messenger] said, “He said that if I found you alive then I should pay it to you, but if I found that you had died, then I should throw the robes over your grave and buy she-camels and slaughter them there. Ḥassān said, “I wish you had found me dead and done that.”

The dates cited for Ḥassān’s death range from 659 to 673. It seems a likely year for his death is 661 when he is said to have visited Mu‘āwiya to pay homage to him shortly after he became caliph. This second visit to Mu‘āwiya is the last appearance of Ḥassān in the classical sources. No mention is made of any particular illness or cause of death, so it is likely that he died of natural causes after a long and exceptionally full life.

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54 Literally this phrase means, “I would put a pigeon collar around your neck.”

55 Abū al-Faraj al-İsfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:167-168. For the verses Ḥassān composed on Jabala, see poem 261.


57 See Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq, 2:124-127 and 2:189-190 who quotes sources claiming different death dates for the poet, ranging from prior to 660 to as late as 673. ‘Arafat and al-Naṣṣ contend that it is likely that Ḥassān’s death was closer to the earlier end of the suggested dates, near the beginning of Mu‘āwiya’s reign. See ‘Arafat, introduction to Dīwān, 3; and al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān, 88.
Chapter 2: Ḥassān’s Literary and Intellectual Milieu: The Ghassānids

2.1 The Near East on the Eve of Islam

In order to understand the literary milieu in which Ḥassān composed his poetry, it is first necessary to examine the broader socio-political currents in the region at the time. This chapter begins with an overview of the historical context of the sixth century, focusing on the political and military role Ḥassān’s patrons, the Ghassānids, played in the ongoing conflict between the Byzantines and the Persians. Next, the chapter outlines the history of the tribe, its migration from south Arabia, and the development of its relationship with the Byzantine Empire. The Christianity practiced by the Ghassānids will be examined. A review of the scholarly literature on the dynasty demonstrates the history of the myth of Ghassānid nomadism. The chapter concludes with a summary of recent scholarship refuting this myth and outlines the evidence supporting the sedentary nature of the Ghassānids and their fervor for architectural projects, both religious and secular.

The Near East of the sixth century was dominated by an enduring power struggle between two imperial superpowers, the Roman Byzantines and the Persian Sasanids. The Byzantine Empire, or Later Roman Empire, had its capital in Constantinople and ruled most of the western Mediterranean basin, including Anatolia, Greece, Italy, Egypt, and North Africa, while the Sasanid Empire was based at Ctesiphon, near modern-day Baghdad, and controlled today’s Iran, Iraq, and parts of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkey. The two empires fought countless wars and skirmishes between the fourth and
sixth centuries, and the frontier lands located between their empires were a frequent battlefield.¹

Both the Byzantines and the Sasanids relied on Arab vassal states in the border regions between their empires and the Arabian Peninsula. The Ghassānid dynasty defended the Byzantine frontier provinces along the eastern border and served as a buffer between Byzantium and the Arab nomads. The Sasanids patronized the Arab Lakhmid dynasty, based at al-Ḥīra in present-day Iraq. The Ghassānid kingdom was an Arabic-speaking, sedentary dynasty with capitals in Jalliq and Jābiya.² The Ghassānid kings were devout Monophysite Christians who traced their lineage to a distant Arab migration from Yemen.

South of the territories occupied by the Ghassānids and Lakhmids and out of reach of direct imperial rule lay the Arabian Peninsula. As a remote frontier of the empires, Arabia was politically and culturally less structured than the rest of the Near East, and it encompassed a diverse range of lifestyles, especially economic. The desert and steppe regions of the peninsula lent themselves to a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of


² In the recensions of Ḥassān’s dīwān the capital city of Jalliq is usually voweled Jilliq. Shahîd has argued the name itself is the Arabic version of the Latin *Gallica*, the third legion of the Roman army stationed in Syria. For this reason, the term has been vocalized Jalliq throughout this study. For this and a detailed analysis on the etymology and history of Jalliq, see Shahîd, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1, pt. 2, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 105-115. Henceforth, this work will be cited as Shahîd, *BASIC*, 1.2.
life, while oasis towns, such as Yathrib and al-Yamāma, sustained larger sedentary populations.  

Arabian society was organized into close-knit, continually evolving kinship groups, each of which was further divided into smaller clans. Tribal elders, or shaykhs, were the most powerful members of this stateless society, yet, even their authority was in a constant state of flux. Tribal association was the basis for identity and protection among the nomadic, semi-nomadic, and sedentary Arabs. Tribal or group loyalty (‘ašabīya) was an essential principle, as was the belief in the importance of bloodlines and noble descent. Often, tribes would engage in intertribal warfare based on the concept of family/group vendetta by which a tribe would attempt to restore its honor through the enforcement of the principle of lex talionis, the law of retaliation.

Most of the Arabs loosely adhered to a pagan religious system in which various local deities were honored. The Arabs believed that the desert was full of spirits who often lived in sacred objects, and belief in oracles and magic was strong. There is evidence that to some Allāh was the supreme god, while to others he was one of many, including his daughters al-Lāt, Manāt, and al-‘Uzzā. The value system of Arabia was not, however, based on this pagan religion but was rooted in the concept of murū’a. The term murū’a literally translates as “virility,” but it encompasses a much broader set of virtues,  

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3 It is important to note that due to its geography and monsoon rains, the historical experience of south Arabia differs greatly from the rest of the peninsula and provides an even greater degree of diversity to the economic experiences in pre-Islamic Arabia; however, it is outside of the scope of this dissertation and it will not be dealt with here.

including bravery, loyalty, generosity, hospitality, and honor. This system of morals has been referred to as “tribal humanism.” In the words of Maxime Rodinson, “Man was the ultimate measure of things.” The only factor that limited man and his potential was fate (dahr). The poetry of the pre-Islamic Arabs often reflects the viewpoint that there is nothing beyond this life.

Fred McGraw Donner has argued that pre-Islamic northern and central Arabia were characterized by competition among various tribal confederations and by the ongoing and cyclical struggle between these tribal confederations and the larger states in the surrounding area, such as the Byzantines, Sasanids, and the south Arabian kingdoms. Thus, despite its remote location, Arabia was not completely isolated from the more powerful empires of the era. The strategic location of Arabia with regard to international trade further linked it to the surrounding states.

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8 Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, 48-49.
2.2 Ghassānid History and Relationship to the Byzantine Empire

Few details are known about the early history of the Ghassānids. As a sub-group of the Arabian tribal confederation of Azd, the Ghassānids originated in south Arabia where the tribe lived in close proximity to the highly sophisticated and sedentary south Arabs. At some point, the exact date and circumstances are unknown, the Ghassānids, along with other Arabs in the Azd tribal grouping, migrated north through western Arabia, stopping along the way in several sedentary centers. At each of these locations, some of the migrants remained. Those who stayed in Najrān came to be known as the Ballārith tribe, those who stayed in Mecca were the Khuzā‘a, and those who remained in Yathrib were divided into the Aws and the Khazraj, both subdivisions of the Azd tribe. It is this historical and tribal connection that explains why Ḥassān considered himself to be related to the Ghassānids; they were all members of the broader Azd tribe.

Around the end of the fifth century, the Ghassānids settled in the region which later came to be known as Bilād al-Shām. Several other Arab tribes, including the Sāliḥids, the current foederati of the Byzantines, resided in the area. The term foederati refers to a client relationship between a vassal, or federate, tribe and the Byzantine Empire in which the foederati provided military support to the Byzantine army. In less

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9 Tribal genealogies are often problematic and can be based on conflicting “genealogical systems.” Some accounts include the Ghassānids within Azd, while others do not. See the following entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* for a system that does not include Ghassān in the Azd tribal confederation. G. Strenziok, “Azd,” in *EI*, 1:811-813. Yet, sources on the Ghassānids almost always place the tribe within the broader Azd grouping. For this reason, and because it is evident from his poetry that Ḥassān considered the Ghassānids part of the Azd tribe, they will be regarded as such throughout this dissertation.

10 The migration from Yemen is also shrouded in mystery. For a medieval Arabic account of the migration, see Ḥamza ibn al-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb tārīkh snī mulūk al-ard wa-al-‘anbiyā‘* (Berlin, Kaviani, n.d.), 76-77.
than twenty years, the Ghassānids superseded the Salīḥids in this role. They accepted Christianity and agreed to pay tribute to the Byzantine Empire. In this client relationship, the Ghassānids received regular subsidies and provided mobile contingents of cavalry to support the Byzantine army in the war against the Persian Sasanids. The Ghassānid kings were accorded the title of *phylarch*, local ruler, and wore the crown of a client king.

Additionally, the Ghassānids fought the Arab vassals of the Persians, the Lakhmids, defended the empire against raids from the nomadic Arab tribes in the peninsula, and protected Byzantine commercial interests along the spice route. As a result of this interaction, the Ghassānids were integrated into the Roman/Byzantine military system and learned their methods of war. Prior to the sixth century, the Byzantines had engaged other tribes as *foederati*, including the Arab Tanūkhids and the Salīḥids in the fourth and fifth centuries respectively. Of the federate tribes, the Ghassānids were the most integrated into Byzantine culture. Nonetheless, they maintained their Arab identity. This federate phase in Ghassānid history lasted for roughly a century and a half.

As mentioned above, the region in which the Ghassānids settled is roughly synonymous with the lands that came to be known as Bilād al-Shām in the Islamic period. The main power base of the Ghassānids was the Byzantine Provincia Arabia, which included the regions Batanaea (Bathanīya), Trachonitis (al-Lajā) and Auranitis (Hawrān).11 Ghassānid presence extended into Phoenice Libanensis, including Damascus and the surrounding region; Palaestina Secunda, the location of the Ghassānid capital

11 Many of the locales associated with the Ghassānids have both Greek names familiar to scholars of Byzantium and the Roman Empire and Arabic names. In these cases, the standard Greek name will be listed first, followed by the Arabic name in parenthesis. After the first reference, the Arabic term will be used.
Jābiya in Golan (al-Jawlān); and Palaestina Tertia, which included the Negev and Sinai, as well as the former territories of the Nabataeans and Palmyrenes. At the peak of their power, Ghassānid hegemony stretched from the Euphrates in the north to Ayla, modern-day Eilat, in the south, and their sphere of influence reached into the Ḥijāz. Ghassānid territory during Ḥassān’s years as court poet would have encompassed the modern nations of Syria and Jordan.

2.3 The Ghassānids and Christianity

It is likely that the Ghassānids adopted Monophysite Christianity during the reign of Emperor Anastasius (r. 491-518). The distinction between Monophysite and Dyophysite Christianity centers on a theological debate regarding the nature of the incarnation. The Monophysites insisted that Christ had a single, divine nature, while the Dyophysites argued for two distinct natures, one human and one divine. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Dyophysite position was adopted as orthodox Christian doctrine, hence the term Chalcedonian refers to the Dyophysite, now orthodox, position on the incarnation. The Ghassānids remained loyal proponents of Monophysite doctrine even after it lost favor with the Byzantine rulers and the Monophysite church in al-Shām was disestablished by the Chalcedonian emperor Justin I (r. 518-527). In fact, the famous Ghassānid king known to the Greeks as Arethas and to the Arabs as al-Ḥārith ibn Jabala13

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13 From this point on, this study will refer to him as al-Ḥārith.
(r. 529-569) succeeded in reviving the church with the assistance of the devout Monophysite Empress Theodora and ordaining two Monophysite bishops, Jacob Baradaeus and Theodore, who played a vital role in sustaining the Monophysite movement in the region. Furthermore, the Ghassânids built churches and monasteries throughout their lands and engaged in missionary activities in the Arabian Peninsula.\(^\text{14}\) This commitment to Monophysitism damaged their relations with later Chalcedonian Byzantine Emperors, culminating in the arrest and exile of the Ghassânid king Mundhir (r. 569-582) in 582 and of his son Nu’mān in 584.

The Chalcedonian emperor Justinian I (r. 527-565) worked to reconcile the Monophysite movement in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt with the orthodox Chalcedonian position. Yet, Justinian’s impact on Ghassânid history is not only from a religious standpoint but also from a military one. In reaction to the outbreak of war with Persia, Justinian reorganized the defense of his eastern border, unifying military command under two individuals, the Armenian Sittas and the Ghassânid al-Ḥārith. Sittas was responsible for the northern section of the Byzantine border, while al-Ḥārith was to control and direct the Arab tribes along the southern frontier. In 529, Justinian elevated al-Ḥārith to the status of archphylarch, or commander-in-chief of all the Arab tribes, and conferred on him the title *Basileus*, roughly translated “the dignity of king.” According to Procopius,

\(^14\) For a more detailed account of the Christianity of the Ghassânids, see the work, Shahíd, *BASIC*, 1.2. Hassān’s exposure to the Christianity of the Ghassânids is discussed in the context of poem 123. See Chapter 2, Part III.
the sixth-century historian of the eastern Roman empire, this was “a thing which among the Romans had never before been done.”  

The history of the Ghassānid dynasty was brought to an end with two crushing invasions. First, the Persians entered northern al-Shām in 611 and within three years they had occupied all Ghassānid and Byzantine lands territory in al-Shām. This military occupation is described poignantly in two of Ḥassān’s poems. Between the period of the Persian conquest and the defeat of the Byzantines by the Muslims at the battle of Yarmūk in 636, Ghassānid history is not well documented. Various Ghassānid rulers may have controlled different areas, and there is evidence that some Ghassānids continued to participate in Byzantine military campaigns. The last Ghassānid king, Jabala ibn al-Ayham, led a contingent of Arab forces in the army of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius at the battle of Yarmūk. After the Muslim victory, Jabala and some of the other Ghassānids who had fought in the battle retreated to Anatolia with the Byzantine army, while other Ghassānids remained in Bilād al-Shām.  

16 See poems 84 and 158.  
2.4 Sources on the Ghassānids and the Myth of Nomadism

Although soundly refuted by recent scholarship, the myth of Ghassānid nomadism is directly relevant to this study and it will, therefore, be discussed briefly here. The inaccurate image of the Ghassānids as wandering nomads can be traced to the sixth-century historian Procopius. A chief source for Byzantine history during the reign of Justinian and a contemporary source on the Ghassānids, Procopius was strongly biased against the Ghassānids, especially King al-Ḥārith. Not only does he accuse al-Ḥārith of treachery, commenting that “Arethas [al-Ḥārith] was either extremely unfortunate in every inroad and every conflict, or else he turned traitor as quickly as he could," but he also downplays the Ghassānid role in Byzantium’s eastern defense. Procopius fails to mention any Ghassānid structures or towns, implying that the Ghassānids had no fixed dwellings. This fit well into the general stereotype of Arabs as wild and nomadic “Saracens” which was often found in contemporary Greek sources. Byzantine historians after Procopius persisted in this representation, deemphasizing the Ghassānid role in the Byzantine wars with the Persians and their role in the defense of Byzantium’s eastern frontier in general. The destruction of many Ghassānid buildings during the Persian occupation, the influx of pastoralists into Bilād al-Shām following the Muslim conquest of the region, and the tendency of the Umayyads to build new structures on top of previous Ghassānid buildings all contributed to the image of Ghassānids as nomads. Later wars, such as the Crusades and the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, further destroyed traces of Ghassānid architecture.

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In the nineteenth century, Johann Gottfried Wetzstein, a Prussian diplomat and Orientalist, made great strides in the identification of Ghassānid toponyms and the cartography of the Ghassānid region, but he did little to dispel the myth of Ghassānid nomadism.\textsuperscript{21} The first scholar to devote a study solely to the Ghassānids was the renowned German Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke. Published in 1887, his monograph entitled \textit{Die Ghassānischen Fürsten aus dem Hause Gafna’s} remained the standard history of the dynasty for over a century.\textsuperscript{22} One of Nöldeke’s greatest contributions to the field was his contention that in order to recreate Ghassānid history, scholars must look at Greek, Syriac, and Arabic sources contemporary to the period. In this case, the relevant Arabic sources are the poems composed on the Ghassānids by Ḥassān and other poets. Although Nöldeke does not deal explicitly with this issue of nomadism, his work was substantially influenced by Wetzstein’s scholarship.\textsuperscript{23} Virtually all Western scholars after Nöldeke have accepted the nomad myth.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For a more detailed analysis of the “pastoralization of the Ghassānids,” including information on historians such as John of Ephesus and technical vocabulary that has contributed to the myth, see Shahīd, \textit{BASIC}, 2.1:1-15 and 2.1:355-364.
\item For more on Umayyad buildings constructed on top of Ghassānid ones, see the description of the Ghassānid tower at Haliorama at Qaṣr al-Hayr al-Ghārī in Shahīd, \textit{BASIC}, 2.1:206-210.
\item Wetzstein’s opinion on Ghassānid culture is ambiguous. One of his works states that the Ghassānids were sedentary, while a later book contradicts this and presents them as nomads. See both Johann Gottfried Wetzstein, \textit{Reisebericht über Haurān und die Trachonen} (Berlin: n.p., 1860); and Wetzstein, \textit{Ausgewählte Griechische und Lateinische Inschriften gesammelt auf Reisen in den Trachonen und um das Haurângbirge} (Berlin: n.p., 1864).
\item According to Shahīd, due to this reliance on Wetzstein, Nöldeke’s work gives the “general impression” of nomadism, without explicitly stating this. See Shahīd, \textit{BASIC}, 2.1:8.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
2.5 The Ghassānids as a Sedentary Dynasty

Despite this tendency of Western scholarship to depict the Ghassānids as pastoralists, classical Arabic scholarship has consistently portrayed the Ghassānids as a settled dynasty. In his work of poetic criticism, Kitāb al-ʿumda, eleventh-century literary critic Ibn Rashīq interprets one of Ḥassān’s verses as praise for the sedentary lifestyle of the Ghassānids. Ibn Rashīq explains that the poet is lauding Ghassānid royalty by differentiating them from “those who journeyed and sought pasture” (ašḥāb al-riḥla wa-al-intijāʾ) or who “moved from place to place.” In his biographical dictionary Tārikh madīnat Dimashq, twelfth-century scholar Ibn al-ʿAsākir records a khabar (report) attributed to the renowned ʿAbbāsid literary scholar al-Asmaʿī. In this account, al-Asmaʿī offers a similar commentary on Ḥassān’s verse. He confirms that the poet’s intention was to praise the Ghassānids for being “kings who stayed in one place.” Al-Asmaʿī expands this, noting that they were “town dwellers (ahl madar), not the people of the tent pole who migrate (yatanaqqalūn).” The phrase ahl madar, which literally translates “the people of the clay,” refers to the substance used to build houses, which distinguishes sedentary peoples from nomads.

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24 This verse and others will be discussed in depth in Chapter 1, Part II.


26 Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārikh madīnat Dimashq, 2:172.

27 See the definition of the phrase in Lisān al-ʿArab which explains the distinction between ahl al-madar and ahl al-wabar (nomads). Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿArab, 5:162.
Another key passage from the Arabic prose sources that illustrates the high value the Ghassānids placed on architecture, especially the construction of religious buildings, can be found in the geographical work of Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-‘Umarī. The following passage, attributed by al-‘Umarī to Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī, describes the Ghassānids in relation to their fellow Christians of south Arabian descent:

There were three groups of Christians from Yemen who used to compete with each other in (the construction of) churches, their ornamentation, and the beauty of their structure: the house of al-Mundhir in al-Ḥira, the Ghassānids in al-Shām, and the house of al-Ḥārīth ibn Ka‘b in Najrān. Their monasteries were lofty structures in locations that abounded with trees, gardens, and streams. They used to make their furnishings of gold and silver and their curtains of silk brocade. They put mosaics in their walls, and gold in the ceilings.\(^{28}\)

Another Arabic prose source from the Islamic period that provides valuable information on the sedentary lifestyle of the Ghassānids is the tenth-century chronology Kitāb tārīkh sinī mulūk al-ard wa-‘anbiyā’ by Ḥamza ibn al-Ḥasan al-Īṣfahānī. This work devotes a chapter to the Ghassānids with special attention given to their structures.\(^{29}\)

Ḥamza presents a chronology of Ghassānid rulers and notes the structures built by each.

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In all, more than thirty structures are ascribed to the Ghassānids, ranging from castles to reservoirs.\footnote{One major problem associated with Ḥamza’s chronology is that it covers 616 years of Ghassānid history, far more than the century and a half that the Ghassānids were known to have been in the service of the Byzantine Empire. One explanation is that Ḥamza listed rulers diachronically rather than synchronously. For example, he lists the six sons of al-Ḥārith as ruling one after another. Shahīd suggests the possibility that a number of minor phylarchs may have ruled various areas simultaneously. For Shahīd’s opinion, see Shahīd, \textit{BASIC}, 2.1:312-313. For Nöldeke’s more skeptical opinion on the problems with Ḥamza, see Nöldeke, \textit{Die Ghassānischen Fürsten}, 6-7 and 49-52.}

Similarly, the \textit{Mu’jam al-buldān} of the thirteenth-century geographer Yāqūt provides a wealth of material on the towns of the Ghassānids. Yāqūt states that some of his information on the Ghassānids relies on a work called \textit{Akhbār mulūk Ghassān}. Although this source is no longer extant, it seems that this historical work on the Ghassānids dated from the Umayyad period and was used not only by Yāqūt but also by Ya’qūbī in the ninth century and Ḥamza in the tenth century.\footnote{For a detailed reconstruction of the contents of \textit{Akhbār mulūk Ghassān}, see Shahīd, \textit{BASIC}, 2.1:364-374. For Yāqūt’s reference to \textit{Akhbār mulūk Ghassān}, see Yāqūt, \textit{Mu’jam al-buldān}, 3:47.}

A final Arabic source that can be mined for details on Ghassānid life, especially Ghassānid social history, is the wealth of Arabic poetry composed by individuals from various Arabian tribes who flocked to the courts of the Ghassānids from all parts of the peninsula. Unlike the Arabic prose accounts mentioned above, these sources can be considered contemporary primary sources. In addition to the protagonist of this study, Ḥassān, the most important poet to compose on the Ghassānids was al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, a slightly older contemporary of Ḥassān who is most famous for his \textit{dālīya} ode which is included among some versions of the \textit{mu’allaqāt}. Other poets who visited
the Ghassānids include Ḥātim, the chief of the Ṭayyi’ tribe, Imrū’ al-Qays, Mutalammis, al-A’shā, Labīd, and ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm.32

Numerous primary source documents have come to light recently which support the depiction of the Ghassānids found in the Arabic sources and contradict their portrayal in traditional Byzantine historiography and in Western scholarship. The first scholar to compile these new sources and use them to refute the myth of nomadism was Irfan Shahîd. In his multi-volume series Byzantium and the Arabs, Shahîd employs Syriac, Greek, and Arabic sources, as well as epigraphical and archaeological evidence, to demonstrate that the Ghassānids were a sedentary, sophisticated, Christian Arab community that made essential contributions to the defense of the Byzantine empire and to the urbanization of the eastern frontier in the sixth century.33

These new sources include references to churches and monasteries constructed by the Ghassānids that suggest an explosion in religious architecture in Byzantine Syria in the sixth century. A series of letters in Syriac between the Monophysite bishops Jacob Baradaeus and Theodore and various churches, monasteries, and clerics in the provinces sheds light on the strength of the Ghassānid connection to the Monophysite creed and their fervor for religious architecture. The letters concern a theological debate, known as the Tritheistic controversy, that raged within the Monophysite community. This dispute

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32 For more on each of these poets and on their Ghassānid poems, see Shahid, BASIC, 2.1:220-305.

33 For the entire series which covers the relationship between the Arabs and the Byzantines from the fourth century, see Shahid, Byzantium and the Arabs, 6 vols. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984-2002). The publication of a volume on the economic, social, and cultural history of the Ghassānids in the sixth century is pending.
centered on an interpretation of the Trinity deemed heretical by the Monophysite leadership. The Ghassānid king al-Ḥārith was closely involved in the struggle and repeatedly attempted to reconcile the heretical bishops to the Monophysite doctrine. In addition to the content of the letters, which confirms the regional commitment to Monophysitism, information about religious life in al-Shām can be gathered from the signatories to the letters. For example, one letter is signed by the abbots of 137 monasteries in the province of Arabia alone. The presence of this many Monophysite monasteries in only one of the provinces under Ghassānid control illustrates the strength of the Monophysite movement in the region and the wide dissemination of Christianity in general. Additionally, the letter is only signed by monasteries, and it seems likely that the number of churches may have far exceeded the monasteries.34

Archaeological discoveries of relevant structures and inscriptions have confirmed the Ghassānids to have been both settled and interested in architecture. Three buildings discovered in archaeological excavations over the past century shown to have Ghassānid connections include: a praetorium (audience hall) at Sergiopolis (Ruṣāfa), the tower of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, and a palatial house at Hayyāt.35 These discoveries confirm that

34 These letters can be found in the Documenta ad Origines Monophysitarum, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Syri, ser. 2, vol. 37, 1907. This section of the study is based on Shahid’s translation and treatment of the correspondence. See Shahid, BASIC, 1.2:805-835. For an analysis of the monastery names and locations, see Nöldeke, “Zur Topographie und Geschichte des Damascenischen Gebietes und der Haurāngegend,” Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 29 (1876): 419-444.

Ghassānid architecture included monumental structures, such as palaces, monasteries, churches, and mansions. In addition to these larger, more formal structures, the archaeological record demonstrates that the countryside in the region protected by the Ghassānids, especially in the Bathanīya region near the capital of Jābiya, flourished in the sixth century. Many small villages devoted to agriculture and cultivation prospered during this period, and their strong sense of safety and lack of concern for defense can be seen in the unique architecture of their homes and the lack of defensive towers.36

It has been shown in this chapter that Ghassānids were a sedentary and highly sophisticated dynasty that contributed significantly to the military defense of the eastern borders of the Byzantine Empire. The Azdī affiliation of the Ghassānids and their distant Yemeni lineage explains Ḥassān’s feeling of familial connection to the Ghassānids. The strong commitment of the Ghassānids to Christianity was linked to their affinity for religious and secular architecture. As will be seen in Parts II and III, these distinctive features of Ghassānid culture are evident in the poetry Ḥassān composed on them.

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Southern Syria, (Leyden: Brill, 1919), 362-363. For the inscription at al-Hayyāt, see Shahid, BASIC, 1.1:489-492.
Chapter 3: Review of the Literature on Ḥassān

3.1 Sources on Jāhilī History and Literature

This chapter presents a detailed literature review of the available sources on Ḥassān ibn Thābit. It begins with a brief overview of the sources for jāhilī literature and history in general and discusses the problematic nature of the source material for this period. The attacks on the corpus of pre-Islamic poetry will be discussed. The chapter then turns to recent developments in the study of oral formulaic poetry and notes how the Parry/Lord thesis impacts the study of pre-Islamic poetry and the ongoing debate on sources and authenticity. Next, the classical sources on Ḥassān are examined in depth and the critical assessment of these classical commentators on Ḥassān and his poetry is presented. Finally, the modern sources on Ḥassān are surveyed, including Arab and Western works. It will be shown that, in general, both classical and modern scholars have focused their attention on Ḥassān’s Islamic poetry and his role as a companion of the Prophet.

The reliability of the source material on the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods has been a subject of great contention.¹ The rise of Islam initiated a critical transition in Arabia from a primarily oral to a written culture. As this new civilization emerged, scholars became increasingly interested in the preservation of the Arabic language, the

¹ Perhaps the most controversial work to attack the reliability of the Islamic sources on the early history of Islam and the pre-Islamic period is Patricia Crone and Michael Cook’s Hagarism, the Making of the Islamic World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). It is important to note that despite Crone’s sweeping rejection of Islamic sources in Hagarism, her views have subsequently softened and she has demonstrated a greater willingness to work with the Muslim sources in her later works. See Crone, Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); and Crone, Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
language of the Qurʾān, and the codification of Islamic history. In this context, they began to write down the wealth of poetry from the jāhiliya which had previously been transmitted orally through narrators (singular: rāwī, plural: ruwā). Concerns about the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry date back to the medieval period when Muslim scholars carefully addressed the issue and attempted to weed out inauthentic versions of earlier poetry. During the ’Abbāsid period scholars devoted themselves to trying to find the “authentic” versions of jāhilī poems. The general assumption was that after the false and inferior material was eliminated the remaining poetry could be assumed to be authentic.

The first major attack on this assumption was made in 1925 by Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn in his work Fī al-shīʿr al-jāhili. Ḥusayn argued that the body of pre-Islamic poetry was not composed by individuals from the jāhiliya, but rather it was fabricated during the ’Abbāsid period for a host of motives, ranging from the desire of grammarians to explain ambiguous terms in the Qurʾān to the need for authoritative texts to prove to non-Arab subjects the high level of Arab culture. In the same year, David Samuel Margoliouth published an article that reached very similar conclusions, citing internal evidence in pre-Islamic poetry indicating composition after the revelation of the Qurʾān. He also argued that the term “poet” in the pre-Islamic period referred to “fortune tellers,” or soothsayers, and not poets in the classical sense. Although A. J. Arberry soundly refuted these

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arguments in *Seven Odes* by responding to each of Margoliouth’s points, some scholars have argued that the debate over authenticity stems from a lack of appreciation for the fundamental difference between poetry composed in a primarily oral culture and the poetry of a literate society. In 1972, James Monroe published an article arguing that even the most brilliant scholars defending the corpus of Arabic poetry had “failed to provide an overall theoretical explanation of the nature of pre-Islamic poetry.” This explanation, Monroe contends, can be found in the application of the Parry/Lord theory of oral formulaic composition to pre-Islamic poetry.

The earliest manifestation of the Parry/Lord theory appeared in 1928 when Milman Parry examined the formulaic nature of Homeric texts and concluded that Homer was an oral poet. The theory behind his conclusion was elaborated and expanded by Parry’s assistant, Albert Lord, in his critical work *The Singer of Tales* which studied the oral epic poetry sung by contemporary illiterate Yugoslavian poets. The author argues that oral poetry can be distinguished from written poetry, and he outlines the criteria for identifying orally composed poetry. These criteria are the following: formulaic diction, avoidance of enjambement (breaking a syntactic unit over two lines, roughly equivalent

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to the term *taḍmīn* in Arabic), and recurrence of fixed themes. 8 Both Monroe and Michael Zwettler have attempted to demonstrate the applicability of the Parry/Lord theory to Arabic poetry. 9 Although their analyses differ on several points, both Monroe and Zwettler insist that studying pre-Islamic poetry in the light of “oral-formulaic composition” enhances our understanding and reveals the authenticity of the poetry. Authenticity, in this context, does not mean that the poetry is identical to the “original” recited by the poet, but as Monroe contends, “What has been preserved of it is probably not an exact recording of what a great poet once said, but a fairly close picture of it.” 10

Other scholars have explicitly rejected the application of the Parry/Lord theory to Arabic poetry. In 1970, Mary Catherine Bateson outlined several features of *jāhilī* poetry that do not fit with the oral-formulaic model, including the “high premium on originality of phrasing” and “a dislike of repetition.” 11 Similarly, Gregor Schoeler’s *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* criticizes the application of the Parry/Lord theory to Arabic poetry claiming it is a logical error to assert that if all oral poetry is formulaic, then it follows that all formulaic poetry is oral. 12 He distinguishes the complex *qaṣīda* from

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12 Schoeler cites a number of examples from German poetry that display all of these features but were not orally composed. See Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl, ed. James E. Montgomery (London: Routledge, 2006), 90-91. For more on Schoeler’s criticism of the application of this theory of Arabic poetry, see his chapter “Oral poetry theory and Arabic literature” in the abovementioned work, 87-110.
shorter forms of poetry that may have been produced spontaneously. Both Schoeler and Bateson note that classical Arabic scholars often describe the process of composing a *qāṣīda* as consuming up to a year. A critical work outlining the prevalence of writing during the pre-Islamic period and arguing for a written tradition for *jāhilī* poetry is Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad’s *Maṣādir al-shiʿr al-jāhilī wa-qīmatuhā al-tārīkhīya*. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve more deeply into this ongoing debate. It is sufficient to note that the subject of poetic composition and transmission has brought renewed attention to the culture of pre-Islamic Arabia, spurring a reexamination of *jāhilī* culture and its level of literacy. That there were pockets of sophisticated, highly literate culture in the Lakhmid capital of Ḥīra and the Ghassānid capitals of Jalliq and Jābiya is undisputed. Nonetheless, beyond these urban centers, pre-Islamic Arabia was primarily an oral culture, and whatever its means of composition and subsequent transmission, poetry was designed to be recited before a live audience. It is important to emphasize the overlapping orality of *jāhilī* culture and the growing written tradition, especially in the Ghassānid towns and cities where Ḥassān was composing and reciting his poetry. Despite the reality of possible embellishments by later Bedouin transmitters and

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13 Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, 94-95; and Bateson, *Structural Continuity in Poetry*, 34.


15 See Chapter 2, Part I on the Ghassānids for more on the culture of Ḥassān’s patrons.

16 At the time of their composition, Ḥassān’s odes would have been intended for a live audience, yet, today we encounter them as readers approaching a written text. For this reason, when analyzing Ḥassān’s poetry this dissertation uses the terms “the reader” and “the audience” interchangeably.
extensive editing, or even forgeries, by later scholars, it is now generally accepted that the body of pre-Islamic poetry as a whole is genuine.  

17 The authenticity of Ḥassān’s poetry and the motivations for forgeries in his name in particular is addressed in greater depth in Chapter 4, Part I.

3.2 Classical Sources on Ḥassān

In light of Ḥassān’s role in early Islamic history and his close relationship to the Prophet Muḥammad, it is only natural that most of the scholarly literature, both classical and modern, has focused on this period in his life. As a companion of the Prophet, Ḥassān’s life was considered instructive due to his interactions with the Prophet. His Islamic compositions have fascinated scholars as examples of poetry composed in the defense of Islam and because of the information his poetry provides on critical battles in early Islamic history. Perhaps the earliest extant work in which Ḥassān plays a significant role is the biography (ṣīra) of the Prophet, written by Ibn Isḥaq (d. 767) and compiled and edited by Ibn Hishām (d. 834). Here Ḥassān features prominently as one of the Muslim poets reciting verses on battles, lampooning enemies of Islam, and praising the Prophet. The body of hadīth literature provides reports (akhbār) on Ḥassān, with an almost exclusive focus on the Islamic period. Ḥassān’s status as one of the Prophet’s

companions (ṣahāba) also means that he is included in numerous biographical
dictionaries, such as Usd al-ghāba by ‘Izz al-Dîn ibn al-Athîr (d. 1233) and the dictionary
of the companions of the Prophet al-Istī’āb fî ma’rifat al-aşhâb by the Andalusian
scholar Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 1070).

Literary scholars of the ‘Abbāsid period who preserved much of the canon of pre-
Islamic and early Islamic poetry in their poetic compilations provide revealing entries on
Ḥassân. These works usually include samples of his poetry accompanied by biographical
information, such as anecdotes from the poet’s life and reports on the circumstances
surrounding the composition of particular poems. The most expansive of these ‘Abbāsid
literary sources is tenth-century Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfahānî’s immense compendium Kitāb
al-aghānî. This work provides a wide array of literary lore on Ḥassân, including reports
on his life in the jāhilîya and his relationship to the Ghassânids. Two ninth-century poetic
anthologies that provide additional biographical information on Ḥassân and selections
from his poetry are Ibn Qutayba’s Kitāb al-shī’r wa-al-shuʿarā’ and Ibn Sallām al-
Jumâhî’s Ṭabaqât fuhûl al-shuʿarâ’. Ibn Rashīq’s eleventh-century work of literary
theory and criticism Kitāb al-ʿumda fî ʿinā‘at al-shī’r wa-naqdihi is also a critical source
on Ḥassân. Historical works from the Islamic period contain valuable information on
Ḥassân. Of particular relevance are al-Ṭabarî’s Tārîkh al-umam wa-al-mulûk and Ibn
ʿAsākir’s Tārîkh madînat Dimashq.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18} The classical Arabic works on Ḥassân are the main sources for reconstructing the biography of
the poet. As such, these sources were cited in full in Chapter 1 on Ḥassân’s life. For full citations of each
source, refer to the footnotes to Chapter 1 or the bibliography.
These classical source materials are used throughout this study to situate Ḩassān’s Ghassānid poems in their proper literary and historical context and to piece together the circumstances surrounding the composition of the poems. Although outside the scope of this dissertation, an interesting possibility for future research would be a careful examination of these later sources with the aim of exploring the dominant discourse of the ‘Abbāsid period based on how these scholars chose to represent Ḩassān. This preliminary study suggests that Ḩassān’s symbolic importance to these chroniclers and scholars is his embodiment of the transition from the “ignorance” of the jāhilīya to the “wisdom” of the Islamic period.

A unifying thread that runs through many of the classical writings on Ḩassān is the critical assessment these scholars provide on his poetry. In the classical works, Ḩassān is usually categorized as being a mukhadram with a long lifespan and one of the poets of the towns. In his chapter on the poets of the Arab towns, Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī lists five towns in the Arabian Peninsula and notes that the town with the best poets was Madina. Among the poets of Madina, the most poetic (ash‘aruhum) was Ḩassān. Kitāb al-aghānī reiterates this, noting that Ḩassān was one of the master poets (fäḥl min faḥūl al-shu‘arā’) and the most poetic of the townsfolk (ash‘ar ahl al-madar).¹⁹

Despite this praise, some classical literary critics detect a decline in the quality of Ḩassān’s poetry after his conversion to Islam. Al-Aṣma‘ī (d. 828) is quoted by several

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scholars expressing variations on this sentiment. The following quote is attributed to al-Aşma‘ī by the tenth-century scholar al-Marzubānī:

It is way of poetry that when it is made to enter to gate of goodness (bāb al-khayr) it goes soft (lāna). Don‘t you see that Ḥassān ibn Thābit excelled in the jāhilīya and in Islam, but when his poetry entered the door of goodness, as in his elegies of the Prophet, Ḥamza, Ja‘far, and others, it went soft? The way of poetry is the way of the poetry of the masters, like Imrū‘ al-Qays, Zuhayr, and al-Nābihga, with descriptions of abodes, departing camp, hijā’, panegyrics, love poetry on women, descriptions of onagers, horses, wars, and boasting. But when it [poetry] is made to enter the gate of goodness, it goes soft.20

Ibn Qutayba cites a similar quote from al-Aşma‘ī reiterating that poetry is weakened when it “enters the good” (dakhala al-khayr). “This (is the case of) Ḥassān, one of the luminaries of the jāhilīya. But when Islam came, his poetry declined.”21 Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr also quote this passage from al-Aşmā‘ī, and they link the issue to the alleged connection between poetry and lying. “Excellence in poetry means excess in what the poet says. This is lying which is forbidden by Islam, so the poetry which is produced is not good.”22

3.3 Modern Arabic Sources on Ḥassān

In the modern period, several books on Ḥassān have been published in Arabic, and these works tend to concentrate on Ḥassān’s Islamic poetry. Issues of the utmost importance to contemporary scholars include the extent of Ḥassān’s commitment to

20 Al-Marzubānī, al-Muwashshah, 78.
21 Ibn Qutayba, al-Shī‘r wa-al-shu‘arā‘, 224.
Islam, whether his poetry suffered from a decline in quality following his conversion, and the presence of seemingly un-Islamic elements, such as wine drinking, in his later poetry. A case in point is Rabī‘a Abū al-Fādil’s book Ḥassān ibn Thābit al-anṣārī, shā‘ir al-Islām. This work focuses on the Islamic period and mentions the jāhilīya only to put Ḥassān’s later work into context and to emphasize the dramatic transformation from this period to the Islamic era. Very little attention is paid to Ḥassān’s life or compositions prior to the rise of Islam.

By far the most exhaustive volume on Ḥassān is Muḥammad Ṭāhir Darwīsh’s Ḥassān ibn Thābit. In addition to providing the reader with extensive historical and cultural background, Darwīsh presents a comparative analysis of Ḥassān’s poetry in the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods. Although Darwīsh does acknowledge the depth of the connection between Ḥassān and the Ghassānid dynasty, fewer than twenty pages out of a 500-page work are devoted to this relationship. Another work that provides a detailed picture of Ḥassān, while retaining a focus on the Islamic period, is Iḥsān al-Naṣṣ’s Ḥassān ibn Thābit, ḥayātuḥu wa-shi‘ruḥu. Of the modern Arabic sources on Ḥassān, al-Naṣṣ’s analysis is often the most insightful, and he offers a critical analysis of contradictory accounts in the classical sources.

The modern commentators also address the decline of Ḥassān’s poetry in the Islamic period alleged by the classical scholars. The contemporary scholars tend to either vigorously defend Ḥassān’s Islamic poetry or present justifications for his weakness, such

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as the poet’s advanced age during the later period. Al-Naṣṣ allows that some weakness can be seen in Ḥassān’s Islamic poetry, but only in certain genres. In those genres that truly resonated with the poet, such as hijā’ and fakhr, Ḥassān’s Islamic compositions are more impressive than those he composed in the jāhilī period.24 Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Jumʿa, another contemporary scholar of Ḥassān, suggests that what the classical scholars intended by the term “weakness” (layn) is nothing more than a sweetness (‘udhūba) that characterizes Ḥassān’s Islamic poetry. He contends that this was due to the poet’s desire to spread the Islamic message in a truthful manner, free from elements of pre-Islamic poetry, such as dishonesty and exaggeration.25 Similarly, Darwīsh notes that if layn means sweetness and mildness (damātha), this demonstrates that Ḥassān was influenced by Islam and the style of the Qur’ān. According to Darwīsh, if al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s claim does imply that Ḥassān’s later poetry declined, it is an “unfair” judgment that is not supported by a careful study of Ḥassān’s poetry.26 Abū al-Fāḍil dismisses al-ʿAṣmaʿī’s criticism by reminding the reader that al-ʿAṣmaʿī was no fan of poetry and considered it a temporal nuisance.27 Shawqī Ḍayf claims that Ḥassān’s poetry did not “go soft” in the Islamic period but the numerous forgeries and inauthentic poems included in the dīwān are weaker than Ḥassān’s authentic poetry from the jāhilī period.28

24 Al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān, 211.
25 Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Jumʿa, Ḥassān ibn Thābit (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965), 38.
26 Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 504-507.
Although it is tempting to agree with the contemporary commentators and insist that there are indeed good specimens among Ḥassān’s later poetry, it is important to remember that al-Asma’ī may have had access to a wider sampling of Ḥassān’s compositions than remain extant today. Comparatively little of Ḥassān’s pre-Islamic poetry has been preserved, especially his poetry on the Ghassānids. It is quite likely that the judgment passed by al-Asma’ī in the early ninth century was based on an analysis of Ḥassān’s pre-Islamic poems that have not survived. More will be said of the scarcity of extant poetry on the Ghassānids in Chapter 4, Part I.

Ḥassān’s life and poetry are also treated in contemporary Arabic works on literary history. These entries on Ḥassān usually reiterate the accounts found in the classical sources and do not generally present new analyses of Ḥassān’s compositions or literary contribution. One representative example is the short chapter on Ḥassān in ‘Umar Farrūkh’s history of Arabic literature.29 Yahyā Wuhayyib Jubūrī’s Shi‘r al-mukhadramīn wa-athr al-Islām fīhi discusses Ḥassān’s poetry within the context of the poetry of the mukhadramūn.30


30 Yahyā Wuhayyib Jubūrī, Shi‘r al-mukhadramīn wa-athr al-Islām fīhi (Baghdad: Maṭābi‘ al-Irshād, 1964). For another work that includes a substantive section on Ḥassān and acknowledges the poet’s close relationship with the Ghassānids, see Khalaf Allāh, Dirāsāt fī al-adab al-Islāmī, 30-59.
3.4 Modern Western Sources on Ḥassān

Very little has been written about Ḥassān in European languages. Some scholars of Arabic literature have dealt with Ḥassān to a limited extent in the context of other topical studies. Jaroslav Stetkevych includes Ḥassān in his analysis of the development of the nasīb, and M. C. Lyons devotes a chapter on Ḥassān in his study of identity in classical Arabic poetry.\(^\text{31}\) The scholarship of Walid ‘Arafat on Ḥassān is extensive, but has focused almost exclusively on authenticity.\(^\text{32}\)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the German Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke was the first to use the poetry of Ḥassān, as well as the poetry of others who composed on the Ghasānids, such as al-Nābīgha, to reconstruct the history of the Ghassānīd dynasty, which was the focus on his interest.\(^\text{33}\) Nöldeke’s goal was to establish a chronology of Ghassānīd kings. His work is notable for its recognition of Ḥassān’s strong connection to the Ghassānids and his use of the poetry to supplement his historical study of the dynasty itself. Like the Arab scholars, Nöldeke addresses the degree of Ḥassān’s commitment to Islam. He famously noted that, at his core, Ḥassān was influenced very little by the spirit of Islam. Even after his conversion, the poet’s dreams remained rooted in the jāhili past and his love of wine, women, and song.\(^\text{34}\) Although this comment appears only in a


\(^{32}\) ‘Arafat’s contribution will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4, Part I where the issue of authenticity is treated.

\(^{33}\) Nöldeke, *Die Ghassânischen Fürsten*, 1-62.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 42n1.
footnote in Nöldeke’s work, it is frequently cited by Arab authors who attempt to refute it by demonstrating the influence of Islam on Ḥassān’s poetry.

Shahîd’s monumental series *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* was mentioned in Chapter 2 in the context of its importance for the study of the Ghassānid dynasty. In addition to this contribution, in the second volume of the series Shahîd carefully examines Ḥassān’s poetry and uses it as a source for social and cultural history of the Ghassānid dynasty. Shahîd is the first scholar to recognize Ḥassān as an important historical source not only for early Islamic history but also for Byzantine and Persian histories. This work has served as a welcome resource during the completion of this study.

As can be seen from the sources cited above, Arabic scholarship on Ḥassān has focused almost completely on Islamic topics, while Western scholarship has been limited and, with the exception of recent work, confined to technical issues of authenticity and chronology. Both classical and modern scholarship has viewed Ḥassān’s most important role in the service of Islam. Virtually no interest has been shown in Ḥassān's background as a poet of the Christian Ghassānid court.
Chapter 4: Ḫassān, the Poetry

4.1 History of the Dīwān

Having presented an overview of the poet’s biography and addressed the scholarly literature on Ḫassān, this chapter turns to Ḫassān’s poetry itself. The transmission of the poems and the history of the publication of the editions of the dīwān are discussed. This chapter then addresses the challenge of determining authenticity and describes the scholarship that has been undertaken in this field. The poems of Ḫassān are discussed and divided into genres and historical periods. The chapter concludes with the definition and identification of Ḫassān’s Ghassānid poems which will be used throughout the remainder of this study.

Eleven full or partial editions of Ḫassān's dīwān have been published, and all but two are based on the recension of the ʿAbbāsid scholar of poetry and history Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 860) as transmitted by al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sukkarī (d. 888). The most complete version of the dīwān was edited and compiled by ʿArafat. Published in 1971, this edition utilizes the manuscripts used in the other editions, the earliest of which dates from the eleventh century, as well as three previously unavailable manuscripts. One of these new manuscripts, manuscript ʿafii62760/afii62796, is especially useful because it is the only manuscript not based on the traditional recension of Ibn Ḥabīb. This manuscript contains additional poems, variant readings, and the insightful comments of the ninth-century scholar al-ʿAdawī.¹ ʿArafat’s edition is comprised of two volumes, the first of which contains the texts of the poems, including the previously unpublished poems, variant readings, and

¹ For more on this and other manuscripts used in the Dīwān, see Dīwān, 1:14-23.
limited notes. The second volume includes all of the scholia found in each of the manuscripts and ‘Arafat’s own commentary. All notes are carefully coded so the contribution of each scholar is evident. In cases where it is not possible to attribute the marginal commentary in a manuscript to one scholar, ‘Arafat clearly notes which manuscripts included the particular comment. Unless otherwise noted, all poetry quoted in this study will be from ‘Arafat’s edition.\(^2\)

Another important version of the *diwan* is Sayyid Ḥanafī Ḥasanayn’s edition published in 1974.\(^3\) The editor of this *diwan* seems to have had no knowledge of ‘Arafat’s version, despite the fact that it was published three years earlier. But, Ḥasanayn’s volume does draw on the same new manuscript (manuscript 260) used by ‘Arafat. This edition also provides perceptive commentary and a detailed section on the classical sources for Ḥassān’s poetry.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Barqūqī’s *Sharḥ Diwān Ḥassān ibn Thābit* published in 1929 is no longer the most complete version of the *diwan*, but al-Barqūqī includes more detailed lexical notes than are found in any of the other editions.\(^4\) His commentary often incorporates the scholia of the manuscripts available to him, in addition to his own comments. Al-Barqūqī does not distinguish between notes from the scholia and his own personal notes, nor does he comment on the authenticity of the poems. His *diwan*, like all

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\(^2\) See the general notes preceding this study for the citation method employed for poetry and commentary from the *Diwan*.

\(^3\) *Diwan Ḥassān ibn Thābit*, ed. Sayyid Ḥanafī Ḥasanayn (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb, 1974).

of the remaining eight published editions, is based solely on the recension of Ibn Ḥabīb and does not reflect the manuscript _written by ‘Arafat and Ḥanafi Ḥasanayn.

4.2 Authenticity

As mentioned in Chapter 3, determining the authenticity of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry is a thorny issue. Ḥassān in particular has been singled out by medieval scholars as having been a common target for forged poetry. In the words of Ibn Sallām al-Jumāḥī, “More poetry was ascribed to him [Ḥassān] than to anyone else. When the Quraysh squabbled among themselves and slandered each other, they attributed to him a great deal of poetry which is unsifted.”\(^5\) As a companion of the Prophet, Ḥassān was a key historical figure and a logical choice for forgeries. Falsely ascribing a poem to Ḥassān could boost a tribe’s status by creating a connection between the tribe or an ancestor and the Prophet. As a result of this, the poetry attributed to him encompasses a range of skill. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in al-İstī’āb fī ma’rifat al-aşḥāb quotes a brief dialogue between al-Asma’ī and Abū Ṣātim on this topic. Al-Asma’ī remarked that Ḥassān was one of the “master poets” (āḥad fuḥūl al-shuʿarā’), then Abū Ṣātim countered that much of Ḥassān’s poetry was weak. Al-Asma’ī defended Ḥassān, noting that “many things were attributed to him falsely” (tunsab ilayhi ashyā’ lā taṣīḥ ʿanhu).\(^6\) One example of poetry being produced to suit a particular purpose can be seen in an account in Kitāb al-aghānī where the descendent of a man who had been disgraced at the battle of Badr


\(^6\) Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-İstī’āb fī ma’rifat al-aşḥāb, 1:246.
attempted to bribe someone to claim that Ḥassān had recited certain verses to the Prophet. In the end, the verses were attributed to Ibn al-Ziba’rāʾ.\(^7\)

Classical scholars have long expressed doubt in the authenticity of the poetry found in Ibn Ishāq’s sīra of the Prophet, a source which attributes a number of poems to Ḥassān. The most damaging criticism of Ibn Ishāq is from Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī who remarks, “Among those who corrupted and ruined (ḥajjānahu) poetry and passed on all manner of scum (gūthāʾ) was Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn Yasār…He used to apologize, saying ‘I know nothing of poetry. It is brought to me and I pass it on.’ But that was no excuse for him.”\(^8\) Scholars such as Yaqūt and Ibn al-Nadīm also questioned the lack of judgment employed by Ibn Ishāq. Yaqūt notes that Ibn Ishāq was considered a scandal among contemporary scholars.\(^9\) At times, even Ibn Ishāq expresses his own reservations on the authorship of certain poems. In one instance, he cites a triplet ascribed to Ḥassān, but notes that the poet’s grandson claimed only one of these three lines was actually recited by Ḥassān. He also prefaces certain lines of poetry with phrases such as “they allege” (zaʾamūʾ), perhaps suggesting an element of reservation on the part of the

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\(^8\) Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī, *Ṭabaqāt fihāl al-shuʿarāʾ*, 1:7-8. Recent scholarship has suggested that the sīra literature may have developed to serve an exegetical function and should not be considered an independent source to interpret the Qurʾān. See Fred Donner, “The historical context,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23-39, especially 33-35.

compiler himself. Additionally, many of the poems or verses cited in the sīra and in other sources are ascribed to more than one poet.\textsuperscript{10}

Ibn Hishām (d. 834), the editor of Ibn Ishāq’s sīra, notes that not all of the poetry cited by Ibn Ishāq is genuine and goes to great lengths to question authorities on poetry to determine authenticity. Some poems cited by Ibn Ishāq are not included by Ibn Hishām, while others are included but only with expressed reservations.\textsuperscript{11} Of the seventy-eight poems attributed to Ḥassān in the sīra, Ibn Hishām rejects fifteen.\textsuperscript{12} Another indication that not all the poems attributed to Ḥassān in the sīra were widely accepted can be seen in Ibn Ḥabīb’s compilation of the dīwān. Ibn Ḥabīb died about thirty years after Ibn Hishām and probably would have been familiar with the sīra. Yet, Ibn Ḥabīb does not include twenty-eight of the poems attributed to Ḥassān in the sīra in his recension of the dīwān. Also, al-Sukkarī, a philologist from Baghdad who transmitted Ḥassān’s dīwān directly from Ibn Ḥabīb, includes the following note preceding the final twenty-eight poems: “This is the last of Ḥassān’s poetry dictated by Ibn Ḥabīb. The remainder I copied out of his books. He did not dictate it.”\textsuperscript{13} ʿArafat contends that these poems were not accidentally omitted by Ibn Ḥabīb, especially considering that these poems share certain

\textsuperscript{10} See ʿArafat, “Early Critics,” 455 and 463; and A. Guillaume, introduction to The Life of Muhammad, xix.

\textsuperscript{11} For one example of Ibn Hishām including part of a poem in the text, but expressing the doubts of the authorities on poetry on Ḥassān’s authorship, see Ibn Hishām, The Life of Muhammad, 761.

\textsuperscript{12} ʿArafat, introduction to Dīwān, 24; and ʿArafat, “Early Critics,” 33.

\textsuperscript{13} Dīwān, 2:268.
features. All of the poems against the Umayyads, including the slanderous poems directed at Hind bint ‘Utba, are included among these twenty-eight poems.\footnote{‘Arafat, “Early Critics,” 457.}

Even the authority of Ibn Ḥabīb’s recension is not completely without doubt. According to one source, Ibn Ḥabīb abruptly ended a public recitation of Ḥassān’s poetry when he discovered the learned scholar Tha‘lab was present. ‘Arafat has pointed out that though this may point to a natural shyness and deference to a renowned scholar, it could have been “the result of inner doubts as to what he was dictating.”\footnote{For the account, see Yāqūt, Mu‘jam al-udabā‘ al-ma‘rūf bi-al-irshād al-arīb ilā ma‘rīfat al-adīb (London: Luzac, 1930), 6:475. For ‘Arafat’s analysis, see ‘Arafat, “Early Critics,” 457.}

Considering the remainder of the story, it seems more likely that the account merely illustrates that Ibn Ḥabīb was not as knowledgeable as Tha‘lab. When he was questioned as to the meaning of a particular verse, Ibn Ḥabīb was unable to provide an explanation.

To understand the motivations for some of the forgeries, the history of the anṣār following the death of the Prophet must be examined. Once the powerful, well-respected “helpers” of the Prophet, the prestige of the anṣār was greatly diminished following the wars of conquest in the early years of Islam. Rebels in Madina rejected the authority of the second Umayyad caliph Yazīd, leading to a confrontation with Yazīd’s army at the battle of al-Ḥarra in 683. The Umayyads are reported to have sacked Madina and humiliated the rebels.\footnote{On the battle of al-Ḥarra, see al-Ṭabarī, History: The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya, trans. I. K. A. Howard (Albany: State University of New York, 1990), 201-220. For more on the anṣār during this period, see ‘Arafat, introduction to Diwān, 26-27.} Later members of the anṣār often composed poetry praising their
history and lineage, harkening back to the days when their prestige was at its peak and they provided valuable assistance to the Prophet.

The scholar who has contributed the most to the study of authenticity in Ḥassān’s poetry is ‘Arafat. He has published a number of articles which directly address the topic of forgeries in the Dīwān and identify certain poems attributed to Ḥassān as later additions. His doctoral dissertation is devoted solely to examining the authenticity of each poem attributed to Ḥassān.\(^\text{17}\) While ‘Arafat may have overstated the case for forgeries within the Dīwān, he does supply specific criteria to determine if a poem is a forgery. According to ‘Arafat, signs pointing to a forgery include disregard for rules of grammar and syntax, anachronistic terminology, a lack of feeling, significant padding, and often “extreme inferiority.”\(^\text{18}\) ‘Arafat divides Ḥassān’s extant poetry into nine categories, only the first of which is truly authentic. The remaining eight categories are forgeries by varying authors, ranging from later descendents of the ansār attempting to revive their old status to chroniclers adding poems on battles and other historical events.


for the sake of their narratives to Shi‘ī authors composing eulogies on members of the Prophet’s family.

James Monroe is the only scholar to address the issue of the authenticity of Ḥassān’s poetry specifically from the standpoint of orality. Monroe has attempted to apply the theory of oral-formulaic poetry, described in Chapter 3, to the poems attributed to Ḥassān in Ibn Ishāq’s sīra. He asserts that these poems reflect a living tradition of oral poetry and attempting to determine which of the poems are forgeries and which are genuine is misguided. According to Monroe, these poems should be considered part of an ongoing and constantly evolving “Ḥassān cycle.”

This brief summary has shown the complexity of establishing authenticity in the poetry attributed to Ḥassān, especially in his compositions dating from the Islamic period. None of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems have been implicated by any scholar, classical or modern, as being a forgery. In fact, there is strong evidence that the poetry devoted to the Ghassānids is the most likely to be authentic. Even the highly critical ‘Arafat has noted that the poems recalling time spent with the Ghassānids are “probably genuine” and they “survived because of their real value.” While the motives for composing false poetry

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19 ‘Arafat notes that this does not imply that Ḥassān did not compose poetry on the battles but that his poetry was lost by the later period.

20 For more on his categories of forgeries, see ‘Arafat, introduction to Dīwān, 28-31.


22 Ibid., 371.

from the Islamic period and ascribing it to Ḥassān are significant, there would be little benefit to forging verses on the poet’s pre-Islamic connections. In Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry, the poet harkens back to a defeated dynasty, a topic of very little interest to later Muslim scholars.

The scarcity of Ḥassān’s compositions on the Ghassānids reflects the priorities of the later Muslim compilers and their lack of interest in this period of the poet’s life. ‘Arafat writes, “Unfortunately none of the poetry in which Ḥassān eulogized his Ghassānid patrons seems to have survived. This is probably understandable, but it is nevertheless a great loss, for Ḥassān must then have been in his most glorious days when he was able to visit his royal patrons and ‘relatives’ in Syria.”

Several poems and fragments from the jāhilī period praise the Ghassānids in the context of other topics, but none of Ḥassān’s pre-Islamic panegyrics on the Ghassānids have been preserved. The extant odes devoted fully to the Ghassānids were composed at the end of the poet’s life when he was reminiscing on his former patrons. If Ḥassān composed these poems on the Ghassānids many years after their fall, it must be assumed that he had composed many more poems when he was in their employ. To have earned the status of “court poet” he would have composed numerous full-length panegyrics on his patrons. Evidence that Ḥassān composed many panegyrics on the Ghassānids that are now lost to us can be seen in several references made by classical sources.

In a passage of rhymed prose composed in the tenth century, al-Hamadhānī admires Ḥassān’s odes, saying “He composed beautiful odes (al-qasā’id al-ḥisān) on

24 Ibid., 547.
them [the Ghassānids]. Time passes but they are new. These bones decay in the ground, but these beauties remain among mankind.”

Use of the term qašā‘īd here is particularly significant as it implies full-length odes, rather than the fragments of praise that remain today. Only one true full qašīda devoted to the Ghassānids remains.

Further reference to the lost Ghassānid odes can be seen in a letter by al-Jāḥiẓ on the topic of Christianity. Al-Jāḥiẓ describes the Christianity of the Ghassānid kings as being famous among the Arabs (*Naṣrānīyat al-Nu‘mān wa-mulūk Ghassān mashhūra fī al-‘Arab*). He continues, “If not for that [the fact that it was so well-known] I would prove it by citing the well-known poems (*al-ash‘ār al-ma‘rūfa*) and the accurate reports (*al-akhbār al-ṣāhiḥa*).” Although he does not cite the poets who composed these odes by name, it is likely that al-Jāḥiẓ was referring to the poetry of Ḥassān and the other main poet of the Ghassānids, al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī.

As was the case with al-Hamadhānī’s passage, it is unlikely that al-Jāḥiẓ would use the phrase “well-known poems” to reference the few poems that have been preserved to today. These passages suggest that several centuries after Ḥassān’s death, many more of his odes must have remained in

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26 Poem 13 is translated and analyzed in Chapter 1, Part III.

27 The name al-Nu‘mān here refers to the Lakhmid king and not the Ghassānid.

circulation. Furthermore, it appears that these qaṣāʾid may have discussed extensively the Christianity of the Ghassānids.

To the ‘Abbāsid-era Muslim scholars who compiled Ḥassān’s poetry, the importance of Ḥassān’s role as the poet of the Prophet far outweighed his earlier life in al-Shām. Beyond this lack of interest in Ḥassān’s poetry on the Ghassānids, the political and military conflict that raged between the Muslim Empire and the Byzantines during the ‘Abbāsid period is likely to have contributed to their disinclination to preserve these odes. This would have been especially true during periods when the rivalry between the two empires had assumed religious dimensions, such as during the Crusades. That the poet of the Prophet had once composed odes praising a Christian vassal state of the Byzantines may have been a matter of some embarrassment for the Muslim scholars compiling his dīwān. Even the reality that Ḥassān was formerly a loyal court poet of any non-Muslim dynasty could have been viewed as a threat to the validity of his poetry on the Prophet and Islam. As seen by the ninth- and tenth-century passages cited above, more of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid odes remained at the beginning of this period, but over the following centuries they were not preserved. The scarcity of extant poems on the Ghassānids is, perhaps, part of the reason they have been so consistently overlooked by scholars and forgers alike, presenting the scholar with a unique opportunity to study a group of Ḥassān’s poems which are likely to be authentic.
4.3 Divisions within the Poetry

i. Genres

The Diwân includes 372 poems,29 and many of these compositions encompass more than one genre or purpose (gharaḏ, plural: aghrāḏ). The genres include most of the traditional pre-Islamic topics, such as boasting (fakhr), lampoon (hijāʾ), love poetry (ghazal), description (wasf), panegyric (madh), elegy (rithāʾ), wine lyric (khamrīya) and poems composed on battles.30 An especially high number of Ḥassān’s poems are hijāʾ or fakhr.

ii. Historical Periods

The poems in the Diwân are arranged neither by genre, nor by historical period. Longer and more famous poems seem to be located near the beginning of the Diwân. For example, the first poem is the well-known hamzīya on the conquest of Mecca. Some poems can be dated based on their content alone, such as the many poems mentioning the Prophet and mocking his enemies by name. Other poems include an introduction which notes the context in which the poem was composed. For example, poem 5 is introduced as having been composed following the battle of Uḥud.31 Based on these indicators, the majority of Ḥassān’s extant poetry is from the Islamic period. According to Darwīš,

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29 Editions other than ‘Arafat’s contain fewer poems. This is because ‘Arafat included manuscripts that were previously unavailable to the earlier editors.

30 For useful charts on the genres of poetry in the diwān and on the historical periods in which they were composed, see Darwīš, Ḥassān, 511-519.

31 See Diwān, 1:41.
only fifty-two of Ḥassān’s 225 poems date from the pre-Islamic period. Of these fifty-two, thirty-nine are fragments containing less than fifteen lines. It is likely that this dominance of the Islamic period reflects the priorities of the later Muslim compilers and transmitters, rather than Ḥassān’s actual production.

iii. Identification and Categorization of Ghassānid Poems

This study is devoted to Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems, but these poems are not grouped as such in any of the versions of the dīwān. The twenty-six poems included in this study have been identified as Ghassānid based on one, or a combination, of the following criteria: internal textual reference to the Ghassānids, recognition as Ghassānid by the scholia or commentators (including prefatory material in the manuscripts of the dīwān), and presence of known Ghassānid toponyms in the text. There is significant overlap between these categories because many poems contain more than one criteria (see table 1).

Based on these criteria the Ghassānid poems can be divided into two main categories. The first category includes those poems whose connection to the Ghassānids is noted in the scholia or mentioned overtly in the text. These poems can be considered to have a strong connection to the Ghassānids. The ten poems included in this category are

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32 Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 511. Darwīsh only includes 225 poems because his work is based on al-Barqūqī’s edition of the Dīwān which contains fewer poems than ‘Arafat’s more complete edition.

33 Scholia here refers to the marginal commentary of the manuscripts included in volume 2 of ‘Arafat’s edition of the Dīwān.

34 The tables of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems can be found at the end of this chapter, beginning on page 94.
the following: poems 13, 84, 87, 90, 123, 153, 158, 261, 266, and 322. Included in this category are poems whose link to the Ghassānids is found in the prefatory information in the manuscripts and included in the published versions of the dīwān. For example, poem 158 is preceded by the following statement: “He recited this on a man from Ghassān who was killed by the Persians.” Although occasionally this information is not matched with the appropriate poem, all compositions introduced as being connected to the Ghassānids will be considered as such in this study. At times, this material provides information on the occasion of the poem’s recitation. In poem 266, the prefatory information from Ibn ʿAsākir recounts a visit of Ḥassān to the Ghassānid court where Jabala ibn al-Ayham requests that he compose a poem on wine. In this case, the introduction links the short poem to the Ghassānids, though the poem itself makes no mention of them.

Many of the poems in which the Ghassānids are explicitly mentioned in the scholia also include internal textual evidence. Textual evidence is defined as overt references in the poetic text to a known Ghassānid king, such as al-Ḥārith al-Jafnī (poem 90) and al-Nuʿmān (poem 5), or to the Ghassānids more broadly. Phrases indicating the group as a whole include, the root of Ghassān (jidhm Ghassān), the tribe of al-ʿAnqā’ (banū al-ʿAnqā’), the tribe of Māʾ al-Samāʾ (banū Māʾ al-Samāʾ), and the sons of Jafna (awlād Jafna).

35 Dīwān, 1:316.

36 The name al-Nuʿmān itself could point to either a Ghassānid or Lakhmid king, but this verse also states the al-Nuʿmān was at Jābiya, the capital of the Ghassānids. For this reason, it is assumed the reference is to the Ghassānid king of this name.

37 Several of these designations refer to one of the legendary ancestors of the tribe or to the dynastic house of Jafna.
In addition to these full poems, the first category, poems with a strong connection to the Ghassānids, also includes five poems which contain isolated verses on the Ghassānids. These lines refer specifically to the Ghassānids, usually in the context of fakhr poems in which the poet praises the Ghassānids and links himself to them. For example, poem 4, the pre-Islamic ode Ḥassān is reported to have recited at the poetry competition at ‘Ukāz, contains three verses in which the poet extols his tribe for their connection to the Ghassānids, claiming that they had given birth to kings. These passing references to the Ghassānids occur even in Ḥassān’s Islamic poetry. When the delegation from the tribe of Tamīm presented themselves before the Prophet and Ḥassān famously recited poetry that caused them to convert to Islam, several verses in these poems mention the Ghassānid in favorable terms. In these lines, Ḥassān praises the ansār for their connection to the kings of al-Shām (poem 321b). Such poems clearly date from the Islamic period and mention the Ghassānids only in these isolated verses. In these cases, only the Ghassanid verses will be included in this analysis. Isolated verses which fall into category 1 and will be included in this study include those from the following: poems 4, 5, 77, 321a, and 321b (see table 2).

A second category of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry is identified by the poet’s reference to Ghassānid toponyms. These poems have a strong connection to the Ghassānids, often mentioning their capitals Jābīya and Jalliq and some of the main towns, such as Damascus. Yet, their connection to the Ghassānīd may not be as well-established.

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38 Several different poems have been preserved which claim to be the one Ḥassān recited to the Tamīm delegation. For Ḥassān’s relevant verses on the Ghassānids in each of these, see no. 24, v. 3; no. 321a v. 5; and no. 321b, v. 2-3.
as in the first category of poems. Full poems included in this category are as follows: poems 23, 24, 27, 85, 105, 136, 245, and 309. Isolated verses or sections that fall into this category are found in poems 1, 16, and 103 (see table 3). As in the case of isolated verses in the first category, the famous ode on the conquest of Mecca is categorized as Ghassânid due to the presence of several place names found in the amatory prelude (nasîb), despite the fact that the ode itself is clearly Islamic. It should be noted that many of the poems in category 1 also reference toponyms from al-Shâm. This is common feature of Ḥassān’s Ghassânid poetry.

Shahîd’s detailed study of Ghassânid toponymy and historical geography is the source used to confirm the Ghassânid association of these place names.39 In this work, Shahîd identifies Ghassânid towns, villages, and structures based on references in contemporary Syriac, Greek, and Arabic literature, as well as modern archaeology. Each of the poems categorized by Shahîd as being associated with the Ghassânids is identified as Ghassânid in this study. This study also includes several poems not mentioned in Shahîd’s categorization in BASIC. This is due to the fact that Shahîd’s categorization in BASIC volume 2, part 1 was based solely on the presence of toponyms in the poems, as this was the topic of the work. These additional poems are as follows: poems 4, 77, 261, 266, 321, 321b, and 322.

Other poems in the Dīwān contain hints alluding to a Ghassânid connection but have not been categorized as Ghassânid. Poem 8 is a lengthy qaṣīda addressed to the

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39 See Shahîd, BASIC, 2.1:232-246. Shahîd is also the first scholar to propose a tripartite historical categorization of Ḥassān’s Ghassânid poetry.
poet’s beloved, Naḍīra. Shahīd has argued that the poem is Ghassānid and that Naḍīra may have been a Ghassānid princess. Clues in the text refer to palaces, kings, and perhaps even a Christian festival.\(^{40}\) The poem contains no overt references to the Ghassānids or place names in al-Shām, and the scholia and commentators have never suggested a Ghassānid link. For this reason, poem 8 has not been included in this study’s categorization of Ghassānid poetry. Another poem in the Dīwān that has a connection to the Ghassānids but is not included in this study is poem 345. This four-line poem mentions several Ghassānid toponyms and describes a tomb of a Ghassānid king. However, the poem is attributed to al-Nābigha in most of the sources, and it appears in his Dīwān. For this reason, poem 345 is not included in this study.\(^{41}\) Prefatory material to poem 156 notes that the ode was composed while Ḥassān was drinking in a tavern in al-Shām, but neither the poem nor the commentary includes references to the Ghassānids or to Ghassānid place names, and for this reason, it has not been included among Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry.

As a result of categorizing the poems based on the criteria mentioned above, the definition of Ghassānid poems employed in this study is not limited to those odes or fragments composed during the historical period during which Ḥassān was the court poet of the dynasty, approximately 600-614. In fact, several of the poems with the strongest connection to the Ghassānids were composed near the end of the poet’s life and long after

\(^{40}\) On this poem and Shahīd’s argument for its inclusion among the Ghassānid odes, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.2:175-177.

\(^{41}\) See ‘Arafat’s notes on this poem, Dīwān, 1:507.
the demise of the Ghassānids. Ḥassān’s extant Ghassānid poetry can be divided into three historical periods.

The first period extends from around 600, roughly the date of Ḥassān’s first visit to al-Shām, to 622, the year of the Muslim emigration (hijra) to Yathrib. Of the total twenty-six poems, fourteen date from this pre-Islamic period. The second period spans the decade in which Ḥassān was the Prophet’s “poet laureate,” from 622 to 632. Not surprisingly, there are no extant examples of poetry devoted solely to the Ghassānids from this period. Yet, seven poems from this period do contain isolated verses on the Ghassānids. The third and final period encompasses the years following the death of the Prophet to the end of the poet’s life, approximately 632-661. It is during this period that Ḥassān composed his most nostalgic odes on the Ghassānids. Tables 4a and 4b show the historical periodization of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry. Table 4b repeats the information presented in 4a with the addition of details about full poem versus isolated verses. This illustrates the fact that most of the poems composed between 622-632 that mention the Ghassānids do so in isolated verses rather than full poems.

As has been shown above and in the tables, Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems vary greatly in length, including full poems of up to thirty-three lines, shorter fragments (singular: qiṭ’a, plural: qiṭa‘), and isolated verses from longer poems. Many of the poems are short, ranging from two to ten lines. It is not known if these fragments once were part of larger odes that have not been preserved. The only full-length panegyric devoted to the Ghassānids is poem 13 which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 1, Part III. For the full Arabic texts of all the Ghassānid poems, refer to Appendices A-C.
Table 1

Evidence of Ghassānid Connection in Ḥassān’s Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem Number</th>
<th>Internal Textual Evidence</th>
<th>External Evidence (Scholia or Commentators)</th>
<th>Ghassānids Toponyms</th>
<th>Number of lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>10/31&lt;sup&gt;42&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>4/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>2/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>309</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
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<td>321a</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>322</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>42</sup> 10/31 indicates that of the thirty-one total verses, ten will be included in this study. See table 3 on isolated verses for which verses are included as Ghassānid. In the case of relatively short poems from the pre-Islamic period, such as poem 23, the entire poem is categorized as Ghassānid.
Table 2

**Isolated Ghassānid Verses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem Number</th>
<th>Verse Numbers included</th>
<th>Total Ghassānid Verses</th>
<th>Historical Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pre-Islamic(^{43})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>28, 35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pre-Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7, 10-12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>6, 8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>6, 7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>321a</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>321b</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Islamic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

**Strength of Association with the Ghassānids**

Category I (scholia or text itself):

- Full poems: 13, 84, 90, 123, 153, 158, 261, 266, 322 [9 total]
- Isolated verses: 4, 5, 24, 77, 321a, 321b [6 total]

Category II (toponyms):

- Full poems: 23, 27, 85, 87, 105, 136, 245, 309 [8 total]
- Isolated verses: 1, 16, 103 [3 total]

\(^{43}\) The composite character of poem 1 has been demonstrated by ‘Arafat. The Ghassānid section of the ode is the opening prelude which may have been composed in the pre-Islamic period. For this reason, poem 1 is categorized here as dating from the first of the three historical periods. The remainder of the poem is certainly Islamic; however, it will not be dealt with in this study. For ‘Arafat’s analysis of the poem see ‘Arafat, “Hassan b. Thabit, Diwan, No. 1: The Historical Background to a Composite Poem,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 15, no. 2 (1970): 88-97; and ‘Arafat, “A Critical Introduction,” 286-298.
Table 4a

Historical Periods of the Ghassānid Poetry

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Poem Number</th>
<th>First Period (600-622)</th>
<th>Second Period (622-632)</th>
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<sup>44</sup> Poems 84 and 158 have been categorized here as dating from the third period of Hassān’s life (632-661), but it is possible that they were composed earlier. Hassān visited al-Shām at least twice after the death of the Prophet in 632 and may have composed these odes then. However, very little is known about Hassān’s life between 614, the year of the Persian victory over the Ghassānids, and his conversion to Islam in the 620s. Hassān may have visited al-Shām during this period and composed these poems at that time. Due to the detailed description of the Persian occupation of the region, it is certain that the odes were composed after 614. See Shahīd, *BASIC*, 2.1:244n124.
Table 4b

**Historical Periods of the Ghassānid Poetry**
(including full poem versus isolated verses)

First period (600-622):
- Full poems: 23, 27, 85, 87, 90, 105, 136, 153, 245, 266, 309, 322
- Isolated verses: 4

Second period (622-632):
- Full poems: n/a
- Isolated verses: 1, 5, 16, 24, 103, 77, 321a, 321b

Third period (632-661):
- Full poems: 13, 84, 123, 158, 261
- Isolated verses: n/a
Conclusion to Part I

Ḥassān’s lifetime spanned a period of immense historical transition. At the time of his birth, the Byzantines and Persians were locked in a seemingly intractable power struggle. By the year of his death, the Sasanid Empire had been defeated and the Byzantines had been severely weakened by a new player on the international stage, the Arab Muslims. Ḥassān’s relationship with the Ghassānids, a dynasty that was swept away with the rise of Islam, can only be appreciated when placed into this broader historical context. The preservation of Ḥassān’s poetry and the accounts of his life must also be viewed through this lens. Beyond addressing the relevant context for the study of Ḥassān’s poetry, Part I has presented the source material on Ḥassān and addressed the tendency of scholarship to focus on his role as the “poet laureate” of the Prophet Muḥammad. Most of his Ghassānid poetry has been lost, and the poems that remain have attracted comparatively little scholarly attention. This section concluded with the identification of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems which form the basic texts for the analysis found in the remainder of the study. Thus, having situated the poet in his proper socio-political, literary, and intellectual contexts, it is now possible to turn to his Ghassānid poetry.
Part II: Poetry Analysis,
The Impact of Ghassānid Life on Ḥassān’s Poetry

Introduction to Part II

The poetry of the jāhilīya is inextricably linked to the desert landscape of the Arabian Peninsula, and many of the themes and motifs portrayed in this poetry are products of the nomadic lifestyle of the pastoral Arabs. In the words of Andras Hamori, “The desert was the true stage for poetry in the pre-Islamic period, and the life of the beduin tribe supplied the subject matter.”¹ The cultural values of the Arab nomads were dominant even among sedentary Arabs, and traditional concepts, such as kinship and lineage, can be seen in Ḥassān’s poetry. As was shown in the poet’s biography, Ḥassān excelled in genres such as fakhr that were rooted in tribal ‘asabīya. His stinging hijā’ mocked opponents using traditional jāhilī insults premised on a deeply-held belief in the importance of lineage, bloodlines, and kinship.

Although Ḥassān’s poetry reflects these desert values, his compositions also demonstrate his connection to the sedentary Ghassānid dynasty and their urban landscape. The following chapters will demonstrate the impact of urban culture on Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems by examining individual verses and sections from these poems. Chapter 1 explores the poet’s expressed preference for urban over rural life and his disdain for the lifestyle of the nomads which he often presents in his poetry in the form of comparisons. In one instance, he describes the Ḥijāz as the “nursling of misery and sorrow” (radī‘ al-jū‘ wa-al-bu‘s) and contrasts it to the lush, fertile terrain of al-

Shām. Next, Chapter 2 examines the poet’s use of urban terminology and argues that his selection of lexical items demonstrates a familiarity with an urban landscape. At times, Ḥassān employs more traditional vocabulary in new and innovative ways. Ḥassān’s treatment of the traditional deserted encampment (atlāl) motif is discussed and analyzed in Chapter 3. The poet’s innovative inversion of the amatory prelude (nasīb) is further evidence of his contempt for pastoral life. This chapter concludes with a brief comparison between Ḥassān and the witty and urbane poet of the ‘Abbāsid era, Abū Nuwās. Finally, Chapter 4 presents Ḥassān as a wine poet who plays on the motif of wine to further distinguish his sophisticated urban patrons from the Arab pastoralists.
Chapter 1: Ḥassān’s Preference for Urban over Pastoral Life

1.1 Quality of Life: “Ḥijāz is the Nursling of Hunger and Misery”

This chapter examines the methods Ḥassān employs to express an explicit preference for urban, or sedentary, life over the nomadic lifestyle of the desert. At times, Ḥassān draws a distinction between the quality of life in the two environments, setting the luxury of the cities against the hardship of the desert. He also contrasts the physical terrain of Arabia and al-Shām by extolling the fertility of al-Shām and complaining of the barrenness of the desert landscape. Finally, Ḥassān explicitly praises his patrons for being sedentary, a fact that he links to their security, bravery, and comfortable lifestyle. This chapter cites verses and longer passages (consisting of several verses) to demonstrate each of these points. Two short poems that address these themes directly, poems 90 and 245, are translated and discussed in depth.

One technique that Ḥassān relies on to demonstrate his preference for urban over pastoral life is to contrast the quality of life in al-Shām with that of Arabia. He praises the comfort and wealth enjoyed by the Ghassānids in al-Shām and disdains what he considers to be the more primitive lifestyle of the nomads. Ḥassān often uses the image of the desert colocynth plant (al-hanẓāl) to portray the bitter reality of life in the Ḥijāz. In contrast, the sweet wine of al-Shām is presented as proof of the superiority of the urban lifestyle of the Ghassānids. This distinction can be seen vividly in poem 13, Ḥassān’s most famous ode on the Ghassānids.¹ Beginning in the twelfth verse, Ḥassān lauds the

¹ For a translation and close reading of this entire ode, see Chapter 1, Part III.
generosity of the Ghassānids and depicts their habit of mixing wine with fresh cool water. He exclaims:\(^2\)

\[
\text{بَسُّونَ دُرِّيَاقَ الرَّحْيِ} \quad \text{وَلَمْ تُكنَّ}
\]

They were given the antidote of nectar as a drink
And their daughters were not called upon to break open the colocynth

The colocynth, a type of climbing vine in the gourd family, is frequently found in arid regions and yields extremely bitter fruit and seeds. *Lisān al-‘Arab* describes the ḥanzal as a bitter shrub (*al-shajar al-murr*) that causes camels who have eaten it to become ill.\(^3\) The term ḥanzal occurs often in pre-Islamic poetry and seems to be especially associated with the brigand poets (*al-ṣaʿālik*) who composed odes on their lives of extreme hardship outside the support system of the tribe. The term appears twice in the famous *muʿallaqa* ode of Imrūʿ al-Qays. In the first occurrence of the word, the poet weeps over a deserted encampment and likens himself to one who breaks open a colocynth. A footnote in his dīwān expands on the impact that breaking open a colocynth had on the one tasked with opening it: “The colocynth has a burning/heat (*ḥarāra*) that causes the eyes to cry.” Over time those who frequently break open the colocynth become immune to this “like one who was tormented by yearning and grief,” in this case the poet himself.\(^4\) The bitter taste of the colocynth is also mentioned in a poem by ‘Antara where he taunts his enemies, challenging them to drink mouthfuls of bitterness

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\(^2\) No. 13, v. 14


from his sword which he compares to the harsh juice of the colocynth. These references illustrate the association of the colocynth with bitterness, as well as the familiarity a contemporary listener would have had with the practice of breaking open the fruit in order to extract its seeds.

In poem 13, Ḥassān’s reference to the ḥanzal draws on this traditional usage of the term in jāhilī poetry but employs the term to emphasize the vast chasm between the lifestyles of the nomads and the urban Ghassānids. Ḥassān’s description of the wine as “the antidote of nectar” in the first hemistich stands in stark contrast to the ḥanzal. Unlike their nomadic counterparts, his patrons do not call on their daughters to break open colocynths. Here wine becomes the representative symbol of the luxury of Ghassānid life, while the colocynth is the emblem of the hardship of life in the desert. It is clear that to Ḥassān nectar-like wine (al-raḥīq) is superior to the bitter juice of the colocynth.

The term walā’id refers to “daughters,” or “maidens,” despite the suggestion of some commentators that it indicates the female servants of the Ghassānids. Even if the interpretation of walā’id as servants were accepted, the contrast between the royal Ghassānids and the nomads is stark - even their servants do not engage in an activities like the women of the desert. Al-Barqūqī, a proponent of the interpretation “servants,” states that the purpose of the verse is to distinguish the Ghassānids from the pastoral

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6 For other examples of the usage of the term al-hanzal by other poets of the mu‘allaqāt, see Albert Arazi and Salman Masalha, eds. al-‘Iqd al-thamīn fī dawāwīn al-shu‘arā’ al-sitta al-jāhilīyīn (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999), 393.

7 For more on the translation of the term walā’id, see Chapter 2, Part III; and Shahīd, BASIC, 2.2:291.
Arabs. He explains how Ḥassān demonstrates his preference for the Ghassānid life of affluence by describing their habit of giving their beautiful servant girls wine to drink. “They are not the ṣaʿālīk who sent their servant girls to break open the colocynth, as the Arabs did.”

The image of the colocynth appears again in poem 123 where Ḥassān describes the Ghassānid maidens, but this time it is in the context of their preparations for the Easter festivities. In line 7, Ḥassān vividly depicts the robes the young girls are wearing as they hasten to prepare for the upcoming holiday:

 Gathering saffron in white veils
Draped in robes of linen
Not distracted by resin or gum
Or with the extraction of the seeds of the colocynth (from the Sharyān tree)

The wealth of the maidens is highlighted by use of the term majāsid (singular: mijsad), robes worn by wealthy women. Not only does Ḥassān portray the activities and attire of the sophisticated Ghassānid princesses, he goes one step further and explicitly

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9 No. 123, v. 7-8.
10 The variant reading nuqab, meaning “veils,” cited by both al-Barqūqī and Ḥanafi al-Ḥasanayn, has been used here rather than thuqab found in Arafāt’s main text in the Dīwān. See al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 365; and Ḥanafi al-Ḥasanayn, ed. Dīwān, 323. For more on the interpretation of this line, see Chapter 2, Part III.
11 On this type of clothing, see Yahyā Wuhayyib al-Jabbūrī, al-Malābis al-ʿArabiyya fi al-shiʿr al-jāhili (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-ʿIslāmī, 1989), 81-82. This further confirms that walāʾid refers to daughters, rather than servants, because it would be unlikely servants would wear such fine robes.
defines them by what they do not do. Namely, they do not engage in extracting the seeds of the colocynth (naqf al-ḥanẓal), and they do not concern themselves with resin or gum “as the Arabs of the desert did” (kamā yafʿal al-ʿrāb fī al-bādiyya). The modern commentators emphasize that these verses demonstrate not only the poet’s affection for the quality of life he enjoyed under Ghassānid patronage but also his explicit preference for urban over Bedouin women.

1.2 Terrain

In addition to comparing the quality of life in al-Shām to Arabia, Ḥassān also contrasts the physical terrain of the two regions. This type of contrast emphasizes the fact that the lands protected by the Ghassānids were arable and fertile, while Arabia was dominated by harsh deserts and semi-deserts. The most concise and dramatic expression of the dissimilarity between the two regions can be seen in a triplet which combines many of the elements of Ḥassān’s comparisons. The following is the Arabic and English text of poem 245:

We are not in Ḥamt, or Zīm, or Ṣawarā
But rather (we are) in a planted meadow in the Golan

\[\text{لَسْنا بِحَمَّةٍ ولا زِمْ ولا سَئَرَةٍ} \]
\[\text{إِنَّ الْحَجَازَ رَضِيعُ الْجَوَاءَ وَالْبَوْسِ} \]
\[\text{صُوْتُ الدَّجَاجِ وأصْوَاتُ النَّوْاقِيسِ} \]

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12 Al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 475n3.
13 See al-Naṣṣ, Hassān, 122.
14 No. 245, v 1-3.
In the mornings, it [wine] was served for us in a pitcher, and a songstress (was present)
Truly, the Ḫijāz is a nursling of hunger and misery

We spent the night in Dārat Jawwātā\(^\text{15}\) and we were startled
By the clucking of the chickens and the sound of the church bells

All three of the toponyms mentioned in the opening hemistich appear to be place names in the Ḫijāz, though their precise locations are unknown. One of the manuscripts of the ḏīwān notes that the location of only one of these toponyms, Ṣawarā, is certain. It is known to be near Madina.\(^\text{16}\) In light of the contrast between the two regions which follows, one can conclude that these locations are not in Ghassānid territory. Ḥassān describes the meadow using the term maghrūs, the passive participle of the verb gharasa, “to plant.” Thus, he conveys the idea that the meadow is both fertile and cultivated, providing evidence of the spread of agriculture in Ghassānid territory, especially the Golan.

The second verse provides the most powerful dichotomy in the triplet. First, Ḥassān sets up the image of the breakfast he enjoyed in the lush meadow. The use of the passive verb yughdā emphasizes that he and his companions did not serve themselves the meal; rather, it was served to them. The poet also mentions the presence of a songstress (musmi‘a) and wine in a pitcher (ībrīk), a term associated with wealth and luxurious consumption. This tableau of luxury, even decadence, is juxtaposed to the second

\(^{15}\) This is an unknown place name. See Ḫīwān, 2:308. There is an alternate reading of Jawwānā, but this location does not fit the context. See Ḥanafī al-Ḥasayan, ed., Ḫīwān, 270.

\(^{16}\) Ḫīwān, 2:308. For Zīm and alternate readings of these locations, see Ḥanafī Ḥasanayn, ed., Ḫīwān Ḥassān, 269-270n4.
hemistich: “Truly, the Ḥijāz is a nursling of hunger and misery” (inna al-Ḥijāz raḍī’ al-jū’ wa-al-bu’ s). Wealth is contrasted with poverty and fertility with aridity. The Golan is verdant, while the Ḥijāz is barren. The term nawāqīs (plural of nāqūs) meaning “bells” or “gongs,” is strongly evocative of church bells.17 The mention of bells in the final verse indicates that the poet may have spent the night at a local monastery whose church bells startled him and his companions, further completing the image of a sedentary locale.18

The fertile land of al-Shām is extolled in poem 158 which praises an unnamed Ghassānid prince or king who was killed by the Persians. Here Ḥassān expresses his preference for the urban lifestyle of the Ghassānids:19

By my life, amidst a stony hill20 and sandy ground there is arable land
Its rivers rose above all the mountain paths

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17 Ibn Manẓūr defines nāqūs as an instrument for ringing that Christians strike at prayer times (mīdrāḥ al-Naṣārā‘ alladhī yadrabīnahu li-awqāt al-ṣallā‘). Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-‘Arab, 6:240. For the broader meaning of the root in other Semitic languages, see the n-q-sh entry in Marcus Jastrow, ed. A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (London: W. C. Luzac, 1903), 935. It is possible the term could be a loanword from the Greek. For this, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:237.

18 Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:237. See the following section on urban terminology for more on the poet’s mention of monasteries.

19 No. 158, v. 7-9.

20 The term quff (plural: qiffāf) appears twice in this poem. All the commentators mention the term and present varying definitions. The word appears to refer to rocky and hilly terrain, and the translation “stony hills” has been chosen here. For a detailed explanation of this type of terrain, see al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 387. Al-Sinjilawi has translated the term “high land” (Al-Sinjilawi, “Lament for Fallen Cities,” 84), while ‘Arafat defines the term as “a comparatively low and rough hill.” (‘Arafat, “Critical Introduction,” 375.)
At every lofty structure and gathering place
Are intoxicated people and a moistened cup which never runs out\(^{21}\)

(All this) is more dear to Ḥassān, were it possible,
Than the camels belonging to the tribes Ghifār and Aslama

In the third verse mentioned here, the subject of the predicate “more dear”\((aḥabb)\) is not stated explicitly in the text. Al-Barqūqī contends that the subject of \(aḥabb\) is the word \(al-ḥarth\), arable land, found in verse 7, the first of the verses cited above. It is likely the poet’s expression of that which is most precious to him is not limited only to the arable land, but includes all that has preceded in his verses praising the wealth and affluence of the Ghassānids. This would include the fertile land, towering buildings, drinking parties, and the “moistened cup” of wine mentioned in the second hemistich of verse 8. Modern commentator Darwīsh cites these lines as evidence of Ḥassān’s infatuation with the “environment of culture and luxury” which he experienced both in Yathrib and in his time spent with Ghassānid royalty in al-Shām.\(^{22}\)

1.3 Praise of the Sedentary Lifestyle

Ḥassān also praises the Ghassānids as being superior to the nomads because of their sedentary lifestyle. Poem 84, in which Ḥassān describes Ghassānid territory after the

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\(^{21}\) Here the verb \(ukhliṣat\) found in ‘Arafat’s text has been replaced with the variant reading \(ukhdilat\) which makes more sense in the context of a cup. For this reading, see \(Dīwān\), 1:317; and al-Barqūqī, \(Sharḥ\), 445. Also, the verb \(tasawwama\) found in ‘Arafat’s text has been replaced with the variant reading \(tasarrama\) meaning “to dwindle.” For this reading, see al-Barqūqī, \(Sharḥ\), 445.

\(^{22}\) Darwīsh, \(Hassān\), 483-484.
Persian occupation, devotes four verses to applauding the Ghassânids for having been a settled tribe, a fact that he contrasts with the lifestyle of nomads. The poet begins:23

By my life, between the abode of Muzāḥim and al-Juthā
A tribe is sedentary, it does not burden itself with moving.

This settled tribe is not vigorous in driving its herd,
Beyond the far places are their kinsfolk who aid them.

Ḥassān explicitly describes the tribe as being settled, or sedentary, using the term ḥādir. The commentators explain the seemingly odd assertion that the tribe does not vigorously drive their herds by noting that no one dared to attack their flocks due to the far-flung friends and supporters of the tribe who defended their honor.24

Ḥassān continues his praise by further distinguishing the settled tribe from the nomadic one:25

If it were said one day, “Depart! You have been attacked.”
They would remain and their camels would not be brought to them
That is more appropriate for youths and riders
Who travel at night on emaciated camels

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23 No. 84, v. 2-3.
24 For a discussion of this topic, see al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ*, 272n1.
25 No. 84, v 4-5.
Unlike nomads who would flee upon hearing that an enemy tribe was approaching, this settled tribe is praised for refusing to leave or request that their camels be brought to them in order to flee. The contrast between the two groups is expanded through Ḥassān’s claim that his patrons are not like those nomads who travel at night on emaciated camels. Use of the expression al-‘ūjun al-dawāmīr to indicate extremely thin camels further emphasizes the poverty Ḥassān associates with the Arab nomads. The poet does not mention the Ghassānids by name in the section quoted above, but the fact that the larger context of the poem is the Persian occupation of Ghassānid territory leaves no doubt to whom Ḥassān was addressing his admiration.

Although not a direct comparison like the other verses we have examined, the eleventh verse of poem 13 indirectly illustrates the sedentary nature of Ghassānid life in the context of the poet’s praise of them. Here Ḥassān describes the Ghassānids visiting the tomb of their ancestor, King al-Ḥārith:

أولاد جفنة حول قبر أبهم
Qabr ibn ṭariya, the generous and noble

The sons of Jafna around the tomb of their father,
The tomb of Ibn Māriya, the generous and noble

This verse has been cited by classical scholars as proof that the Ghassānids were sedentary. Ibn Rashīq writes that Ḥassān’s intention here is to praise the Ghassānids for being settled and powerful urban kings, unlike “those who journeyed and sought pasture” (ašḥāb al-riḥla wa-al-intijā‘). They did not migrate from one location to another. These

26 No. 13, v. 11.
27 Ibn Rashīq, Kitāb al-ʿumda, 1:505.
comments make more sense when viewed in the context of a recurring motif in pre-Islamic poetry in which the former comrades of a dead man quickly desert his grave to resume their nomadic wandering. That the descendents of King al-Ḥārith had not abandoned his grave implies that they were different from the pastoralists of the desert.  

In his biographical dictionary Tārīkh madīnat Dimashaq, twelfth-century Ibn ʿAsākir records a report attributed to al-ʿAṣmaʾī in which he comments on this line of Ḥassān’s poetry. Al-ʿAṣmaʾī confirms that the poet’s intention was to praise the Ghassānids for being “kings who stayed in one place.” He explains that they were “the people of the city (ahl madar) and not the people of the tent pole who migrate (yatanaqqalūn).” Later Ibn ʿAsākir quotes the verse again, this time noting that Ḥassān’s goal was to contrast the religious, agricultural Ghassānids with other fearful, pastoralist Arabs. This verse will be discussed in greater depth in the subsection on urban terminology in Ḥassān’s poetry, especially as it relates to the possibility that the grave of al-Ḥārith was a pilgrimage center.

1.4 Poem 90

The seven-line pre-Islamic elegy (rithāʾ) on the Ghassānid king al-Ḥārith, poem 90, combines a number of the previously mentioned methods of comparison and presents

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28 For more on this motif in Arabic poetry, see Bravmann, “‘Life After Death’ in Early Arab Conception,” in Spiritual Background of Early Islam, 288-295.

29 Ibn ʿAsākir, Tārīkh madīnat Dimashaq, 2:172.

30 Ibid., 2:175.

31 See the section on gabr in Chapter 2, Part II.
an excellent illustration of Ḥassān’s confidence in the superiority of Ghassānid culture.

Given the relevance of the poem and its brevity, a line-by-line translation and analysis is included here. The first two verses are as follows:32

إِيَّيُحَلَّفْتُ بِمِنْهَا غَبْرَ كَافِيَةٍ أَصْحَابُ
لَا يُفِقُونَ مِنْ الْعَرْيَ إِذَا أَوَى

Indeed, I swore an oath and I was not lying
If the companions of al-Ḥārith al-Jafnī had been from the tribe of Ghassān,

Whose sword straps are slackened
And who do not drink goat’s milk in the evening when they return33

The first verse of the poem contains the sub-clause of a conditional construction. Had the companions of al-Ḥārith been true Ghassānids, then the events of the battle would have had a dramatically different outcome. The second half of the conditional construction does not appear until the fifth verse, and the intervening verses all modify and praise the virtues of the “tribe of Ghassān.”34

The first hemistich of verse 2 is an expression of the security and strength of the Ghassānids. They were so powerful and confident that they did not even need to keep their weapons ready. In the second half of the verse, an implicit comparison between the Ghassānids and other Arabs appears. The Ghassānids do not drink goat’s milk in the evenings. Al-Barqūqī explains that it was the habit of the ṣaʿālīk to drink the warm milk

32 No. 90, v. 1-2.

33 The second hemistich cited here is a variant reading favored by al-Barqūqī. See al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 85; and Dīwān, 2:162.

34 The phrase jidhm al-Ghassān literally translates “the root of Ghassān.”
of goats at night. This habit is perceived by Ḥassān to be primitive in comparison to the drinking of wine he associates with the Ghassānids. He expresses his preference for wine mixed with water later in verse 4. As in poem 123 where the “antidote of nectar” was contrasted with the colocynt, poem 90 defines the Ghassānids by what they do not drink. Ḥassān continues:

They are not turned away from the illustrious one displeased
When the gate is crowded with visitors
When they (guests) come, the wine is mixed for them
And goblets and drinking glasses are passed around for them

Ḥassān presents the example of offering good wine to guests as proof not only of Ghassānid hospitality but also of their sophistication. This is especially true when presented in contrast to the evening milk drinking of the ṣa‘ālik poets. He stresses the quantity of wine the Ghassānids are willing to share by his use of the phrase ākwās wa-akwāb, meaning “goblets and drinking glasses.” In addition to being hospitable themselves, as presented in verse 4, the preceding line demonstrates that the Ghassānids are well-received by other elite individuals, or noblemen. Ḥassān describes how his patrons are not turned away from “the illustrious one” (al-mājid) like the masses.

35 Al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 85-86n5.
36 No. 90, v. 3-4.
37 Muhmarr ‘uyūnuhum literally means “red-eyed.” This could indicate that they were angry or displeased.
In verse 5, Ḥassān returns to the conditional sentence started in verse one. Had the companions of al-Ḥārith been Ghassānids, with all the attributes described in the verses 2-4, then the outcome of the battle would have been different:

إِذَا لَآبَوا جَمِيعًا أَوْ لَكَانُ لَهُمْ أَسْرُى مِنَ الْقَوْمِ أَوْ قَلْبٌ وَأَسْلَابٌ

لَجَالُدُوا حَيَّاثَ كَانَ أَمْوَاتٌ أَذَرْكُهُمْ حَتَّى يَوْزُوبُوا هُمْ أَسْرًا وَأَسْلَابًا

Then they would have all returned, or (at least)
They would have (brought) prisoners from the tribe, or causalities, or plunder

They would have fought wherever death overtook them
Until they returned with prisoners and booty

The men would have returned in victory, rather than defeated, bearing prisoners and other spoils of war. Ḥassān strongly emphasizes the booty with which they would have returned, using the term aslāb (singular: salab) at the end of the both verses 5 and 6. He notes that even if they had died they would have done so bravely. The courage and fortitude of the Ghassānids are extolled.

In the final verse, the poet returns to the reality of the defeat and explains what actually occurred on the battlefield. The contrast is completed as he explains that the companions were not noble Ghassānids, but “common riff raff” (maʿshaba) without the lineage and honor of the Ghassānids. And, it is this fact that caused the Ghassānid defeat:39

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38 No. 90, v. 5-6.

39 No. 90, v. 7.
But rather, he encountered common riff raff
And at the true moment of death, they were not of noble descent.

A similar portrayal of the remarkable bravery of the Ghassānids can be found in poem 85. This ode contains one verse that mentions the manner in which the Ghassānids fight. Ḥassān proclaims:

Abodes made beautiful by God,
They do not fight like the shepherd of sheep from behind the camels

Unlike the shepherds (ri‘ā’ al-shawī), who are assumed to be nomads, the Ghassānids are brave and courageous. Although Ḥassān does not elaborate on the “fighting behind camels” accusation, it is clear that he does not consider the shepherds to be courageous. A number of the manuscripts note that Ḥassān’s intention in his use of the phrase “abodes made beautiful by God” is to show that “they are the abodes of kings, not the tents of Arabs.” Again, Ḥassān appears to be making a direct connection between the sedentary lifestyle of the Ghassānids and their bravery.

1.5 Prose Accounts

Ḥassān’s love for the Ghassānid life of luxury is expressed not only through his poetry but also in prose accounts attributed to him in Kitāb al-aghānī. Although this

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40 No. 85, v. 4.

41 Dīwān, 2:157. For more on the poet’s use of the term diyār here in a royal and sedentary context, see Chapter 2, Part II on urban vocabulary.
study is based on his poetry, not prose, it is worth mentioning one of these accounts here.

In a section of rhymed prose, Ḥassān describes a royal banquet he attended at the Ghassānid court mentioning details such as the songstresses (qiyān) he heard perform. He comments on the wine, the delicate fragrances, and the attire of the king and his couriers. The entire text is imbued with a sense of wonder and delight. The authenticity of prose accounts passed down for generations through oral transmission is much more doubtful than poetry. Despite the likelihood that these accounts were not composed by Ḥassān, the substance of the narrative may be illustrative of Ḥassān’s strong association with Ghassānid culture and of the fact that this relationship was known to later scholars who recorded these accounts. Reynold Nicholson notes that though the text is unlikely to be attributed to Ḥassān, it provides useful information on the Ghassānids and its apocryphal nature “does not seriously affect its value as evidence.”

Chapter 2: Urban Terminology in Ḥassān’s Ghassānid Poetry

2.1 Location and Lexicon in Jāhili Poetry

In addition to his overt comparisons between life in the city and the desert, Ḥassān’s selection of lexical items reflects a conscious choice to set his poetry in a distinctly urban context. This is especially relevant given the dominance of desert motifs and stock themes in jāhili poetry which were reproduced by generations of poets. Traditional themes related to the life of a nomad, such as the description of the poet’s journey on his mount, are by no means absent from Ḥassān’s poetry but many of his compositions intertwine urban terminology with the more standard desert repertoire of terms and themes. In particular, Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry is rich in terms for structures and edifices associated with cities and settled villages. Locales featured as backdrops for his odes include taverns, castles, and monasteries.

This section highlights the most important and frequently occurring urban terminology in Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry. The terms that will be examined are the following: tavern (ḥānūt), castle (qaṣr/qasṭal), temple (haykal), monastery (dayr), vineyard (karm), structure (bunyān), fortress (ma’qil), and pillar (‘amūd and rukn).¹ Ḥassān’s use of these terms will be compared to his contemporaries.² Lexical items that

¹ Some of these terms have more than one meaning that will be dealt with in greater detail in the following subsections.

² Various concordances of jāhili poetry have been used to establish the relative frequency of terminology. See especially Nadī ‘Abd al-Rahmān Yūsuf al-Shāyi’, Mu’jam lughat dawāwīn shu’arā’ al-mu’allaqāt al-‘ashar (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān Nāshirūn, 1993); and Albert Arazi and Salman Masalha, al-’Iqd al-thamān fi dawāwīn al-shu’arā’ al-sitta al-jāhiliyyīn (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999). Arazi and Masalha’s work includes the collected compositions of six renowned jāhili poets, while al-Shāyi’ includes the works of ten mu’allaqāt poets. For this reason, the number of occurrences of a particular term cited by each concordance is not identical.
occur in high frequency in pre-Islamic poetry but are employed in unique and innovative ways by Ḥassān will also be studied. These terms include several words for dwelling or abode (manzil, dār, and bayt) and gate (bāb). These terms have been divided into five broad categories: castles and fortified buildings, religious structures, locales associated with wine-drinking, tombs, and other large or monumental structures.

2.2 Castles and Fortified Structures

Castle (Qaṣr and qastal)

The term qaṣr (plural: quṣūr) probably entered the Arabic language from the Latin term castrum, meaning fort or fortress. The word spread throughout the Near East as a result of the Roman military presence from the first century BCE. Gradually, armed Roman forts evolved into stationary villages, and the term eventually broadened to include castles, mansions, and palaces. The terms qaṣr and, to a lesser extent, the related qasṭal, occur frequently in Ḥassān’s poetry. There are four occurrences of the term qaṣr, or its plural quṣūr, and one occurrence of qaṣṭal in Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry. In a triplet from the pre-Islamic period, Ḥassān illustrates the devastating impact of the plague on al-Shām. He comments that people perished in every castle, or mansion, in al-Khammān (kull qaṣrin min al-Khammān). The text and translation are as follows:

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3 Lawrence Conrad has argued against this. He contends that qaṣr is the verbal noun (masdar) of the regular Arabic root q-s-r, and that the term has historically referred to a range of buildings, from ordinary shacks to compounds, rather than only monumental ones, such as castles and mansions. See Conrad, “The Quṣūr of Medieval Islam: Some Implications for the Social History of the Near East,” al-Abhāth 29 (1981): 7-23. For the opposing argument and a detailed analysis of this term, see Shahîd’s appendix entitled “On the Etymology and Connotation of Qaṣr” in Shahîd, BASIC, 2.1:67-75.

4 No. 105, v. 2.
It brought destruction to Dhū Ba‘l until its inhabitants perished  
And (destroyed) every inhabited mansion in al-Khammān

The poet’s intention seems to be to convey the extent of the devastation inflicted by the plague. Hassān’s use of the structure kull followed by the singular noun points to the abundance of castles found in the area. It is for this reason that the translation of qaṣr as mansion, rather than fortress, has been chosen.⁵

A possible parallel to this verse in the poetry of Hassān’s contemporaries can be seen in the diwān of al-Nābibhā, also a frequent guest at the court of the Ghassānids. Here al-Nābibhā uses the same phrase, kull qaṣr, in a line praising the Ghassānids for their conquest of Iraq and all of its castles.⁶

َفَدْرَحَتِ العِرَاقَ فَكَلُّ قَصْرٍ َيَجْلَلُ خَندَقَ مَنْهُ وَحَامِ

You have conquered Iraq, every castle,  
Every trench and ever general honors you

Al-Nābibhā is the only one of the mu‘allaqāt poets to use the term qaṣr or its plural. At times other jāhilī poets express the concept of a lofty castle, however, they tend to use other terms, including mijdal, ‘aqr, and fadan. In Mu’jam lughāt dawāwīn shu’arā‘ al-mu‘allaqāt al-‘ashar, Nadā al-Shāyi’ notes that usually these synonyms for

⁵ See Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:235. Shahīd comments that it is more likely that the region of al-Khammān encompassed multiple castles or mansions, whereas one fortress would have sufficed.

⁶ Diwān al-Nābibhā, 68; and Arazi, al-‘Iqd al-thamīn, 903-4. Some scholars have argued this line refers to the Lakhmids. Nöldeke has shown it is more likely in reference to the Ghassānids. See Nöldeke, Die Ghassānischen Fürsten, 37.
*qasr* are found in the context of a description of the poet’s camel. For example, Labīd employs the term ‘*aqr*, a synonym of *qasr* meaning “tall structure” or “castle,” to demonstrate the majesty and strength of his mount by comparing it to a well-built castle:

> كَعْفَرَ الْهَاجِرِيّ إِذَا اِبْنَاهَا

Like a castle at midday when it was built
By design, with stacked bricks

In his famous *mu’allaqa* ode, ‘Antara describes his she-camel (*nāqa*) in a similar way using the synonym *fadan* to illustrate her bulk:

> فَقَدْ فَقَطَتْ فِيهَا نَافِقٌ وَكَانَتَا

Then I halted my she-camel, like a castle,
So that I might tarry for a moment

In contrast to ‘Antara and Labīd’s lines, the references to castles made by Hassān and al-Nāighba are not figurative comparisons but rather point to physical castles themselves.

In poem 123, Hassān uses the plural of the term *qasr* to point to deserted “nearby mansions” (*al-quṣūr al-dawānī*) in his opening *nasīb*. It is possible that here Hassān could be referring to a proper name, al-Quṣūr. The remainder of the poem treats the topic of the Christian holiday of Easter for which the Ghassānids princesses were preparing.

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7 Al-Shāyi’, *Mu’jam lughat dawāwīn*, 118.


9 *Dīwān ‘Antara*, 140.

10 A. J. Arberry’s more poetic rendering of this line is, “For there I halted my she-camel, huge-bodied as a castle/That I might satisfy the hankering of a lingerer.” Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 179.
This royal connection solidifies the conviction that the proper translation of *qusūr* here is “mansions” or “castles.” The text and translation of the verse are as follows:  

![Verse Text]

And the al-Qurayyāt from Bilās, the Dārayyā
Then Sakā’ā and then the nearby mansions

The plural of *qaṣr* with the meaning “castle,” or “mansion,” also appears in poem 136. Its use here is somewhat weaker than the other references because it is found in only one version of *Kitāb al-aghānī* and it is a variant reading of a variant reading. In verse 8 of the poem, one of the commentators suggests that the original meaning intended by the poet was beautiful castles (*qusūr ḥusnā*). ‘Arafat does not seem to give much credence to this reading and notes that the commentator does not even cite the source for this reading.  

![Verse Text]

Although it is certainly weaker than the other examples, this reading is nonetheless relevant to the topic of urban references in Ḥassān’s poetry.

An instance where the proper translation for *qaṣr* is “fortress,” rather than “castle” or “mansion” can be seen in poem 13. Here Ḥassān proudly portrays how secure and well-protected he is from his enemies, contending that his foes consider him to be “in the fortress of Dūma” (*qaṣr Dūma*):  

![Verse Text]

Those who threatened me viewed me as though I were
In the fortress of Dūma or in the center of the church

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11 No. 123, v. 2. For a translation and close reading of this poem, see Chapter 2, Part III.

12 *Dīwān*, 2:209.

13 No. 13, v. 20.
There are a number of Dūmas in the region to which Ḥassān could be referring, but the most likely is Dūmat al-Jandal in Wādī Sirhān in the Arabian Peninsula.\(^{14}\) This location was famous for its massive fortress, a connection which would be consonant with the purpose of the line which is to establish that Ḥassān’s enemies viewed him as though he were unassailable. Sawā’ here could be a proper name, a town associated with a church or temple, or it could mean “center” which is what most of the commentators have argued.\(^{15}\) In either case, the intention is to reiterate the poet’s security and, as such, this reinforces the translation of qaṣr as fortress.\(^{16}\)

A final occurrence of the term qaṣr indicating a physical structure appears in an ode that contains hints of a Ghassānid connection, but is not one of the twenty-six poems identified as Ghassānid in this study. Dating from the jāhilī period, poem 8 is Ḥassān’s longest ode and is dedicated to the poet’s beloved, a woman named Naḍīra.\(^{17}\) Although it contains no overt references to the Ghassānids, the ode hints at a Ghassānid connection through its allusions to royalty. In verse 28, Ḥassān describes an unknown religious festival called “the day of the procession” (yawm al-khurūj):\(^{18}\)

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\(^{14}\) For a thorough treatment of this location and the other possible Dūmas, see Shahîd’s appendix “Qaṣr Dūma and Sawā’ al-Haykal” in BASIC, 2.1:283-287.

\(^{15}\) The term haykal can be translated as “temple” or “church.” It will be discussed in this chapter in section 2.3 on religious structures.

\(^{16}\) See Shahîd, BASIC, 2.1:286-287.

\(^{17}\) Poem 8 consists of forty-four lines and is Ḥassān’s longest ode. The Dīwān only contains one other poem of this length, poem 6.

\(^{18}\) No. 8, v. 28.
You are best when you appear to us
In the courtyard of the castle on the day of the procession

Here the poet mentions that Naḍīra was in the courtyard of the castle (bi-sāḥat al-qaṣr) on this day. Shahīd has argued that the woman mentioned in this poem was a Ghassānid princess and that the day mentioned was an important religious procession. It is clear that Ḥassān’s mention of the term qaṣr and its courtyard is to be interpreted in a literal sense, to give the audience an idea where his beloved was on the day of this procession.

In addition to these references to qaṣr and quṣūr, Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry also contains one mention of the term qaṣṭal, a variant of qaṣr. In Ḥassān’s passage on wine in poem 13, the location of the drinking party is between the vineyards (al-kurūm) and Jiz‘ al-Qaṣṭal. Here the term appears as part of a proper noun. Despite the fact that the poet is not mentioning qaṣṭal here in its literal meaning, this reference demonstrates the strength of the connection between the region being described - al-Shām - and its abundance of castles and fortresses.

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19 For the possibility that Naḍīra might be a Ghassānid princess, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.2:175-177 and 2.2:198-199. See also Darwīsh’s section on al-Naḍīra. Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 270-273.

20 See Shahīd, 2.1:241. Shahīd notes that there are several locations known as al-Qaṣṭal to which Ḥassān could be referring, and he argues that the Qaṣṭal close to Damascus and near al-Nabk is most likely in this context. For the location of al-Qaṣṭal, see Dussaud, Topographie, Map 14.
Fortress (ma‘qil)

Fortified structures were known to pre-Islamic poets, even those who were from nomadic tribes, and the most common word in the register of jāhili poets for these fortified buildings is ḥiṣn.21 Hassān’s extant Ghassānid poems do not include this term, but a less common synonym ma‘qil appears once.22 Although the term cannot be said to occur with frequency, in light of the other signs of his attachment to sedentary society even this infrequent reference may contribute to our understanding of this poet. The term appears in poem 153, an ode describing Ghassānid participation in the Byzantine wars with Persia. Hassān mentions two Ghassānid commanders who encouraged their men in battle by saying:23

اجْعَلُوا مَعْقِلَّها أَيْمَالَكُمْ،َ بِالصَّفِّيْحِ المَصْطَفَى غَيْرِ الْفَطْرِ

“Make your right hands its/their fortress, and (guard)
With the choice broad sword, not blunted”

Here the image of a fortress as a bastion of protection and safety in times of war is linked to the bravery and military prowess of the men.

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21 This term occurs nine times in its singular and three in its plural form (ḥusūn) in the works of the major pre-Islamic poets. Al-Ṣāyi’, Mu’jam lughat dawāwīn, 113.

22 This term appears only once in al-‘Iqd al-thamīn, and this reference occurs in the dīwān of Badr ibn Ḥudhār. Arazi, al-‘Iqd al-thamīn, 742.

2.3 Religious Buildings

Monastery (dayr)

Ḥassān’s use of the term monastery (dayr) points to the sedentary, Christian landscape of the Ghassānids. The monastery, along with the church, was one of the most important architectural landmarks of the Ghassānids and was a center of cultural life. In Ḥassān’s twenty-six Ghassānid poems, there are two direct references to the dayr, and one indirect allusion. In poem 123, Ḥassān’s most overtly Christian ode, the monastery is not mentioned in passing, rather the monastery itself provides the setting for the verse. Ḥassān describes the daily events occurring in a monastery, mentioning the individuals who inhabited it and the prayers they recited. From the detail provided by the poet, it seems likely that Ḥassān himself had spent time in a monastery. Ḥassān exclaims:

صُفُواتُ المسيح في ذلك الدُيوانِ رُدّ دعاءُ المسيح والرهبانِ

The prayers addressed to Christ at that monastery
Are the supplications of the priest and the monks.

This verse is not included in the main text of ‘Arafat’s Dīwān, but can be found only in Kitāb al-aghānī where the above verse is inserted between the sixth and seventh lines. The verse is consistent with the broader context of the ode, the preparations for the Easter festivities. The fact that this verse has been eliminated from other recensions may point to the editorial choices of later Muslim commentators.

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24 For more on this topic, see Shahīd’s chapter “Ghassānids Religious Architecture: The Churches and the Monasteries,” in BASIC, 2.1:143-219 and 2.2:588-597. For more on Christianity and the Ghassānids in general, see Chapter 2, Part I.

25 Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:154-156. Also see Dīwān, 1:518 where ‘Arafat includes the Kitāb al-aghānī version in full.
In poem 309, Ḥassān mentions *al-dayr* in the opening line where the poet weeps over abandoned abodes:²⁶

أَوْحَشَ الْعَجْبِيْذَانِ فَالْمِتْيِّ آنُهُ
فَقِرَاذا فَالْمَزْرَعُ الْمَحْظُوْرُ

Al-Junbūdhān is deserted, as is its monastery
And its villages, and the fenced in house

Al-Junbūdhān is a place name, though its exact location is not known. It is not clear if *al-dayr* here is a place name or if it refers to a specific monastery. The preposition *minhā* may support the argument that it refers to an actual monastery. Even if the term should be understood to be a proper name in this context, the reference shows the influence of Christianity in the region and Ḥassān’s familiarity with it. Many villages in the region reflect this Christian past through names which are based on the construct state (*idāfa*) in Arabic and begin with the term *dayr*.²⁷

It is possible that Ḥassān stayed overnight at monasteries while visiting al-Shām, which later became a popular practice among Umayyad wine poets who often drank at the monastery’s tavern and composed poetry on their adventures there.²⁸ Based on the first verse mentioned in this section, Ḥassān may have had the opportunity to observe the daily workings of the monastery while lodging there himself. Although not a direct reference, another clue pointing to Ḥassān’s familiarity with monasteries can be found in

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²⁶ No. 309, v. 1.

²⁷ On this, see Shahīd, *BASIC*, 2.2:567.

in poem 245. Ḥassān mentions that in the morning he and his companions were woken by
the chiming of bells.\textsuperscript{29}

We spent the night in Dārat Jawwātā and we were startled
By the clucking of the chickens and the ringing of the church bells

The term used here for bells (\textit{nawāqīs}) has strong Christian overtones and could imply
either a church or monastery.\textsuperscript{30} Ḥassān may have been referring to a night spent at a
monastery where he could hear the bells of the church or the monastery itself in the
morning. Note how the Umayyad poet Jarīr (d. 728/9) harkens back to Ḥassān’s verse in
the following line from the later poet’s \textit{dīwān}:\textsuperscript{31}

When I recalled the two monasteries (I remember) I was woken
By the clucking of the chickens and the ringing of the church bells

**Temple (haykal)**

The term \textit{haykal} can have three distinct definitions. First, it can be a descriptor for
a large horse. Secondly, it can refer to any large, tall building. According to al-Azharī,
\textit{haykal} is “a tall building to which tall horses are likened.”\textsuperscript{32} And finally, it can describe a
house of worship for Jews or Christians. Its most common usage in \textit{jāhilī} poetry is in

\textsuperscript{29} No. 245, v. 3.


\textsuperscript{32} Ibn Manzūr, \textit{Lisān al-‘Arab}, 11:700-701.
describing the size of the poet’s mount, and it occurs six times in this context in the
collected poems of the ten mu’allaqāt poets.\textsuperscript{33} For example, Imrū’ al-Qays admires the
size of his horse in the following line:\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{quote}
وَلَمْ أَشَهَّدَ الْحُنَّةَ الْمُغَرِّبَةَ بِالْصُّحَّيْنِ

(It was as though) I had never witnessed other horses in the forenoon
Of the size of the hump of a wandering camel
\end{quote}

The above verse appears in the context of Imrū’ al-Qays describing aging and his lost
youth. In the preceding verses, he proclaims that it were as though he had never dallied
with the young ladies or drunk wine. Thus, he was remembering the days of his youth
and recalling the size of the horses he used to ride. Similarly, in his mu’allaqā ode Imrū’
al-Qays uses the term haykal as follows:\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{quote}
وَقَدْ أَعْنَدُي وَالْطَّيْرِ فِي وَكَتَانِهَا

In the morning, I used to journey when the birds were in their nests
On a short-haired, well-built [horse] which reigned in wild animals
\end{quote}

Hassān does not use the term haykal in the context of a description of a horse or
camel. As previously mentioned, in verse 20 of poem 13, Hassān demonstrates his
invulnerability by referring to Dūmat al-Jandal and in the same line uses the phrase sawā’

\textsuperscript{33} Al-Shāyi’, \textit{Mu’jam lughat dawāwīn}, 183 and 189.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Dīwān Imrū’ al-Qays}, ed. Muhammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1964), 36; and Arazi, \textit{al-Iqd al-thamānī}, 1203.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Dīwān Imrū’ al-Qays}, 19.
al-haykal to cement the image of his invincibility.\textsuperscript{36} Sawā’ here could be a proper name, a town associated with a church or temple, or it could mean “center.” Shahîd has also noted that Ḥassān’s choice of the term haykal here, rather than the more common word for church, bi’a, may be evidence that he was referring to a cathedral where he was “unassailable because of the sanctity of the place,” instead of a typical church.\textsuperscript{37} In this context, it is clear that Ḥassān is referring to a physical structure of a church.

2.3 Locations Associated with Wine Drinking

Tavern (ḥānūt)

In his study of Ghassânid social history, Shahîd cites the tavern as “an important center of social life with all that it had to offer of wine, women, song, and dance.”\textsuperscript{38} Relying on the fragmentary references to it in the poetry of Ḥassān and other poets who visited the Ghassânid court, he outlines the elements of the tavern and the individuals associated with it. The waiter (al-sāqī), songstress (al-musmi‘a or al-qayna), and boon companion (al-nadīm) are often mentioned by the poets in their wine lyrics. Patrons visited the tavern throughout the day, drinking wine both in the morning and in the evening. At times, the wine was consumed mixed with water or other substances like saffron, honey, or ice designed to enhance the flavor. In other instances, it was served

\textsuperscript{36} This verse has been cited with a translation previously in this chapter. See the subsection on the term qaṣr. For a contemporary of Ḥassān’s who employs the term haykal to refer to a church, see Dīwān al-A‘shā, 84.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 2:72-73 and 2:250-253.
pure and undiluted. The environment of the tavern was enhanced by perfumes and
patrons may have sat on chairs or reclined on pillows.

The term most frequently used by Ḥassān to describe the tavern, the location of
his many drinking parties, is the Syriac word ʰᵃⁿᵘᵗ.\(^{39}\) The term ʰᵃⁿᵘᵗ itself is not entirely
absent from the poetry of pre-Islamic masters, and ʰᵃⁿᵘᵗ, or its plural form ʰᵃʷᵃⁿⁱᵗ,
occurs a total of three times in the extant works of the ten muʿallaqāt poets.\(^{40}\) Other jāhilī
poets who composed poetry on wine often used other terms for tavern, such as mashraba.

An example of Ḥassān’s usage of this term can be seen in poem 13, an ode with a
prominent wine lyric section. Ten of the total thirty-three lines are devoted to the topic of
wine. These verses include four lines on wine consumed in the tavern. In the first line of
this section (verse 21), Ḥassān boasts of having consumed wine in the town’s tavern
(ʰᵃⁿᵘᵗⁱʰᵃ):\(^{41}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{وَلَقَدْ شَرِبْتُ الْخُمْرَ ۚ} & \text{في حاوتِها صُبْحًا صَافِيًا كُطْطُمَ مُفَلَّلٍ} \\
\text{I have sipped wine in its tavern} & \\
\text{Reddish in color, pure, like the taste of pepper} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

Ḥassān’s second reference to the tavern using the term ʰᵃⁿᵘᵗ occurs in poem 23.

This poem includes an octet on wine, which describes the poet and his companions
drinking at the ʰᵃⁿᵘᵗ, then going to the “marble houses,” which will be discussed in

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\(^{39}\) See the following entry in Marcus Jastrow, ed. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London: W. C. Luzac, 1903), 482.

\(^{40}\) Al-Shāyi‘. *Mu‘jam lughat dawāwīn*, 15. The term is mentioned in *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn* in its plural form (ʰᵃʷᵃⁿⁱᵗ) which occurs only once in the dīwān of Ṭarafa. See Arazi, *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn*, 393. For an example of the term in the poetry of al-ʿAṣḥā, see *Dīwān al-ʿAṣḥā*, 147.

\(^{41}\) No. 13, v. 21.
detail later in this chapter. Ḥassān praises the quality of the wine and describes the aging process. The tavern appears as the place where the wine was stored and aged: 42

\[
\text{عَنْتَهَا أَلْحَانَتُ دُهْرًا فَقَدَ مَّرُّ عَلَيْهَا فَرَطُ عَامٍ فَعَامَ}
\]

The tavern stored the wine for a long time, Year after year passed it by

Ḥassān also mentions in the term ḥānūt in several poems that are not among the twenty-six Ghassānid poems identified by this study. Nonetheless, poem 156 may have a connection to the Ghassānids because the prefatory material comments that it was composed when Ḥassān and al-Aʿshā were at a tavern (bayt khammār) in al-Shām. In the opening line of the poem, which is Ḥassān’s response to al-Aʿshā’s accusation that he was stingy, Ḥassān mentions the term ḥānūt. 43 Similarly, in another pre-Islamic poem describing and praising wine Ḥassān mentions the ḥānūt as the location of his morning drinking: 44

\[
\text{وَقَدْ غَدَّوْتُ عَلَى الْحَانُوْتُ يَسَرَّبَخَنِي مِنْ عَانَاتٍ دُلْلُ عَنِّي الْمَدِينَةَ ضَفَاعً}
\]

In the morning, I went to the tavern and a morning draught was offered to me (It was) aged and mixed, like the eye of a rooster 45

\footnotesize{42 No. 23, v. 9.

43 For this line, see no. 156, v. 1. For the account of the incident with al-Aʿshā, see Dīwān, 1:313; and Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 4:167-168.

44 No. 150, v. 9.

45 The phrase ‘ayn al-dīk may be a reference to the dark and rich color of the wine which the poet compares to the eye of a rooster. Ḥassān choice of the image of a rooster’s eye may be a clever play on the previously mentioned fact that this trip to the tavern occurred early in the morning.
**Tavern (manzil)**

The root *n-z-l* is very common in *jāhili* poetry and its meaning, “to dismount, or stop,” is intimately connected to the pastoral lifestyle of the desert nomad. The place name from this root, *manzil*, can be translated as dwelling, campsite, or stopping point. In this capacity, the term is found throughout pre-Islamic poetry, especially in the *nasīb* section of the *qasīda*. The term *manzil* and its plural *manāzil* appear twenty-one times in the *dawāwīn* of the six most famous pre-Islamic poets.⁴⁶

At times, Ḥassān’s use of the term is distinctive from his peers and points to an urban influence. For example, Ḥassān uses *manzil* as a synonym for *ḥānūt*. In poem 13, verse 16, the poet recalls reclining in a *manzil* high in the hills and drinking wine. This line is part of a quintet on wine infixed into the larger ode. In the preceding two lines, Ḥassān describes the habit of mixing water with wine and then refers to wine as an antidote (*al-diryaq*). Within this context, it seems that verse 16 is an expansion of the wine lyric. Here Ḥassān recalls climbing up a hill in al-Barīṣ with his companions until they reached an undisturbed *manzil*:⁴⁷

> من أرض البريص إليهم<br>فَعَلَّتْ مَنْ أَرْضُ الْبَرِيصِ إِلَيْهِم<br>حَتَىَ الكَّاتَبَ بَيْضَةَ لَمْ يُؤْثَرِ<br>

I went up to them from the land of al-Barīṣ<br>Until I reclined in a tavern, free from scoundrels

The verse following this line describes a songstress and the goblet from which the wine was consumed. If it is assumed that verse 17 is thematically related to the preceding line,

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⁴⁷ No. 13, v. 16. For more on this line, see Chapter 1, Part III. For more on the term *diryaq* as a Greek loanword, see Chapter 4, Part II on the wine lyric.
the continuation of the motif of wine drinking confirms the interpretation of the term *manzil* as referring to a tavern or location associated with drinking.

In spite of the common usage of this term in pre-Islamic poetry, Ḫassān employs the word *manzil* in a unique fashion, transforming it into a sedentary term referring to a tavern. This is not to imply that Ḫassān never employs the term in its more traditional meaning. In poem 309, Ḫassān uses *manzil* in a traditional opening line recalling the deserted abode.\(^{48}\)

**Vineyard (**καρμ**)**

At first glance, the term vineyard may not seem to have an urban connotation, but the cultivation of grapes for wine requires a civilization that is both sedentary and agriculturally advanced. The vocabulary of wine cultivation and consumption is varied and frequent in Ḫassān’s poetry due to the prominence of the wine lyric in his Ghassānid compositions. This section focuses on the poet’s specific references to vineyards (singular: *karm*, plural: *kurūm*).

The root of this term *k-r-m* is common in pre-Islamic poetry, and its use is generally related to generosity and not wine cultivation. The particular noun used by Ḫassān signifying vine or vineyard, *karm*, is not as frequent. The term appears once in the *diwan* of al-Nābigha whose exposure to al-Shām region would have been similar to Ḫassān’s.\(^{49}\) The noun also occurs twice in the *diwan* of Ḥmrū’ al-Qays in reference to Ḫassān’s.\(^{49}\)

\(^{48}\) No. 309, v. 1. This verse was cited earlier in this chapter in the context of Ḫassān’s use of the term *dayr*.

\(^{49}\) For al-Nābigha’s reference to *karm*, see Arazi, *al-‘Iqd al-thamīn*, 943.
vineyards, once in the singular, and once in the plural. Both al-Nābigha and Imrū’ al-Qays had exposure to sedentary civilizations. Al-Nābigha’s experience has been mentioned previously, and Imrū’ al-Qays traveled through Ghassānid territory and includes several Ghassānid toponyms in his famous mu’allaqa ode.\(^{50}\)

In Ḥassān’s poetry, the term *karm* appears in the singular once and twice in the plural. Poem 13, which has been noted previously for containing a lengthy section on wine, is the backdrop for two of these references. In the first instance, the poet describes the location and composition of a drinking party:\(^{51}\)

\[
\text{نَعۡدُو بِنَاجِمٍ وَمُسۡتِعَةٍ لَنَا} \\
\text{بَيۡنَ الۡكُرُومِ وَبَيۡنَ جَرِّعَ الۡقُسُطَلِ}
\]

We had our morning drink in a goblet and a songstress (was present) Between the vineyards and Jiz’ al-Qaṣṭal

There is a possibility that in this verse the poet was referring to a proper noun called al-Kurūm. Given the context of wine and the reference to a songstress, it seems that the most likely translation is the literal “vineyards.”\(^{52}\) In the final verse of the same ode, Ḥassān describes a “trellised vineyard” from which the grapes used for his wine had originated. This phrase further emphasizes the level of agricultural cultivation that had been reached in Ghassānid lands. Ḥassān remarks:\(^{53}\)

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\(^{50}\) For more on Imrū’ al-Qays’s connection to the Ghassānids, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:259-265.

\(^{51}\) No. 13, v. 17.

\(^{52}\) Additionally, Shahīd has pointed out that the Qaṣṭal region was renowned for its vineyards. See Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:241n112.

\(^{53}\) No. 13, v. 33.
Early in the morning I set out to drink with him and I did not tarry. It was in a glass, plucked from the best trellised vineyard.

In poem 85, Ḥassān again uses the term kurūm in the context of a description of the vineyards, which may have been in al-Shām. Although the intended meaning of the verse is not clear, the usage of the term vineyards is relevant to this study:

Then the yards of the district [vines?] produced Vineyards that were pampered above the high place

Ḥassān’s repeated mention of vines and vineyards distinguishes him from other jāhili poets, with possible exception of al-Nābigha who spent a great deal of time outside of the Arabian Peninsula, and further demonstrates his familiarity with the sedentary and agricultural Ghassānids.

2.4 Structures Associated with Burial

Tomb (qabr)

The term qabr (tomb) is not absent from jāhili poetry, but it does not appear frequently. This fact can be attributed to the fact that nomadic tribes would have been unlikely to build elaborate tombs for deceased family members. The pre-Islamic poet who mentions tombs the most frequently is al-Nābigha. In one verse, he mentions two

---

54 Shahîd argues that the toponym mentioned in the poem Dhāt al-Salāsil is located in al-Shām due to the description of the vineyards that follow. Shahîd BASIC, 2.1:233-234.

55 No. 85, v. 3.
tombs, that of King al-Ḥārith and the tomb of another Ghassānīd king.\(^{56}\) This verse provides information that can supplement the description of the tomb of al-Ḥārith found in the poetry of Ḥassān. Similarly, Ṭarafa mentions the term *qabr* twice in his *dīwān*.\(^{57}\)

In poem 13, Ḥassān describes the tomb of al-Ḥārith, using the term *qabr* twice in the same verse:\(^{58}\)

\[
\text{أولاد جُنَّة حُرَّل قَبر أبيهم}
\]

The sons of Jafna around the tomb of their father,
The tomb of Ibn Māriya, the generous and noble

As mentioned previously, this verse has been cited by classical scholars as evidence that the Ghassānīds were sedentary. Ibn Rashīq notes that Ḥassān is praising the Ghassānīds for being settled and contrasting them with those who migrated from place to place.\(^{59}\) Ibn Rashīq is correct to note that a nomadic tribe would be unlikely to have a tomb like this visited by the king’s descendants, however, the significance may go beyond even this. This poem was composed during the Islamic period, probably between 632 and 661. Those visiting the tomb were not the literal “sons of Jafna” (*awlād Jafna*), but they were Ghassānīd descendents remembering King al-Ḥārith, a ruler and ancestor who had died many years before in 569. Shahīd has suggested that al-Ḥārith’s tomb may

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\(^{56}\) *Dīwān al-Nābīgha*, 30.

\(^{57}\) For more the usage of *qabr* by Ṭarafa and al-Nābīgha, see Arazi, *al-‘Iqd al-thamīm*, 872-873.

\(^{58}\) No. 13, v. 11. For more details on the debate over which al-Ḥārith is being mentioned here, see Shahīd, *BASIC*, 2.2:130. Also see Chapter 1, Part III for more on this verse in context.

have been a mausoleum that had become a pilgrimage center for the Ghassānids in the years after their demise.\(^{60}\)

### 2.5 Other Lofty or Monumental Structures

**Marble Houses (buyūt al-rukhām)**

The term *bayt* (plural: *buyūt*) is a high frequency term in pre-Islamic poetry, and it is used as a synonym of *dār*, especially in its meaning of a deserted abode. The term *bayt* occurs eighty-seven times in the singular or plural in *Mu‘jam lughat dawāwīn shu‘arā’ al-mu‘allaqāt al-‘ashar*.\(^{61}\) For this reason, the terms *bayt* and *dār* have not been included in this analysis of urban terminology. Nonetheless, Ḥassān, at times, uses the terms *bayt* and *dār* more creatively, showing his connection to urban culture. This is the case in his phrase “houses of marble” (*buyūt al-rukhām*), which appears in poem 23 in the context of the praise of wine. Following a description of how the wine in question had been aged, Ḥassān proceeds to say that after drinking the wine, he and his companions went to the houses of marble to listen to poetry being sung:\(^{62}\)

\[
\text{نَمْ نَغَىٰ في بيوت الرَّخَمَ}
\]

We drink it pure and mixed
Then we listen to singing in the houses of marble

---

\(^{60}\) Shahīd, *BASIC*, 2.2:582-585 and *BASIC*, 2.1:108. In these sections, Shahīd also addresses the question of the exact location of the tomb and suggests Jalliq as the most likely option.

\(^{61}\) Al-Shāyi’, *Ma‘jam lughat*, 113.

\(^{62}\) No. 23, v. 10.
The phrase “houses of marble” clearly points to a sedentary culture. The significance of Ḩassān’s mention of *buyūt al-rukḥām* is even greater when it is considered that the term for marble (*rukḥām*) is not common in pre-Islamic poetry, and it only appears twice in the collected *dawāwīn* of the six preeminent poets of the *jāhilīyā*. The term is used by al-A’shā in a line mentioning the destruction of the Ma’rib dam in south Arabia, recalling that it had been built with marble. The monumental structures mentioned by Ḩassān may have been designed primarily for the recitation or singing of poetry and other oratory. Shahīd has dealt with this concept in depth and suggests that the term points to the existence of an *oiseion* in Ghassānid cities.

Ḩassān does not specify what is being sung is the houses of marble, but the term *ghanna* which Ḩassān uses may imply the singing of poetry. The poet uses the passive form of the verb “to sing” to indicate that he and his companions listened to the singing of poetry, probably performed by songstresses. Evidence of Ḩassān’s belief in the link between singing and poetry see the following line found in his *Dīwān*:

*eterangan*=

Sing in every poem you compose
Verily, song is poetry’s venue

---

63 *Arazi, al-‘Iqd al-Thamīn*, 510. Imrū’ al-Qays uses the term in the context of a description of his mount.

64 *Dīwān al-A’shā*, 201.

65 For more on the *odeum*, its history in ancient Greece, and Ḩassān’s use of the term *buyūt al-rukḥām* in this context, see Shahīd’s section “The Oideion/Odeum” in *BASIC*, 2.2:676-81.

66 No. 230, v. 1. This is not one of Ḩassān’s Ghassānid poems.

67 The term *midmār* is the venue, or domain, where horses are trained.
Structure (bunyān)

The form I verb from the root $b-n-y$ is common in jāhili poetry and occurs twenty-eight times in the collected dawāwīn of the ten poets of the mu‘allaqī. The verb is used in both figurative and literal contexts. Despite the frequency of the verb, the noun bunyān, meaning “building” or “structure,” is only mentioned twice in the works of the major jāhili poets. In both cases it is in the context of a comparison. Unlike in these uses of the word bunyān, Ḥassān employs the word literally and not in a comparison in poem 158. Here he emphasizes the tall, imposing nature of the buildings by modifying the term bunyān with the adjective rafī‘. The term rafī‘ encompasses a range of meanings, including “high, elevated, exalted, lofty, or eminent, in rank, condition, or state.” Ḥassān describes “every lofty structure and gathering place” (kull bunyān rafī‘ wa-majlis) of the Ghassānids, whom he is remembering long after their demise:

\[
\text{نَدَّى كُلّ بُنَيَّةٍ رَفَعٍ، وَمَجَلِّسٍ}
\]
\[
\text{مَيْلَى، وَكَأْسٍ أَخْلَصَتْ لِمَ تَصَرَّفُ}
\]

At every lofty structure and gathering place
Are intoxicated people and a moistened cup which never runs out

The term bunyān also appears in a passage of rhymed prose recited in praise of ‘Amr Ibn al-Ḥārith and attributed to Ḥassān. The prose passage enumerates the many superlative traits of the Ghassānids, including admiration for the edifices they built. The

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68 Al-Shāyi’, Mu’jam lughāt dawāwīn, 112 and 120; and Arazi, al-‘Iqd al-thamīn, 281-283.

69 Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, 3:1124.

70 No. 158, v. 8.
passage lauds these structures for their height, saying “The tallest building is your building” (wa-‘alā al-bunyaīn bunyānuka). Although Kitāb al-aghānī cites sources attributing the rhymed prose to both al-Nābigha and Ḥassān, Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfāḥānī endorses the opinion of al-Madā’inī who claimed that Ḥassān was the true author.

Following his quotation of al-Madā’inī’s opinion, Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfāḥānī adds, “And that is more accurate” (wa-hūdhā aṣhāḥī).

**Pillar (‘āmūd and rukn)**

Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry contains several references to pillars, using either the term ‘āmūd (plural: ‘umud‘/a/mida) or rukn (plural: arkān). Several of the verses that mention pillars employ traditional desert-related terminology in a more urban context. In poem 123, Ḥassān praises the Ghassānids:

*Tall was the abode of the powerful one who always put his guests at ease And whose structures possessed imposing pillars

Like bayt, the term dār occurs very frequently in jāhilī poetry, especially in the opening nasīb when the poets mention the remains of a deserted encampment. Dār, or its plural diyyār, appears 143 times in the poetry of the ten mu‘allaqāt poets. In the above verse, however, Ḥassān’s use of the term is different though the literal translation

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72 No. 123, v. 4.

73 Al-Shāyi’, Mu’jam lughāt dawāwīn, 113.
“abode” is the same. Similarly, the term *hulūl* is from the high frequency root *ḥ-l-l* whose general meaning, “to dismount, take up residence, and settle down,” is closely tied to a nomadic lifestyle. The term *hulūl* here is the plural of *ḥall* and does not convey the more common meaning of “staying” or “stopping.” In this context, the best translation is structures. Ḥassān then employs an adjectival construct state (*īḍāfa ghayr ḥaqiqīya*) literally meaning “great of pillars” (*‘azīmat al-arkān*) to modify the term structures (*ḥulūl*). Ḥassān admires both the structures of the Ghassānids and the character of the rulers. The strength of the structures appropriately matches the might of the rulers themselves.

Another mention of a pillar (*‘amūd*) appears in poem 158 where the poet laments the defeat of the Ghassānids by the Persians. In a nostalgic line, Ḥassān recalls when the Ghassānids were still in power, employing the image of a collapsed pillar to convey this sense of time gone by:

Abodes of kings whom I saw in a state of delight
When the pillar of kingship had not yet collapsed

---

74 For more on this root and its connection to the Bedouin lifestyle, see al-Shāyi’, *Mu’jam lughat dawāwīn*, 121-124.


76 Conrad has translated this line as follows: “That was the abode of him whose tent is raised on lofty poles/The one dear unto me beyond the measure of his friendship and favour.” By interpreting *arkān* as poles, rather than pillars, Conrad implies that the Ghassānids were nomads. See Conrad, “Epidemic Disease in Central Syria,” 30. See also Shahīd’s detailed rejection of this interpretation. Shahīd, *BASIC*, 2.1:293-295.

77 No. 158, v. 6.
Again, the poet employs the plural of the high frequency term *dār* to refer to the palaces where he had once visited the Ghassānids.

Another example of the common term *dār* being used in a distinctly urban way can be seen in poem 85. In the opening verse, Ḥassān mentions several elements of a deserted campsite: 78

أجَدْكَ لَمْ تَجْنِ لَرَسْمِ الْمَنَارِ  
وَدَارٍ مُُلُوكٍ فَوْقَ ذَاتِ السَّلَامِ

You were not moved by the remains of abodes  
Nor by the abode of kings above Dhāt al-Salāsil

While the first of these two abandoned sites, “remains of the dwellings” (*rasm al-manāzil*), fits entirely within the traditional desert *nasīb*, mention of “the abode of kings” (*dār mulūk*) is less common. The image of kings once residing in this deserted abode creates a very different impression than the traditional remains of a tent. The description of these dwellings continues in line 4 where Ḥassān describes them as “abodes made beautiful by God.” 79 The scholia clarifies, “The abodes of kings were not the tents of the Bedouins.” 80

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78 No. 85, v. 1.

79 No. 85, v. 4. For the text and translation of this line, see Chapter 1, Part II.

Gate (bāb)

In the jāhilī period, the term bāb refers to an entrance, arch, or door. It is relatively common and does not seem to always point to urban settlement. In at least one instance, Ḥassān’s use of the term may imply that he was describing a walled city. In the opening verse of poem 136, a pre-Islamic ode, Ḥassān requests that his companion gaze out from the gate of Jalliq:

Look, my friend, from the gate of Jalliq
Can you make out anyone at this side of al-Balqā’?

The main version of the text in ‘Arafat’s Dīwān includes the phrase bi-batn Jalliq, but an alternate reading suggests bāb instead of batn. This reading is favored by Ḥanafi al-Ḥasanayn. Given that the term bāb here is the first term in the īdāfa, and that the second term is the well-known urban center of Jalliq, one of the two capital cities of the Ghassānids, the verse may imply that the city was surrounded by a wall, with arches or gates.

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81 The term and its plural (abwāb) appear thirty-two times in the combined dawāwīn of the ten mu’allaqāt poets. See Al-Shāyi’, Mu’jam lughat dawāwīn, 112. See also Arazi, al-Iqd al-thamān, 274-275.

82 No. 136, v 1. For this reading of bāb, see Dīwān, 1:280. According to al-Mubbarad, when Ḥassān was elderly and had lost his sight he attended a banquet where he heard this verse being performed. The old man is reported to have wept, remembering the days of his youth and good health. See al-Mubbarad, al-Kāmil, 2:809-810.

83 For a persuasive argument for this meaning, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:235; and Shahīd, BASIC, 2.2:579.
In another instance, Ḥassān uses the phrase “gates of the kings” (*abwāb al-mulūk*) when remembering when he used to visit his patrons, the Ghassānids. The linkage between *bāb* and royalty here may also be meaningful. He boasts:84

وتوّروِ أبواب المُلُوك رَكَابًا ومِمَّن حَكَمُ في الْبَرَِّ كَتَدِلِ

Our mounts visit the gates of the kings
And when we are appointed as arbiters over people we act justly

In addition to these references, Ḥassān mentions the term *bāb* in contexts that could mean “door” or “entrance.” In these cases, his use of the term would be more in line with his peers.85

This section has explored some of the terminology in Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry that suggests a familiarity with an urban, sedentary culture beyond that of his contemporaries who hailed from nomadic tribes. Ḥassān’s choice of lexical items reflects a conscious decision to set his poetry in an urban context. Although traditional themes related to the life of a nomad can also be found in Ḥassān’s poetry, many of his compositions combine urban terminology with the standard desert repertoire of terms, and some lexical items that occur in high frequency in pre-Islamic poetry are employed in uniquely urban ways by Ḥassān who links these terms to his experiences with the royal house of Ghassānids.

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84 No. 13, v. 30.

85 See the following verses: 153, v.6; no. 5, v. 10; and no 90, v. 3.
Chapter 3: Ḫassān and the Nasīb

3.1 The Traditional Nasīb

This chapter discusses Ḫassān’s treatment of the amatory prelude (nasīb) of the traditional pre-Islamic qaṣīda. A brief description of the traditional nasīb is provided, followed by an analysis of Ḫassān’s nasīb, with focus on his innovative treatment of the aflāl motif. Another poet who famously rejected and manipulated this theme is the ‘Abbāsid poet, Abū Nuwās, and a brief comparison is drawn between these two poets. Next, this chapter argues that Ḫassān initiated the genre of lament for fallen kingdoms (riṯā’ al-mamālik) in which the traditional topos of aflāl is employed to mourn a fallen dynasty. This type of poetry is associated with later periods in Arabic literary history. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of the Ghassānid toponyms which occur throughout the poetry of Ḫassān, especially in his opening nasīb. By substituting towns in the sedentary, agricultural al-Shām for the traditional desert place names associated with the Arabian Peninsula, Ḫassān again demonstrates his preference for settled life. Several examples of Ḫassān’s ability to employ the more traditional motifs associated with the nasīb are also examined in this chapter.

One of the most common desert-related motifs found in the nasīb of the qaṣīda is weeping over ruins (bukā’ ʿalā aflāl). In this topos, often simply referred to as aflāl, the poet stops to weep over the remains of an abandoned encampment where his lover’s tribe had once resided. This literary convention rests on the assumption that the poet and the beloved are from nomadic, or semi-nomadic, tribes that migrate depending on conditions, and it can only be understood within this context of desert life. Hamori
accurately notes that “the abandoned campsite is an embodiment of the nomadism that dictates the meetings and partings which the *nasīb* deals with.”¹ Often the poet will describe the specific “remains,” including tent pegs, hearth stones, and trenches. Surveying the ruined campsite provides the poet with an opportunity to recall his time spent with his lost love and to evoke a feeling of nostalgia that sets the stage for the rest of the poem.

The ninth-century scholar Ibn Qutayba elaborates on the traditional opening of a *qaṣīda*, explicitly linking it to the nomadic lifestyle of the Arabs:

I have heard from a man of learning that the composer of Odes began by mentioning the deserted dwelling-places and the relics and traces of habitation. Then he wept and complained and addressed the desolate encampment, and begged his companion to make a halt, in order that he might have occasion to speak of those who had once lived there and afterwards departed; for the dwellers in tents were different from townsfolk or villagers in respect of coming and going, because they moved from one water-spring to another, seeking pasture and searching out the places where rain had fallen. Then to this he linked the erotic prelude (*nasīb*), and bewailed the violence of his love and the anguish of separation from his mistress and the extremity of his passion and desire, so as to win the hearts of his hearers and divert their eyes towards him and invite their ears to listen to him…²

One example of this type of *nasīb* considered exemplary by commentators, both classical and modern, is the opening verse (*maṭla‘*) of Imrū’ al-Qays’s *mu‘allaqa* ode:


Stop, both of you. Let us weep for the memory of a beloved and an abode
At the curving ridge of sand between al-Dakhūl and Ḥawmal

Weeping over the ṣṭālāl was not the only possible opening motif for the nasīb
during the pre-Islamic period. Other motifs for this section of the ode include description
of the beloved’s “night apparition” (khayāl or ṭayf) or the poet observation of the
preparations of the beloved’s tribe for departure. The dominance of the poetic convention
of ṣṭālāl was established in the jāhilī period, and it became the model for a poetic prelude
which was imitated well into the Islamic period, remaining popular even among urban
poets who had little experience in a desert environment. During the Umayyad period,
poets such as Dhū al-Rumma retained the centrality of the desert in their poetry,
especially in the nasīb. Yet, during the ‘Abbāsid period, many traditional desert motifs
were manipulated, assimilated, or imbued with a metaphorical symbolic meaning.

3.2 Ḥassān and the ṣṭālāl

Ḥassān’s creative treatment of the deserted encampment motif can be seen as a
further expression of his rejection of the traditional pastoral lifestyle. In one instance, he
employs the traditional ṣṭālāl motif, but rather than weeping over the remains he claims
that they do not evoke feelings of nostalgia and loss.

3 Dīwān Imrū’ al-Qays, 8.


5 No. 23, v. 1.
The traces of the site did not stir Ḥassān
Nor did the departure of the tribe or the edifice of the tents

By claiming that the abandoned campsite has no impact on him, Ḥassān is not only rejecting the nomadic lifestyle implied by the motif, but revising the conventional aṭlāl itself. He mentions the traditional elements that are often employed to evoke a lost youth, such as the structure of the tents (mabnā al-khiyām) and the image of the tribe departing (maẓ‘an al-ḥayā), but they do not appear as physical manifestations of his grief. To the contrary, he observes them dispassionately, commenting that they do not move him.

Similarly, in poem 85, Ḥassān opens with a verse evoking the traditional imagery of the aṭlāl motif:

أَجَادِكَ لَمْ تَهْتَجْ لَرَسْمِ الْمَنَازِلِ وَدَارَ مَلُوكٍ فَوَاقِ ذَاتِ السَّلَامِ

I swear that you were not moved by the remains of a dwelling
Nor by the abode of kings above Dhāt al-Salāsil

The poet here uses terms that are traditionally associated with the nasīb, such as “remains of dwellings” (rasm al-manāzil) and an “abode” (dār), but he again indicates that these locales did not move his companion. Ḥassān’s use of the second-person singular in “I swear that you were not moved” (ajiddaka lam tahtaj) may indicate that he is speaking to a companion, or he could be addressing himself here in the form of a soliloquy. The poet employs verbs from the same root (h-y-j) in the opening line of poems 23 and 85. The

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6 No. 85, v. 1.
two forms Ḥassān uses, forms I and VIII, convey the same meaning “to be astir, to be agitated.”

3.3 Ḥassān and Abū Nuwās

The poetry of Abū Nuwās (c. 757-814) reveals a literary genius with a penchant for parody and subversion of a variety of traditional themes, not just those related to desert-dwelling Arabs. Abū Nuwās famously rejected and parodied many conventions of the qasīda, including the traditional atlāl topos. There has been great debate over his motivations for this, especially his possible connection to the broader shu‘ūbī movement which derided Arab culture in favor of the Persian heritage. Julie Scott Meisami has argued that much of Abū Nuwās’s rejection of the atlāl of should not be taken “at face value.” Rather, she argues that “it serves to establish the khamriyya as counter-genre” and notes that Abū Nuwās could “employ the topic seriously when he wished.”\(^7\) Philip F. Kennedy has noted that Abū Nuwās’s manipulation of the atlāl motif was to demonstrate that he was “a master of its lexicon whilst effectively - and impishly - providing the khamriyya with its own nasīb.”\(^8\) Whatever his motivation, Abū Nuwās’s rejection, or manipulation, of the traditional nasīb represents the first major challenge to this dominant topos.

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Unlike Abū Nuwās, Ḥassān was not attempting to create a new genre of poetry, nor are his compositions characterized by the literary skill or sense of sharp irony employed by Abū Nuwās. Despite this, there are two main parallels that can be drawn between the poets. First, both were imbued with an urban, sedentary mindset and worldview which led each to manipulate traditional motifs less well-suited to their own lifestyle. Secondly, each poet mocks the pastoral lifestyle. Ḥassān’s rejection of the nomadic ways of the desert Arabs has already been discussed. In this section, aspects of Abū Nuwās’ urban viewpoint and his disdain for the lifestyle of nomads will be considered.

Frequently, Abū Nuwās dismisses the *ātlāl* in favor of wine:

\[
\text{والراحُ النَّفِقِيَ على الرُّبُوعُ يَبَيِّمُ}
\]

The wretch went off wandering at the *ātlāl,*

Whilst I wandered off with the wine in the palm of my hand

In the following verses, Abū Nuwās employs the *ātlāl* imagery to describe a tavern that is deserted of its patrons:

\[
\text{وَدارُ نُدَايَ عَطْلَوْها، وَأَذُلَّوا،}
\]

\[
\text{وَأَعْضَافُ رَيْحَانَ جَنَّيٍّ وَيَابِسً}
\]

\[
\text{مَسْاحَبٌ مِّن جَرْرٍ الرُّفَاقِ عَلَى الْقْرِيَّ،}
\]

\[
\text{وَإِلَيْ أَتُمَّ اَلْقَبُّ لَكِ لَحَبْسٍ}
\]

My boon companions left the abode and went away by night

One trace from them is new, and one is crumbling

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9 Kennedy, *Wine Song*, 45.

10 *Dīwān Abū Nuwās*, 488-489.
On the ground are the traces of wineskins being dragged
And bouquets of basil - fresh and dry
I asked my companions to stay and I have renewed our acquaintance
Verily I will do this [compose poetry] on the likes of this [a tavern]

Abū Nuwās skillfully employs traditional terms and phrases associated with the ruined encampment, such as “crumbling” (dāris) and “they deserted it” (ʾattālāhā), but he uses them to paint the image of an empty tavern instead of an abandoned campsite. In the final line cited above he suggests that he prefers to compose poetry on this and not on the irrelevant campsite of an Arab nomad.

Another example of Abū Nuwās’ treatment of the aṭlāl can be seen here where he follows the traditional format of the opening lament but replaces the standard desert traces with urban locales in his native town of Basra:11

The prayer-place is now empty of me [as are my old haunts],
The sand dunes of the two markets of Mirbad and Labab -

Faded is the mosque which brought together noble qualities and Religion, faded too are al-Ṣīhān and al-Raḥāb,

Abodes where I spent my youth until this greyness appeared in my side-whiskers

According to Meisami, in these lines Abū Nuwās manipulates the familiar topos so that “his traces have been effaced from those placed [sic] he frequented in his

11 Dīwān Abū Nuwās, 68. For this translation, see Kennedy, Wine Song, 46.
youth." Jaroslav Stetkevych has cited these verses in his book *Zephyrs of Najd* as an example of "fully internalized" ruins. He contends that Abū Nuwās is not telling us that the town itself is actually ruined, rather, "it is his youth and happiness in that city which are in ruins." 

In addition to such playful manipulation of the *ahlāl* motif, Abū Nuwās demonstrates his disdain for pastoral Arabs throughout his compositions. In the following lines from one of his most famous *khamrīya*, the poet expresses his loyalty to his life of wine drinking:

For this life (of pleasure) is the one for me, not the tents of the desert
And this drinking (is for me), not the drinking of (camel’s) milk

Where are the Bedouins compared to Kisrā’s vaunted halls?
Where compared to its surrounding expanses?

These verses are strikingly reminiscent of Ḥassān’s rejection of the nomad’s custom of drinking milk in the evening, in favor of the fine wine of the Ghassānids. Both Ḥassān and Abū Nuwās illustrate their preference for an urbane lifestyle by contrasting the drinking of wine with the beverage of the desert Arabs, milk. Thus, 

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14 *Dīwān Abū Nuwās*, 91.

15 No. 90, v. 2.
Ḫassān’s Ghassānid poetry anticipates the odes of Abū Nuwās, but Ḫassān’s compositions are free from the later poet’s anti-Arab shuʿūbiya. While Abū Nuwās extolled the Persians over the primitive Bedouin Arabs, Ḫassān’s poetry lauds the Byzantinized Arabs over the Arab nomads.

3.4 Nasīb as Elegy

Ḫassān can also be seen as a forerunner to later developments in Arabic literary history in his use of the ʿatīlāl motif to lament the demise of a fallen dynasty. Although it is traditionally associated with Andalusian poets who composed elegiac laments for their lost homeland following the collapse of the Umayyads and the reconquest of al-Andalus, employing the topos of ʿatīlāl to mourn fallen cities is not without precedent in the Arab East and there are examples of this in the ʿAbbāsid, Crusader, and Mongol periods. Yet, long before these poems were composed, Ḫassān creatively and effectively employs elements of the standard desert-focused nasīb to lament the defeat of the Ghassānids, his former patrons. In two odes, poems 84 and 158, composed at the end of the poet’s life, Ḫassān laments the conquest of al-Shām by the Persians. In these compositions, Ḫassān

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17 This study has categorized poems 84 and 158 as dating from the third period of Ḫassān’s life (632-661) when the poet is reported to have visited al-Shām at least twice. However, it is possible that these two odes were composed earlier. Ḫassān may have visited al-Shām between the time of its conquest by Persia in 614 and his conversion to Islam in the 620s. Due to the detailed description of the Persian occupation of the region, it is certain that the odes were composed after 614. See Shahīd, BASĪC, 2.1.244n124.
innovatively uses the traditional aṭlāl motif to lament the fate of the Ghassānids, initiating a new genre of Arabic poetry, elegies on fallen dynasties.

Poem 84 describes the Persian occupation of Ghassānid territory, with particular attention to the region of the Golan (al-Jawlān). The poem opens with an oath and a traditional nasīb. Ḥassān mentions a deserted abode (maskan) in the vicinity of two toponyms, Muʿarraf and Naṭā. Then, in the following lines, the poem describes the tribe which had previously resided in this region, a tribe that the poet distinguishes for their sedentary lifestyle. After extolling the tribe and contrasting its members with nomads, the poet moves on to describe the scene of their departure:

As she scattered the tears from her face, she said, “Perhaps you are leaving early tomorrow. May I go before you.”

The sentiment of emotional pain caused by an impending departure in this verse seems to fit the traditional mold of the nasīb. Use of the term ħurr here implies that the woman in question was a freewoman, and not a slave. Yet, in the following line it becomes evident that the cause of the separation and anguish is not the migratory life of a nomadic tribe, but the defeat of the Ghassānids by the Persians:

18 Verses 2-5 will not be dealt with in depth here as they have been discussed in the context of Ḥassān’s praise of the Ghassānids for their sedentary lifestyle. See Chapter 1, Part II on Ḥassān’s preference for urban over rural life.

19 No. 84, v. 6.

20 This translation of nafsī qabla nafsika relies on al-Barqūqī’s explanation of the phrase. See al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 272n4.

21 No. 84, v. 7-8.
The Persian commander conquered the lowlands
Surrounded by the herbs and flowers of the peaks of the Golan

He possessed himself of the land of Ghassān from the edges 22 of Muhbil
To Mount Arethas, thus his intentions are obvious 23

In addition to their importance from a literary perspective, these lines provide
valuable historical data on the extent of the Persian occupation. Their presence stretches
from Muhbil to Ḥārith al-Jawlān (Mount Arethas). The first of these two locations has
been vocalized Muhbil or Mahbal and its location is unclear. 24 Ḥārith al-Jawlān is the
mountain now known as Jabal al-Ḥāra located east of Jābīya. 25 The phrase Ḥassān uses
here to describe the leader of the Persians biṭrīq fāris, literally meaning “Persian
patricius,” demonstrates his familiarity with Byzantine terminology to refer to rulers.

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22 The term akfāf found in ‘Arafat’s main text has been substituted with the alternate akgāf, meaning “sides” or “edges.” See Dīwān 1:196.

23 The last two terms in this verse have caused commentators considerable consternation. Most versions of the dīwān read fa-al-nayī ẓāhir. The commentators attempt to explain the former reading by noting that al-nayī is a rare plural of al-nīya, meaning “intention,” or as al-Barqūqī elaborates “the direction that a traveler takes in a journey, near or far.” See al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 273n1. Shahīd suggests that al-nayī is a corrupt reading and should be replaced with al-baghtī, an aggressive, wrong deed, which would accurately capture the pejorative connotation needed to describe the actions of the Persian general. Additionally, the term is the same morphological pattern as the al-nayī and al-shayī and fits the meter of the poem. See Shahīd, BASIC, 1.1:243n118. Another possible translation could be to utilize the alternate reading fa-al-shayī ẓāhir, meaning, “he (it?) is the conqueror.” For this reading, see Dīwān, 2:196.

24 Shahīd contends the word may be a corruption of Majdal, dating back to the medieval period. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:242-243.

25 For Jabal al-Ḥāra, see Dussaud, Topographie, map 1.
Hassān may have been referring to Shahrbaraz, the Persian general who led the forces in the campaign against the Ghassānids and the Byzantines.26

In poem 158, Hassān again laments the Persian conquest of the Ghassānid lands. He weeps for an anonymous Ghassānid king or prince who was killed in battle against the Persians. He opens the ode by employing the standard toponyms of the nasib, but his goal here appears to be to show the extent of the destruction inflicted by the Persians (Kisrā) who he mentions in the first line:27

The Persian kings have given me such misery
Between us are the stony hills28 of al-Sammān and al-Mutathallim29

Verses 3 and 4 continue on the traditional theme of the emptiness of the deserted encampment. But, in this case, this is not the result of a migrating tribe but rather of a brutal military campaign:30

26 For this, see Shahid, BASIC, 2.1:242 and BAISC, 1.1:638.

27 No. 158, v. 1.

28 See footnote 20, page 107 on quff (plural: qifaf) meaning “stony hill.”

29 The location of al-Sammān is unknown, while al-Mutathallim also occurs in the mu’allaqa of Zuhayr. Yaqūt suggests that al-Sammān might be in Jordan or Arabia. See Yaqūt, Mu’jam al-buldān, 3:423.

30 No. 158, v. 3-4.
The waters of al-Ḥārithayn are being wiped out
And all the numerous living beings were obliterated from their waters

The watering hole is deserted of its owners
It used to give a drink in earthenware jars and green wine jars

Using the ātlāl motif to mourn a fallen dynasty is an effective and poignant innovation on the traditional nasīb. Made famous by the poets of al-Andalus, this genre has appeared as recently as the nineteenth century in the compositions of the neo-classical poet Ahmad Shawqī. Although his poetry lamenting the defeat of the Ghassānids is less developed than these later poets, Ḥassān was certainly among the first Arabic poets to attempt this innovation on the traditional ātlāl theme.

3.5 Ḥassān as a Traditionalist

It is important to note that Ḥassān’s treatment of the nasīb is not uniform throughout the Dīwān, and he does not discard all the traditional aspects of the prelude. Even in his Ghassānid poetry, at times, Ḥassān uses traditional nasīb motifs, including

31 The phrase “the waters of al-Ḥārithayn” (miyāhu al-ḥārithayn) is in the dual and is explained by most of the commentators as referring literally to the two al-Ḥāriths, al-Ḥārith the father, and al-Ḥārith the son. Al-Barqūqī suggests that Ḥassān’s intention here is to convey that if the Hāriths had been in power, the Persians would not have been able to defeat the Ghassānids. See al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 444n2. The phrase may also refer to a body of water named after the two kings, which is how it has been translated here.

32 The final two terms in this verse, qilāl and ḥantam, are nouns referring to various types of wine jars.

33 References to the vanished kingdoms of south Arabia do appear occasionally in the poetry of other jāhilī poets, but these lines praise a distant civilization familiar to the poet only through myths and stories. There is no personal connection between the poet and the fallen dynasty. Two cases in point are al-Aʾshā’s mention of the destruction of the Maʾrib dam in Yemen and al-Aswad ibn Yaʿfur’s reference to the abandoned abodes of the people of Muḥarriq and Iyād. See Dīwān al-Aʾshā, 201; and al-Dabbī Muʿaddal ibn Muḥammad, Sharḥ al-Muʿaddaliyāt li-Ṭabarzī, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī (Cairo: Dār Nahdat Miṣr, n.d.), 2:793. In contrast to these verses, Ḥassān’s elegies on the Ghassānid reflect the poet’s intimate connection and emotional attachment to his subject.
descriptions of the night sky, the apparition, and the departure of the beloved’s tribe.\(^{34}\)

One example of Ḥassān’s use of traditional pre-Islamic imagery can be seen in the following line where the poet expresses apprehension regarding the beloved’s impending departure:\(^{35}\)

\[
\text{وَأَفْخَفَتُ لَمَا قُوَّضَ الْحَيَّ حَيْمِهِمُّ بَرَاعُونَ بِبِنْ تَرْكُ الْرَّأْسِ أَشْيَاا}
\]

I was certain of the fears of separation which left my head white
When the tribe had departed (from) their tents

Some scholars have criticized Ḥassān’s attempts to use these conventions. Salma K. Jayyusi contends that his weeping over ṣṭlāl “reeks of artificiality.”\(^{36}\) Al-Naṣṣ is more generous, commenting that the reader has the feeling that the poet only included an amatory prelude “in deference to the prevailing traditions of the Arabic ode since the days of the jāhiliya.” He also notes that despite Ḥassān’s lack of first-hand knowledge of the pastoral lifestyle of the desert nomads and the ṣṭlāl they encountered, he “knew another ṣṭlāl other than that which was spoken of by the desert poets, and those were the ruins of the Ghassānid abodes in Bilād al-Shām.” Al-Naṣṣ cites the opening lines of Ḥassān’s famous ode on the conquest of Mecca as an example of abandoned Ghassānid abodes being used to express a mixture of grief and love, elation and bitterness. On other

\(^{34}\) For Ḥassān on the night sky, see no. 27, v. 1-5. For the beloved’s apparition, see no. 1, v. 4. For the departure of the tribe, see no. 27, v. 6. For a translation and analysis of five of Ḥassān’s lines on the night sky, see J. Stetkevych, The Zephyrs of Najd, 150.

\(^{35}\) No. 27, v. 6

common desert themes, al-Naṣṣ notes that Ḥassān is not particularly innovative and tends to keep the opening ʿatlāl section rather brief. 37

Darwīsh approaches this topic from a slightly different angle. He notes that Ḥassān’s strong preference for luxurious, urban life can be seen in “his clear lack of interest in describing aspects of desert life, such as drought, clouds, horses, camels, cattle, gazelles, or onagers.” For this reason, Darwīsh continues, Ḥassān’s compositions on these themes are not as impressive as other famous jāhilī poets, like Imrūʿ al-Qays. Yet, on subjects where he had greater experience, such as wine drinking and parties, he excelled. 38

3.6 Place Names in Ḥassān’s Nasīb

The poetic significance of the string of place names which frequently characterize the opening lines of the jāhilī and classical Arabic qaṣīda has been well-expressed by Jaroslav Stetkevych in his work devoted entirely to the development of the nasīb. 39 He emphasizes the symbolic role of the toponyms rather than their geographical location. By employing a litany of familiar poetic locales, the poet connects to the mood of loss and yearning which the nasīb evokes. In the case of Ḥassān’s poetry, toponyms frequently serve this function, sometimes setting the stage for the elegiac mood for the poem, while at other times playing the role of establishing a proper introduction to the main gharad of

37 Al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān, 203-206.  
38 Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 484.  
the poem. Yet, he often selects names of towns and cities associated with the Ghassānids in al-Shām rather than the recurring Arabian mountains and regions of his contemporary poets. This is a telling distinction that sets him apart from other poets. In these instances, his invocation of the locales is not merely symbolic. Hassan presents a “new toponymic necklace using these Syrian place names” which further confirms his familiarity with al-Shām and his close connection to the Ghassānids who ruled there.40

Among the toponyms of al-Shām that Ḥassān employs frequently in his opening nasīb are the Ghassānid capitals at Jābīya and Jalliq; mountains such as Jabal al-Thalj (Mount Hermon), Ḥārith al-Jawlān (Mount Arethas), and Buḍay` near Damascus; regions like the Golan, Ḥawrān, al-Bathanīya, and Gaza; and towns in al-Shām such as Damascus, al-Barīs, Buṣra, Jāsim, ‘Adhrā’, and Yarmūk.41 Ḥassān does not employ this technique only in his odes devoted to praise of the Ghassānids, such as poems 13 and 123, but at times, he prefaces a poem on an unrelated topic in this manner. For example, his poem on the conquest of Mecca begins with a prelude depicting the ruined abodes in towns like ‘Adhrā’ near Damascus.42 Ḥassān continued to employ these toponyms even when he was no longer court poet for the Ghassānids.

40 Shahīd, BASIC, 2.2:655.

41 This is not an exhaustive list of Ḥassān’s Syrian toponyms but merely a sampling. For a detailed treatment of toponyms in Ḥassān’s poetry, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:233-246. Also see, Chapters 1 and 2 in Part III which provide analysis of two specific poems that demonstrate Ḥassān’s use of place names.

42 No. 1, v. 1. Some scholars have suggested that the entire opening prelude for this ode dates from the pre-Islamic period, noting that it would not have been appropriate for the poet of the Prophet to praise wine in this context. While it is possible that the nasīb pre-dates the remainder of the poem, there are examples of other early Islamic poetry employing traditional motifs such as wasf al-khamr in distinctly Islamic poems, such Ka’b ibn Zuhayr’s famous burda ode.
It has been shown that Ḩassān’s treatment of the *nasīb* was innovative on several levels. He inverts the *topos* of the deserted ruins by referring to the traditional elements of this stock theme while declaring himself to be unmoved by it. The separation that Ḩassān establishes between himself and the desert precipitates the urbanization of later Arabic poetry during the ‘Abbāsid period, especially in the poetry of Abū Nuwās. Perhaps Ḩassān’s most critical contribution to the development of Arabic literary history lies in his initiation of the genre of *mithāl al-mamālik* in which he applies the *atlāl* motif to the deserted abodes of his former patrons, the Ghassānids. Finally, Ḩassān’s connection to the Ghassānids is evident in his use of Syrian place names and other toponyms from the region controlled by the Ghassānids rather than the traditional desert locales of his contemporaries.
Chapter 4: The Wine Lyric as an Element of Urbanism

4.1 Ḣassān as a Wine Poet of the Jāhilīya

When historians of Arabic poetry discuss the motif of wine (khamr) in the pre-Islamic period, two individuals are usually identified as the main wine poets of the era, al-Aʿshā and ʿAdī ibn Zayd. The poet al-Aʿshā has been hailed as the greatest wine-poet of the jāhilīya and his effusive descriptions of wine include many of the elements that were expanded on and developed further in the later ʿAbbāsid khamrīyāt. Although originally from the tribal group of Bakr, al-Aʿshā traveled extensively and his poetry demonstrates his experience in the urban settings of Ḥīra in Iraq and the Ghassānid towns of al-Shām. Similarly, ʿAdī ibn Zayd composed his wine poetry in the highly sophisticated, urbane environment of the Lakhmid court at Ḥīra. He was fluent in Persian, as well as Arabic, and is often cited as an example of urbane pre-Islamic poetry.

Ḥassān’s wine poetry has been largely neglected by scholars, but a careful study of his verses on this topic reveals that he belongs among the ranks of these great jāhilī wine poets. The neglect of Ḥassān’s contribution in this realm is likely linked to his involvement with the Prophet in the Islamic period. Islam prohibits the consumption of wine, and so to focus study on the wine poetry of the “poet laureate” of the Prophet may have seemed inappropriate to later scholars. Even poetry composed prior to Ḥassān’s

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conversion to Islam has not elicited much serious scholarship. The extent of scholarly treatment of this motif is usually limited to discussion of the poet’s denunciation of wine following his conversion.\(^3\) Both ‘Adī and al-Aʿshā were Christian poets who did not convert to Islam. ‘Adī, the earlier of the two, certainly did not live into the Islamic period, and al-Aʿshā is thought to have died around 625. Although there are some legendary accounts of al-Aʿshā considering conversion at the end of his life, his connection to Islam is slight. Thus, neither of these poets share Ḥassān’s “problematic” association with Islam to detract from their wine verses. In his forthcoming work on the social, cultural, and economy history of the Ghassânids, Shahîd presents Ḥassān as the preeminent wine-lyricist of the Ghassânids and explores his verses on wine for the precious information they provide regarding the social life of the Ghassânids. He describes Ḥassān as “an ancestor in spirit of the great wine poet of the Umayyad period, al-Akhtal, who like Ḥassān was a Christian and was inspired by the wine and vineyards of the same region, Umayyad Bilād al-Shām formerly Byzantine Oriens.”\(^4\)

Thus far, this study has addressed the motif of *khamr* only in passing as it appeared as a point of contrast between the primitive ways of the Bedouins and the sophisticated Ghassânids. This chapter explores more thoroughly the poet’s bacchic verses and examines their role in the urbanism that characterizes Ḥassān’s Ghassânid poetry. It will be shown that Ḥassān’s poetry on wine serves as a critical element of his

\(^3\) For classical accounts of Ḥassān’s alleged renunciation of wine, see Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-āshāb*, 1:344.

\(^4\) Shahîd, *BASIC*, 2.2:235. For the entire section on Ḥassān’s wine poetry, see *BASIC*, 2.2:235-256.
urbanism and illustrates his appreciation for the luxurious lifestyle of the sedentary Ghassānids.

Ḥassān’s extant wine poetry encompasses concise poems devoted solely to wine, including two independent couplets weighing the positive and negatives effects of wine, as well as longer passages extolling wine that are embedded within polythematic odes. These passages are sometimes woven into the opening *nasīb*, often following a depiction of the beauty of the beloved. The transition from this motif to the wine lyric is frequently a comparison between the woman’s mouth or saliva and the taste of wine. At other times, the wine lyric occurs in the context of descriptions of drinking gatherings or as an example of the generosity and hospitality of the poet’s patrons. Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems that include sections or isolated verses on wine are poems 1, 13, 23, 90, 261, and 266. Rather than treating each poem individually, this chapter categorizes the verses based on three main themes in Ḥassān’s wine poetry: praise of the wine itself, description of the effects of wine, and accounts of drinking gatherings.

### 4.2 Praise of Wine

The first aspect of Ḥassān’s wine poetry is praise of the wine itself. These verses frequently include a physical description of the wine, often mentioning its color and quality. The excellence of the wine is sometimes depicted by emphasizing the lengthy process of aging or by noting the origin of the wine. Certain towns in al-Shām were

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5 It is a common feature of pre-Islamic wine poetry to include praise of *khamr* within the broader *qaṣīda* rather than composing full-length independent *khamrīyāt*, as became popular in the ‘Abbāsid period. For more on wine poetry in the *jāhiliyya*, see Harb, “Wine Poetry,” 219-224.
associated with vineyards and the production of particularly high quality wine, and these locales are frequently mentioned in Ḥassān’s wine poetry. The flavor of the wine is lauded in these verses and is sometimes compared to other types of food. The wine may be extolled as the best of all beverages.

In the following line from poem 13, Ḥassān describes the wine as red (ṣahbā’) and pure (ṣāfīya):⁶

I have sipped wine in its tavern,
Reddish in color, pure, like the taste of pepper

The description of the wine’s flavor as being pepper-like has been explained by the commentators as referring to the burning sensation felt by the drinker.⁷

A second verse that mentions the hue of the wine occurs in poem 23, a pre-Islamic ode that includes a substantial section on wine. Of the total twenty-three lines, eight are devoted to the praise of wine (v. 8-15). The passage immediately preceding the wine section is the description of the poet’s beloved, a woman named Sha’ṭhā’.⁸ Ḥassān compares her to a gazelle, then describes her mouth to be like a cool pool of water (thaghab bārid). This water is so sweet that it is as though it were mixed with wine. This vibrant tableau provides the transition from the description of Sha’ṭhā’ to the wine lyric.

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⁶ No. 13, v. 21.

⁷ Al-Barqūqī, Shārḥ, 367n1.

⁸ Sha’ṭhā’ appears frequently in the poetry of Ḥassān. The scholia suggests that she may have been a member of the Naḍīr tribe, one of the two main Jewish tribes in Yathrib, or possibly Ḥassān’s wife from the tribe of Aslam. See Diwān, 2:6.
Hassān then describes the flavor and color of the wine and praises it for having been aged a long period of time:

\[
\text{شَجَتُ بَصَبْهاءِ لَهُ سُوَٰرَةُ
مُرَّ عَلَيْهَا فِرْطُ عَامٍ فَعَامَ}
\]

It is mixed with reddish wine that has a sharpness
From Bayt Ra’s, it has been aged in sealed casks

The tavern stored the wine for a long time,
Year after year passed it by

Hassān employs the passive verb ‘\textit{uttiqa}, meaning “to age” or “to cellar,” to highlight the importance of the aging process. During this period of storage, which appears to have lasted several years (‘\textit{ām fa-‘ām}), the wine was kept in sealed casks (\textit{khitām}).

Another verse that suggests the high value of properly aged wine can be seen in poem 1. Like poem 23, this ode includes wine description as part of the opening \textit{nasīb}.

The verses preceding the wine lyric describe the apparition (\textit{tayf}) of Sha’thā’ who keeps the poet awake at night. The saliva of the beloved is compared to well-aged wine that has been mixed with honey and water. The mention of the beloved’s teeth (\textit{anyāb}) is a frequent motif in love poetry from this period.\footnote{10} Again, Hassān changes the topic from Sha’thā’ to wine by the linking her saliva to wine. The following two verses from poem 1 introduce the wine lyric:\footnote{11}

\textsuperscript{9} No. 23, v. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{10} The phrase “on her teeth” (‘\textit{alā anyābihā}) occurs in at the beginning of line 7 in the Arabic, but for the sake of a smooth translation it has been moved to line 6 in the English.
\textsuperscript{11} No. 1, v. 6-7.
It is as though a hidden [wine] from Bayt Ra’s
Is on her teeth, mixed with honey and water

Or like the taste of a succulent apple,
(Just) pulled close and snapped (from the branch)

In the first line, the poet refers to the wine as *khabī’a*, meaning “hidden,” implying that the wine has been tucked away and stored somewhere for a long period of time. After noting that the wine has been mixed with honey and water, the poet continues his depiction of the taste of the wine by comparing it to the flavor of a fresh apple (*ta’m ghadd min al-tuffāḥ*).  

Also apparent from the above verses is the emphasis on the origin of the wine. Both of the above examples (no. 1 v. 6 and no. 13 v. 21) mention that the wine is imported from Bayt al-Ra’s (Capitolias), a town in Jordan renowned for its wine and vineyards. Another town mentioned by Ḥassān in connection to wine is Baysān (Skythopolis), located in Byzantine Palestine and famous for its vineyards.  

Before continuing the exploration of the wine passage in this poem, a word of background on the ode itself is necessary. Poem 1 is Ḥassān’s renowned *hamziya* on the conquest of Mecca. It is in this ode that the poet first describes himself as the defender of the Prophet. Although the main *gharad* of the poem is overtly Islamic and certainly dates from the second period of Ḥassān’s life (622-632), the poem is likely to be of a

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12 In the context of a Ghassānīd ode, the reference to an apple may indicate Ḥassān’s familiarity with the famous apples of Lebanon, which he could have tasted when spending time in the neighboring Golan. See Shahīd, *BASIC*, 2.1:238.

13 See no. 23, v. 13.
composite nature. The opening prelude follows a strictly traditional pre-Islamic format. It begins with surveying the traces of abandoned towns (set in al-Shām), a description of the poet’s beloved, and verses praising wine. These references to wine have puzzled scholars who view this section as a contradiction of the Islamic principles espoused in the later sections. Seeking to explain the “unIslamic” aspects of the ode, some have argued that this section of the ode pre-dates the following section. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr quotes Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī (d. 851), commenting that the opening of poem 1 was composed by Ḥassān in the jāhilīya, while the remainder was composed during the Islamic period. Other scholars point to the literary conventions of early Arabic poetry and the importance of certain stock themes, arguing that including a feature such as the traditional introduction in an Islamic poem would not have seemed inappropriate at the time. For example, the famous burda ode composed by Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr on the Prophet includes set themes of jāhilī poetry, such as a sensual description of a woman and praise of wine. Regardless of its composition date, poem 1 contains five lines of wine poetry.

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14 For more on this poem, its sections, and the debate over its composition date, see ‘Arafat, “Hassan b. Thabit, Diwan, No. 1: The Historical Background to a Composite Poem,” Journal of Semitic Studies 15, no. 2 (1970): 88-97; and Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 194-195. Interestingly, ‘Arafat’s skepticism of the authenticity of Hassān’s poetry leads him to the conclusion that Hassān is not the author of the main section of the poem. ‘Arafat contends that the only section of the poem which may be authentic is the Ghassānid prelude.

15 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, al-Iṣṭīḥāb fī maʿrifat al-ashāb, 1:344. For other modern scholars who have argued that the prelude was composed during the pre-Islamic period and the body of the poem in the Islamic period, see Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 194-195; Abū al-Fāḍil. Ḥassān, 65-66; and ‘Arafat, “The Historical Background to a Composite Poem,” 96.

After comparing the taste of the wine to an apple, Ḥassān praises the quality of the wine as being above other wines and superior to all other beverages. So much does Ḥassān prefer the wine to other drinks that he suggests all the other beverages should serve as ransom (al-fidā’) for the wine.\(^\text{17}\)

إِذَا مَا الأَشْرَابُ ذَكَرَنَّ يَوْمًا ۖ فَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ للرَّاحٰلِ الْفَدَاَٰءُ

When drinks are mentioned one day
They are (all) ransom for the best wine

The term ṭāh employed here to refer to the wine is derived from the root r-w-h which is related to being comfortable. This adds to the image of the relaxing effect that wine had on those who drank it. The scholia of the manuscripts elaborates on this term saying, “Wine is called ṭāh because of the relaxation of the one who drinks it.”\(^\text{18}\) Similarly, the following two verses of poem 1 fall into the category of the effects of the wine and will be explored in the following section.

4.3 Effects of Wine

Beyond describing the appearance and quality of the wine, Ḥassān’s bacchic lyrics extol the effects the wine has on the one who consumes it. These effects are deftly portrayed using a range of analogies from the sensation of ants crawling through sand (no. 23, v. 11) to the tendency of wine to make the drinker feel like an invincible lion (no. 1, v.10). Ḥassān also acclaims the medicinal benefits of wine and notes that it can make

\(^{17}\) No. 1, v. 8.

\(^{18}\) Dīwān, 1:7.
an old man feel young again (no. 23, v. 12). Wine’s capacity to make sorrows and concerns vanish (no. 266, v. 3-4) is also praised.

Returning to poem 1, verse 9 exclaims that wine can serve as the drinkers’ scapegoat if any disagreements arise between them:¹⁹

إذا ما كان مفت أو لحاء

We blame it [the wine] if we suffer,
If strife or insults arise

Ḥassān continues:²⁰

وأسدنا ما ينهبونا اللقاء

We drink it and it leaves us kings
Or lions who cannot be restrained

The poet claims that the wine makes those who drink it feel like royalty or invincible, fearless lions. This mention of kings (mulūk) is especially significant in the context of the Ghassānid association of this prelude. It explicitly links the wine and its effects to the poet’s experiences with the Ghassānid kings.

Verses 11-13 of poem 23 eloquently describe the effects of wine. Ḥassān likens intoxication to the feeling of ants crawling in sand and remarks that the wine can even make an elderly man feel younger. He also compares the wine to an antidote (diryāq) with a relaxing, medicinal benefit:²¹

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¹⁹ No. 1, v. 9.
²⁰ No. 1, v. 10.
It creeps through the body
Just like a tiny ant crawls through the sand

When an old man drinks five times from its cup
He will wear the clothes of a youth

I chose it from the wines of Baysān۲۲
As an antidote which quickly loosens the bones

Hassān’s use of the Greek loanword *diryāq* in his poetry has been cited as evidence of the Hellenization of the Ghassānids through their contact with the Byzantine Empire.۲۳ The term *diryāq* also appears in another of Hassān’s verses:۲۴

They were given the antidote of nectar as a drink
And their daughters were not called upon to break open the colocynth

۲۲ Baysān (Skythopolis), located in Byzantine Palestine, was renowned for its vineyards.


۲۴ No. 13, v. 14. For more on this verse, see Chapter 1, Part III.
Poem 266 provides a final example of Ḥassān’s verses on the impact of wine. This composition consists of two related couplets on wine and is found only in Ibn ‘Asākir’s Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq and not in the traditional recensions of the dīwān. According to Ibn ‘Asākir, Ḥassān composed these lines at the request of the Ghassānid king Jabala ibn al-Ayham. The king is reported to have said, “I am infatuated with wine, so vilify it so that I can refuse it.” The poet then recited the following two lines in which he portrays wine as a vice:

ولولا ثلاث هن في الكأس لم يكن ها نم من شارب حين يشرب
ها نرق مثل الجنون ومصرع، ذي، وآن العقل بناء، ويزرب

Were it not for three things in the glass (of wine)
It would be priceless to the one who drinks it

It has recklessness like madness and imminent destruction,
Rationality remains at a distance and slips away

Then Jabala replied, “You have vilified it [wine], so now present it in a favorable light.” The poet recited the following couplet:

ولولا ثلاث هن في الكأس أصبحت
كألفس ما لا يستفاد ويتطلب
على حرفها، والهم يسلى فيذهب

Were it not for three things in the glass (of wine)
It would be the most precious of useless, unrequested things

It slays worry, the soul reveals goodness over sadness,
And worries are thought of no more, then depart

---

26 No. 266, v. 3-4.
Thus, Ḥassān’s poetry portrays both the positive and negative results of wine consumption. Ibn ‘Asākir concludes this anecdote by informing his readers that Ḥassān’s second poem was so convincing that Jabala determined not to renounce wine.27

4.4 Descriptions of Drinking Gatherings

Ḥassān’s wine poetry also encompasses numerous lines and passages depicting drinking parties which often took place in al-Shām in the company of the Ghassānids. Set in taverns or in the “marbles houses” of the Ghassānids, these gatherings are described as enjoyable affairs, involving characters such as drinking companions, servers, and singing girls. Such verses are valuable not only for the information they provide about how and when wine was consumed but also because in them Ḥassān explicitly link the consumption of wine to the luxurious, sophisticated lifestyle of the Ghassānids.

Poem 13 contains a number of verses on wine; ten lines of the thirty-three line ode are devoted to praise of wine. As this ode is translated in full in Part III, here the analysis is limited to the verses of wine lyric.28 In verse 16 the poet describes climbing to a tavern near al-Barīṣ in al-Shām. Once in the tavern, he describes the drinking gathering, using the specialized verb ghadā meaning “to have a morning drink.” Wine is served in a goblet (nājūd) and songstress (musmī‘a) performs.29

27 For this account, see Dīwān, 1:442; and Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq, 2:181-182.

28 For the Arabic text and English translations of the full ode, see Chapter 1, Part III. The following verses deal with wine and are included in this chapter: verses 13-17, 21-25, and 33.

29 No. 13, v. 16-17.
I went up to them from the land of al-Barīṣ
Until I reclined in a tavern, free from scoundrels

We had our morning drink in a goblet and a songstress (was present)
Between the vineyards and Jizʿ al-Qastal

A second passage on wine appears later in the poem 13 which also describes a
drinking gathering. This line has already been mentioned in this chapter in the context of
the physical description of the wine (no. 13, v. 21). Here, Ḥassān recalls drinking wine in
the town’s tavern and depicts the color and flavor of the wine. The following verse
describes the waiter, a frequent character in poetic descriptions of drinking gatherings. In
poem 13, the waiter at the tavern appears in line 22, either wearing an earring
(mutanaṭṭif) or wearing a belt, or girdle, around his waist (mutanaṭṭiq). Both of these
readings are found in the manuscripts. The exact meaning of the poet here is not clear,
but in either case, the waiter is portrayed as bringing drinks quickly. Ḥassān notes that the
attentive waiter supplies more wine “even though it was not my first drink” (wa-law lam
anhal). The wine is of high quality and the waiter is attentive. The poet addresses the
waiter directly in lines 23 and 24, requesting that he bring him a new glass of wine, one
that is not mixed with water. He praises both the pure and the diluted wine as being
“well-pressed” (ḥalab al-ʿaṣīr), but demands the stronger of the two which will “loosen

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30 Ḥassān’s use of the verb yūghal here may be an original play on the noun waghl (plural: awghāl) meaning “intruder” or “unwanted guest.”

31 Dīwān, 1:79.
his joints more” (arkhāhumā lil-mafšil). Next, Ḥassān describes the wine as dancing in its glass. This image of the glass dancing (zujāja raqaṣāt bi-mā fi qa‘rihā) can be interpreted in a variety of ways. It is possible that what is dancing in the depths of the glass is something added, such as saffron.\textsuperscript{32} The dance is compared to a she-camel (al-qalūš) being ridden by one who is in a rush (bi-rākibin mustā’jīlī). The Arabic text and translation are as follows:\textsuperscript{33}

A server with an earring gave me a drink in a goblet
He gave me a second drink, though I had not had the first

I said, “I have sent back what you served me.
It was mixed with water, so bring me one which is undiluted.

Both of them are well-pressed,
But give me the one that will loosen my joints more!”

In a glass which danced with what was in its depths,
Like the dance of a young she-camel with a hurried rider.

The phrase “he gave me a second drink, though I had not had the first” uses the specialized verb nahila meaning, “to have a first drink.” The scholia elaborates on the

\textsuperscript{32} Shahīd, BASIC, 2.2:237.

\textsuperscript{33} No. 13, v. 22-25.
poet’s meaning, paraphrasing “he brings me drinks, in any case, whether I am thirsty or not.”\(^{34}\)

A second description of a waiter occurs in poem 23. The server is described as red-faced, or possibly blond (\textit{ahmar}),\(^{35}\) and wearing a tight belt and a \textit{burnus}, which could refer to a hat or cowl worn by monks at the time of the rise of Islam.\(^{36}\) As in poem 13, the most important characteristic of the waiter appears to be his speed and attentiveness in providing wine to his clients. In this, he was focused and undistracted:\(^{37}\)

\[
\text{يَسِعُ بِهَا أَحْمَرُ ذُوَّ بَرْسِ,
مَخْتَلِفُ الْدَّفْرَى هَلْدَبِ الْحِزَامُ
أَرْزُعُ لِلْذَّغَة مَسْتَغْفِرُ,
لَمْ يَدْهِكْ الشَّأْنُ خَفْيَفُ الْقِيَامُ.
}
\]

The ruddy one with a long cowl brings the wine
His belt tightly circling his waist
Most wonderful was his quickness to serve
Lively and attentive, nothing diverted him

Poem 23 also introduces a new location to those frequented by Ḥassān and his drinking companions. Ḥassān comments that after drinking wine in the tavern, he and his friends went to the “marble houses” where poetry was sung to them.\(^{38}\)

\(^{34}\) \textit{Dīwān}, 2:78.

\(^{35}\) Some of the commentators have noted that the term \textit{ahmar} here implies that the waiter is not Arab but is Persian. For this, see al-Barqūqī, \textit{Sharh}, 437n8.

\(^{36}\) The term \textit{mukhtalaq} appears in some of the editions as an alternate reading of \textit{muhtalaq}. In this case, the meaning is more ambiguous. See al-Barqūqī, \textit{Sharh}, 437n8. For more on the possible meanings of \textit{burnus}, see \textit{Dīwān}, 2:103.


\(^{38}\) No. 23, v. 10. For more on “marble houses” as evidence of Ḥassān’s urbanism, see Chapter 2, Part II.
4.5 Wine as a Symbol of Sophistication

Chapter 1 discussed wine as the emblem of the refinement of the Ghassānids in the context of the contrast Ḥassān draws between the bitter colocynth of the desert and the fine wine of al-Shām (no. 13, v. 14). Similarly, the stark dichotomy presented by the poet between the milk-drinking pastoralists and the wine-loving urbanites (no. 90, v. 2-4) was explored.39 Beyond these two examples, Ḥassān employs the imagery of wine and drinking gatherings to emphasis the luxurious lifestyle of his Ghassānid patrons in several other poems.

In poem 261, Ḥassān mentions wine in the context of praise for his patron Jabala. This short poem was composed near the end of the poet’s life and long after the demise of the Ghassānid dynasty. According to the account in Kitāb al-aghānī, Jabala sent a generous gift to his former court poet from his exile in Constantinople. Ḥassān, by then aged and blind, was touched by this kindness and composed a short poem in praise of his former patron. The second line of the poem recalls Jabala’s generosity in sharing wine with his guests:40

39 For this, see Chapter 1, Part II.

40 No. 261, v. 2. Even ‘Arafat who is skeptical of the authenticity of Ḥassān’s poetry includes this short poem among the few authentic poems: “There is no reason why these lines should not be authentic, indeed one would not wish such a touching expression of sincere gratitude to be otherwise.” See ‘Arafat, “A Critical Introduction,” 544-545.
I came to him once, and he brought me nearer to him,  
He gave me his fine wine to drink

This verse includes two terms for wine, *rāh* which has been discussed and *khurtūm*. Ibn Manzūr explains that *khurtūm* is wine that intoxicates quickly.\(^\text{41}\) The following line of poem 261 praises Jabala for his loyalty to the poet throughout his life. Ḥassān exclaims, “He did not forget me when he was the lord of al-Shām, nor when he was Christian among the Romans” (*lam yansanī bi-al-Shāmi idh huwa rabbuhā/ kalā wa-lā Mutanaṣṣiran bi-al-Rūmī*).\(^\text{42}\)

Another poem from the late Islamic period (632-661) that contains a reference to wine is poem 158. In verse 8, the poet describes the lofty structures of the Ghassānids and comments that inside these buildings are intoxicated people (*nashāwā*) and a moistened cup that never runs out.\(^\text{43}\)

\[
\text{لَدَى كُلُّ نَيْبٍ رَفيعٍ وَمَجَلِّسٍ}
\]
\[
\text{نَشَآوَى وَكَأسٍ أَخْضَبَتْ لَمْ تَضْرِبَ مُ}
\]
At every lofty structure and gathering place
Are intoxicated people and a moistened cup which never runs out\(^\text{44}\)


\(^{42}\) No. 261, v. 3.

\(^{43}\) No. 158, v. 8. See Chapter 3, Part II for more on this verse as it relates to urban terminology.

\(^{44}\) Here the verb *ukhlisat* found in ‘Arafat’s text has been replaced with the variant reading *ukhḍilat*. For this reading, see *Dīwān*, 1:317. Also, the verb *tasawwama* found in ‘Arafat’s text has been replaced with the variant reading *tasarrama* meaning “to dwindle.” For this reading, see al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ*, 445.
The final line of poem 13, an isolated verse on the motif of wine, can also be seen as an example of wine presented in the context of leisure and sophistication. The poet describes setting off in the early morning to drink wine with a companion, perhaps his Ghassānid host mentioned several lines previous. The wine is in a glass (zujāja) and comes from the best vineyard (khayr al-karm):

\[
\text{بُجِّاحَةَ مِن خُبْرِ كَرْمِ أُهْدَلِ}
\]

Early in the morning I set out to drink with him and I did not tarry. It was in a glass, plucked from the best trellised vineyard.

This chapter has highlighted the passages in Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poems that describe and praise wine. These verses demonstrate Ḥassān to be one of the great wine poets of his era. Although the motif of wine in Ḥassān’s poetry has not attracted much scholarly attention until recently, the poet’s bacchic poetry includes verses extolling the quality of wine, describing its physical appearance, and noting the effects it has on the drinker. Beyond this, his verses shed light on the drinking gatherings and parties he attended in al-Shām in the company of the Ghassānids. These passages, in particular, form a critical aspect of his urbanism and demonstrate his preference for the refined, sedentary lifestyle of the Ghassānids. The descriptions of wine mentioned in this chapter are by no means Ḥassān’s only references to wine. Passages on wine can also be found in poems 40, 41, 150, 154, and 156.\(^{46}\) As this study is limited to Ḥassān’s Ghassānid odes,

\(^{45}\) No. 13, v. 33.

\(^{46}\) For more on the wine references in poems 41, 150, 154, and 156 see Shahīd, \textit{BASIC}, 2.2:241-244.
only these twenty-six poems have been considered here. The extensive wine poetry in Ḥassān’s Ḍīwān is a topic that requires further research.
Conclusion to Part II

Part II has highlighted some of the features of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry that reflect the poet’s interaction with the urban culture of the Ghassānids. Despite the dominance of desert-related motifs and terminology in jāhilī poetry, Ḥassān’s odes often reject this focus on the desert and the life of nomads in favor of a depiction of life in the villages and towns of al-Shām. He presents a sharp dichotomy between sedentary and nomadic lifestyles and expresses his disdain for the pastoral life. At times, Ḥassān employs urban terminology, while in other instances he uses more traditional vocabulary in a sedentary context. Ḥassān’s innovation extends to his treatment of the traditional atlāl motif which he transforms into a lament for a fallen dynasty. As one of the great wine poets of the jāhilīya, Ḥassān’s poems develop the wine lyric substantially and employ this motif to further distinguish the sophisticated Ghassānids from the Arab pastoralists. Nonetheless, Ḥassān’s poetry sometimes employs traditional literary conventions, and he often interweaves stock desert-related motifs with urban elements.
Part III: Translations and Close Readings of Selected Ghassānid Poems

Introduction to Part III

As has been demonstrated, Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry strongly reflects his exposure to the urban, sedentary lifestyle of his patrons, and Part II has detailed the specific features of his poetry that point to this influence. The final section takes a slightly different approach, focusing on two poems and examining each ode as a complete unit. By studying the poems in this manner, it is possible to glimpse more fully the depth of Ḥassān’s connection to the Ghassānid dynasty.

The following chapters are each devoted to a single poem and consist of a translation and close reading of the poetic text. The chapters begin with a brief background on the text, its historical context, and the circumstances surrounding its composition. The structure of the poem and thematic progression are summarized and presented in a chart. The Arabic text of the poem is then presented, followed by an English translation with line-by-line analysis and commentary. These close readings reference the commentaries of classical and modern scholars and draw comparisons between Ḥassān’s treatment of certain topics and that of his contemporaries.

The two odes selected for close reading are poem 13 (on the letter lām) and poem 123 (on the letter ṇūn). In addition to being, perhaps, Ḥassān’s most famous odes on the Ghassānids, these poems have been chosen based on their artistic value and relevant themes. Both poems date from the last period of the poet’s life and reflect the nostalgic reminiscences of an older man recalling the days of his youth. These compositions have inspired praise from classical and modern scholars, even among those who have shown
little interest in Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry. Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥi praises poem 13, saying, “Among his splendid poetry is (his poem) praising the sons of Jafna of Ghassān, the kings of al-Shām” (wa-min shi’rihi al-rā’i [al-jayyid] mā madaḥa bihi banī Jafna min Ghassān, mulūk al-Shām). Ibn Qutayba also admires the ode. He quotes several lines from poem 13 immediately after citing al-Asma’ī on the decline of Ḥassān’s poetry. The quoted verses are introduced as being among Ḥassān’s good poetry (wa-min jayyid shi’rihi).

‘Arafat notes that Ḥassān’s nostalgic poems on the Ghassānids, including poems 13 and 123, are “among the most readable and noblest of all Arabic poetry on the subject [wine, women, and memories].” Modern scholar ‘Abd al-Majīd Hindī refers to poem 13 as “one of the pearls of his praise poetry” (durra min durar madā’ihihi).

In addition to the critical acclaim these poems have received, their status as Ghassānid is undisputed. Both internal textual evidence and external commentary clearly indicate that these odes were composed on the Ghassānids. Some scholars have even cited these odes as proof that the intimate connection between Ḥassān and his patrons went beyond the typical poet-patron relationship. Additionally, these odes are very likely authentic. Even ‘Arafat contends that these poems are probably genuine and were

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2 Ibn Qutayba, al-Shi’r wa-al-shu’arā’, 224.
5 Al-Nasṣ, Ḥassān, 119-122. Al-Nasṣ claims that Ḥassān could not have been simply a paid court poet if he continued to compose on the Ghassānids long after their fall from power. He also argues that this poem, and others like it, do not contain all the elements of a traditional madīḥ because of their late composition date.
preserved through the centuries due to their true literary value.\footnote{\textquoteleft Arafat, \textquotedblright A Critical Introduction\textquoteright , 546-547.} This is an especially noteworthy comment considering ‘Arafat’s critical approach to the authenticity of Ḫassān’s poetry in general.

The selected odes embody certain features and themes of Ḫassān’s Ghassānid poetry which have been mentioned in this study. Both poems are vivid examples of Ḫassān’s appreciation for the sophisticated lifestyle of the Ghassānids. In these odes, the poet deftly intertwines his nostalgic praise of the fallen dynasty with his belief in their superiority over the nomads. These poems present a sharp dichotomy between the behavior of town-dwellers and nomads. In some cases, individual verses or passages of these poems have been examined in the preceding sections; however, this in-depth treatment provides critical context for these verses by showing how they fit into the larger whole, the complete ode.

In addition to the urban/rural theme, each poem included in Part III deals with an additional theme that is directly related to Ḫassān’s relationship with the Ghassānids. In poem 13, the bacchic motif portrays wine to be the emblem of the refined Ghassānids, while poem 123 provides some of the few remaining references in Ḫassān’s poetry to the Christianity practiced by the Ghassānids. Additionally, poems 13 and 123 provide excellent case studies of Ḫassān’s use of toponyms related to the Ghassānids and the region they inhabited.
Chapter 1: Poem 13

1.1 Background

This ode was composed in the last period of Ḥassān’s life, probably some time after the battle of Yarmūk and the subsequent conquest of Bilād al-Shām in 636 and before the poet’s death around 661. This period has been determined on the basis of internal textual evidence, including specific phrases that indicate a great distance of time between the poet and his subject, and by the fact that the praise itself is general in nature, rather than directed at one particular ruler. Based on this and the nostalgic mood of the poem, most contemporary scholars agree on a late composition date for this poem.¹

Internal textual evidence indicates that the subject of Ḥassān’s praise, the Ghassānids, were no longer in power when the poem was composed. The poetic text includes phrases and terms, such as “in the distant past” (verse 7) and “once” (verses 6 and 7), that suggest a composition date long after the demise of the dynasty. Despite this separation in time between the poet and the reign of his patrons, it is clear that Ḥassān had been a regular visitor at their court. He laments, “I abided in their company a long time, then it became just a memory to be recalled” (verse 18). The text also indicates that the poet was an old man when he composed the ode. For example, Ḥassān bemoans the passage of time and his hair turning gray, then white (verse 19).

Another indication of a late composition date can be seen in the content of the ode more generally. This poem does not fit the standard template for a panegyric in which the

The poem praises a particular ruler in hopes of a reward. The praise in poem 13 is broad in scope. The only king mentioned by name is Ibn Māriya (al-Ḥārith) who died in 569 and would have been long deceased by the time the poem was composed. Rather than appearing as the subject of the panegyric (al-mamdūḥ), al-Ḥārith is mentioned in the context of a description of his tomb which is visited by his descendants. The subject of the ode’s praise can be said to be the Ghassānid dynasty as a whole or Ḥassān’s memories of the Ghassānids.

The mood of the poem is nostalgic and does not contain any hint of the triumphant, exaggerated tone that characterizes many panegyrics. Al-Naṣṣ defines this poem as one of Ḥassān’s “odes of remembrance” (qaṣāʿid al-tadhkār) rather than a direct panegyric (al-madīḥ al-mubāshir). He suggests that poem 13 and the other extant poems praising the Ghassānids do not have the air of poetry composed for the sake of earning money or receiving a reward from the mamdūḥ. Rather, they demonstrate a deep love for the Ghassānids and their urban, sophisticated culture. The lack of some traditional features of a panegyric (madīḥ) can be explained by the fact that these odes were composed late in the poet’s life to recall the fond memories of his youth.²

Despite the evidence that poem 13 was composed in the Islamic period by a nostalgic Ḥassān who was recollecting his days at the Ghassānid court, the classical literary lore surrounding this poem directly contradicts the content of the poem and claims it was composed during the jāhilī period. In Kitāb al-aghānī, Abu al-Faraj Iṣfahānī relates varying versions of a similar story. Although these accounts differ in

² Al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān, 119-120.
several aspects, they share certain key features. In all versions, a young Ḥassān travels to the Ghassānid court where he encounters the renowned poet al-Nābīgha, and in some accounts ‘Alqama ibn ‘Abada, another panegyrist of the Ghassānids. Each of the poets recites verses in praise of the Ghassānids, and in some cases rhymed prose comparing the Ghassānids to their rivals, the Lakhmids. Several accounts mention that prior to entering the court Ḥassān is advised by the king’s chamberlain (ḥājib) who gives the young poet guidance on how to behave in the presence of the king. When it is Ḥassān’s turn to perform, he recites several verses from poem 13. The king is delighted and rewards the poet with a substantial yearly gift.³

There are several reasons to believe that the gist of these accounts is accurate, despite their inaccurate inclusion of poem 13. First, the presence of so many similar accounts with only minor differences suggests that this event, or something resembling it, did occur on one of Ḥassān’s early visits to the Ghassānid court. Each of the accounts presents Ḥassān as a younger and less experienced poet than al-Nābīgha and ‘Alqama who are portrayed as established visitors at the court. This fits well with the facts known about these more senior poets. Al-Nābīgha is thought to have died prior to the rise of Islam, and is certainly an older contemporary of Ḥassān. Most reports on his poetic

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³ Abū al-Faraj al-İsfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:157-161 and 15:170-172. For another version, see Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārīkh mādīnät Dimashq, 2:172-180. There are also variants on this story that occur at the court of the Lakhmids, but do not contain any lines from poem 13. See Ibn Qutayba, al-Shi‘r wa-al-shu‘arā’, 98-99. For a translation of one of the accounts at the Lakhmid court, see S. Stetkeyvych, The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 44-46.
activity can be assigned to the period between 570 and 600. An even earlier figure than al-Nābigha, ‘Alqama was active in the first half of the sixth century. In the Kitāb al-aghānī accounts, Ḥassān is depicted as an untested poet at the Ghassānid court in comparison to the other two poets. Even the king’s praise of Ḥassān’s recitation betrays his surprise at the young poet’s abilities. In one version, he exclaims, “By my life, you are not below them!” (La-‘amrī mā anta bi-dūnīhimā!) In another account, the king discourages Ḥassān from reciting poetry for fear of the other two poets outshining him. These details suggest that the accounts may be generally accurate portrayals of an early visit of Ḥassān to the Ghassānid court. Yet, poem 13 cannot have been the ode recited in this context. The verses of the poem do not make sense in the context of a young, inexperienced poet on his first visit to a royal court.

See A. Arazī, “al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī,” in EI, 7:840-842. That al-Nābigha did not live into the Islamic period is suggested by the fact that he is consistently categorized with the jāhili poets rather than with the mukhadramūn.

G. E. von Grunebaum, “‘Alqama b. ‘Abada al-Tamīmī,” in EI, 1:405. ‘Arafat suggests that while it is accepted that Ḥassān did meet al-Nābigha at ‘Ukāz and possible they also met at the Ghassānid court, it is highly unlikely that he ever met ‘Alqama. ‘Arafat, “A Critical Introduction,” 550.

Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:158.

Some modern scholars have uncritically accepted the classical accounts, insisting poem 13 must have been composed in the jāhili period. For example, Darwīsh claims the poem is from the pre-Islamic period, defending this statement by citing the Kitāb al-aghānī account. See Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 146 and 321-322. Jam’a, another contemporary scholar, presents the poem in the context of one of the versions of the classical accounts in which the poet recites in the presence of al-Nābigha and ‘Alqama at the court of ‘Amr ibn al-Ḥārith without providing any critical analysis. Jam’a, Ḥassān, 91-94. See also Farrūkh, Tārīkh al-adab al-‘Arabī, 1:327.
One explanation for this apparent contradiction is that poetry composed on a dynasty from the pre-Islamic period did not seem particular important in the early years of Islam, and its preservation was not a priority. For this reason, none of Ḣassān’s full-length elegies on the Ghassānids have survived to this day. Yet, several accounts of his interactions with other great poets at the Ghassānid court were passed down through the years, as is evidenced by the variants in the classical sources. When the chroniclers and compilers recorded these accounts in their works, they inserted the only relevant poetry on the Ghassānids available to them. ‘Arafat endorses this possibility, claiming that later narrators may have built up the story around the fact that Ḣassān met al-Nābigha at the Ghassānid Court, and “In the absence of any poems which could have actually been recited to the Ghassānids during their reign, this poem was found the most suitable substitute for this element of the story.”\(^8\) ‘Arafat also asserts that poems 13 and 123 are authentic odes addressed to the Ghassānids “long after their fall.” He suggests that they were composed in Madina and not in their royal courts in al-Shām.\(^9\)

A similar explanation may be suggested to make sense of the confusion in the accounts on the identity of the Ghassānid king. Several different names are mentioned in the varying accounts, including Jabala ibn al-Ayham, the last Ghassānid king.\(^10\) As in the

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\(^9\) Ibid., 551.

\(^10\) The confusion on the king’s identity is hardly surprising considering the lack of documentation on the chronology of Ghassānid rulers after the end of al-Mundhir’s reign in 582, as well as the fact that Ḣassān’s poetry does not include the name of a particular king. From the information known about Hassān’s life, it can be surmised that the poet’s first visit to the Ghassānids was near the end of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice’s reign (r. 582-602) or the beginning of the reign of Phocas (r. 602-610). For more information on the political relationship between the Byzantine Empire and the Ghassānids from arrest of al-Mundhir in 582 to the defeat at Yarmūk in 636, see Shahid, BASIC, 1.1:529-657.
case of the poetry composed on the Ghassānids, the chronology of rulers may not have seemed important in the early years of Islam. By the tenth century when these *akhbār* were compiled by Abu al-Faraj Iṣfahānī, the details of Ghassānid chronology had not been carefully preserved. Due to Jabala’s infamy based on his alleged rejection of Islam, his name may have been more familiar to the later scholars and could have been inserted into accounts involving earlier Ghassānid kings even when chronology of events does not match. This would explain Jabala’s presence in these earlier stories.

The ‘Abbasid-era literary compilations also recount stories that associate poem 13 with the final period of Ḥassān’s life. Lines from this ode appear in another set of accounts which describe the relationship between the exiled Jabala and Ḥassān after the death of the Prophet. Following a brief conversion to Islam, Jabala allegedly reverted to Christianity when he discovered the extent of the egalitarian principles of Islam and fled to Constantinople. Although other sources explicitly deny the conversion, many classical authors narrate an account of an envoy of the Muslim caliph being sent to Jabala in Constantinople. According to *Kitāb al-aghāni*, an envoy was sent to the Byzantine capital by ʿUmar to convince Jabala to return to Islam. Jabala refused to reconsider his decision, but he entertained the messenger and impressed him with his lavish lifestyle. The envoy described hearing the poetry of Ḥassān, including lines from poems 13 and 123, being sung by slave girls. After inquiring about his former poet and hearing that Ḥassān was still alive, Jabala entrusted the messenger with a large monetary gift and fine

robes of silk brocade for the poet. Once the messenger returned, ‘Umar sent for Ḥassān, then aged and blind, and he was led into the court. Upon receiving the gifts and message from his former patron, Ḥassān recited several lines of poetry in praise of Jabala.\textsuperscript{12} Then the envoy told Ḥassān that Jabala had instructed him to spread the robes out over the tomb if Ḥassān died prior to the envoy’s arrival. The episode draws to a close with the poet’s lament: “I wish you had found me dead and done that.”\textsuperscript{13}

It is very likely that Ḥassān did maintain a relationship with Jabala, even after the exiled king moved to Constantinople. ‘Arafat contends that Ḥassān probably received a yearly, or at least regular, gift from Jabala which explains certain details of the story. He cites examples from the accounts as proof that Ḥassān expected a gift from Jabala. In one of the accounts, when the messenger tells Ḥassān that Jabala sends his greetings, Ḥassān immediately responds by ordering the messenger to bring him what Jabala sent. The astonished messenger replies, “I didn’t tell you I had anything with me.” Ḥassān responds, “He [Jabala] always sends his greetings with a gift.”\textsuperscript{14}

One unifying aspect of all of these anecdotes, both those set in the jāhili and Islamic periods, is that each concludes with the exiled king awarding a tangible gift to the poet. Suzanne Stetkevych has explored the role of ritual and ceremonial exchange

\textsuperscript{12} No. 261.

\textsuperscript{13} Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:169. For similar accounts of this interaction between Jabala and Ḥassān, see Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:162-169; and Ibn‘Asākir, Tārikh madīnat Dimashq 2:181-183. Nöldeke has noted that though Ḥassān may have been in contact with Jabala, these tales are probably closer to fictitious legend than historical fact. See Nöldeke’s Die Ghassānischen Fürsten, 46. Also see, ‘Arafat, introduction to Dīwān, 6.

\textsuperscript{14} Abū al-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:169.
between the patron and the poet in the courtly panegyric qaṣīda (qaṣīdat al-madhī).\textsuperscript{15} In the case of this particular ode, the theme of supplication and submission, as elaborated by Stetkevych, is altered due to the fact that the poem is not an actual madīḥ composed in hopes of reward. Rather, it is a nostalgic expression of an old poet recalling his days at the Ghassānid court. He is no longer the court poet, but he vividly recalls that period in his life. Nonetheless, the poem itself draws heavily on the conventions of the panegyric, despite the fact that the mamdūḥ is not one individual but a set of memories.

Additionally, the akhbār and surrounding lore described above demonstrates the patron-client relationship which must have existed previously between Ḥassān and the Ghassānids and supports Stetkevych’s theory on the ritual and ceremonial aspects of courtly praise poetry.

In addition to the unquestioned authorship and literary merits of poem 13, it is a true polythematic ode. The qaṣīda treats subjects ranging from deserted abodes and the passage of time, to fakhr and wine. Carefully woven throughout the poem is the motif of khamr. The wine lyric encompasses eight lines and serves as a critical component of the broader praise theme. Wine is presented as an emblem of the sophistication of the poet’s patrons, and, as such, it is demonstrative of their superiority to others. A detailed examination of this poem provides an excellent opportunity to highlight Ḥassān’s use of this motif in his Ghassānid poetry. Another of Ḥassān’s favorite themes which can be seen in this ode is the poet’s legendary fakhr. Even in a nostalgic ode devoted to his

\textsuperscript{15} S. Stetkevych, \textit{The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy}. See especially her chapters “Transgression and Redemption: Cuckolding the King,” 1-47; and “Transmission and Submission: Praising the Prophet,” 48-79.
former patrons, the poet includes a five-line section in praise of himself and his tribe. Also, poem 13 is an example of a Ghassānid poem saturated with place names associated with al-Shām, confirming the poet’s connection to the region inhabited by the Ghassānids.¹⁶

1.2 Structure of Poem 13

At a length of thirty-three lines, poem 13 is the longest of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid odes and can be divided into five sections.¹⁷ The poem opens with a traditional six-line nasīb which describes the traces (diman) of the abandoned abodes (verses 1-6). The second section (verses 7-20) is the lengthy madīh which praises the Ghassānids for their nobility, wealth, bravery, generosity, sophistication, and might. This passage presents several tableaux which explore these praiseworthy traits. As was mentioned previously, this praise section is not devoted to any one Ghassānid ruler. The praise is general and can be applied to the Ghassānids as a whole, or perhaps more accurately, the praise is dedicated to Ḥassān’s memories of the Ghassānids. This section contains some of the indicators that Ḥassān’s patrons were not in power when the poem was composed. Phrases such as “in the distant past” (fī al-zamān al-awwal, verse 7) and “I abided in their company for a long time” (fa-labīthtu azmān tiwāl fīhim, verse 18) suggest both that Ḥassān spent significant time with his patrons and that this time was in the distant past.

¹⁶ For a detailed study of each of the ten toponyms mentioned in this ode, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:239-242.

¹⁷ Poems 6 and 8 each consist of forty-four lines and are the longest poems in the Dīwān; however, neither of these odes has been included in this study. See Chapter 4, Part I on the identification of Ghassānid poems.
The passage of time is emphasized in verse 19, by the poet’s mention of his graying hair. The madīḥ section is peppered with references like this to the poet himself, such as his reminiscences of the time he spent drinking with his patron (verses 16-17) and the security of his position at that time (verse 20). These lines give the poem a personal touch and suggest that the poet is not simply composing lines for personal gain. These statements indicating the passing of time are not part of the nasīb proper, where they sometimes appear in the other odes; rather, they are part of the praise section itself. This link between the mood of loss and nostalgia traditionally associated with the nasīb and the main gharad of the ode gives the poem a unity of meaning and cohesive organization.

This section of nostalgic praise shifts to a five-line passage on wine (verses 21-25). Although not the first reference to wine in the poem, this is the longest consecutive series of verses on the topic. In the preceding praise section, Ḥassān mentions reclining in a tavern and listening to a songstress (verses 16-17). In this passage, Ḥassān extols the quality of the wine and retells an anecdote that occurred at a tavern (ḥānūt) in al-Shām.

Following the wine description is a section of fakhr (verses 26-30) in which the poet praises his own poetic prowess and extols the virtues of his tribe. Ḥassān closes with a three-line coda (verses 31-33) that returns to the main topic of the ode, the praise of the Ghassānids. He reiterates the generosity and strength of his patrons. In this final section, it seems Ḥassān may have had a specific Ghassānīd king in mind, unlike his earlier section which only praised the Ghassānids in broad terms. Yet, he does not mention a name, referring only to the mamdūḥ as “a youth.” The qaṣīda closes somewhat abruptly.
as the poet mentions setting off in the early morning to drink wine with the unnamed
Ghassānid companion.

The following is an outline of the sections and subsections of poem 13:

I. *Nasib* (v. 1-6)

II. *Madīh* (v. 7-20)

   A. General opening praise (v. 7)
   B. Tableau 1: Nobility and wealth, camel comparison (v. 8)
   C. Tableau 2: Bravery, battle imagery (v. 9)
   D. Tableau 3: Generosity, patronage (v. 10)
   E. Tableau 4: Tomb of Ibn Māriya (v. 11)
   F. Tableau 5: Generosity (v. 12-13)
      a. Panel 1: Image of dogs (v. 12)
      b. Panel 2: Sharing wine (v. 13-14)
   G. Tableau 6: Sophistication, “antidote of nectar” vs. colocynth (v. 14)
   H. Tableau 7: Nobility, lineage (v. 15)
   I. Tableau 8: The poet’s memories with the Ghassānids (v. 16-20)
      a. Panel 1: Drinking in the tavern, sophisticated lifestyle (v. 16-7)
      b. Panel 2: Time spent with patrons, fading memories (v. 18)
      c. Panel 3: Hair turning gray (v. 19)
      d. Panel 4: Poet’s inviolability due to Ghassānid association (v. 20)

III. Wine lyric (v. 21-25)

   A. Tableau 1: Memory of drinking wine in the tavern
a. Panel 1: Wine description (v. 21)

b. Panel 2: Interaction with the waiter, sends back diluted wine (v. 22-24)

c. Panel 3: Comparison between wine and she-camel (v. 25)

IV. Fakhr (v. 26-30)

A. Tableau 1: Praise of the poet’s burning tongue (v. 26)

B. Tableau 2: Praise of tribe’s authority and bravery (v. 27-30)

V. Conclusion, return to praise of the Ghassānids (v. 31-33)

A. Tableau 1: Praise of unnamed Ghassānid king (v. 31-2)

B. Tableau 2: Drinking in the morning with abovementioned king (v. 33)

The rhyme letter is lām and the meter is al-kāmil. Due to the length of the poem and the variety of themes, some verses will be treated together with their broader section, as opposed to individually.

1.3 Arabic Text

اَسْأَلْتُ رَسْمَ الْدَّارِ أَمْ لَمْ تَسْأَلُ
فَأَمْرُ جُرِّ الصَّفْرِينَ فَجَاسِم
فَدِيَ سُلْمِيُّ ذُرُّساً لَمْ تَخْلِلْ
أَقْرَى وَعُطْلَ بِنَهْمِ فَكَاهُهُ
بَعْدَ الْبَيْلَى آيُّ الْكَتَابِ المُنْحَمَل
وَالْمَدْجُونَاتِ مِنَ السَّمَاكِ الأَغْزَلِ
لِمَدْزَلِ ذَرْسَةَ كَأَنَّ لَمْ تَوْهَلْ
فَأَفْعَلَ عَاَلِيَاً نَفْضَ دُمَوعَهَا
دَمَّنَ تَعَابِيْهَا الرَّبَاحَ دُوَارَ
فَأَقْرَى وَعُطْلَ بِنَهْمِ فَكَاهُهُ
دَارَ لَقُوْمَ فَدَ أَرَاهُمْ مَرَةً
يُهْوَماً بِحَلْقِ فِي الَّذِيْمَةَ أَوْلِ
يَمَشُونَ فِي الْحَلَّلِ المُضَاعَفِ نَسْجُهَا
مَشْيِ أَلْجِمَالِ إِلَى أَلْجِمَالِ الْأَبْرَزِ
الْصَّارِبِينَ الْكَبِيْسَ يَبْرُقُ بِيَضَةٍ
ضَرْبًا يَطْلِبُ لَهُ بِنَاهُ نَفْصُيَّل
والحالفون على الصعيف المرن
أولاد حفظة حول فرع أبهم
يغرضون حتى ما نبى كل ابنهم
يسعون من وزر البيض عليهم
يسعون دوي الريح حتى لن نتمكن
بعض الوجوه كرمة أحسابهم
فعلوا من أرض البيض إليهم
نقد بناهج ومسهية لنا
فلبئوا أرمانه طولا فيهم
إما نزي رأسه تغفر لولئه
فلقد يراي موعدي كأتي
ولقد شربت الحمر في حالتها
يسعى على بكأسها متنطف
إنا نوائمني فرد ذئها
كلناها حلب العصر فعطني
برجاهم رفعت بما في فقرها
نسبى أصبل في الكرام ومذودي
ولقد ألقاننا العشيرة أمرها
ويسود سببها جحاهم سادة
ولاوحون الأمر لمهم خطابة
وتزور أبواب الملك ككابينا
وفق يتربى الحمد يجعل مالة
يغطي العشيرة حقها وزيدها
بأكرمت لدنه وما ماظتها

197
1.4 Translation and Commentary

Did you ask the remains of the dwelling
Between al-Khawābī and al-Buḍay‘ and al-Ḥawmal, or did you not?

Then Marj al-Ṣuffarayn and Jāsim,
And the crumbling abodes of Sulmā, as though they were never inhabited

Ḡassān opens the poem with the traditional motif of the abandoned remains (atīlāl) and poses a rhetorical question to his listener (audience). This prelude is more than a simple convention, and it sets the nostalgic mood which dominates this ode. In keeping with the traditional progression of the nasīb, the poet mentions a series of place names in the second hemistich of line 1. The first toponym in ‘Arafat’s edition of the text reads al-Jawābī, but the reading cited here is al-Khawābī, a valley (wādī) located in Bathānīya near al-Buḍay‘, a mountain south of Damascus and the second place name mentioned in the verse. If the reading al-Jawābī is retained, the scholia suggests that Ḥassān’s intention was Jābīyat al-Jawlān and the villages there. Ḥawmal, the third toponym, appears in the mu’allaqa ode of Imrū’ al-Qays, but its exact location has not been identified.

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18 For marginal commentary from the manuscripts on the place names in this verse, see Diwān, 2:74. For the location of Wādī al-Khawābī, see Mustaṭfā Ṭlāṣ’s map of Ḥawrān and al-Jawlān in his edited work, al-Mu’jam al-jughrāfī lil-quṭr al-‘Arabī al-Sūrī ([Damascus?]: Markaz al-Dirasāt al-‘Askariya, 1990), 1:500. For Shahīd’s suggestion that al-Jawābī should be read al-Khawābī, see Shahīd, BASīC, 2.1:240. For al-Buḍay‘, see Diwān, 1:78 and 2:74.
The second line continues the abandoned dwelling *topos*, mentioning additional place names and crumbling abodes. Marj al-Ṣuffarayn is located south of Damascus and is most well-known as the site of a major battle during the Muslim conquest of the region. The town of Jāsim still exists today and is located between Marj al-Ṣuffarayn and Damascus. Both Marj al-Ṣuffarayn and Jāsim are also mentioned in verse 3 of Ḥassān’s poem 123.

19 Both of these toponyms can be seen on Dussaud’s map 2. Dussaud, *Topographie*, map 2.
mujmal). This entire verse is omitted from several of the manuscripts. Verse 4 details the impact that nature has had on the deserted traces over time, emphasizing the poet’s separation and alienation. Use of the form VI verb ta’āqaba meaning “to be successive” emphasizes the ongoing assault of the winds and rains on the abodes.

This section presents two other images which are minor motifs within the nasīb, the night sky and a weeping eye. Descriptions of the night sky and astronomical imagery are a part of a common theme within the traditional nasīb. In the second hemistich of verse 4, Ḥassān mentions Spica Virginus (al-simāk al-a’zal), the brightest star in the constellation Virgo. Another sub-motif in this section is the reference to the eye (al-‘ayn) whose tears are overflowing (tufīd dumū‘uhā or possibly taftīd dumū‘uhā). This description further illustrates the poet’s sense of loss.

The dwelling is so deserted and desolate that it appears no one has ever lived there (ka’in lam tu’hal). This is reminiscent of the phrase in verse 2 where the poet notes that it is as though the crumbling abodes had never been inhabited (lam tuh/lal). This stark reality of desolation stands in contrast to Ḥassān’s vivid memories of the former inhabitants whom he begins to describe in the following line.

Line 6. The abode of a group I once beheld, above the mighty men
Their power was not displaced

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20 Dīwān, 1:76.

This verse plays the role of linking the *nasīb* to the *madīh*, and as such, it highlights a distinctive aspect of many of Ḩassān’s opening preludes. The *atlāl* over which Ḩassān weeps are not reminders of a lost beloved who has migrated with her tribe, nor are they mere adherence to convention. These ruins are both literally and figuratively the abandoned towns of the Ghassānids. This verse provides the first mention of the identity of the inhabitants of the now deserted abodes. The poet describes them as a group so praiseworthy that they were above the mighty men (*fawq al-a’izza*). He contends that their power was not transferred, or displaced (*‘izzuhum lam yunqal*). The scholia clarifies the meaning of this phrase, noting that “their might was not transferred from them to anyone else.” This could imply that no other tribe or group had surpassed them despite their fall from power.

Another feature of this verse is Ḩassān’s personalization of the line. Not only does he praise the former inhabitants of these abodes, but he remembers his own experiences with them. Ḩassān contends that he “once beheld” the tribe (*qad arāhum marratan*). In early Arabic, the grammatical construction of *qad* followed by the imperfect conveyed the meaning “indeed,” rather than its modern meaning of “perhaps” or “sometimes.” Also, the use of the adverbial *marratan* here emphasizes the past tense and the fact that Ḩassān’s experiences with the subjects of his praise was long ago.

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22 For more on Ḩassān’s innovative use of the *atlāl* motifs in his other Ghassānid poems, see Chapter 3, Part II.

23 *Dīwān*, 2:74.

Line 7.  Oh the accomplishments granted to that group! 
Once, in the distant past, I caroused with them in Jalliq

Line 7 is one of the most famous verses in this ode and its opening phrase, *lillāh darr ʿišāba*, is often given as the title of the poem. This phrase extols the achievements of the Ghassānids. The literal meaning of the phrase *lillāh darr ʿišāba* is “the achievement of (that) group is presented to God.”25 It has been rendered more idiomatically here “Oh the accomplishments granted to that group!” After praising the achievements of the Ghassānids, Ḥassān recalls his time spent drinking with his former patrons, explicitly mentioning Jalliq, one of the two Ghassānid capitals. The most likely location of Jalliq is the modern Syrian town of Kiswa, south of Damascus.26 Jalliq was an important city and possibly the winter capital of the Ghassānids. It is here that the famous Ghassānid king al-Ḥārith (r. 529-569) is likely to have been buried.27

Although wine is not explicitly mentioned in this verse, the term *nādamtu* implies drinking and presents the first hint of this sub-theme of the ode. The phrase *fī al-zamān al-awwal*, translated here “in the distant past,” demonstrates the length of time between

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25 Lane interprets the phrase *lillāh darruha* to mean “to God be attributed his deed!” See Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, 13:863.

26 On Jalliq, see Dussaud, Topographie, 319-321; and Diwan, 2:75.

27 For the etymology and history of Jalliq, see Shahid, BASIC, 2.1:105-115. Shahid argues the name itself is the Arabic version of the Latin *Gallica*, the third legion of the Roman army stationed in Syria. For this reason, the name has been vocalized Jalliq throughout this study, rather than Jilliq as it appears in ‘Arafat’s Diwan.
the composition of this poem and Ḥassān’s carousing in the Ghassānid capital. This makes it impossible that the poem could have been composed during the pre-Islamic period, as it sometimes appears in the some of the classical accounts.

Line 8. They walked in robes made of layered fabric,
Striding like stately older camels

After having introduced the main gharad of this poem, praise of the Ghassānids, and mentioned some of their virtues, the first of a series of tableaux demonstrating these traits appears in line 8. Ḥassān lauds the Ghassānids for their maturity and sophistication by comparing them to older camels (singular: bāzil, plural: buzzal). According to al-Barqūqī, a comparison between a man and a bāzil, a camel whose age exceeds eight years, is a compliment which implies that the individual is experienced and his mind has reached full maturity.28 Ḥassān describes the appearance of his patrons when they walk clothed in luxurious attire. This phrase ḥulal al-muḏāʾ af nasjuhā could imply that the garments were made of layered fabrics or that the weaving itself is layered, or doubled. Given the following comparison between the Ghassānids and the stately camels, it is clear the portrayal is a positive one and that the garments add to the sophistication of the poet’s patrons. Another possibility is that the phrase ḥulal al-muḏāʾ af nasjuhā refers to a double-breasted plate of armor, emphasizing the military prowess of the Ghassānids.

28 Al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 364n4.
Line 9. When they struck the leader of a clan, his helmet glimmering, 
The blow would be so powerful that wrist joints were cut off

Line 9 introduces the second tableau of this section. Here Ḥassān commends the 
Ghassânids for their military prowess and bravery. The term kabsh mentioned in the first 
hemistich means “male sheep,” but it is used here to refer to the chief of a clan. Al-
Barqūqī elaborates on this, noting that the male sheep was associated with leading and 
protecting the other sheep.29 In this verse, the military skill of the Ghassânids is 
highlighted by the description of their triumph over the chiefs of other tribes. The term 
used for helmet, bayd, derives its name from the shape of the helmet which resembles an 
ostrich egg.30 Much of the imagery here, such as the glimmering helmet, is traditional for 
battle scenes from poetry of this period. The term banān mafšil refers to the wrist joint 
which are severed by the powerful blows delivered by the powerful Ghassânid warriors.

Line 10. They did not distinguish between the rich and the poor. 
They are the patron of the poor widow

Al-Barqūqī claims that Ḥassān is demonstrating the generosity and magnanimity 
of his patron in this line.31 Ḥassān suggests that the Ghassânids treated both the wealthy 
and the impoverished fairly. Literally, the text states that they mix between the two

29 Al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 364n5.
31 Al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 364-365n6.
groups (wa-al-khālițīn faqi̇rahun bi-ghanīhim). The second hemistich elaborates this concept, claiming that the Ghassānids are the patrons (mun‘īmūn) of the weak widow (al-ḍa‘īf al-murmil).

قبر ابن ماریة الكورم المفضل

Line 11. The sons of Jafna around the tomb of their father,
The tomb of Ibn Māriya, the generous and noble

This verse and its interpretation by classical Arabic scholars has been discussed in Part II as it pertains to the argument that the Ghassānids were a sedentary dynasty. Here the line is analyzed from the perspective of the role it plays in the broader madīḥ section. This verse lauds the loyalty and devotion of the Ghassānids to their ancestor, King al-Ḥārith. The phrase awlād Jafna literally means “the sons of Jafna,” but it also refers to the royal house of the Ghassānids. The phrase ʿal Jafna was often used to refer to the Ghassānids as a whole.

Ibn Rashīq praises this line in his chapter on tatbī’, a literary device he defines as “among the types of allusions (min anwā‘ al-ishāra)” used when a poet “desires to mention something, but he goes beyond it to mention that which follows it. He substitutes it with that which points to it.” In this chapter, Ibn Rashīq identifies and analyzes good examples of this technique. He describes verse 11 as one of the best examples of al-tatbī’. The phrase ḥawla qabr abīhim is a “beautiful tatbī’ which points to the fact that

32 For more on the interpretation of this line by classical scholars, see Chapter 1, Part II.

33 Al-A‘shā refers to the Ghassānids as ʿal Jafna in one of his odes. See Dīwān al-A‘shā, 114.
they are sedentary kings who do not fear, nor do they move from place to place. Their might is firmly established (annahum fī mustaqarr al-‘izz).

The scholia explains that the Māriya referred to in the second hemistich is “she of the two earrings” (dhāt al-qurtayn). The matronymic Ibn Māriya (son of Māriya) refers to al-Ḥārith, though there has been some scholarly debate over which of the two al-Ḥāriths is being mentioned in this line. That al-Ḥārith is referred to by his matronymic attests to the significance of his mother, a princess from the Kinda tribe and one of the most famous Ghassānid queens.

Line 12. They were visited so much that the dogs did not even growl, They do not inquire about the approaching throng

With this tableau Ḥassān shifts the topic of his praise to the generosity of his patrons. He illustrates the extent of the hospitality of the Ghassānids by claiming that their dogs were so accustomed to the great number of guests that were always present that they no longer barked or growled at strangers. In addition to generosity, Ḥassān is praising the wealth of the Ghassānids. This vivid picture of the dogs silently observing the approaching throng (al-sawād al-muqbil) has made it one of the most famous lines

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34 Ibn Rashīq, Kitāb al-‘umda, 1:517 and 526.

35 For more on Māriya, see Shahîd, BASIC, 2.2:129-132. This section contends that this Māriya was the mother of the earlier al-Ḥārith (529-569), rather than the later al-Ḥārith. Nöldeke argues that the reference to Ibn Māriya indicates a later al-Ḥārith who may have died during Ḥassān’s lifetime. See Nöldeke, Die Ghassānischen Fürsten, 22-23.

36 This interpretation of the line is confirmed by the scholia. Dīwān, 2:75.
attributed to Ḥassān, and it has elicited much praise from classical literary scholars. Ibn Rashīq relates an anecdote in which the poet al-Ḥuṭay’a, a contemporary of Ḥassān and fellow mukhaḍram, exclaims on his death bed, “Tell the anṣār that their brother [Ḥassān] was the best praise poet when he said [this line.]”

Line 13. They gave a drink to those who came to them at al-Barīṣ
Ice was mixed with the exquisite wine and cool fresh water

The theme of generosity is expanded in line 13. Here Ḥassān’s patrons are portrayed as offering fine wine (al-rahīq) mixed with cool water (al-salsal) to their visitors. The quality of the wine is implied through the term al-rahīq which literally means “nectar” or “fine wine.” Some scholars have cited this line as an appropriate method of praising kings. According to Darwīsh, Ḥassān extols the hospitality of his patrons while never forgetting that his subjects are kings and not ordinary people. In his chapter on madīḥ, Ibn Rashīq discusses the proper method of praising royalty and identifies this line of Ḥassān’s as an example of appropriate praise for kings.

There has been some debate about the location of the toponym al-Barīṣ. The scholia and many of the commentators contend that it is a river in Damascus, while others have argued it is synonymous with al-Ghūṭa, a fertile oasis to the south of Damascus. It

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37 Ibn Rashīq, Kitāb al-ʿumda, 2:813.
38 Darwīsh, Hassān, 324-325.
40 Dīwān, 2:75-76. It is also possible that al-Barīṣ refers to Khān Shīḥa, west of Kiswa. See al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān, 43.
is possible that the second hemistich contains another place name, Baradā, a river near Damascus. Here the term has not been interpreted as a river, but as a referring to the ice (barad) that was mixed with the wine.\footnote{For this interpretation, see Ibn ‘Asākir, \textit{Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq}, 2:175; and al-Barqūqī, \textit{Sharh}, 365.}

\begin{verbatim}

\textit{yusqawn Dirāq al-rāhiq wal maqāmDirāq al-rāhiq}
\end{verbatim}

Line 14. They were given the antidote of nectar as a drink And their daughters were not called upon to break open the colocynth

Line 14 reinforces the hospitality of the Ghassānids and their practice of giving wine to their guests. The form IV verb \textit{asqā} employed in the previous line appears again here to mean “to give a drink.” Also, the term \textit{al-rāhiq} is repeated and paired with \textit{al-diyrāq}, meaning “antidote.” Based on the term \textit{al-diyrāq}, Ibn ‘Asākir notes that their wine occupied the position of an antidote in medicine.\footnote{Ibn ‘Asākir, \textit{Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq}, 2:176.} Ḥassān’s use of this Greek loanword has been cited as evidence of the Hellenization of the Ghassānids through their contact with the Byzantine Empire.\footnote{For more on the term \textit{diyrāq} and other Greek loanwords in Arabic, see footnote 23, page 171.}

Beyond reiterating the generosity of his patrons, Ḥassān makes a stark comparison between the behavior of the Ghassānids maidens and the daughters of the Arab nomads.\footnote{The translation of the term \textit{walā’id} will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 1, Part III.} This statement of preference for the sedentary, sophisticated Ghassānids has been discussed previously in Chapter 1, Part II, as has the significance of the term

\begin{verbatim}

\textit{al-diryāq}
\end{verbatim}
colocynth (*al-hanzal*). Multiple layers of praise are woven throughout each of these verses. Hospitality, sophistication, and urbane city-dwelling are among the points of pride noted by Ḥassān in this verse.

Line 15. Their faces were white and their descent was noble, Noses prominently raised, first class

Ḥassān lauds the nobility of the Ghassānid lineage (*karīmat aḥsābuhum*) and their white faces (*bīd al-wujūh*). The latter comment may be an allusion to the purity of their honor and their high morals. The phrase *shumm al-unāf* literally indicates that they had proudly prominent noses. The term *shumm* is the plural of *ashamm* meaning “having a sensitive, proud nose,” implying a certain haughtiness and honor. ⁴⁵ According to Ibn ‘Asākir, this expression demonstrates the pride and honor of the possessor of the nose. ⁴⁶ Darwīsh has linked the term *shumm* here to *shamm*, meaning “smell.” He argues that they had a true sense of smell due to the length and straightness of their noses, which was a sign of their nobility and their ability to keep themselves far away from disgraceful habits. ⁴⁷ Darwīsh admires this verse, noting that in it the poet combined “the most elegant expressions of [his patrons’] ancient ancestral line, nobility of descent, glorious deeds of

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⁴⁷ Darwīsh, *Hassān*, 323.
their fathers, pride, purity of honor, goodness of their morals, and their excellent deeds.”

Line 16. I went up to them from the land of al-Barīṣ
Until I reclined in a tavern, free from scoundrels

Line 17. We had our morning drink in a goblet and a songstress (was present)
Between the vineyards and Jiz‘ al-Qastal

In lines 16 and 17, the ode turns to the poet’s personal memories of time spent with the Ghassānids and explicitly introduces the sub-theme of wine. Ḥassān recalls climbing to a quiet tavern from al-Barīṣ, the same place name mentioned in verse 13. The term used for tavern here is manzil, a word that appears frequently in pre-Islamic poetry. Ḥassān’s use of the term here is somewhat unique because he appears to be employing it to refer to a tavern, or drinking establishment. The phrase here lam yūghal, translated here “free from scoundrels” emphasizes the undisturbed, perhaps even exclusive, nature of the tavern. The verb wagḥala is not common but is related to the noun waghl (plural: awghāl) meaning “intruder” or “unwanted guest.” Ḥassān’s use of the verb from this root may be his own invention.

48 Ibid., 325.

49 For more on this, see Chapter 2, Part II.
The tableau of drinking at the tavern is further elaborated in verse 17. The specialized verb ghadā meaning “to have a morning drink” is used, indicating both the activity and the time of day when it occurred. The vessel from which the drink is taken is described to be a goblet (nājūd). Other details of the drinking party emerge, such as the attendance of a songstress (musmi‘a). There are several locations known as al-Qaṣṭal to which Ḥassān could be referring. Given the context of the ode and the abundance of Syrian place names mentioned, it seems likely that Ḥassān intended the al-Qaṣṭal in Phoenicia Libanensis, near al-Nabk.\textsuperscript{50} The significance of the term al-kurūm (vineyards) has been discussed in Chapter 2, Part II. In this line, the term could be a proper noun or have its literally meaning, the plural of vineyard. It has been translated here as “vineyards” due to the numerous vineyards in the al-Qaṣṭal region.\textsuperscript{51}

Line 18. I abided in their company for a long time
Then I (merely) reminisced, as though it had never occurred.

After recalling his pleasant, carefree days drinking in al-Shām, the poet returns to the present reality. Although he did stay in their company for a long time (labithtu azmān ṭiwāl fīhim), those days had passed away and only the poet’s memory of them remains. This verse provides evidence that the ode was composed after Ḥassān had become a regular visitor at the court and not on an early visit. It also reinforces the claim that it was

\textsuperscript{50} For the location of al-Qaṣṭal see Dussaud’s map, Dussaud, \textit{Topographie}, map 14.

\textsuperscript{51} See Shahīd, \textit{BASIC}, 2.1:241n112.
composed well after the fall of the Ghassānids when their power and might were only memories.

Line 19. Although you see that the color of my hair has changed to gray And then transformed to white

The passage of time and its effects on the poet’s appearance are illustrated in line 19. Ḥassān describes his hair turning gray, and then white, demonstrating the distance between the days of youthful indulgence described in verses 16 and 17 and the present day of the poet. Graying hair as a sign of old age is a common *topos* in pre-Islamic poetry, and it is especially associated with the opening *nasīb*, either forming a component of the *nasīb* or replacing it entirely. ⁵² Interestingly, this reference to the poet’s advanced age does not appear in the *nasīb*, but in the heart of the poem itself. Rather than merely fulfilling a literary convention, this line is consonant with the feeling of the entire poem and does not seem to be hyperbole.

Line 20. Those who threatened me viewed me as though I were In the fortress of Dūma or in the center of the church

This line is a continuation of the statement begun in the previous line. Although the poet is now old and long past his prime, he reminds the woman addressed in line 19 and his audience that at one time he had been inviolable to his enemies. He claims that

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⁵² Saud Dakhil al-Ruhayli, “Old Age and Lost Youth in Early Arabic Poetry” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1986), 16-44.
his enemies, or ill-wishers (mū’idīyya), viewed him as though he were in the fortress of Dūma (qaṣr Dūma), a fortified structure possibly located in Wādī Sirḥān in the Arabian Peninsula, or in the center of a church or temple (sawā’ al-haykal). In both cases, the poet emphasizes the strength of his position and his inviolability due to his connection with the Ghassānids. Ḥassān links his own status to that of the Ghassānids, and he fondly remembers the clout he once had. Ibn ‘Asākir makes the connection between this sense of security and the poet’s patrons explicit, commenting that those who threatened Ḥassān saw him in a state of strength and invincibility (fī al-‘izz wa-al-mana’a), as though he were with the sons of Jafna.

Line 21. I have sipped wine in its tavern Reddish in color, pure, like the taste of pepper In this passage, Ḥassān takes his audience back in time once again to his memories with his former patrons. He recalls drinking wine in the town’s tavern, then describes the color of the wine. It was red (ṣahbā’) and pure (sāfīya), and it had a pepper-like flavor (kaṭa’m al-fulful). Al-Barqūqī notes that in his comparison between the taste of the wine and a pepper, Ḥassān implies that the wine burns like a pepper (talḍha’ ladh’ al-fulful). The praise of wine here seems to be linked to the poet’s high opinion of the

53 For more on the sedentary connotations of qaṣr and haykal in this verse and the translation of qaṣr here as “fortress,” see Chapter 2, Part II. For details on the possible locations of other Dūmas and the phrase sawā’ al-haykal, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:283-287.

54 Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq, 2:177.

55 Al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 367n1.
sophisticated lifestyle of the Ghassānids. In addition to commending his former patrons, Ḥassān personalizes his praise by linking it to his own enjoyment.

يُسْعَى عَلَيْ بِكَاسِهَا مَتَنْتَفِعُ
فَيَعْلَى مِنْهَا وَلَوْ لَمْ أَهَلْهَا

Line 22. A server with an earring gave me a drink in a goblet
He gave me a second drink, though I had not had the first

The waiter at the tavern appears in line 22. He is depicted either as a man with an earring (mutanaṭṭif) or, perhaps, one wearing a belt, or girdle, around his waist (mutanaṭṭiq). The exact meaning of the poet here is not clear, but in either case, the waiter is portrayed as being attentive and bringing drinks quickly. The phrase “he gave me a second drink, though I had not had the first” employs the specialized verb nahila meaning, “to have a first drink.” The scholia has attempted to explain the ambiguity of the statement by paraphrasing Ḥassān’s meaning as follows: “In any case, he brought me drinks, whether I was thirsty or not.”

إِنَّ الَّذِي نَارَلَّنِي فَرَدَّدَهَا
فَيَلْتُ فَيَلْتُ فَهَآفَا لَمْ تَقْتُلِ

Line 23. I said, “I have sent back what you served me.
It was mixed with water, so bring me one which is undiluted!

كَنَاَهَا حَلَبُ العَصْرِ فَعَاطِنِ
بِرَجَاحَةَ أَرْخَاهَا لِلْمُفْصَلِ

Line 24. Both of them are well-pressed,
But give me the one that will loosen my joints more!”

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56 Both of these readings are found in the manuscripts. See Dīwān, 1:79.

57 Dīwān, 2:78.
The poet addresses the waiter directly in lines 23 and 24, calling on him to bring a new glass of wine, one that is not mixed with water. The practice of mixing wine with water was common in this period, and in other verses Ḥassān praises water mixed with water (see verse 11). Yet, in this instance the poet requests unmixed wine (fa-hāthā lam tuqtal). The usage of the verb qatala to mean “to mix” is explained by the classical scholars.\(^{58}\) He commends both the pure and the diluted wine as being “well-pressed” (ḥalab al-‘aṣīr), but demands the stronger of the two which will “loosen his joints more” (arkhāhumā lil-mafṣil). Ḥassān employs a similar phrase in praise of wine in another of his Ghassānid poems. In poem 23, verse 13 he praises wine that loosens his bones, implying that the beverage relaxed his body and lowered his inhibitions.

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\[^{58}\text{Ibn ʻAsākir, Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq, 2:179.}\]

\[^{59}\text{Shahīd, BASIC, 2.2:237.}\]

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**Line 25.** In a glass which danced with what was in its depths,
Like the dance of a young she-camel with a hurried rider.

The wine lyric continues in line 25. Ḥassān describes the wine as dancing in its glass. This image of the glass dancing (zujiạ raqasat bi-ma fī qa‘rihā) may imply that what is dancing in the depths of the glass is something added, such as saffron.\(^{59}\) The dance is compared to a she-camel (al-qalūš) being ridden by one who is hurrying (bi-
rākib musta‘jil). Walid Khazendar has translated this line as follows: “A bottle that surged with what lies within it/ The surge of the long-legged mount with a hasty rider.”

The following five verses are thematically united and will be treated together.

Line 26. My lineage is pure and my tongue burns, Its words burn the sides of the fire

Line 27. The clan has entrusted us with its affair On the day of vicissitudes we prevail and rise aloft

Line 28. Our master reigns over the chiefs, Our speaker hits the joints unerringly

Line 29. We attempt the grave decree that concerns them And we decide each difficult problem

Line 30. Our mounts visit the gates of the kings And when we are appointed as arbiters over people we act justly

Following the wasf al-khamr, a relatively lengthy section of fakhr (verses 26-30) appears in which Hassān praises his own poetic prowess and his tribe. The presence of

such a substantial fakhr section in a poem whose main gharad is not fakhr has been noted by modern scholars. Some have argued that Ḥassān’s mixing of fakhr and madīḥ shows the ode is not a traditional praise poem. Darwīsh notes that this further demonstrates that Ḥassān was not merely a court poet who was paid in exchange for composing panegyrics on rulers.  

Perhaps part of the reason why later scholars are reluctant to describe Hassan’s poetry on the Ghassānids as praise poetry is because they are hesitant to accept that the Prophet’s poet was ever an official paid court poet. This could be seen as detracting from his poetry in praise of the Prophet. It certainly seems clear that Ḥassān’s connection to the Ghassānids went beyond a traditional poet-patron relationship.

In the opening line of this section (verse 26), the poet extols his lineage (nasabī ašīl fī al-kirām) and his biting tongue which enables him to produce stinging lampoons. The scholia confirms that Ḥassān’s references to midhwātī imply the poet’s tongue as well as his words (mawāsimuḥu). More specifically, he is praising “his hijā’, with which he poisoned whomever he wanted.”

In the following line, Ḥassān’s fakhr broadens and extends to his tribe. He claims that they are always victorious in battles. Then, he commends the tribal chief (sayyidunā) who is the master of the chiefs (verse 28). The phrase yuṣīb qā’ilunā sawā’ al-mafsīl literally means “our spokesman hit the mark of the joint,” praising the battlefield prowess of the tribe. In line 29, he describes the importance and the difficulty of the tasks assigned

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61 Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 149.

62 Dīwān, 2:78.

63 For confirmation that the term jaḥājih refers to chiefs, or leaders, see Ibn ‘Asākir, Tāriḵh madīnat Dimashq, 2:180.
to his tribe. The tribesmen are portrayed as riding confidently on horseback to the gates of the kings (abwāb al-mulūk). Here Hassan is probably referring to the Ghassānids, and the line may be an allusion to the ancestral connection between the Khazraj tribe and the Ghassānids.

Line 31. [The Ghassanid King is] a youth who loves praise and gives of his money More than his father, even when he is not asked

Line 32. He gives the tribe what it is entitled to and more And he protects it from challenging misfortunes.

Line 33. Early in the morning I set out to drink with him and I did not tarry. It was in a glass, plucked from the best trellised vineyard.

Hassan closes with a three-line coda (verses 31-33) that returns to the main topic of the ode, the praise of the Ghassānids. In line 31, he appears to have a particular Ghassānid king in mind, unlike his earlier section which only praised the Ghassānids in general terms. Yet, he does not use a name, referring only to the mamdūh as “a youth” (fatan). This young man is portrayed as a generous individual and a brave protector of his subjects.

The qasīda closes somewhat abruptly as the poet returns in the final line to the theme of wine. He describes setting off in the early morning to drink wine with a companion. The form III verb bākara indicates the time of day. It is likely that this
individual is the same unnamed Ghassānid patron of line 31-2. This image of Ḥassān as a court poet, as well as a boon companion would make sense based on the depth of connection Ḥassān appears to have had with the Ghassānid royal family. The wine is described as being in a glass (*bi-zuļa*), and this is the third time this word has appeared in the poem (verses 24 and 25). The term *ahdal* meaning “hanging down” is somewhat obscure, but is has been interpreted here as referring to the vineyard, which is described as the best vineyard (*khayr al-karm*). Darwīsh cites this verse and the reference in verse 16 to an undisturbed tavern as proof that though Ḥassān was enthusiastic fan of wine, he chose his companions carefully and avoided crowds of rowdy drunks.  

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64 Darwīsh, *Ḥassān*, 138.
Chapter 2: Poem 123

2.1 Background

Like poem 13, Ḥassān’s nūnīya, poem 123, was probably composed between 636 and 661. Its late date is evident from both internal textual evidence and external comments in the scholia and classical sources. According to its introduction in the dīwān, this poem was composed in praise of Jabala ibn al-Ayham, the last Ghassānid king. Yet, the poem does not mention Jabala, nor any other subject of praise (mamdūh) as would be expected in a traditional panegyric. According to Ibn ʿAsākir, Ḥassān composed this poem following the battle of Yarmūk in 636, in which the Muslims decisively defeated the army of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius.¹ The Byzantine force, which is thought to have had a strong numerical advantage over the Arab Muslims, included a contingent of Ghassānid and other federate Arab forces led by Jabala. Although Ibn ʿAsākir’s history is the only source to claim the connection between this poem and the battle of Yarmūk, the subject matter and nostalgic tone could have been inspired by the dramatic events of the battle.² It is certainly unlikely that the poem was composed prior to 636 and very possible that it was composed much later. The nostalgic mood and sense of distance between the

¹ On the battle of Yarmūk, see al-Balādhurī, Futūḥ al-buldān, 184-188. Also see Donner’s analysis of the various historical narratives on this phase in the conquest of Syria. Donner, The Early Islamic Conquests, 128-148. Walter Kaegi’s analysis of the battle is also useful. Walter E. Kaegi, Byzantium and the Early Conquests (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 112-146.

² Some scholars have denied the link between this poem and the battle of Yarmūk. See ‘Arafat, “Critical Introduction,” 549.
subject of Ḥassān’s pleasant memories and the poet himself suggest that the ode was recited long after the demise of the Ghassānid dynasty.³

Even scholars who have focused on Ḥassān’s religious role during the Islamic period have cited this poem as a poignant expression of the poet’s affection for his former patrons. Darwīsh situates this ode in the broader context of Ḥassān’s nostalgic feelings for the Ghassānids at the end of his life. By admitting that the poem was composed after Ḥassān’s conversion to Islam, Darwīsh is forced to address an issue that has troubled some contemporary scholars. How could Ḥassān who had been the poet of the Prophet and the defender of Islam reminisce about his days in the jāhiliya, and how could he remember fondly a dynasty that resisted Islam and was defeated by the Muslims? Darwīsh resolves the issue by remarking that Ḥassān is “excused” for his affection for the Ghassānids, because it merely reflects a “type of beautiful loyalty that dwells in generous hearts” (fa-dhālika lawn min al-wafā’ al-jamīl ya’mar al-qulūb al-kabīra).⁴ Other modern scholars, such as Jum’a and Abū Fāḍil, who have a more narrow vision of Ḥassān only in his Islamic context, ignore the poem entirely.

Another noteworthy feature of poem 123 is Ḥassān’s portrayal of Christianity at the Ghassānid court. Although very few references to Christianity in Ḥassān’s poetry have survived to this day, this poem sheds light on the religious practices of the Ghassānids and on Ḥassān’s exposure to them. In this poem, Ḥassān describes the

³ See al-Naṣṣ, Ḥassān, 120; and Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 213-214. Both agree on a late composition date for poem 123. Only a few scholars suggest that this poem is pre-Islamic. See Ḥanafi al-Ḥasanayn, ed. Dīwān Ḥassān, 496.

⁴ Darwīsh, Ḥassān, 213.
preparations for the Easter festivities and mentions the rituals of monks and priests at a monastery. A parallel to this poem’s description of Easter can be seen in al-Nābigha’s verses on Palm Sunday at the Ghassānid court, which will be discussed in the annotated notes on the relevant verses.

In the ten verses which form the base text for poem 123 in the Dīwān, Ḥassān mentions a total of ten place names. The additional lines and variant readings found in other sources add up to five more toponyms. All but three of these can be linked to known place names in al-Shām. The known toponyms in al-Shām include: Yarmūk, al-Khammān, Bilās, Dārayyā, Sakā’, Jāsim, Marj al-Ṣuffarayn, Ḥārith al-Jawlān, al-Jawlān, Afīq, al-Khawābī, and Ḥawrān. The location of al-Qurayyāt is unknown, but the scholia clearly states that it is also in al-Shām.⁵ The remaining two place names are Ma‘ān, located in southern Jordan, rather than al-Shām proper, and Bayt Rās, a city of the Decapolis of Palestine.⁶

2.2 Structure of Poem 123

The base text that will be analyzed here is the ten-line version of the ode based on Ibn Ḥabīb’s recension found in ʿArafat’s Dīwān. There are many variant readings of individual words, but the only source to present a substantive variant of the poem is Kitāb al-aghānī, which presents two different versions of the poem. These versions include

⁵ Dīwān, 2:193.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of each the toponyms in this poem and their locations and Ghassānid associations, see Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:244-246. Also, see Dussaud’s map which includes many of these locales. Dussaud, Topographie, map 2.
several of the lines found in the Ibn Ḥabīb recension with only small differences and a few additional verses that are not included in the other versions. These additional lines will be dealt with in the last section of this chapter.

This poem does not fit Ibn Qutayba’s neat tri-partite progression of a proper qasīda, but it does contain distinct sections that encompass certain aspects of the traditional polythematic ode.\(^7\) The poem can be divided into three major sections. The first section (verses 1-3) consists of the opening nasīb in which the poet sets the stage for the poem. By mentioning deserted abodes and locales he used to visit in al-Shām, he introduces a nostalgic mood which characterizes the entire ode. In this composition, the nasīb is not merely perfunctory. It provides the backbone and unifying theme for the ode. The second section is the madiḥ (verses 4-8) which extols the virtues of the Ghassānids. Although it is not a traditional madiḥ that pays tribute to one ruler in the hopes of reward, the poet presents several illustrative tableaux which demonstrate their praiseworthy traits. The section begins with admiration of the power and hospitality of Ḥassān’s former patrons. In the first tableau, he depicts their bravery in the face of a catastrophe or battle. The following tableau comprises a description of the preparations for Easter. These verses are characterized by a strong sense of pride, even superiority, mingled with the ever-present nostalgia. The feeling of loss and yearning established in the opening prelude does not diminish through the course of the ode. The preparations for the coming religious festivities shift seamlessly into a description of the appearance of the Ghassānid

\(^7\) Ibn Qutayba, al-Shī‘r wa-al-shu‘arā‘, 20-21. For a translation of Ibn Qutayba’s famous passage on the proper structure for a qaṣīda, see Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, 77-78.
maidens who are weaving wreathes for the holiday. The activities of the Ghassānid daughters are starkly contrasted with the pastimes of nomads, and it is clear the poet believes the city-dwellers to be far superior to their desert counterparts. The final section of the poem (verses 9-10) revisits the emotion of the prelude, and for this reason it is referred to here as the “nasīb II.” The concluding verses reiterate that these events occurred in the long distant past. The elegiac mood is so pronounced throughout the entire poem that all ten verses could be viewed as an extended nasīb. Another possibility is that the poem could be a fragment, and the ten verses may have once been the opening prelude to a now lost full-length ode.

The following is a brief outline, or map, of the sections outlined above:

I. *Nasīb* I (v. 1-3)

II. Nostalgic *madīḥ* (v. 4-8)

A. Tableau 1: General praise of the Ghassānids (v. 4)

B. Tableau 2: Battle at Ḥārith al-Jawlān, bravery (v. 5)

C. Tableau 3: Preparations for Easter (v. 6)

D. Tableau 4: Description of Ghassānid maidens (v. 7-8)

III. *Nasīb* II (v. 9-10)

A. Tableau 1: Destructive effects of time (v. 9)

B. Tableau 2: The poet’s status with the Ghassānids (v. 10)

Another way to approach the poem is to chart the thematic progression based on the chronology of the events described. The timeline of the ode begins in the present, when the poet first recites the poem, then retreats back in time, then finally returns to the
desolate present. Verses 1-3 describe the present barrenness of the region formerly protected by the Ghassānids. Then, verse 5 travels back in time to a day when the Ghassānids were defeated in battle but demonstrated great bravery. Although this verse recalls a historical event when the Ghassānids were actively defending their territory, their demise seems to be looming on the horizon. Verses 6-8 transport the audience, or reader, back even further in Ghassānid history, to a point well before the fall of the dynasty. In this tableau, the Ghassānids appear at their peak, completely untroubled and unaware of their future downfall. The final two verses of the poem complete the circle, bringing the audience back to the present where the poet stands alone, recalling his former days of happiness. The short poem closes with a reminder of the poet’s high status in the eyes of the kings of this fallen dynasty. In effect, Ḥassān mourns not only the downfall of the Ghassānids but also the termination of his close association with them.

A creative interpretation of this poem has been put forth by Lawrence Conrad in his article “Epidemic disease in central Syria in the late sixth century.” Conrad pairs poem 123 with poem 105, a Ghassānid triplet composed on one of the outbreaks of the bubonic plague which devastated the Near East from the sixth to the eighth centuries. Although poem 105 explicitly addresses the plague and is introduced in the Dīwān by the following: wa-qāla fī ṣā‘ūn kāna bil-Shām (“And he said this on the plague which was in al-Shām,”) much more imagination is required to connect poem 123 with any epidemic disease. Of all the scholars, classical or modern, who have studied this ode, only Conrad has suggested that it bears any relation to the plague. Conrad’s main argument is

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8 Dīwān, 1:228.
premised on the translation of the phrase *fī al-dahr* in verse 9 as “when calamity struck,” rather than “at one time,” the more common meaning of *dahr*. Another key in his theory is the association of *al-shayṭān*, itself probably a corrupt reading, with *al-jinn*, the spirit beings who were thought to cause plagues and diseases in the pre-Islamic period. This hypothesis has been challenged by Shahīd who demonstrates numerous problems with Conrad’s analysis in a detailed, line-by-line critique.

The rhyme letter of the poem is *nūn* and the meter is *al-khāfīf*.

### 2.3 Arabic Text

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من الدار أوزحتي بمخاى
يَا مسكات فلفصورة الدوائي
معنى قابل وهجاء
وحول عظيمة الأركان
يوم حلوا بحارث الجولان
يسميم سعارة أكلة المرجان
الرثط عليها محايد الكتان
ولا لنفث حنطل الشربان
وحق تعالى الأرمان
قد أراني هنالك حق مكن
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9 For Conrad’s translation and analysis of this poem, see Lawrence Conrad, “Epidemic Disease in Central Syria in the Late Sixth Century, Some new insights from the verse of Hassān ibn Thābit” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 18 (1994): 29-51. Conrad argues that the version of the poem in *Kitāb al-aghānī* is a distinct version composed by a different poet. He contends that the entire second version is a “recasting” of the earlier poem, probably composed by a Syrian poet who lived not long after Ḥassān.

2.4 Translation and Commentary

Line 1. To whom belongs the abode deserted among the settlements
From the source of the Yarmūk to al-Khammān

The ode opens with a traditional *nasīb* as the poet surveys an abandoned dwelling, setting an elegiac tone that pervades the entire poem. The first three lines which form the *nasīb* proper are densely packed with place names. The toponyms that appear in the first verse are Yarmūk, a tributary of the Jordan River, and al-Khammān, a toponym located near the Yarmūk River which is mentioned by Ḥassān in three of his Ghassānid poems. Yāqūt describes al-Khammān as being “in al-Shām in the direction of al-Bathaniya.”

According to the fourteenth-century encyclopedic manual on Mamlūk administration *Masālik al-absār fī al-mamālik al-amṣār* by al-ʿUmarī, a monastery dating from the Byzantine period was located at al-Khammān. This would be consistent with Ḥassān’s frequent mention of the location and especially his reference to having spent the night there in poem 27. Some have translated *aʿlā al-Yarmūk* as “above al-Yarmūk.”

According to some readings, an additional place name is mentioned in the first hemistich. The term *maghān*, rendered here “settlements,” appears in some readings with

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11 *Dīwān*, 2:193. For Dussaud’s description of this location, see Dussaud, *Topographie*, 336. In the same source, see also Dussaud’s map 2 showing the location of al-Khammān.


13 ʿArafat, “Critical Introduction,” 548. The translation here relies on Shahīd’s argument that the phrase refers to “the upper region of the course of the Yarmūk River at its source as opposed to the region where it flows into the Jordan.” See Shahīd, *BASIC*, 2.1:293.
the letter ‘ayn instead of ghayn, making the term Ma‘ān, a town in southern Jordan.

Using this variant the first hemistich would read, “To whom belongs the deserted abode in Ma‘ān.” Although this town’s location is established, it is somewhat problematic because it is not geographically close to al-Yarmūk and al-Khammān. The reading chosen here is that preferred by ‘Arafat who concludes that Ma‘ān is too distant from the other place names in the poem, all of which are in the north and in the vicinity of Damascus.\(^\text{14}\) In either case, the general meaning of the line is not altered. The main significance of this verse appears to be to open the poem and set the stage for what is to be a nostalgic poem imbued with a pervasive sense of loss.

\(\text{فَالَقُرُوبُاتِ مِنْ بَلَاسٍ فَقَدَرَ} \)  
\(\text{يَا فَسَكَاهُ فَالَقُصُورُ الدِّوَانِي} \)

Line 2. And the al-Qurayyāt from Bilās, then Dārayyā,  
Then Sakā’ and then the nearby mansions

The second verse continues the \(\text{nasīb} \) allusions to place names in al-Shām. Again, the scholia informs the reader that all of these toponyms are in Damascus as well (\(\text{kulluhā mawādi’ bi-Dimashq aydān} \)).\(^\text{15}\) Al-Qurayyāt is either a toponym whose exact location is unknown, or a cluster of villages. Bilās, Dārayyā, and Sakā’ are towns near Damascus. Even the term \(\text{qusūr} \), rendered here as “mansions,” could be a toponym, al-Quṣūr.\(^\text{16}\) Given the following adjective \(\text{al-dawānī} \), meaning “near,” the translation chosen here is “mansions.”

\(^\text{14}\) Despite his preference for this reading, ‘Arafat’s main text of the verse retains the reading Ma‘ān. For the reading \(\text{maghān} \), see Ibn ‘Asākir, \(\text{Tārikh madinat Dimashq} \), 2:182; and \(\text{Dīwān} \), 1:257.

\(^\text{15}\) \(\text{Dīwān} \), 2:193.

\(^\text{16}\) For an analysis of \(\text{qusūr} \) as an term reflecting an urban environment, refer to Chapter 2, Part II.
In the third verse, Ḥassān mentions two more toponyms, Jāsim, a town in al-Shām that has retained that name to this day, and the valleys of al-Ṣuffar. The term al-Ṣuffar here is interpreted to be a shortened form of Marj al-Ṣuffarayn, the site of a major battle during the Arab conquests. The second hemistich draws the *nasīb* to a close by describing the herds of horses (*qanābil*) and camels (*hijān*) which used to graze in the previously mentioned locales. The term *maghnan*, meaning “dwelling place,” is the singular form of *maghānin* found in verse 1. This term is derived from the root *gh-n-w*, which is associated with being free from want, and its use here emphasizes that the plentiful pastures of al-Shām provided the mounts with all that they wanted. This vivid image of animals peacefully grazing heightens the sense of nostalgia evoked by the poet’s mention of the place names and paints a vibrant picture of the region in the past.

Hassān shifts from the opening prelude to the main theme, nostalgic praise for the Ghassānids, by describing those who used to live in the deserted abodes described above.

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17 Both Jāsim and Marj al-Ṣuffarayn are on Dussaud’s map. Dussaud, *Topographie*, map 2.

18 In some readings, the word *qanābil* is replaced with *qabā’il*, which could suggest the poet was referring to tribes, rather than animals. Al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ*, 474.
He proclaims that it was the dwelling of the mighty one (dār al-‘azīz). The poet makes it very clear that he is not referring to a nomadic tribe, as could have been expected from the largely traditional nasīb. He explicitly lauds the structures of the Ghassānid kings as “possessing imposing pillars” (‘azīmat al-arkān), a line of praise which would not make sense in the context of a nomadic tribe.\(^{19}\) In addition to these impressive buildings, the poet extols his former patrons for their hospitality. To convey this trait, Hāssān employs the term anīs, translated here “making his guests feel comfortable.” This term implies friendliness and sociability, further emphasizing the difference between this abode in its heyday, full of guests and visitors, and its current state of emptiness and desolation.

According to Shahīd, it is meaningful that the poet selected the two epithets ‘azīz and anīs, which “constitute the two arms of Arab murū’a, in war and in peace.”\(^{20}\)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Hāssān composed this poem long after the demise of the Ghassānids, so he cannot have been motivated by the hope of a reward from the subject of his praise. For this reason, he does not narrow his praise to focus on any one ruler; rather, he devotes the remainder of the poem to intense and affectionate praise of his former patrons, in general. Often this praise appears in the form of nostalgic reminiscences of his own personal experience at the Ghassānid court.

Line 5.  Let their mother lose them, and indeed she did lose them
On the day when they dismounted at Ḥārith al-Jawlān (Mount Arethas)

\(^{19}\) For this line’s interweaving of urban terminology and traditional vocabulary, see Chapter 2, Part II.

\(^{20}\) Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1:294.
This line transfers the focus from the hospitality, might, and great architectural structures of the Ghassānids to their bravery in battle. The meaning of the phrase *habilat ummuhum wa-qad habilathum* has been translated here, “Let their mother lose them, and indeed she did lose them,” but the meaning goes beyond this literal rendering. The expression is often used in admiration of an individual’s bravery. The poet is not “stating the fact of bereavement as much as he is expressing admiration through the concept of bereavement.”

The reference to Ḥārith al-Jawlān (Mount Arethas) in the second hemistich is another place name associated with al-Shām. The poet seems to be referring to a particular event, or catastrophe, that befell the Ghassānids at Ḥārith al-Jawlān but is not explicit about what that event was. Shahīd has suggested that this battle could have been an attempt of the Ghassānids to repel the invading Persians.

Line 6.  
Easter drew near, so the young maidens hastened  
To string garlands of coral

In this three-line section (verses 6-8), Ḥassān moves from general praise of the Ghassānids to a vibrant retelling of his memory of an event at the Ghassānid court, namely the Easter celebration. The subjects of praise in these verses are not the Ghassānid kings, but Ghassānid maidens (*al-walāʾid*). Al-Barqūqī has suggested that this


22 Ibid., 2.1:245.
term refers to the beautiful, young serving girls of the Ghassānids.\textsuperscript{23} This definition of \textit{walā'id} appears to have been al-Barqūqī’s own suggestion and does not come from the earlier commentators or scholia who are silent on the definition of this term. ‘Arafat does not comment explicitly on this note of al-Barqūqī’s, but his own notes on the poem refer to the “maidens.” Shahīd has convincingly argued that the term must refer to the Ghassānīd daughters, perhaps even princesses. He notes that \textit{walā'id} is the plural of \textit{walīda} meaning daughter. The contrast Ḥassān draws in verse 8 between the practices of the sedentary Ghassānīds and those of the nomads implies that it would be beneath the dignity of the Ghassānīds to participate in certain activities, a claim unlikely to be made of servants.\textsuperscript{24} Both the context and the description of the girls would not be appropriate for servants, and it seems highly unlikely that Ḥassān would have devoted three lines to praising the servants of his former patrons.

In the new tableau presented in this line, the poet describes the preparations of the maidens for the Easter festivities. As Easter (\textit{al-fīsh}) draws near, the maidens are busy stringing garlands, or wreaths, of coral (\textit{akillat al-marjān}). The exact purpose or significance of these garlands of coral is not known.\textsuperscript{25} In some manuscripts, the second hemistich of this verse contains the term \textit{qu'ūdan} in the place of \textit{sirā'an}. Though ‘Arafat’s main text of the poem includes \textit{qu'ūdan}, meaning “seated,” this study has

\textsuperscript{23} For al-Barqūqī’s interpretation, see al-Barqūqī, \textit{Hassān}, 475n1.


\textsuperscript{25} See Shahīd’s discussion on Easter and Palm Sunday in his sections on Ghassānīd feast days in Shahīd, \textit{BASIC}, 2.2:75-77 and 2.2:122.
chosen the variant reading *sirā’an* found in al-Barqūqī’s *Sharḥ* and in several of the manuscripts.²⁶ The term *sirā’an*, meaning “rushing,” or “hurrying,” is consonant with the opening verb of the verse *danā*, meaning “to draw near.” The combination of these two terms implies that the maidens were hurriedly stringing their garlands prior to the arrival of Easter.

Ḥassān’s treatment of Easter is complemented by al-Nābigha’s verses on Palm Sunday found in his *bā‘īya* ode composed on a Ghassānid king. Like his younger contemporary Hassān, al-Nābigha describes the Ghassānid maidens, but in this context they are presenting flowers, rather than stringing wreathes:²⁷

\[
\text{ريكَةٌ للإيالاء، طُبّا لُحْجَرَاتُهُمَ،}
\text{وَأَكْسِبُ الاضْرِيحُ فِوقَ المَذاَجِبٍ}
\]

Slender and delicate-soled, chaste
They present fragrant flowers on Palm Sunday
Among them are fair maidens who greet them,
Their silken robes hanging over clothes pegs

The meaning of *tayyib ḥujuzātuhum* is somewhat unclear. Al-Layth is quoted in *Līsān al-‘Arab* as saying this phrase refers to the chastity of the maidens.²⁸ Charles James Lyall’s translation “girded with chastity” echoes this emphasis on purity, and the praise

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²⁶ Al-Barqūqī, *Ḥassān*, 475; and *Dīwān*, 1:258. Use of the term *qu‘ūdan* does not dramatically alter the meaning of the line. The verse would then imply that the maidens were seated as they strung the wreathes of coral.

²⁷ *Dīwān al-Nābigha*, 32-33.

of the chastity would certainly make sense in the context of the Christian reference. In these lines, al-Nābigha mentions Palm Sunday (yawm al-sabāsīb) and describes the white maidens (bīd al-walā’id) presenting flowers (rayhān). Like Ḥassān, al-Nābigha uses the word walā’id to describe the young girls, providing further confirmation that “maidens” is the proper translation of the term.

In addition to providing information about the Christianity of the Ghassānids, Ḥassān’s line on Easter confirms his own familiarity with the Christian celebrations of his Ghassānid patrons. Although his extant references to Christianity are few, these remaining lines provide tantalizing hints of his own experience with Christianity. This scarcity of references is perhaps a result of choices made by later compilers and anthologists who were more interested in Ḥassān’s poetry in the service of Islam. In addition to the verses in this poem which allude to Christianity (verses 6, 2a, and 3a), a few of Ḥassān’s other Christian references should be mentioned as parallels these verses.

In one of his elegies on the Prophet, Ḥassān describes Muḥammad’s widows as nuns (rawāhib). In this distinctly Islamic context, the poet exhibits his familiarity with the monastic life of nuns.

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29 Charles James Lyall’s translation of these verses is as follows: “Their sandals are soft and fine, and girded with chastity/They welcome with garlands sweet the dawn of the Feast of Palms. There greets them when they come home full many a handmaid fair/And ready on trestles hang the mantles of scarlet silk.” See Lyall, Translations of Ancient Arabian Poetry, 96-97.

30 For Shahîd on the importance of these verses in the context of Ghassānid religious and social history, see BASIC, 2.2:76-7.

31 No. 132, v. 8. From this line, Shahîd has argued that Ḥassān must have actually seen nuns in order to be familiar with their appearance and clothing. Shahîd, BASIC, 2.2:119.
Like nuns clothed in the monastic veil
They are certain of misery after delight

Another possible reference to a Christian holy day can be seen in poem 8 in which the poet describes the appearance of his beloved in the courtyard of the castle on the “day of the procession” (yawm al-khurūj). Although it is not clear exactly what the phrase yawm al-khurūj means, Shahîd has suggested the possibility that it is a technical term referring to a Christian holiday.32

Line 7. Gathering saffron in white garments
Wearing robes of linen

This line fleshes out the tableau of the maidens preparing for Easter by describing their attire. The term thuqab, found in Arafât’s Dīwān, has been replaced here with the alternate reading nuqab, meaning “veils” found in al-Barqûqî.33 The meaning of this line is somewhat ambiguous, and there are several different interpretations. Based on the reading cited above, it seems the maidens were gathering saffron (yajtanīn al-jādīy), while wearing veils of rayt (plural of rayṭa, meaning “white garment”) and linen robes (majāsid al-kattān). The classical commentators have suggested that the maidens were painting or dying themselves (or their clothing) with saffron, so that it was “as though

32 Shahîd, BASIC, 2.2:198-9. For the verse itself, see no. 8, v. 28.

33 Al-Barqûqî, Sharh, 475.
they had gathered it [saffron].”34 In another interpretation, the verb is altered to read *yahtabīn*, meaning “they put on.” Relying on this reading, saffron is the color of the robes, not what is being gathered.35 Despite this ambiguity, what the verse conveys clearly is the luxurious clothing worn by the maidens. The girls are described as being clothed in *majāsid*, plural of *miṣad*, luxurious robes worn only by wealthy women.36

Line 8. Not distracted by resin nor gum
Nor with the extraction of the seeds of the colocynth (from the Sharyān tree)

Having illustrated the attire of the maidens and described their activities of weaving garlands of coral and gathering saffron, Ḥassān now explicitly states what they do not do. They do not extract the seeds of the colocynth (*hanḍal*) or bother themselves with resin (*magḥāfīr*) or gum (*ṣamgh*), common practices among the nomads.37 Of verses 7 and 8, al-Naṣṣ says, “These lines of praise (*madā’ih*) reveal clearly Ḥassān’s affection for the luxurious, urban life he enjoyed under the protection of the Ghassānids and his preference for urban women over Bedouin women.”38 These verses illustrate the depth of

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35 Shahīd, *BASIC*, 2.2:553.


37 For more on this contrast and the significance of the reference to the colocynth in this verse, see Chapter 1, Part II.

38 Al-Naṣṣ, *Hassān*, 122
his connection to the Ghassānids and his affection for them, as well as an impressive poetic ability to make a strong statement of preference through indirect means.

ذاك مغني من آل جفنة في الدهر وحق تعاقب الأزمان

Line 9. That was the abode of the clan of Jafna at one time,
It is true that times change

With this haunting verse, the poet brings the reader’s attention back to the nostalgic emotion of the opening lines through his repetition of the term maghnan used in the first line. The phrase fi al-dahr, meaning “at one time,” further solidifies the conviction that this poem was composed years after Ḥassān’s interactions with the Ghassānids. It is evident that the Ghassānids with whom Ḥassān had celebrated Easter are no longer in power, and all that remains are Ḥassān’s memories. The term dahr implies time in the sense of ages, or a long time, and serves to emphasize the distance between the poet and his memories, and between the Ghassānids and their former glory. The phrase āl Jafna, meaning “family of Jafna,” is a reference to the dynastic house of the Ghassānids.

قد أرى هناك حق مكين عند ذي الناج مجلسي ومكاني

Line 10. I did indeed consider myself well-respected there. I sat in my place by the crowned king

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40 For Lane’s definition of dahr, see Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon, 3:923. The connotations of this term are rich, and use of the term here may even evoke a sense of fate, as the term was often used in the pre-Islamic period.
The poem closes with the most personal of all the verses. Prior this line, the position of the poet himself has not been explicitly stated. He has appeared only as an observer. Although it is evident that he had spent time with the Ghassānids and felt an intimate attachment to them, the first-person pronoun has not been employed. In this one verse, grammatical markers pointing to the first person appear four times. At the beginning of the verse, the verb *ra’ā*, to see or regard, is conjugated in the first-person present tense and has an attached first-person object pronoun. This verbal construction *qad* followed by the present tense to mean “indeed” has been discussed in the previous chapter. Next, both the term *majlis* and *makān* are signified as belonging to ʿHassān by his use of the first-person possessive pronoun. These grammatical markers strongly underscore the personal connection between the poet and his fallen patrons. ʿHassān also recalls his own esteemed position with the Ghassanids by emphasizing the royalty of the Ghassānid rulers. The phrase *dhū al-taj* means “he of the crown.” The verse highlights the strength and security of his former position with the Ghassānids.

### 2.5 Additional Verses from *Kitāb al-aghānī*

Two separate versions of this poem are given in *Kitāb al-aghānī*. As is common in later compilations of Arabic poetry from this period, the order of the lines varies in these versions and several new lines appear. Only the new verses will be treated here and they have been numbered 1a, 2a, and 3a for the sake of convenience though they do not appear in this order. The first version consists of four lines, three of which are verses included in the *Dīwān* version of the poem and one of which is a new line. The order of
the verse numbers is as follows: 1, 2, 9, 2a. A second version is then presented, and the
order of the verse numbers is as follows: 1a, 3, 2, 6, 3a, 9, 2a, and 10. The presence of
variant verses and varying arrangements of the verses is a typical feature of pre-Islamic
poetry compiled at a later date. Due to the atomic nature of each verse, variant versions of
a poem reflect the editorial decisions of the anthologist or scholar who compiled the
poem.42

قد عفا جاسبم إلى بيت راس
فإجوابي فجانب الجولان

Line 1a. Jāsim has been wiped out, until Bayt Rās
And Jawābī, and the side of the Jawlān

Beyond introducing several new place names, this verse does not add any
substance to the poem. Jāsim is mentioned in verse 3 and its location has already been
discussed. Bayt Rās is one of the cities of the Palestinian Decapolis and is mentioned by
Ḥassān in his other Ghassānid poems. Similarly, Jawlān refers to the Golan and is cited
throughout Ḥassān’s poetry. Al-Jawābī may be a corruption of al-Khawābī and was
discussed in greater depth in the chapter on poem 13.

صلوات المسيح في ذلك الدين
ر دعا القسيس والرهبان

Line 2a: The prayers addressed to Christ at the monastery
Are the supplications of the priest and the monks

41 Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, Kitāb al-aghānī, 15:154-156. Also see Dīwān, 1:518 where ‘Arafat
presents one of the versions found in Kitāb al-aghānī.

42 Shahīd, BASIC 2.1:298. Shahīd also notes that the opening line (matla’) of the second version in
Kitāb al-aghānī does not rhyme internally, while the matla’ in the Dīwān does. This provides further
evidence that the versions should be combined into one poem, rather than studied as independent poems by
different poets.
This verse further demonstrates Ḥassān’s familiarity with the Christian culture of the Ghassānids. Not only does the poet mention a monastery (al-dayr), but he paints a vibrant picture of the daily activities within its walls. He mentions the inhabitants of the monastery, the priest (al-qassīs) and the monks (al-ruhbān), and their prayers to Christ (ṣalawāt al-masīḥ). It is possible that the prayers mentioned in the first hemistich were sung or chanted and heard by Ḥassān.43 It is not surprising that this verse is found in only one source. Overt references to Christianity such as this would have been likely targets for elimination by later editors and compilers.

Line 3a. They vied in their supplications to God
And every prayer went to Satan

The appearance of the term al-shaytān, meaning “Satan” or “demon,” stands in stark contrast to the rest of the poem’s sense of nostalgic longing. This line only appears in one of the two versions of the poem in Kitāb al-aghānī. In this version, it follows verse 6 in the base text, which describes the Ghassānid maidens preparing for Easter. Thus, the “they” appears to refer to the maidens. For the poet to insult the girls he was praising in the previous line seems impossible. ‘Arafat notes that it is highly unlikely that Ḥassān should “speak so disrespectfully of the maidens’ prayers when he is recalling his happy memories” and concludes that the verse is likely a later addition, not composed by

43 Shahīd has explored this possibility in his chapter on sacred music and song. He suggests a link between the Ghassānids and the hymnography of their relatives in Najrān. See Shahīd, BASIC, 2.2:338.
A more likely suggestion is that the term *al-shayṭan* is a corruption of another word. Shahīd suggests *al-raḥmān* or *al-mannān* as the context seems to indicate that the term should be a term referring to God. Shahīd’s comment that this problematic reading could reflect the editing of a “facetious critic or scholar” also seems quite likely. At any rate, this line does not make sense as it stands now. Yet, it does not seem that the only option is to accept ‘Arafat’s suggestion that the entire line is inauthentic. This line could be yet another faint echo of the Christian themes that appear so infrequently in the extant poetry of Ḥassān. In this case, it is an echo that has been corrupted and altered during the intervening centuries between its composition and today.

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45 Shahīd, BASIC, 2.1.297.
Conclusion to Part III

As has been shown through these close readings of two odes which serve as representatives of Ḫassān’s nostalgic poetry on the Ghassānids, the poet’s connection to his former patrons was deep and remained strong even long after their downfall. It is hoped that by examining a small number of poems in this detailed manner, the strength of this connection would be evident. The selected poems embody features and themes of Ḫassān’s Ghassānid poetry that have been mentioned in this study, especially the poet’s love for the sophisticated, urbane lifestyle of the Ghassānids. In these odes, the poet combines nostalgic praise with his belief in their superiority over the nomads. These poems present a sharp dichotomy between the behavior of town-dwellers and nomads. Ḫassān’s skill in the genres of wine lyric and fakhr is evident in poem 13, and his experience with Christianity is alluded to in poem 123.
Conclusion

As this study has demonstrated, Ḥassān’s years spent as court poet of the Ghassānid dynasty in al-Shām had a profound and lasting impact on his poetry. This is especially true in terms of the attachment that Ḥassān developed to urban civilization during this period of his life, making him an uniquely urban *mukhadram*. The poet’s Ghassānid odes present a sharp dichotomy between urban and pastoral lifestyles, contrasting the fertile land and lush landscapes of al-Shām with the harsh desert environment of the Arabian Peninsula. This contrast is often highlighted by comparisons that portray the juice of the bitter colocynth as representative of the desert and fine wine as the emblem of the sophisticated, urban Ghassānids. Cultivation of wine requires significant agricultural advancement as well as fertile soil. The imagery of wine and the sophistication of wine drinking in the taverns of al-Shām represents a critical aspect of the urbanism displayed in Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry.

This study has also demonstrated Ḥassān’s use of formal elements of the *qaṣīda* in innovative ways to show his preference for sedentary landscapes. His creative application of the *topos* of the deserted *atlāl* to lament the fallen Ghassānids inaugurates a new form of poetry which peaked following the defeat of the Umayyads in al-Andalus. In light of the importance of stock themes in Arabic poetry, the transformation of the traditional prelude featuring a deserted encampment to an elegiac lament on a defeated sedentary civilization is an valuable literary contribution. Additionally, the terminology found throughout Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry reflects his association with a sedentary
culture and his conscious choice to set his poetry in the distinctly urban context of taverns, monasteries, castles, and vineyards.

The urbanism displayed in Ḥassān’s poetry is not unmitigated. At times, it emerges as the dominant theme in a poem, while in other instances more traditional desert-related motifs prevail. In many cases, his poetry represents an intermingling of urban and desert imagery. This may be a result of the poet’s negotiation between prevailing literary norms and his own urban reality or at least his “ideal” reality. The poet’s Ghassānid odes interweave “mansions of marble” with traditional “deserted remains” resulting, at times, in an ambiguous outlook on the topic of urbanism. In one ode, admiration for the sedentary lifestyle of the Ghassānids is set in stark contrast to the meager subsistence of nomads, then the topic abruptly shifts to a lengthy description of a journey on a camel (i.e., poem 84). Place names associated with al-Shām are often juxtaposed with toponyms of the Arabian Peninsula. This study has revealed Ḥassān’s urbanism, while suggesting that a nuanced perspective is required to fully understand and appreciate the poet’s stance and literary contribution. As a transitional figure, a certain level of ambiguity can be expected in his odes. There are layers of meaning within each ode, and these layers are tied to the poet’s identity as a transitional figure.

Ḥassān’s status as a mukhāḍram and a transitional figure makes him a fascinating case study of religious transition. Prior to the rise of Islam, Ḥassān was the court poet for devout Christian kings who supported missionary work in the Arabian Peninsula and the building of monasteries and churches throughout their territory. He witnessed their religious ceremonies and holidays, and echoes of his experience with Christianity can be
found in his extant Ghassānid poems. Due to the unfortunate reality of preservation, the true extent of Ḥassān’s own understanding of and commitment to Christianity may never be known. His role in the Islamic period is better documented. Following his conversion to Islam, Ḥassān became a key figure in the propagation of the new religion, as well as a defender of the founder and most pivotal figure in Islam, the Prophet himself. Ḥassān’s poems attacked the enemies of the Muslims and extolled the virtues of Islam. Ḥassān’s identity as a *mukhāḍram* is heightened by his intimate experience with two religions.

In addition to being a *mukhāḍram* in terms of religion, Ḥassān was a *mukhāḍram* who lived through two distinct historical eras. The significance of the rise of Islam for political and social history in the Near East has been explored in depth, and Ḥassān’s life spanned this period of immense historical transition. At the time of Ḥassān’s birth, the Byzantines and Persians were locked in a seemingly intractable power struggle. By the year of his death, the Sasanid Empire had been defeated and the Byzantines had been severely weakened by a new player on the international stage, the Arab Muslims. Ḥassān’s relationship with the Ghassānids, a dynasty that was swept away with the rise of Islam, can only be appreciated when placed into this broader historical context. The preservation of Ḥassān’s poetry and the accounts of his life must also be viewed through this lens.

Beyond the importance of his historical and political transition of the era, what emerges from this study of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry is a glimpse of an exciting and fluid period in Arabic literary history. Ḥassān appears as the embodiment of this era of literary and cultural transformation, again representing the *mukhāḍram* predicament.
After embracing the new religion, the mukhadramūn were asked to leave behind certain aspects of the old life, many of which related, directly or indirectly, to their composition of poetry. Ḥassān was an established poet in the jāhiliya and he participated fully in the literary and social life of that period. Following his conversion to Islam, Ḥassān appears to have fully embraced the new religion and incorporated many of its principles into his poetry. His commitment to jāhili literary conventions, such as the wine lyric, is evident even in his later poetry. It is this strong connection to both periods, both religions, and both cultures that makes him a true mukhadram.

Another theme that comes into view in this study is the reality of the difficulty of interacting with and interpreting poetry from this period. Part I has presented the source material on Ḥassān and addressed the tendency of scholarship to focus on his role as the “poet laureate” of the Prophet Muḥammad. Most of Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry has been lost, and the poems that remain have attracted comparatively little scholarly attention. Although this focus on the Ghassānid odes afforded this study a certain degree of confidence regarding the authenticity of these odes, this decision also entails certain limitations. This study focused its attention on Ḥassān’s Ghassānid odes, twenty-six poems out of a total 372. Further studies are necessary to explore the urban elements in Ḥassān’s non-Ghassānid poetry. To solidify the claim of his preference for urban life, Ḥassān’s Ghassānid poetry could be compared with his other compositions. Within Ḥassān’s Dīwān, the topics of wine and Christianity merit more in-depth examinations, and a comparative approach between Ghassānid and non-Ghassānid poems could be highly productive.
Opportunities for further research in this field are abundant, especially in terms of comparative studies with other contemporary poets. The examination of urban terminology in Chapter 3, Part II indicates that Ḥassān was familiar with sedentary and urban locales. He often employs urban terms that are not common among his contemporaries or uses terms that appear frequently in jāhilī poetry but applies them in an urban or sedentary context. Although Ḥassān was born in the settled town of Yathrib, his identity as an urban poet goes far beyond his contemporaries among the “city poets,” and this can be seen in his mocking of the desert Bedouin and in his use of urban terminology. However, this lexical study is preliminary and requires substantial follow-up. For this theory to be confirmed it would be necessary to study the use of certain terms in the poetry of additional jāhilī poets, including those who were nomads as well as other poets who traveled to the Ghassanid court. This preliminary study has revealed that the poet al-Nābigha relies on similar terminology to Ḥassān, and a more rigorous study on his use of terms could expand this connection. Comparative studies could be conducted of the poetry of Ḥassān and his contemporaries, including other mukhāṭramūn who did not visit the royal court of the Ghassānids.

A final avenue for future research would be an examination of the manner in which the literary and historical persona of Ḥassān was developed and expanded by Muslim scholars. This would shed light on the values of the later periods and their perception and portrayal of the jāhilīya. A careful examination of these later sources with the aim of exploring the dominant discourse of the ‘Abbāsid period based on the ways in which the scholars chose to represent Ḥassān would be revealing. This preliminary study
seems to suggest that Ḥassān's symbolic importance to these chroniclers and scholars lies in his embodiment of the transition from the “ignorance” of the jāhilīya to the “wisdom” of the Islamic period.
Appendices of Arabic Texts

Appendix A: Ghassānid Poems in the Pre-Islamic Period (600-622)

Poem 1 (verses 1-10)

Poem 4 (verses 28 and 35)

Poem 23
Poem 27

什جّت بصحاء لها سورة
عنفتها الحراوات دحرًا فقد
نّشرتها صرفاً وممزوجة
دبَّ ديب وسط رقاق هيام
خمساً ترى برداء الفلام
درِّاقة تولدن قفر العظام
مختلف الدفوى شديد الحرام
لم يَنهِ المشاعر، خفيف القيم
جلُّدُها ذات مراح عقام
تهوى خورفاً في فصول الزمان
إذ فُعّل الآله رؤوس الأکام
شُحِّها ترمي أهلها بالقناة
مولى ولا تخصم يوم الحصاد
يضرب بالسبيشْلَ بنى المقام
ويفرُج النَّ служいません الرحمة
ما عضاق بالعرَف صدور اللانم

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Poem 85

أجَّلَكَ لَّمْ تُهْتَجِ لَرَسَمَ الْمَنازل
وَدَارُ مَلْوَلٍ قُوْقَ ذاتِ السَّلاسل
مَا بَرَدًا يَذْرِي أَصْوَلَ الأَسْفَال
نَجُوهُ قَدْرِي فَوْقَ أَعْرُفَ مَايٌل
إِذَا غَدَّرَتِ الأَحْيَى كَانَ نِائِجَهَا
دِيَارُ رَزَاهَا اللَّهُ لِيُخْلِجْ بِهَا
رُعَاهَا الشَّرَّى مِنْ وَرَاءِ الشَّرَّى
وَلَسْتُ بِنَحَرِ الأَمْيَنَ أَنْجَابَب
فَهَمَهَا يَكُنْيُ مَيْنَ قُلْسَتْ بِكَادِبٍ
وَإِنِّي إِذَا مَا قَلَتْ قَوْلًا فَعَلْتُهَا
وَمَنْ مُكَرِّرُ هُوَ إِنْ شَيْبَ أَنْ لَا قَوْلُهَا
وُقِعَ الأَمْيَنَ شِيْمَةً عِبْرَ طَائِلٍ

Poem 87

فَلَقَتْ وَلَا مَلْكُ بَن عَامِرٍ
لِفَرْجٍ بَنِي العَنْقَاءِ يُقْتَلُ بَالْعَصْمٍ
وَمَعَتْفَتُ سُعْدَ بْنُ زَرْدِلَا هَنَذَ
لَقِدْ شَبَّ رَأِسِي أَوْ دَنَا لِمَشْيِهِ
لَمْ تَأْنِ الْغَدَرُ وَالْلَّؤْمُ وَالْجَلِّي
إِلَى بِتَيْبٍ زَمَارَاء لَنَلَدَأَ عَلَى شَلَادٍ
فَأَلْصَوُرتُ فَأَلْصَوُرتُ فَأَلْصَوُرتُ
لَمْ تُأْمَلُ أَعْمَرَ بْنُ عُمَرٍ...
Poem 90

Poem 105

Poem 136

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1 The second hemistich cited here is a variant reading favored by al-Barqūqī. See al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 85; and Dīwān, 2:162.

2 The voweling of tahaddhara here is from al-Barqūqī’s edition. See al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 86.

3 For this reading of bāb, see Dīwān, 1:280.
Poem 153

إذاً يا ذهن للقلب الحُبص،
أجمعّت عمرة صرّماً فابتكر.
ليسان هذا ملك يا عصر بسر،
لا يَكنّ حُبّك هذا ظاهراً
إلهام الأطلال غزوات العُدر.
سرب المشتية في اليوم المحتر.
كلّ وجه حسن الثقبة حر.
يُعمل القردّ بأنباج الجَرْور.
من قبلّ يبعد غمره وحمر.
جانيّيّ أَثْبَأّ من غهاء وحَرّ.
ما كانا خيار من نال النَّدى.
فسقًا الناس باقِسِنا وبر.
هربة المُحترذ بآطراف السَّبأ.
فتناها بعد إغبار بفر.
إذ يُوم مصائِل صرب.
بصيح المُصطفى غير القَطر.
طالع من أمامكم.
بضرب تأذن الجُرّ له.
ولقد بُعْدَم من حارِنَا.
الدائم في أبأس غمري نفر.
لدننا هيئة على الناس الكُبر.
يعفر الناس لفخر المتفجر.
غير أكاس ولا بيل غصرب.
كل قومٍ عندهم علم الحبّ.
Poem 245

لكنْ بُحرٌ من الحولانْ مَفرِوسٍ
بسَبَعَةٍ عَلَيْها بِإِرابٍ وَمُبِيضٍ
ِّبِنْنا بِحَرَاةٍ حُواَّلا صَفرَعُنا

Poem 266

وَلَوْ لا ثَلاْثَ هُنِّ فِي الْكَاسِ لَمْ يَكْنِ
هَا نَزَقٌ بِمُلْ جَنَّونٍ وَمَصْرَعٍ
وَلَوْ لا ثَلاْثَ هُنِّ فِي الْكَاسِ أَصْبَحَتْ
إِمَانُهَا وَالْتَفْسِيرُ لَهُ طَبِيبٌ

Poem 309

فَقْرَاهَا فَامْلَأْلَهُ المَحْظُورُ
فَإِذَا مَا حَصَّرَتْ طَابٌ الْحَضُورُ
أَوْ تَرَى نَعْمَةً بِهِ وَسَوْرُ
أَوْ حَشْنَ السَّلْبِ بَالْدَةَ لَسْتُ فِيهِ

Poem 322

يُسَابِيْكَ الْمَحْرَثِ الْأَكْبَرِ
فَزَدَّالكْ أَحْسَنَ مِنْ رَجُلِهِ
كَيْمُتْ بَيْنِي فَلاً تَتَمَّرِ
وَفِي الْبَاسِ وَالْحَبِّ وَالْمَنْثَرِ
Appendix B: Ghassānid Poems in the Islamic Period (622-632)

Poem 5 (verses 7, 10-12)

إنَّ خُلاي خَطِيب جَابِلَة الْجُوُرَ
لاَنَّ عَنَّدَ الْمَهْمَانَ حِينٍ يَقُومُ

٧

وَلَا نَصْفُ عَندَ بَابِبْ بْنِ سَلْمَى
يَوْمًا لَعْمَانُ فِي الْكُبْوَل مَقِيمٌ

٨

وَأَبِي وَرَافِقَ أَطْلَقَ أَلْفَةٍ لِّي
نَمَّ رَحْنَا وَقَفَّلُهُم مَّخْطُوْمٌ

٩

وَرَهَنْتَ الْبَيْدَنَينَ عَنْهُمْ جَمِيعًا
كُلُّ كَفَّ فِيهَا جُرُّ مَفْضُومٌ

١٠

Poem 16 (verses 6, 8)

ذُرُوا فِلَجَاتِ الشَّامِ قَدْ حَانَ ذُوْلَا
صَرَبَ كَأَفَوْا الْمَخَاصُ الأُوْلَادِ

٦

إِذَا هُبِطَتْ حُورَانَ مِنْ رَمَلِ عَالِجٍ
فَقُولَا لَهَا نِيْسَ الْطَّرِيقِ هُدَاعِ

٧

Poem 24 (verse 3)

بِجَابِلَة الْجُوُلَانِ وَسَطَّ الأَعَاجِمِ
بِحِيْرَةٍ أَصْلَةٌ وَدِمَارٌ

٣

Poem 77 (verses 6-7)

كَفَّتُهَا وَالْقُصَامِ عَمْرُو بْنِ عَامِرٍ
وَأُلُوَادَ مَلَزْنَ وَابْنِ مُحَرَّقِ

٦

وَخَارِجَةُ الْعَطْرِيْفِ أَوْ كَابِنٌ مُّتْنِدِرٍ
وَمَثِيلٌِ أَبِي قَافِوُسْ رَبُّ الْخَوْرِقِ

٧

Poem 103 (verse 5)

فَلُوْلَا أَبُو وَهْبٌ لَمْ تَمْرِتْ قَصَانَةٌ
عَلَى شَفَّ الرَّبْعَةِ يَهْوَى حُسُنًا

٥

Poem 321a (verse 5)

وَنُضِرِبَ حَامَ الدَّارِينِ وَنَتِمَّناً
إِلَى حَسَبِ مِنْ جَدْمِ عُسْوَانٍ فَاهِرِ

٥
Poem 321b (verses 2-3)

1. اولاء ببو ماء السماء نارئوا ملوكاً بأرض الشام فوق المنابر
2. دمشق بملكَ كابراً بعدَ كابر يؤمنون ملكَ الشام حتى مكنوا

256
Appendix C: Ghassānid Poems after the Death of the Prophet (632-661)

Poem 13

1. أسألت رسم الدار ألم لم تستأل
2. فلم يرج مرج الصقرين فجاس
3. أقوى وعطل منهم فكأنه
4. فهدت الالي آئى الكتاب المجل
5. دم تعايقها الرجاء دوArs
6. لما قوم قد أراهم مرة
7. يوما يحلق في الزمان الأول
8. يشوشن في النحل المضاعف نسجها
9. الصبارون الكبش يرق بحمة
10. والخاطلون قفبرهم بغشيهم
11. أولاد حفصة حول قبر أبيهم
12. يغشون حتى ما تهور كيامهم
13. يشقون من ورد الريش عليهم
14. يشقون درابق الريح ولم تكن
15. بيش الوجوه كرامة أحسائهم
16. فعلوات من أراض الريش إليهم
17. نغمو بهجوم ومسيجة لنا
18. فليست أزمانا طولا فيهم
19. إما ترتي بأسى تغي لولته
20. فلقد يراي موعدي كأني
21. ولقد شتية الحمر في حاويتها
22. فرعت في心意ها متنطف
23. إن التي ناورته فردها
24. كناهما حلب الغصير فعاطي

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4 For the selection of the variant reading Khawābī, rather than Jawābī, see the discussion of this verse in Chapter 1, Part III.
Poem 84

1. لعمره بالبطخاء بين مغرف
2. في نغمة مسكون ومعاصر
3. في النجلي ليفحص السطور حاصر
4. فحيجاه لا يعض بهم السرايا زراعيه
5. أمرهم وجعلهم يألفهم أعذر

6. أحق بها من ضيق وركاب
7. تقول وذكرى الدماغ عن خر ورغمها
8. أباح لها بطريق فارس غائطها
9. غرئت لها بالرفاه فهد بلالها
10. فارقتها ماء من شربت به
11. فاصدرتها في ما تدهم غذارها
12. فائت وriasات الكفاح لنفسها

5 For the alternate reading aknāf, see Dīwān, 1:196.
Poem 123

1. مَن الدَّار أُوْحِيَتْ تَمْهَالٌ
2. فَالْفُرْقَاتُ مِنْ بَلاَسْ قَدَّارٌ
3. فَفَقَبَ جَاهِسٌ فَأَوَّلِيَ الصَّمْرٌ
4. يَا فَسَكَاءُ فَالْفُصْورُ الدُّوَانِ
5. مَعْنِى قَنَابل وَهِجَانٌ
6. يَلْكَ دَارُ الْغَرْيَ بَعْدَ أَنْسٍ
7. وَحَلَّوْلُ عَظِيمَةِ الأَرْكَانٍ
8. يَوْمِ هُمْ بَحَارَتُ الْجُولَانٍ
9. تَنْضَمُّ سَرَاعَاً أَكَلَتَ الْمُرْجَانٍ
10. قَدْ ذَٰلِكَ أَفْضَحَ فَأُولَادُهُ

Alternate verses, poem 123

1. فَالْخَوَائِيْنُ فِجَانُ الْجُولَانِ
2. رُذُعَاءُ الفَصُّصُ السِّيْسُ وَالْرَّهْبَانِ
3. يَتَبَارَىْنُ فِي الْدَّعَاءِ إِلَى اللَّهِ

Poem 158

1. تَنَأَاوَلِي كَسَرَى بُوْسَيْنِ وَذُونَةٍ
2. فَجَمَعْنِي لَا وُفَقَ اللَّهُ أَمْرَةٍ
3. لَتَغْفَفْ بِمَيَاءِ الطَّحُّرِينِ وَقَدْ غَفَتْ
4. وَأَفْقَرُ مِنْ حَضَرٍ وَرَدَّ أَلْهَيْنِ

6 For the alternate reading *mughan*, see Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madinat Dimashq*, 2:182; and *Dīwān*, 1:257.

7 ‘Arafat’s *Dīwān* mentions both possible readings *sirā’an* and *qu‘ādan*. See *Dīwān*, 1:255 and 1:258.

8 The variant reading *nuqab* cited by both al-Barqūqī and Ḥanafī al-Hasanayn, has been used here rather than *thuqab* found in Arafat’s main text in the *Dīwān*. See al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ*, 475; and Ḥanafī al-Hasanayn, ed. *Dīwān*, 323.
Poem 261

5  وقالت لعينا بالجرى يا أسالى ثغورًا ثم لم تنطق ولم تتكلم
6  ديار ملوكون قد أراههم بعفطة زمن عموذ الملك لم يتهالك
7  لعمرى لمحّيت بين فت ورملة يبرز علّت الهارة كل منخر
8  نشأري وكأس أخصّت لم تصرح لى كلٌّ نبيان رفيق ومجلس
9  أحب إلى حسان لا يستطيعه من المُرقِّقات من غفار وأسلم

1  لم يقصدهم آباؤهم باللوم
2  وسقي برائته من الخرطوم وإن بنيه يوما فقرّ مجلي
3  لا متصرّا بالروم لم ينسى بالشام إذ هو ربيها
4  إلا كُبُّغض عطية المأمون

9 For variant reading ukhdilat, see Dīwān, 1:317. For the verb tašarrama, an alternate reading of tašawwama, see al-Barqūqī, Sharḥ, 445.
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