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## AL-ZAMAKHSHARI'S PANEGYRIC

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### Introduction

Panegyric is one of the oldest and most important genres in Arabic poetry. Its composition started with the Jāhili poets who were recognised as being the first to defend the honour of their tribes, and they made their prime duty the celebration of their people's glorious deeds and ensuing fame. It was from this time that numerous poets began to extol the virtues of certain famous personalities and gain financial reward in return. Among the better known of these poets was Zuhayr, who was famous for praising the great and receiving gifts, but whom the critics tried to excuse by alleging that he never praised men but as they deserved<sup>1</sup>. The poets al-Nābighah and al-A'shā were considered to be the first of the Jāhili poets to actually sell their praises, and subsequently lower their standards, in search of reward from the hands of the wealthy and famous<sup>2</sup>.

During the opening century of Islam, poetry was subjected to strict limitations as Islam reacted unfavourably to literature in general, partly because conquest, expansion and organisation, then civil strife, had absorbed the nation's energies. However under the Umayyads the old pagan spirit asserted itself once more. Among many others, the three most famous poets were al-Akḥṭal, al-Farazdaq and Jarīr, who were professional eulogists, avaricious and only too ready to defame and curse anyone who would not pay for their eulogies<sup>3</sup>.

Following the accession of the Abbasids, the conditions of the Arab nation in all the walks of life including poetry, underwent an enormous change since the times of Zuhayr. Poetry sprang no longer from

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1 Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan b. Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, *al-'Umdah fī ṣinā'at al-shi'r wa naqdih*, Cairo 1344/1925 (2 vols. in 1) Vol.1, pp. 49-50.

2 *Ibid.*, Vol 1, p. 49.

3 Nicholson, R.A., *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge 1953, pp. 235, 240.

the nomad life of the desert, but from the luxurious atmosphere of the Caliph's palace. The vagabond poet was no longer surrounded by desert images but by the pomp and grandeur of the rulers residence<sup>4</sup>, so the poets skill was at the disposal of whoever paid the highest.

The large-scale patronage of poets by the Abbasid Caliphs and their viziers was no less than that of their Umayyad predecessors. Consequently, panegyric poetry became the most lucrative type of poetry, and it stimulated many poets to attach themselves to the famous and wealthy.

As for the Arab critics, they paid great attention to panegyric and studied its integral composition thoroughly. According to Qudāmah, only moral and personal virtues were to be praised in a panegyric. He followed the principle that the poet should only attribute qualities to somebody, which personally gave honour to him. The physical qualities of a person, his nobility and the glory of his ancestors were merits which did not belong to him personally. Qudāmah insisted that the panegyric poet must use his art to set off the advantage the personal virtues and exploits of his subject. For Qudamah, manly virtues were four in number wisdom, courage, justice and decency. "The poet who celebrates these virtues in a patron of the arts, follows the right path. He who praises other virtues strays."<sup>5</sup>

These four virtues themselves composed all the moral qualities which gave man his value. Sagacity, vast knowledge, eloquence, power of conviction, political sense, restraint and discretion all came from wisdom. Confronting danger, the protection of the feeble and relations, vengeance and strength against the enemy, are different aspects of courage. Breadth of outlook, forbearance and hospitality all support justice. Finally moderation, indifference to the pleasures of the table, and chastity are part of decency. Moreover, the union of two of these virtues engendered a crowd of other virtues. For example the union of wisdom and courage gave patience<sup>6</sup>. The poet was not obliged always to extol these four virtues at the same time. He could mention only a part of them. So according to Qudāmah<sup>7</sup> these three verses of Zuhayr, extracts of a panegyric in honour of Ḥisn al-Fazārī had succeeded admirably:

4 Goldziher, I., *A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature*, tr. and enlarged by J. Desomogyi, Hildesheim 1966, p. 72.

5 Qudāmah b. Ja'far, *Naqd al-shi'r*, ed. 'Iysā Mikhā'il Sābā, Beirut 1958, p. 47.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 49.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

"A trustworthy man-generosity exhausts his wealth not debauchery.

If you come to ask him help, he will receive you with an overflowing joy as if you were offering him what you were asking him.

Who can rival Ḥiṣn in battle? Who spurns injustice like him?

And who could confound the eloquent adversary like him."

It was permissible for the poet to exaggerate these virtues and to reach the blameworthy extremity. For hyperbole only has the other role of giving to the theme a proverbial range.

Panegyric must be adapted to the social rank of the person who is being praised. The man whom a poet wanted to praise, belonged to all classes in society. Therefore it would have been illogical, even ridiculous to use for all the same language and to praise in all of them the same qualities. For example when eulogizing ministers, a poet had to praise their intelligence and intuition, their skilful execution of decisions, political sense, alertness of spirit, and steadfastness. The poet could also speak about their fidelity to the sovereign and how they deputised for him with dignity and loyalty in the conduct of the affairs of state. It was also recommended to make allusions to the vast knowledge of the ministers and to his talent as a writer<sup>8</sup>.

So critics legislated at will, and imposed on the laudatory themes these precise and restricting limits, which encouraged the panegyric to remain always what it was; a collection of clichés which the poets did not grow tired of taking up with very little originality. The poems differed so little, one from the other, that one could sell them indifferently to the best buyers. In fact certain poets, either greedy or abused by their dedication. al-Buḥturī was one of them<sup>9</sup>.

As for the artistic structure of the full-length and fully articulated *qaṣīdah*, which was esteemed as the only valid form of "classical" poetry, its pattern rapidly became highly conventionalised<sup>10</sup>. Ibn Qutaybah, one of the early critics summarised the structure of the *qaṣīdah*, which served as a model and was imitated by the poets especially in panegyric odes, throughout the following centuries of Arabic Literature.

8 *al-Umdah*, Vol. 11, pp. 107-108.

9 *Ibid*, Vol. II. p. 114.

10 Arberry, A.J., *Arabic Poetry* (A Primer for Students), Cambridge 1965, p. 5.

"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 . . . . Then to this he linked the erotic prelude (*nasīb*), and bewailed the violence of his love and the anguish of separation from the mistress and the extrimity 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 . . . . Now, when the poet had assured himself of an attentive hearing, he followed up his advantage and set forth his claim: thus he went on to complain of fatigue and want of sleep and travelling by night and of the noonday heat, and now his camel had been reduced to leanness. And when, after representing all the discomfort and danger of his journey, he knew that he had fully justified, his hope and expectation of receiving his due meed from the person to whom the poem was addressed, he entered upon the panegyric (*madiḥ*), and incited him to reward, and kindled his generosity by exalting him above his peers and pronouncing the greatest dignity, in comparison with his to be little."<sup>11</sup>

Thousands of poems have been composed even down to modern times, in close conformity with the pattern as set out in the foregoing lines<sup>12</sup>. The classical poets often run the risk of copying, in their erotic preludes, the pagan feelings, imagery and other conventional aspects, and also imitating the structure of the ancient as a whole<sup>13</sup>. However the above description must not be regarded as the invariable model. "The erotic prelude is often omitted, especially in elegies; or if it does not lead directly to the main subject, it may be followed by a faithful and minute delineation of the poet's horse or camel which bears him through the wilderness with a speed like that of an antelope, the wild ass or the ostrich."<sup>14</sup>

There were even some dissident poets who with the flourishing of the Abbasids, saw the irrelevance of these poetic conventions to their

11 Ibn Qutaybah 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim, *al-Shi'r wa al-shu'arā'*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo 1364 A.H., Vol. 1, pp. 20-21. The translation is by Nicholson, R.A., *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge, 1953, pp. 77-78.

12 Arberry, A.J., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

13 Kinany, A. Kh., *The Development of Ghal in Arabic Literature*, Damascus 1951, p. 304.

14 Nicholson, R.A., *op. cit.*, p. 78.

modern life and dared to reveal their sentiments. Abū Nuwās, for example suggested a prelude in praise of wine instead of the practice of beginning a poem with lamenting for the abandoned desert encampments. In the famous ironic line he said:

"He deviated from his path, the unhappy one! to examine the traces of an abandoned camp,

An I have deviated from mine to look for the tavern in the village."<sup>15</sup>

al-Mutanabbī also revealed his own sentiment of revolt in the following opening by questioning the conventional erotic prelude:

"Everytime a pagengyric is composed, it begins with an erotic prelude!

Is every poet then a lover?"<sup>16</sup>

But even these two poets, for the most part, followed docilely the implacable tradition in a great many of their poems.

al-Zamakhsharī's panegyric

al-Zamakhsharī, like most of the contemporary Saljūq poets was a prolific writer of panegyric odes. His eulogies provide almost two-thirds of the *diwān*. Although some of the eulogies are short, if we consider his poetry as a whole, then we find that the majority of his eulogies are longer than the rest of his poetry.

As for the artistic structure of his panegyric odes he seems to have followed the conventional format of the *qaṣīdah*, with its monorhyme, amatory prelude and desert image, at least in regard to the introductory part of his odes. However al-Zamakhsharī did not imitate the traditional model of the *qaṣīdah* blindly; in some odes he omitted the amatory prelude altogether whilst in others he merely dropped certain parts of it and improved upon its details.

al-Zamakhsharī, like some of his predecessors such as Abū Nuwās, broke the conventional tradition by starting one of his eulogies in praise of wine, which is simple and straightforward in style:

حَتَّى تَرَى الْمَيْلَ فِي عَطْفِي وَفِي سَأْيِي	"كَرَّرَ عَلَيَّ كَوْوَسَ الرَّاحِ يَا سَأْيِي
وَالرَّقِيَّةَ الرَّاحَ وَالرَّاقِيَّ هُوَ السَّاقِي	قُمْ فَارْقِنِي إِنْ صَيَّلَ الْهَمَّ يَلْسَعُنِي
فَهَاتِ يَا أَمْلَحَ السَّاقِينَ تَرِيَاقِي	قَالُوا الْمَدَامَةَ تَرِيَاقَ لِشَارِبِهَا

15 *Diwān Abī Nuwās*, ed. Maḥmūd Kāmil Farīd, Cairo 1364/1945, p. 156.

16 *Diwān al-Mutanabbī*, Beirut 1958, p. 302.

مالي ابقى من الذات باقية      وإن شرح شبابي ليس بالباقي  
 هات التي شبّهت ظلماً بشمس ضجى      لو عارضتها لغطتها بأشراق  
 نارية النعت إلا أنها عدلت      نار الخليل فلم تهتم بإحراق<sup>17</sup>

"Bring me repeatedly goblets of wine, oh cupbearer,  
 Until you see my legs side bending.  
 Arise and cast your spell on me, for the bite of sorrow hurts me,  
 The spell is the wine and the magician is the cupbearer.  
 They said, wine is the cure for the drinker,  
 So give me my cure, most beautiful of the cupbearers.  
 Why should I leave behind any pleasures?  
 When the prime of my youth will not last forever.  
 Bring me the wine, which is unfairly likened to the noonday sun,  
 If it confronted the Sun, it would overshadow it in its radiance.  
 It is fiery except that, like the fire of Abraham, it does not intend  
 to burn me."

However immediately after these lines, al-Zamakhsharī regretted the fact that he praised wine, and went on to ask God's forgiveness, as if he was afraid that readers might wrongly interpret these lines, and think of him as a wine-drinker. He emphasised the fact that neither he, nor any member of his family had drunk wine.

وَأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ أَنِّي قَدْ نَسَبْتُ بِهَا      وَلَمْ أَكُنْ لِحَمِيَّاهَا بِذَوِّاقٍ  
 وَلَمْ يَذُقْهَا أَبَى كَلَّا وَلَا أَحَدٌ      مِنْ أَسْرَقِي وَإِتِّفَاقِ النَّاسِ مُصَدِّاقٍ

"I ask God's forgiveness because I have praised it (wine), but I have never even experienced the effect of its taste.  
 My father never tasted it, nor any of my family, and mutual agreement by the people is my substantiation of this."  
 And from here he passed smoothly and lyrically into the main theme.

”وَفِي نَسِيْبِي بِهَا إِسْمٌ تَحْصُهُ      كَفَارَةٌ وَهِيَ مَلْحَى لِبْنِ إِسْحَاقِ”

<sup>17</sup> See p. 168 of the Arabic text of my Ph. D. thesis entitled "Al-Zamakhsharī's life and a critical edition of his *Diwān*" submitted to the Faculty of Arts in the University of Durham, January 1979. Henceforth in this article all page numbers of the Arabic quotations refer to the pages of the Arabic section of my thesis unless otherwise stated.

More than half of al-Zamakhshari's panegyrics began with the traditional amatory prelude<sup>18</sup>, which is rather surprising when we consider the difficulty that he himself admitted to having when composing love themes. al-Zamakhshari seemed torn between complying with the convention of composing an amatory prelude which in one of his odes<sup>19</sup> he admitted made poetry more beautiful, or omitting it, because he found it very difficult to write, probably because of his lack of experience in amatory matters and the hardships he had endured.

"The hardships of my days dominated my odes,  
and they did not leave any opportunity for the erotic prelude.  
When I composed an ode bewailing the times,  
I found the rhyme acceding to my wishes and desisting from error,  
But when I composed an eulogy on an erotic prelude,  
Its revolt was astonishing (in its disobedience)."<sup>20</sup>

There are about forty eulogies in the *diwān* where al-Zamakhshari omitted the amatory prelude altogether, and began his praises immediately<sup>21</sup>. Some of these are short fragments of only a few lines which obviously did not need any introductory part. He commenced only a couple of his eulogies with complaint and reproach.

His amatory preludes generally lack warmth, originality and depth in their imagery. For instance the following portion of the opening lines of his panegyric, in which he praised Mujir al-Dawlah, is highly conventional.

ولا حَبْدًا أَنْ تَسْتَقِلَّ خِيَامَهَا	"أَيَا حَبْدًا سَعْدَى وَحَبَّ مَقَامَهَا
وَعَزَى وَذُلَى وَصَلَهَا وَانْصَرَمَهَا	حَيَاتِي وَمَوْتِي قَرَبَ سَعْدَى وَبَعْدَهَا
وَأِنْ كَانَ لَا يَقْرَأُ عَلَيَّ سَلَامَهَا	سَلَامَ عَلَيْهَا أَيْنَ أَمْسَتْ وَأَصْبَحَتْ
وَرَوْضَ أَرْضَا فِيهَا سَوَامَهَا	رَعَى اللَّهُ مَرْحَاقًا رَعَى فِيهِ مَرْحَهَا
فَقَدْ أَرْغَمَ الْمَسْكَ الذَّكَّى رَغَامَهَا	إِذَا سَجَّتْ سَعْدَى بِأَرْضِ ذِيُولَهَا
تَنْكَسُ وَاسْتَعْلَى عَلَيْهَا قَوَامَهَا	وَإِنْ مَا يَسْتَقْضِيَانِ بَانَ رَأْيَتَهَا
وَيَحْدَرُ عَنْ بَدْرِ مَنِيرٍ لثَامَهَا" <sup>22</sup>	يَكْشِفُ عَنْ لَيْلٍ بِهِمْ قَنَاعَهَا

18 See *Text*, pp. 26, 36, 38, 40, 55, 57, 88, 89, 115, 122, 124, 168, 171, 176, 182, 205, 216, 224, 225, etc.

19 *Text*, p. 10, poem 22.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 10, poem 11.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3, 17, 18, 47, 49, 64, 69, 78, 83, 86, 146, 157, 177, 183, 186, 192, 227, 247, 251, etc.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 205.



However these lines show the poetical ability of al-Zamakhsharī in using rhetorical figures which are abundant in his poetry. There is hardly a page in his *diwān*, where some of the rhetorical embellishment are not employed. He was particularly fond of *jinās* (homonym) and *ṭibāq* (antithesis). He adorned successfully the second line of the above quotation with four successive examples of antithesis; these are between *ḥāyātī* and *mawtī*, *qurb* and *bu'd*, *‘izz* and *ḡull*, and *waṣl* and *inṣirām*. Then in the third line he used antithesis again between *amsat* and *aṣḥabat*. In the fourth line, al-Zamakhsharī used homonyms four times. The first one is the two usages of the verb *ra‘ā*, here meaning to protect and to graze successively. The second is between *sarḥan* and *sarḥuhā*, the third one between *rawwaḍa* and *arḍan* and the fourth one between *sāma* and *sawām*.

Besides the amatory prelude his long odes contain many other themes like maxims, chivalry, description and boasting. al-Zamakhsharī showed considerable skill in changing his subject, in switching from one theme to another. He did not cause surprise in these changes as he made the transmission smoothly and logically by somehow relating one to the other. For example in his ode numbered 233 in the *diwān*, al-Zamakhsharī commenced the panegyric with a conventional amatory prelude at the end of which he complained of the era, expressing his grievance at not finding loyalty in friends, and described himself as helpless against the vicissitudes of time. He then passed skilfully on to the praise of an Amīr, who remained nameless.

"أنا اليوم إن عرتني خطوب  
 فل أنيابها الأمير الأجل  
 إنما حضرة الأمير لمن يشكو  
 صروف الزمان شمس وظل" 23

It was a common practice during al-Zamakhsharī's time to end the eulogies with an invocation to God (*du‘ā*)<sup>24</sup>, asking his blessings for those whom the poets praised. The poets often used to express their sincere wishes for subjects. However al-Zamakhsharī did not conform universally to this conventional practice. There are only a few praises which al-Zamakhsharī concluded with *du‘ā*<sup>25</sup>, asking God to prolong his subjects life and to fulfil his wishes. Otherwise al-Zamakhsharī merely drew his odes to a conclusion with a continuation of his praises,

23 *Ibid*, p. 201.

24 al-Ṭāhir ‘Alī Jawād, *al-Shi‘r al-‘arabī fī al- Irāq wa bilād al-‘ajam fī ‘aṣr al-Saljūqī*, Baghdad 1958-1961, Vol. 11, p. 103.

25 *Text*, pp. 6, 14, 31, 164, 195, 208.

except in a few cases, where he concluded either with an open demand for material reward and gave thanks for that<sup>26</sup> or was reproachful<sup>27</sup>. He seems to have followed the critics who regarded the closing of panegyrics with *du'ā'* as a sign of weakness. They only excused this mode of closing an ode when the subject was a king<sup>28</sup>.

al-Zamakhsharī's panegric can be roughly divided into two types, official and personal. His "official" panegyrics, which occupy most of his eulogies, are devoted to rulers and persons holding important positions, some of whom remained anonymous. This group of panegyrics can itself be subdivided into two parts, the first consisting of poems written during the first part of al-Zamakhshar's life and the second of poems composed in the latter part of his life. The object of the composition of poems in the first part of his life was to acquire material reward and recognition<sup>29</sup>. The poems al-Zamakhsharī wrote in this period are characterised by complaint, reproach and arrogance. They tended to complain of his ill-fortune and the way the world treated him. The fact that he had to spend many years in poverty and without employment did not make his poetry less gloomy. His praises are pretentious and do not give an expression of his true feelings toward his subjects. The second part of his official panegyrics seem to have stemmed from admiration and appreciation for those he praised. He did not seek any favours or recognition of any sort, and the poems were devoid of any open demand for material reward<sup>30</sup>.

As for al-Zamakhsharī's "personal" panegyrics, they are the praises dedicated to his teacher, colleagues and close friends. It is immediately noticeable that they are more sincere than his official panegyrics. They are expressions of true feelings and intimate friendship<sup>31</sup>. It is interesting to point out that al-Zamakhsharī did not praise his own tribe, family or any of his relatives unlike the famous poets al-Mutanabbī, Abū Firās al-Hamdānī and al-Sharīf al-Raḍī who did so proudly and frequently. He did not take any pride in his origins nor did he attach any importance to clans, ancestors or tribes, except the one to which the prophet belonged. Whenever al-Zamakhsharī mentioned a tribe or a clan it was in praise of their virtuous deeds, not because of their noble

26 *Ibid*, pp. 42, 53, 69, 171.

27 *Ibid*, p. 40.

28 *al-Umdah*, Vol. 1, p. 160.

29 See my *Ph. D. thesis*, pp. 30-41.

30 *Text*, pp. 90, 152, 159, 163-164, 210, 225-227.

31 *Ibid*, pp. 156, 160-161 etc.

origins. This was a practice al-Zamakhsharî abhorred and criticised in others<sup>32</sup>.

One of the characteristics of his panegyrics is that he often made overt demands for either official recognition or to attain worldly gain. al-Zamakhsharî, however, was not unique in doing this, since the history of Arabic poetry is not short of poets who used their poetry as a means for material reward and were ready to sell their talents to the highest bidder. One of the best examples of al-Zamakhsharî's open demands is in the following lines.

وَأَدْرِكُ وَحْدِي مَا ارْتَجَى كُلَّ آمَلٍ      "وَكَمْ قُلْتُ أَلْقَى فِي وَزَارَتِكَ الْمَنَى  
تَمْنُوا وَأَنِّي لَسْتُ أَحْظِي بِطَائِلٍ      وَلَمْ أَدْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْذَلِينَ يَرُونَ مَا  
غَلَامُكَ يَجْبَعُنِي كَبَعْضِ الْأَرَاذِلِ" <sup>33</sup>      فَوْقَ إِلَى هَذَا الزَّمَانِ فَانَّهُ

"How often have I said that I would fulfil my aspirations in your ministry, and that I, alone would realise the hopes of every aspirant.

I did not know the mean could achieve what they hoped for,

Whereas, I am never blessed with anything.

So put an end to this condition, for it is your servant (child), and it is treating me like one of the base (mean)"

On another occasion this is what he had to say to 'Ubayd Allāh.

لَقَدْ طَفْتُ فِي نَجْدِ الْبِلَادِ وَغُورِهَا      فَمَا كَانَ إِلَّا بِالْوَزِيرِ مَعْرِجِي  
وَمَا ارْتَجَى إِلَّا عَطِيَّةَ كَفِّهِ      وَهَلْ غَيْرَ هَذِي الْكَفِّ كَهْفٍ لِمَرْتَجِي <sup>34</sup>

In the following, mentioning his own name, al-Zamakhsharî asked for a special favour.

وَابْذِلْ لِأَهْلِ الْفَضْلِ مِنْكَ مَوْدَةً      فَاِنَّ الْفَضْلَ لَا يَنْهَنُ وَدُودُ  
وَمَتَى بَذَلْتَ لَهُمْ وَدَادًا فَالْتَكُنْ      مُتَخَصِّصًا بِزِيَادَةِ عُمُودِ <sup>35</sup>

As Aḥmad al-Hūfi noted<sup>36</sup>, al-Zamakhsharî in his open demands, resembles the famous poet Jarîr when the latter praised 'Amr b. 'Abd al-'Azîz.

<sup>32</sup> My thesis, pp. 51-52.

<sup>33</sup> Text, p. 187.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> al-Hūfi Aḥmad Muḥammad, *al-Zamakhsharî*, Cairo 1966, p. 291.

والنفس مولعة بحبّ العاجل      "إني لآمل منك خيرا عاجلا  
لابن السبيل والفقير العائل" 37      الله أنزل في كتابه فريضة

al-Zamakhsharī might also have been influenced by al-Mutanabbī who in his panegyric asked Kāfūr to show him a special favour.

"أبا المسك هل في الكأمن فضل أنا له      فإني أغني منذ حين و تشرب  
وهبت مقدار كفى زماننا      ونفسي على مقدار كفّيك تطلب  
إذا لم تنظ بي ضيعة أو ولاية      فجودك يكسوني وشغلك يسلب"

"Father of musk, is there a superfluity in the cup for me to take?  
For I have singing a while since, and you have been drinking.

You have given according to the measure of the hands of your time,  
and my soul seeks according to the measure of your hands.

If you do not attach to me an estate or a governorship, your bounty  
robes me and your preoccupation unrobes me." 38

However some of al-Zamakhsharī's open demands for material reward were obviously met, but he was not given any official position. Some of the personalities he praised seem to have appreciated his poetry and rewarded him financially. al-Zamakhsharī acknowledged the gifts and continued writing odes in accordance with the reward he received. For instance when he praised Rabīb al-Mulk, he thanked him openly for the favours he received.

"You Rabīb al-Mulk, do I thank for bounties,  
Which your right hand has showered upon me.  
I constantly call blessing upon you,  
Whose fulfilment would fill the high heavens." 39

There are many other examples in the *diwān* 40.

The overriding impression of al-Zamakhsharī's style is that it is simple and straightforward. Some Arab poets, such as al-Mutanabbī

37 Jarīr b. Atīyyah, *Sharh diwān Jarīr*, ed. Muḥammad Ismā'īl al-Sāwī, (no place), 1353 A.H., p. 415. See another example where Jarīr praises 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, pp. 96-99.

38 Arberry, A.J., *Poems of al-Mutanabbī*, Cambridge 1967, pp. 99-100. For another example see *Diwān al-Mutanabbī*, pp. 480-481.

39 Text, p. 24, lines 39, 40.

40 Ibid, poems 3, 167, 170 etc.

and Abū Tammām, had a style which was immediately recognisable, but al-Zamakhsharī's while not being so obvious is distinctive enough. He can not be said to be original in his ideas and images, although he revealed his hatred for fabricated poetry which lacked originality and invention of any sort, especially when composed by those who lacked knowledge<sup>41</sup>.

He generally attempted to be lucid in his expression of ideas and the majority of his poetry could be understood readily by the readers. He did not saturate his poetry with philosophy nor did he, like the poets Abū'l 'Alā' and Abū Tammām, seem to take a perverse pleasure in challenging the reader's wit and intelligence<sup>42</sup>.

However al-Zamakhsharī himself had a high opinion of his own poetry. He compared himself with Zuhayr in his panegyrics.

"كنت زهيراً إذا مدحت فكن أنت إذا منحتني هراً"<sup>43</sup>

He considered his poetry to be as excellent as himself(!) and good poetry to be priceless.

"شعري مثلي غال لجودته وجيد الشعر ماله ثمن"<sup>44</sup>

He did not wish to be likened to those ignorant in the science of rhetoric and eloquence and revealed the pride he took in his poetry<sup>45</sup>.

However al-Zamakhsharī can hardly be classed as inventive or creative in his poetry. Most of his metaphors and similes are commonplace clichés which had been used for centuries in the traditional conventions of Arabic poetry. He compared the generosity of a praised man to the ocean and rain clouds, his courage to that of a lion, and his firmness and wisdom to a deep-rooted mountain. The following line is one of the many examples in his *diwān*.

"حضارة في جوده قطرة ورضوى إلى حلمه كالخضاة"<sup>46</sup>

It is important to note that al-Zamakhsharī, in line with the stringent demands of the critics, attached great importance to notable deeds

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 134, 136.

<sup>42</sup> Gibb, H.A. R., *Arabic Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Text*, p. 213.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 221.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, poem 227.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

and virtues such as wisdom, courage, patience, sagacity and justice. Sometimes he even combined some of these virtues in one line.

"مذهب مرتضى لسان ذليق      راحة سمحة فؤاد شبييع"  
"هذه أربع الخصال اللواتي      كل مجد منها له التفریع<sup>47</sup>"

However he placed special emphasis on generosity since the poets imagined all those they praised to be generous<sup>48</sup>. Examples of this are easily found throughout the *diwān* and are too numerous to quote here.

It is also interesting to point out that al-Zamakhsharī avoided praising physical and external qualities such as beauty and splendour which did not add anything to the virtue of the one being praised. In doing this, al-Zamakhsharī was in line with the critic Qudāmah. According to some other critics however, one could add to the virtues enumerated by Qudāmah, some external or physical qualities such as beauty, majesty, height, wealth and the great number of the tribe. According to Ibn Rashīq, Qudāmah was wrong when he rejected all these outright. He should have limited himself to affirming that moral qualities are the most worthy of glorification. But to exclude from the panegyric all the other qualities was to be mistaken<sup>49</sup>. On the other hand al-ʿAskarī considered it a distinct fault on the part of a panegyrist to leave aside the moral virtues such as decency, wisdom, justice and courage in favour of praising only the physical or external qualities<sup>50</sup>.

Another artistic feature that is evident in his praise is the use of exaggeration (*mubālaghah*) and hyperbole (*ghuluww*). Again, this is not a feature unique to al-Zamakhsharī's poetry, since exaggeration was widely used throughout the history of Arabic poetry. The pre-Islamic poet al-Nābighah was considered to be one of the outstanding users of hyperbole. The critics quoted the following lines from him as an example of exaggeration.

"ألم تر أن الله أعطاك صورة      ترى كل ملك دونها تتذبذب"  
فإنك شمس والملوك كواكب      إذا طلعت لم يبد منها كوكب"<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 145.

<sup>48</sup> al-Ṭāhir ʿAlī, *op. cit.*, Vol. 11, p. 103.

<sup>49</sup> *al-Umdah*, Vol. 11, p. 108.

<sup>50</sup> al-ʿAskarī, *Kitāb al-ṣināʿatayn al-kitābah wa al-shiʿr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī and Muḥammad ʿAbū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo 1371/1952, p. 98.

<sup>51</sup> *Naqd al-shiʿr*, p. 58, *al-Umdah*, Vol. 11, p. 111.

"(Monarch) Hasn't God conferred on you such strength  
that all the kings fear you and flatter you?

Kings are stars which dare not reveal themselves  
before your rising sun!"

Poets like Abū Nuwās and al-Mutanabbī employed this artistic feature to excess, and gave it new meanings as well as new imagery. al-Mutanabbī was generally acknowledged as having surpassed all others in this field. In a famous line to Sayf al-Dawlah al-Hamdānī we have one of the finest examples of exaggeration.

”تجاوزت مقدار الشجاعة والنهى الى قول قوم أنت بالغيب عالم

“You surpassed the bounds of courage and reason,

So that people said you had knowledge of the unseen.”<sup>52</sup>

al-Zamakhsharī, like other poets, used exaggeration not merely in order to gain gifts and rewards from the wealthy he was eulogizing, but also to emphasise and enrich his images and clarify his ideas and thoughts. There are many examples in his *diwān*, but the following lines I have selected are taken from the ode in which he praised Sultan Sanjar:

”سمّاه كل الناس كعبة سؤدد أهل الحوائج منهم حجاجها

لولا تقاك لسا ر غيرك سيرة ما سار فى عهده حجاجها

ولو ركب النجوم لما نبت أفرادها عنه وأزواجها

ولو أن عدلك شبيهته بمياها لارتد كالعذب الفرات أجاجها”<sup>53</sup>

al-Zamakhsharī often compared, and sometimes contrasted, those who had become proverbial for their virtues and noble deeds or nefarious actions, with the persons he praised. He wished to make an example of the deeds of great men for his contemporaries. The famous people he mentioned include: Yaḥyā, Hātim, Ka'b, Aḥnaf, Saḥbān, Hajjāj and Aktham. For example, when praising Fakhr al-Ma'ālī he compared him with Hātim and Ka'b, who were themselves typified for their generosity.

”أجود من حاتم وأكرم من كعب ولكن تمثّلوا بهما”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Arberry, A.J., *Arabic Poetry*, p. 86.

<sup>53</sup> *Text*, pp. 38, 39.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 212.



He also made reference to some of the prophets like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

al-Zamakhsharī seems to have read most of the important *diwāns* of his predecessors including pre-Islamic poets. The proof of this is his works namely, *Kashshāf* which is full of example extracts from the old poetry that al-Zamakhsharī used to support his explanations of the Qur'ān. On one occasion when commenting on the 92 nd verse of the chapter entitled *al-An'ām* of the Qur'ān, he even quoted the following line from his poetry without mentioning his name.

”فن يلق في بعض القريات رحله فأم القرى ملقى رحلى ومتابى“<sup>55</sup>

His study of the old poetry must have influenced him in many different ways when composing his own poetry. When reading al-Zamakhsharī's poetry one gets the impression that he bears a resemblance to his predecessors in the structure of his odes, ideas, desert images, similes and metaphors. It is difficult however to pinpoint those poets who had influenced him in his panegyrics, or whom he imitated except for Jarīr and al-Mutanabbī, the latter of which was a source of inspiration for many other poets who succeeded him. al-Zamakhsharī very occasionally borrowed similar ideas, especially in his self praise and open demands, from al-Mutanabbī who was very proud of his own poetry which he considered would be sung by time:

”وما الدهر إلا من رواة قصائدى اذا قلت شعرا أصبح الدهر منشدا  
فساربه من لا يسير مشمرا وغنى به من لا يغنى مغردا“<sup>56</sup>

In the following lines al-Zamakhsharī conveyed a similar idea when he said that his odes had flown to the farthest lands.

وما شجافى أن غر مناقبى - تغنى بها الركبان بين القوا فل  
وطارت الى أقص البلاد قصائدى وسارت مسير النيران رسائل<sup>57</sup>

“What has distressed me is that my best qualities are sung by the riders in their caravans,  
My odes have flown to the farthest lands and  
My treatises have soared as far as the stars.”

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Diwān al-Mutanabbī*, p. 373.

<sup>57</sup> *Text*, p. 187.



He also borrowed and adopted lines from other poets whom he appreciated. Sometimes he mentioned the name of the poet from whom he borrowed.

”وكم كررت للعرجى قولاً  
أضاعوني وأى فنى أضاعوا”<sup>58</sup>

The second hemistich of the above line is taken from ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar b. ‘Uthmān al‘Arjiyy (d. 120 /738) whose verse reads.

”أضاعوني وأى فنى أضاعوا  
ليوم كريهة وسداد ثغر”<sup>59</sup>

al-Zamakhsharī borrowed the following verse from al-Hutay’ ah without mentioning his name.

”من يعمل الخير لا يعدم جوازيه  
لا يذهب العرف بين الله والناس”<sup>60</sup>

The influence of the Qur’ān on his poetry is evident. al-Zamakhshari enriched his poetry by adopting certain words and phrases from the Qur’ān.

”ستظفر بالملك العزيز مرامه  
يداك وإن تبّت يداحاسد وتب”<sup>61</sup>

His verse is obviously taken from the Qur’ānic verse.

”تبّت يدا أبى لهب وتب”<sup>62</sup>

In the following line al-Zamakhsharī adopted and combined both a verse from the Qur’ān and a proverb.

”كأيدى سبا ارفضوا شعاعا فشبهوا  
وكانوا جبال الجبد عنها منفشا”<sup>63</sup>

The proverb is  
”تفرقوا أيدى (أيادى) سبا”<sup>64</sup>

And the verse is  
”وتكون الجبال كالعهن المنفش”<sup>65</sup>

al-Zamakhsharī made extensive use of proverbs and traditional sayings which are abundant in his poetry. Since he compiled a sizeable collection of Arabic proverbs<sup>66</sup>, al-Zamakhsharī was obviously well

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 137.

<sup>59</sup> Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah (11 Vols. in 6), Cairo 1927-1938, Vol. 1, p. 413.

<sup>60</sup> *Text*, p. 123, *Shi‘r al-Huṭay‘ah*, ed. ‘Isā Sāpā, Beirut 1951, p. 77.

<sup>61</sup> *Text*, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> *Qur’ān*, CXI/1.

<sup>63</sup> *Text*, p. 128.

<sup>64</sup> Ibrāhīm Mustafā and others, *al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ*, two vols., Tahrān (undated) Vol. 11, p. 413.

<sup>65</sup> *Qur’ān*, CI/V.

<sup>66</sup> *My thesis*, p. 82.

acquainted with the subject and was in an ideal position to choose the right proverb for the appropriate occasion. For example his verse

"لن يضروك بقول أو بفعل هل يضرب البدر كلب بعواء<sup>67</sup>

contains the proverb

"هل يضرب السحاب نباح الكلاب<sup>68</sup>

The following verse

"على أن نفسي لا تذاق بوصحة واية ما حنساء يعلم ذامها<sup>69</sup>

is taken from the proverb

"لا بعلوم الحنساء ذامها<sup>70</sup>

Another example is this verse:

"تعاطى القوس باريا ونيطت بعاتق سيقل السيف الحماله<sup>71</sup>

which contains the proverb

"أعط القوس باريا<sup>72</sup>

There are many examples in his *dīwān*<sup>73</sup>.

His linguistic studies had considerable influence on him also; many expressions, terms and phrases of grammar and prosody can be found in his poetry. He used the conjunctive *hamzah* and the letter "r" which was mispronounced by Wāsil b. 'Āṭā in a simple but effective way.

"لا تجعلوني مثل همزة واصل فيسقطني حذف ولا راء واصل<sup>74</sup>

"Do not make me a "hamzat wāṣil" lost in elision or like Wāsil's "R"."

He used *ishtiṣāq*, *fi'l* and *maṣḍar*.

"إن اشتقاق الفخر منه كما للفعل من مصدره الاشتقاق<sup>75</sup>

Another example includes *ḥarf al-ta'rif*, the definite article.

"إلى حرفي التعريف قسيتها معا فذا ألف التعريف وهو كلامه<sup>76</sup>

67 Text, p. 5.

68 al-Maydānī Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, *Majma' al-amthāl*, (2 Vols. in 1), Cairo 1352-53 A.H., Vol.11, p. 166.

69 Text, p. 205.

70 Ibrahim Mustafā and others, *al-Muḥjam al-wasit*, 2 Vols., Tehran (n.d.), p. 318.

71 Text, p. 188.

72 *Muḥjam al-wasit*, Vol. I, p. 53.

73 Text, pp. 150, 207, 214, 251, etc.

74 Text, p. 187.

75 *Ibid*, p. 174.

76 *Ibid*, p. 204.

The habitual attack of misfortunes and calamities are likened to that of Zayd striking 'Amr, a famous example employed in the classical texts of Arabic grammar to illustrate the subject and object of a verbal sentence.

”وبطش بنات الدهر بالجر دأبها كما أن زيد النحو ضارب عمره”<sup>77</sup>

al-Zamakhshari's panegrics reveal other aspects of his education and culture, such as jurisprudence and Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*). He frequently employed terms relating to these subjects. In the following line he used *tawātur*, *aḥādīth* and *ruwāt*.

”تواتر فيها أحاديثه فلم تخل طائفة من رواة”<sup>78</sup>

He used *ḥarām*, *mubāḥ*, *ṭalāq* and *‘aqd al-nikāḥ*.

”وقتل مثلى حرام في الدين غير مباح

طلقت مدح سواهم من قبل عقد النكاح”<sup>79</sup>

Other terms, including *ḥadīth*, *musnad*, *ahl al-isnād*, *siyar*, *riwāyah*, *isnād* and *ighṭisāl* are abundant in his *diwān* and used accurately in the appropriate context<sup>80</sup>.

al-Zamakhshari was an educated man who was well-versed in almost every subject that was current during his times. A glance at the list of his works shows the diversity of his knowledge. Although he concentrated on the commentary of the Qurʾān and different aspects of the study of the Arabic language and literature which earned him fame, he produced works about such varying topics as jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*, geography and biography. Despite the fact that he was not accredited with writing any books about astronomy, nevertheless he revealed that he had more than a passing knowledge of this subject. In his panegrics he used the names of stars and planets, like Arcturus and Spica Virginis, Sirius, Procyon, Pleiads, Mercury, Shooting stars and Bellatrix as a comparison to those he was praising, likening them in their brilliance and high position in the heavens.

It is important to note that although al-Zamakhshari was originally Persian, and had compiled an Arabic-Persian dictionary, he did not include any new Persian words in the poetry that were not already in common usage among the Arabs. The few Persian words he did use, such as *dast*, *bunūd*, *būsiyy* and *nayāzik* were already Arabised and commonly found in literature.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 64, 77, 110, 200, 202, etc.

Although al-Zamakhshari's poetry is almost devoid of historical allusions and philosophical argument nevertheless, it does reveal his ideological convictions and portrays to some extent his character. He stated that he was a *Hanafite* and not a *Shāfi'ite*<sup>81</sup>. He revealed his condemnation of the *Shu'ūbite* movement, and of those who imitated blindly. He placed special emphasis on the proof and substantiation of arguments and vilified imitation of any sort.

Finally, it must be pointed out that in his panegyrics, al-Zamakhshari's language became more vivid and imaginative on certain specific occasions—namely, when he was bewailing the vicissitudes of life and when he was praising either himself or scholars with whom he obviously associated himself. On these occasions one does not feel that al-Zamakhshari was forcing himself. He was merely responding to his inner urge.

The following lines are an example of the fluency and smoothness that he achieved in his style. He praised God-fearing scholars.

العلماء إلا الخاطر المجهود	"جهدوا خواطرهم وليس يروح
تحت الظلام وسائد وحدود	أحيوا ليالهم فما اجتمعت لهم
تدعوا هواهم أوجه وقود	وزووا عن الدنيا نقوسهم فما
هل في ثدى الغانيات نهود	لم يفتنوا هل في الشفاه لمي ولا
لم يبق إلا أعظم وجلود	أكلت لحومهم العبادة فانشؤا
هرما ركوع دائم وسجود <sup>82</sup>	وحتى ظهورهم ولما يبلغوا

"They took pains with their thoughts, and nothing revives the learned except their laboring minds,

They did not waste their nights; even in the darkness their cheeks did not touch the pillow.

They kept their souls away from the world; beautiful faces and attractive figures did not arouse their passions.

They did not notice if the lips were ruby-coloured, nor were they aware of the rising breasts of beautiful maidens.

Religious devotion has eaten their flesh, so that nothing is left but the skin and bones.

Before reaching old age, their backs were bent from constant bowing and prostration."

<sup>81</sup> Text, p. 154.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 68.