

Description of Animals in Arabic Heritage

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menyeloroi gambaran haiwan dalam empat sumber warisan Arab: al-Qur'an, Hadith, prosa dan puisi. Ia membincangkan beberapa ayat al-Qur'an dan hadith berkaitan dengan haiwan. Prosa dan Puisi Arab pula merupakan suatu khazanah yang amat kaya tentang hubungan manusia dan haiwan serta persepsi manusia terhadap pelbagai spesis haiwan. Selain daripada membentangkan konotasi umum pelbagai jenis haiwan dalam puisi Arab, rencana ini turut mengemukakan beberapa petikan terpilih meliputi gambaran Imru' al-Qays tentang kudanya, rasa kagum Tarafah terhadap untanya, kisah pertemuan Farazdaq dengan seekor serigala, dan perubahan persepsi seorang penyair yang tidak dikenali terhadap anjing, serta prosa al-Jahiz berkenaan ular. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa al-Qur'an banyak menekankan tentang kepentingan haiwan sebagai kegunaan dan rahmat dalam kehidupan rohani dan jasmani manusia. Manakala hadith pula menegaskan hak dan tanggungjawab dalam hubungan antara manusia dan haiwan. Prosa dan puisi pula mendokumentasikan pemerhatian dan pemerihalan yang amat halus dan terperinci tentang haiwan dan sikap manusia terhadapnya. Gambaran ini diwarnai oleh sikap saling hormat-menghormati, rasa kagum dan pergantungan emosi. Jelasnya, haiwan merupakan suatu sumber inspirasi yang penting dalam bahasa dan kesusasteraan Arab. Oleh kerana haiwan amat penting dalam kehidupan rohani, intelek dan harian manusia, maka sewajarnya manusia memelihara hubungan Pencipta-manusia-haiwan sebagaimana yang dianjurkan dalam Qur'an dan hadith, iaitu dengan mengamalkan sikap kasihan-belas terhadap haiwan.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the portrayal of animals in four Arabic sources of heritage: the Qur'an, the prophetic tradition, prose and poetry. As regards the holy sources, several Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions related to animals are presented and discussed. Arabic prose and poetry provide a very rich window into the Arab man-animal relation and the perception of man

towards the different animal species. In addition to providing an overview of the general connotations associated with different types of animals in Arabic poetry, this article presents selected excerpts encompassing Imru' al-Qays's descriptions of his horse, Tarafah's adoration for his camel, Farazdaq's description of his encounter with a wolf, an anonymous poet revisiting his perception towards the traits of dogs and al-Jahiz's prose on the snake. The Qur'an mainly emphasizes the utility-grace significance of animals in human spiritual and material lives while the prophetic traditions emphasize the rights and responsibility relationship between man and animals. The prose and poetry document the Arabs' detailed observation and vivid descriptions of animals and their attitudes towards these beings, which are largely characterized by mutual respect, adoration and emotional dependence. Animals have inspired much of the Arab's literary and linguistic experience. Given the importance of animals in human's spiritual, intellectual and daily lives, it is only fair that humans preserve the Creator-human-animal relationship as enjoined in the holy Qur'an and prophetic traditions, which means exercising mercy in dealing with animals.

INTRODUCTION

A scrutiny of the Arab-Islamic heritage which encompasses the Qur'an, Prophet's traditions, prose and poetry reveals that a considerable portion of its content, vocabulary, and proverbs was inspired by animals. The concern to this article is the rich window the Arab-Islamic heritage provides into the world of animals and especially, into the relation of God-human-animal. Although the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions were revealed as the spiritual guidance to govern human affairs, yet the mention of animals in these holy sources is not to be taken lightly for it signifies the significance of animals in human spiritual and material life. In the Arabic prose, we find that prolific Arab literary scholars such as al-Jahiz (died AD 869) and al-Damiri (died AD 1405) dedicated volumes of their work in describing and discussing the nature of animals. In doing so, they interweaved their personal observation and knowledge about these animals with Qur'anic verses, Prophet's traditions, folktales, individual anecdotes, proverbs, poetry and debates revolving around the merits of a species over another. The compilations of poetry by great poets of the pre-Islamic (before AD 622), Umayyad (AD 661-750), 'Abbasid (AD 749-1258) and subsequent periods revealed the nature of human-animal relationships of the time. Due to space limitations, we have only

included a summary of animals' connotations in poetry and some examples of the literary works of Imru' al-Qays, Tarafah and al-Farazdaq. As for prose, the excerpt presented is selected from the writer al-Jahiz.

ANIMALS AS PORTRAYED IN THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

The Qur'an refers to animals as *bahimah* (animals; beasts), *dabbah* (moving creatures), *an'am* (animals with daily benefits for humans; cattles) or with specific reference to their species. There are at least 15 types of different animal species mentioned in the Qur'an, with six chapters named after animals and they are al-Baqarah (the heifer), al-An'am (the cattle), al-Nahl (the bees), al-Naml (the ants), al-'Ankabut (the spider), and al-Fil (the elephant). The mentions of animals in the Qur'an are often related to the call to observe nature as manifesting God's might and power and thus to reinforce faith in Him.

Do they not observe the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them in? None can uphold them Except the Most Gracious, truly it is He that watches over all things.

(Qur'an 67: 19)

The Qur'an emphasizes that animals constitute a part of the human community:

There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you.

(Qur'an 6: 38).

Like humans, animals have souls, mind and societal life and their existence is significant to human life. Therefore, their lives should be treated with equal importance to humans'.

The Qur'an stresses that both humans and other animals and all other living and non-living things are the products of Divine creation. It also portrays animals as having the abilities to reason, to communicate and to execute duties, as in stories about an ant, a crow, a hoopoe, the *ababil* (flocks of birds), etc. However, man's communicative and reasoning abilities are far more dynamic than those of animals. This very superiority puts man at the position of being the manipulator of animals, and at the same time, the guardians of animals. The relationship between these two animate beings is that of responsibility and rights.

A related concept to explain the God-man-animal relationship is *‘ibadah* (servitude), which is the *raison d’etre* of creations in Islam and which underlies all its activities. While all creations are commanded to please Allah by serving Him, each creation does it in its own unique way. A man exercises his servitude in two ways: as an *‘abd* of God (slave) by performing formal religious obligations and as God’s *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth by making the world a better place for every single being. In all other beings, the concept of *al-taskhir* (subjection) applies as part of this servitude. Allah commands all other beings to be at the disposal of man. The sun and moon adheres to God command by their mere alternate movements such that gives man and the world the sense and benefits of the day and night, heat and light, time and calendar. In the case of animals, glorifying Allah, executing the special tasks commanded by Him, subjecting themselves to the ecological chain and human use are all part of this servitude to God. In brief, with such important roles, animals are actually a grace from God to the human beings. One of the numerous Qur’anic verses that illustrate this fundamental fact of animal as utility-grace to mankind is:

And He has created cattle for you: you get from them your warm garments and other benefits, and you eat of their produce. And you pride yourselves on their beauty as you drive them home in the evenings, and as you lead them forth to pastures in the mornings. And they carry your heavy loads to places where you could not otherwise reach save by laborious strain to yourselves. Verily! Your Sustainer is most kind- a Dispenser of grace} And He has created horses and mules and asses that you may ride them, and as a source of beauty. And He will create what you do not yet know.

(Qur’an 16: 5-8)

While the Qur’an emphasizes the divinity and utility values of animals, the Prophet’s traditions appear to emphasize more on the welfare of these beings:

Narrated Anas bin Malik: Allah’s Apostle said, “There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him.”

(Bukhari Volume 3, Book 39, Number 513 <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah>)

‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Mas’ud narrated: “We were on a journey with the Apostle of God, and he left us for a while. During his absence, we saw a bird called hummara with its two young and took the young ones. The

mother bird was circling above us in the air, beating its wings in grief, when the Prophet came back and said: "Who has hurt the feelings of this bird by taking its young? Return them to her."

(Cited in Masri (1989) from 'Awn al-Ma'bud Sharh Abu Daud)

Shaddad b. Aus said: Two are the things which I remember Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) having said: Verily Allah has enjoined goodness to everything; so when you kill, kill in a good way and when you slaughter, slaughter in a good way. So every one of you should sharpen his knife, and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably.

(*Sahih Muslim Book 021, Number 4810*, <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah>)

These traditions obviously reveal that men must be kind to animals and should not inflict any kind of emotional or physical distress to animals. Thus, animals are at par with humans in their right to be treated kindly and protected from cruelty: any act of kindness or cruelty towards fellow men or animals would be rewarded or punished accordingly in the hereafter.

Animals are without doubt such a grace to human beings and man can claim superiority to animals. However, such an honour to man is not without conditions. It is unfortunate that there are men, and many of such men, who take advantage of this dominance to treat animals as they wish. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. They promote a culture of over-consumption of animal products to make more profit. Factory farming, which subjects these poor creatures to unnatural and suffocating environment and synthetic food, thus became a lucrative enterprise. This very gullible nature of some men explains why absoluteness is reserved only for God and man by no means should perceive himself as having absolute freedom and power, complete dominance over others and total liberation from rules. In manipulating animals to serve his needs, man is governed by ethics and jurisdictions explicitly prescribed in the Qur'an, the Prophet's traditions or derived from the consensus of Muslim scholars. Thus, as part of gratefulness to God for this infinite grace, observation of these moral and jurisdictional principles in dealing with animals is obligatory.

For those readers who are interested to learn more about Islamic perspectives and concerns regarding the welfare of animals, we highly recommend Masri (1989) and <http://www.islamicconcern.com>.

ANIMAL SPECIES IN ARABIC POETRY

This section presents a summary of the connotations of animals in Arabic poetry, much of which is taken from al-Qaysi (1984) and al-‘A’lim (1987).

Camels were very significant for the Arabs:

“Above all other animals, the most vital to the desert Arab was the camel, for it alone made his way of life possible, and without it, most of Arabia would have been uninhabitable. The Bedouin did not exist apart from the camel; it was the source of its food and drink; it furnished him with materials for his clothes, his shelter, his fuel, his medicine, it was his means of transportation; and it was his unit of wealth.”

(Wilson 1965: 8)

All these traits resulted in lengthy and vivid descriptions on camels in which the poets praised the attributes and skills of these animals and expressed their emotional attachment for them. Poets experienced mutual feelings for camels as they lived with them in the same environment. Camels were their best friend whom they adorned to the extent they could sacrifice themselves for their camels.

Horses were equally adored by Arabs for their numerous benefits. Their nurture and care for horses exceeded anything else. They took great efforts to maintain their breeds. Horses were their fortress in wars, their outlet for leisure and hunting, for bets and races, and their source of pleasure. Hence, they competed in immortalizing horses in their poetry in such a marvelous fashion and authored numerous books about them.

Their concern for animals was very much tied to their dependence on them in protecting their properties and in hunting. Dogs were mostly described in great detail in terms of skills and attitudes during hunts. Furthermore, they were indicators for coming guests. They helped the lonely and needy travelers survive the scary nights in the barren desert.

Other animals were mentioned for illustrative and comparative purposes. Goats and sheep were briefly mentioned in Arabic poetry to illustrate meek characters that lose before beasts or heroes. Arab poets compared their horses and camels to other wild animals in terms of their prowess and swiftness as they traveled to their companions or loved ones. The toughness and strength of horses and camels to carry provisions in long journeys were compared to

bulls, Oryx and zebras. As for gazelles, they were described in enumerating the beauty and elegance of women. They were also mentioned in relation to ruined homes, along with other tame animals that would roam around those sites for the gentleness of these animals commensurate with the sentimental images and memories of these places. These metaphors and similes were highlighted in the prelude to their poems. Antelopes were also weighed against their horses in terms their prowess, speed and fitness. As for the deer, the Sa'alik poets (a gang of poor poets who were ousted from their tribes during pre-Islamic period) compared themselves to these gentle animals in terms of speed.

Ostriches were compared to their camels and horses in their speed and ability to escape trouble. Poets described the red colour of their feathers and their legs when moving fast that even horses cannot cope with them. Ostriches were also described and compared to ships of the sea. Occasionally and quite contradictory, poets confess fear, cowardice and defeat in images of ostriches pursued by persistent horsemen.

El-Tayib (1983) mentioned that wolves were compared to horses as poets found an intimate companion in them during hardship, loneliness and hunger while traveling, such that led to comradeship even with wild beasts. At times, wolves were also mentioned to symbolize betrayal. Foxes were mentioned as poets described the desert when the wild wind hits through and at other times were used as icons of shrewdness and cunning. Ibex were illustrative of protection and safety as it stays at the peaks of mountains. Lions portrayed courage and bravery in Arabic poetry, even though there was never any real confrontation between a poet and a lion, except for 'Urwa bin al-Ward, who did so and described them thoroughly and vividly. In personal and tribal self-glorification, it was common to compare men and young horsemen to lions. In elegy odes, the dead heroes' courage and boldness were briefly compared to the attributes of lions and tigers.

Different birds inspired different connotations. Falcons, eagles and hawks portrayed power and authority. Pigeons portrayed romance, as poets did a splendid job describing them and their singing. The strong bond between the Umayyad poets and pigeons resulted from their common experience; they both traveled from time to time to different locations and suffered the difficulties of the journey and the bitterness of strangers. The crow is the most

frequently mentioned bird in the Arabic poetry. It is associated with ill-omen and depicts pessimism and depression. The sound of the crow was perceived as a sign of moving away from people. The sad appearance of owls and their presence around deserted sites and dilapidated homes made them the omen of crises and conflicts. Sand grouse's speed was compared to horses' and camels crossing the vast desert. Poets described the sand grouse lying and sleeping, escaping the heat of the sun. The way a sand grouse walks was compared to that of a woman. Other birds such as cocks, bats, and hoopoes were briefly mentioned.

Reptiles such as snakes were well described as a source of fear due to the poisonous venom; therefore, it had a prominent strong image in their poetry. Chameleons were mentioned in hot seasons. Poets also described colors and the delicious taste of chameleons. Grasshoppers were compared to herds of horses. The buzzing of bees was compared to the chat of friends and the sweetness of its honey to the ecstasy of conversing with the loved one. Flies were used in criticism and satire.

Both the poetry in the pre-Islamic period and the early-Islamic period of Umayyad have abundant portrayal of animals. However, camels and horses occupied a more prominent place as human living then was very much dependent on the benefits these animals offered (al-Qaysi 1984, al-°A°lim 1987). Other animals were briefly described as means of illustrations and comparisons in preludes or in highlighting themes such as self-glorification, amatory, eulogy, elegy, or mere descriptions. In general, animals are normally mentioned in positive ways. Although the Qur'an does not associate any particular species with luck, the association of crows and owls with bad luck continued even in the Umayyad times. This is due to the fact that many poets remained loyal to the conventions of pre-Islamic poetry. Furthermore, this association is also so deeply rooted among Arabs that the word *tayr* itself carry the meaning of both bird and omen.

SELECTED EXCERPTS OF ANIMALS IN ARABIC HERITAGE

IMRU' AL-QAYS'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS HORSE

Imru' Al-Qays ibn Hujr (sixth century) was a pre-Islamic poet whose lines were among the seven *Mu°allaqat* or the hanged poems (Jacobi,

1998; al-Zawzani, 1980). The following lines are some of the most well known of Imru' Al-Qays in his lively description of his horse, from lines no. 52-69 (see Appendix A for verses in Arabic).

The poet mentions his waking up early morning to go for hunting, whilst birds are still in their nests. He takes his horse which is *long bodied, outstripping the wild beast in speed*, as though he is a chain on beasts' legs. His horse has swift reflexes, whether in attacking, fleeing or turning forewords or backwards. It has a mighty speed in attacks like a rock slipping down from the peak of a mountain to a valley. Imru' al-Qays says:

Early in the morning, while the birds were still nesting, I mounted my steed.
Well-bred was he, long-bodied, outstripping the wild beasts in speed,
Swift to attack, to flee, to turn, yet firm as a rock swept down by the torrent,
Bay-colored, and so smooth the saddle slips from him, as the rain from a
smooth stone.

(<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/640hangedpoems.html>)

The poet describes the saddle on the back of his horse as it slips just like the rain slipping down the surface of a rock. It has light and swift in movements, and when it runs, it sounds like a boiling pot on fire. When his horse is weary of running, it pours like water unlike other stallions that raise clouds of dust while trying to catch up with his horse's speed. In its momentum, it could drop off its rider whether light or heavy in weight. Moreover, he has a waist like a deer, long legs like an ostrich, runs as fast as a wolf, and walks as slow as a fox.

The tail of his horse is long enough to touch the ground. It is so hairy that if one was to stand behind the horse, he could not see between his legs. His tail being in the center between his legs is considered a mark of his good breed. Then he compares the strength of the sides of the horse to the hard rock on which the fragrant of brides is crushed. This description goes to confirm the smooth nature of the back of the horse, which is crammed with meat. He then describes the blood on the neck of the horse to the Henna when applied on white hair. In other words, the blood of all these beasts has pilled over its neck, as an inference to show that this horse is so vibrant in hunts that he never misses a prey.

Thin but full of life, fire boils within him like the snorting of a boiling kettle;
He continues at full gallop when other horses are dragging their feet in the
dust for weariness.

A boy would be blown from his back, and even the strong rider loses his garments.

Fast is my steed as a top when a child has spun it well.

He has the flanks of a buck, the legs of an ostrich, and the gallop of a wolf.

From behind, his thick tail hides the space between his thighs, and almost sweeps the ground.

When he stands before the house, his back looks like the huge grinding-stone there.

The blood of many leaders of herds is in him, thick as the juice of henna in combed white hair.

(<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/640hangedpoems.html>)

Imru' Al-Qays further sheds light on the dynamism and overflowing enthusiasm of his horse by describing his attitude in hunting seasons. When his horse met with a herd of oryx, whose females were packed with meat and their walk resembled that of maidens. As these oryx approached his horse, not knowing he is after them, they dispersed and got scattered around like a necklace of pearls hung on the neck of a young boy with many uncles. When these cows escaped, his horse followed them intently and caught up with the closest to him and troubled the far ones to him dashing away in crowds. All this exaggerates the might and prowess of his horse. His horse could catch up with both cows and oryx without getting exhausted or sweating. Therefore, the poet needs not wash the horse.

As I rode him we saw a flock of wild sheep, the ewes like maidens in long-trailing robes;

They turned for flight, but already he had passed the leaders before they could scatter.

He outran a bull and a cow and killed them both, and they were made ready for cooking;

Yet he did not even sweat so as to need washing.

We returned at evening, and the eye could scarcely realize his beauty

For, when gazing at one part, the eye was drawn away by the perfection of another part.

(<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/640hangedpoems.html>)

That was the description of the Hanged poet of Imru' Al-Qays which represents Arabs' adoration of and need for their horses, mounting them for hunt and war.

TARAFAH'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS SHE-CAMEL

Tarafah ibn al-'Abd (middle of sixth century) was an important pre-Islamic poet from the respected tribe Qays ibn Tha'laba. With less than a dozen preserved and authentically verified poems, his fame resided almost entirely with his description of a riding camel, a description rich with metaphors and comparisons (Bauer, 1998; al-Zawzani, 1980).

When Tarafa is upset and troubled with life, he spends his time, night and day, on the back of his female camel. He asserts the beauty of his camel and its ability to move onwards peacefully and swiftly. Furthermore, his camel is safe from tripping while running, so huge in size that its bones are like tomb's pieces of wood. His horse can race with good breeds of other camels, by placing its hinds where its shanks were on well treaded paths.

Ah, but when grief assails me, straightway I ride it off
mounted on my swift, lean-flanked camel, night and day racing,
sure-footed, like the planks of a litter; I urge her on
down the bright highway, that back of a striped mantle;
she vies with the noble, hot-paced she-camels, shank on shank
nimble plying, over a path many feet have beaten.

(<http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/taraf.htm>)

He describes his camel as it feeds from the green valley with a herd of camels. It is also a well bred good camel that enjoys being with its crowd, if called back by its owner, it would stop feeding and responds to him. If a male camel approaches it, it would avoid it with its tail. It has a tail as fair as the wing of an eagle. She plays with her tail often, hitting her back, sides and breasts that ceased to give milk. She has fat thighs crammed with meat, as high as the gates of a castle. Its back bones of well arranged vertebrates and the ribs stretching from them are like bows. He describes its armpits and elbows as mighty and huge like the bridge of Romans in its strength.

Along the rough slopes with the milkless shes she has pastured
in Spring, cropping the rich meadows green in the gentle rains;
to the voice of the caller she returns, and stands on guard
with her bunchy tail, scared of some ruddy, tuft-haired stallion,
as though the wings of a white vulture enfolded the sides
of her tail, pierced even to the bone by a pricking awl;
anon she strikes with it behind the rear-rider, anon

lashes her dry udders, withered like an old water-skin.
 Perfectly firm is the flesh of her two thighs—
 they are the gates of a lofty, smooth-walled castle—
 and tightly knit are her spine-bones, the ribs like bows, her
 underneck stuck with the well-strung vertebrae,
 fenced about by the twin dens of a wild lote-tree;
 you might say bows were bent under a buttressed spine.
 Widely spaced are her elbows, as if she strode carrying the two
 buckets of a sturdy water-carrier;
 like the bridge of the Byzantine, whose builder swore
 it should be all encased in bricks to be raised up true.

(<http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/tafar.htm>)

The poet dwells on his camel's color, as reddish as wine in color, which shows its noble breed. He describes its front legs as extremely powerful just like the pillars of a huge building. When walking joyfully, it leans to one of its sides. Its shoulders with long legs keep a long distance between its body and the ground. The saddle on the back of his camel has left marks on its thighs. He then describes different parts of its head, and its neck in its height resembles the steer of a ship. The skull of the camel is as stiff as iron. Its cheek is as smooth as a sheet of Syrian paper. It has lips like the skin of a Yemeni man. It has glittering eyes like two mirrors in two caves. These eyes are fine large like that of oryx eyes when afraid for its child, as its eyes are widest in such alarming conditions. It has ears with a sharp sense that can hear every faint and loud sound like a sheep's ear when left alone. In addition, its mind is intelligent like a Mirdat rock which can break other rocks.

Reddish the bristles under her chin, very firm her back,
 broad the span of her swift legs, smooth her swinging gait;
 her legs are twined like rope untwisted; her forearms
 thrust slantwise up to the propped roof of her breast.
 Swiftly she rolls, her cranium huge, her shoulder-blades
 high-hoisted to frame her lofty, raised superstructure.
 The scores of her girths chafing her breast-ribs are water-courses
 furrowing a smooth rock in a rugged eminence,
 now meeting, anon parting, as though they were
 white gores marking distinctly a slit shirt.
 Her long neck is very erect when she lifts it up
 calling to mind the rudder of a Tigris-bound vessel.
 Her skull is most like an anvil, the junction of its two halves
 meeting together as it might be on the edge of a file.

Her cheek is smooth as Syrian parchment, her split lip
a tanned hide of Yemen, its slit not best crooked;
her eyes are a pair of mirrors, sheltering
in the caves of her brow-bones, the rock of a pool's hollow,
ever expelling the white pus more-provoked, so they seem
like the dark-rimmed eyes of a scared wild-cow with calf.
Her ears are true, clearly detecting on the night journey
the fearful rustle of a whisper, the high-pitched cry,
sharp-tipped, her noble pedigree plain in them,
pricked like the ears of a wild-cow of Haumal lone-pasturing.
Her trepid heart pulses strongly, quick, yet firm
as a pounding-rock set in the midst of a solid boulder.
If you so wish, her head strains to the saddle's pommel
and she swims with her forearms, fleet as a male ostrich,
or if you wish her pace is slack, or swift to your *fancy*,
fearing the curled whip fashioned of twisted hide.

(<http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/taraf.htm>.

See Appendix B for verses in Arabic)

Those lines, 11-39 from Tarafa's Hanged Poem give a full account of the strength and physical attributes of Tarafa's camel, apart from the strong emotional bond between Tarafa and his camel.

FARAZDAQ'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS ENCOUNTER WITH A WOLF

Farazdaq or Hammam ibn Ghalib (AD 640-728) was one of the prominent poets of the Umayyad period with over 7,000 preserved lines. Through his panegyric and invective poems which often combined satires, Farazdaq portrayed the tribal, political and personal experience of his time (Van Gelder, 1998; al-Sayyid, 1983).

Farazdaq was traveling when darkness sets in, he decided to rest from the hardship of traveling. At midnight, a wolf in a weak pitiful state came by and thus Farazdaq offered and shared his food with the poor creature. However, acknowledging the trait of betrayal in the wolf, he took precaution by having his sword ready should he needed to use it. In the following poetry, we see Farazdaq making two offers to the wolf: firstly, to dine with him, and secondly, to promise comradeship and not to hurt him:

A trembling ash-colored whom was never a friend
To the light of my fire in the wee night thus came by
As he approached, I said "Come close, for I
And you shall together share my provision"

So I tore the portions between him and me
 amidst the lit of fire and sometimes smoke
 And I said to him as he grinned with laughter
 while I stood on my spot holding still my sword
 “Dine, if thou give thy word to betray me not
 then we -though thou art wolf- shall befriend
 Had it been others whom thou plead for courtesy
 Made thy the target of an arrow or the point of a bow
 For ye O wolf and betrayal are known
 Siblings who suckled the same milk
 Each of my companion at every journey though
 Fight they did yet still remained brothers”

(Farazdaq, as cited in Al-Sayyid (1983); translated by
 Kaseh Abu Bakar et al.)

Despite the common belief among Arabs then that the wolf and betrayal are synonymous, Farazdaq nevertheless put compassion above everything else. In his offer for comradeship, Farazdaq frankly told the wolf that it would have been destined to death if it was someone else whom the wolf sought mercy from. Such is how a human would have reacted when confronted with a human betrayer. Yet, Farazdaq did not give in to stereotype. He believed that companionship and mutual trust between man and animals is possible (see Appendix C for verses in Arabic).

THE TRAITS OF DOGS – ANONYMOUS

The following poetry is taken from an edited manuscript written in the 9th Century (see Appendix D for verses in Arabic). Perhaps the author of the manuscript himself did not know the name of the poet as he only mentioned: “Some people recited....” when introducing the poem. In these verses, the poet narrated his experience and conversations when a friend betrayed him. When he could no longer endure this hypocrisy and torture, he cursed this friend a dog. The friend however mocked at this curse because he perceived dogs as possessing good traits, a fact that deserves no cursing. Perhaps, he even felt honored to be associated with a dog. This made the poet revisit his views of dogs:

My heart was lost oh wither my heart
 To regain happiness oh my fellows is no easy
 A friend’s betrayal had made me homeless
 I gave in to him while he fought me

Veiling behind hypocrisy and the heart
Concealed hatred though the surface is amity
I said to him one day when I have been tormented
By the things he did: "You are a dog!"
He asked: "A praise?" I replied: "Something bad".
He said: "An insult?" I said: "But it is no insult".
For the trait of a dog is protecting his owner
From the living creatures of the dark night
He protects the neighbor's neighbors and patrols
with two vigilant pupils though he curves with hunger
Leaving those in slumber sleeping tightly, passing the night
with concern for them, such is difficult to emulate
You see the dog in the barren desert is a rescuer
Responding to the needy as the fire fades away
Feeling scared, he barks at the dog in reciprocity
And crawls to the sound in the murk of the night
O why did you withhold his luck, tell me
And why curse him when he deserves no slur?
(Ibn al-Marziban (died 309H, edited by Shubbaru (1990)),
translated by Kaseh Abu Bakar et al.)

As in Farazdaq's description of the wolf, the dog too, is sometimes associated with betrayal. Yet, this poetry calls its audience to look at dogs objectively. In reality, the dog is a loyal guard of his owner against creatures that prey in the night. With his alert eyes, he protects the neighborhood lest all can sleep soundly. And the dog does so even if he himself is in the state of hunger. In the desert where no living things exist, the dog breaks the loneliness and rescues those in need. If such wonderful traits are so inherent in the dog, then why do we insult and curse with dogs?

AN EXCERPT FROM AL-JAHIZ'S DESCRIPTION OF THE SNAKE IN AL-HAYAWAN

Al-Jahiz (AD 777-868) was a highly celebrated prose writer of the early ʿAbbasid period. He was known for his large-scale works, short treatises and epistles encompassing a wide range of topics (Richards, 1998). Al-Jahiz's most-famous masterpiece *al-Hayawan* consists of over 1000 pages, phased out over seven books. Pellat described *al-Hayawan* as "a monumental and chief work of al-Jahiz, which is not so much a bestiary as a genuine anthology based on animals, leading off sometimes rather unexpectedly into theology,

metaphysics, sociology etc.; one can find embryonic theories, without it being possible to say how far they are original, of the evolution of species, the influence of climate and animal psychology, which were not developed till the nineteenth century” (Pellat, 1969: 22). Apart from reflecting the rich picture of societal life and the trends of thought during al-Jahiz’s time, this work particularly concerns the nature of a variety of animal species and debates revolving around merits of the species. In between the zoological discourses, we find al-Jahiz relying on or linking these species and his observation of them to the Qur’an, hadith and other literary sources of his time namely, Arabic poetry, proverbs, and reports handed down by oral tradition, a practice common among Arab-Muslim scholars. As a matter of fact, al-Jahiz quoted extensively from pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry in addition to historical accounts of Jahiliyyah, early Islam, the Umayyad and the early ‘Abbasid periods.

The following is an excerpt from his discussion of the snake:

Chapter on the Citing of Proverbs

Comparing the Crafty Person and the Wily Fellow to the Snake

... It is said, “So-and-so is a wadi snake”, which is no other than a sill aslal (viper of all vipers). The sill is both a crafty person and a snake...

It is said that the *hindiya an* (Indian snake or Indian cobra) is found in houses, buildings, stables, and ruins, because it is carried in vegetables and their like. Snakes eat locusts voraciously, and sometimes a person will open the top of sack, provision bag, or saddle bag to get locust, and they will have been affected by the chilliness of the pre-dawn, and some of them will have piled up on others because they are characterized by coldness. Snakes are also characterized by coldness. They will bask, however, if the pre-dawn chill overtakes them and they have not yet achieved their suitable state. They come out at night to obtain food, just as other beasts of prey do. Sometimes, a man with a provision bag sweeps up locusts among which is a viper or an *aswad salikh* (a solid black venomous snake) and, putting them into his bag, brings them to houses, and sometimes people meet with difficulty there from. Bashr ibn-al-Mu’tamar says in his poem in the *muzawaj* meter:

“... ”

While the wood-collectors gathers fire-wood at its source

In the dark of night, in night’s obscurity

He collects at its source the male *ayyim*

And the *aswad salikh* ugly of aspect”.

Al-Akhtal says:

“Frogs in the dark of night reply to one another
And their clamor directs the hayya al-bahr (sea serpent) upon them”.

The ayyim (a slender male snake) is the male snake which they liken to the camel's halter, and sometimes they may compare a thin, slender-hipped slave girl in her walk to the ayyim, because the male snake has no ventral folds and its belly is slender and not flabby.

(al-Jahiz, *Kitab al-Hayawan*, died AD 869, translation by
Wilson (1965), pp. 168-172)

This very brief excerpt depicts the Arab's observation of and fascination for the snake that different species of it is captured in their poetry and proverbs. al-Jahiz quoted al-Akhtal's poetic description of how the croaking of the frog attracts the presence of their predator, the sea serpent. al-Jahiz then described two analogies drawn from the physical traits and movements of snakes: a very cunning person is commonly referred to as viper of the vipers and the walk of a slim young lady is compared to the movement of a slender snake, perhaps not only because the bellies of the two are not flabby, but also because this slenderness makes movement of the two very easy, light and swift.

CONCLUSION

All the literature studied in this article point to one direction, that is animals are indeed a grace from God that have made our life more meaningful and colorful. Although God could have created animals for other purposes as His divine wisdom dictates, the Qur'an emphasizes that it is God's wish that humans benefit from the divine signs inherent in animals and from the utilities that they provide in improving the quality of human life. The Qur'an and Prophet's traditions also prescribed kindness and mercy to these creations, such that cruelty is divinely abhorred. From the human perspective, the Arab literary heritage further dwells on the wonders, beauty, merits of animals and describes human mutual respect for and dependence on animals for livelihood, friendship and emotional rewards. Unlike plants and other creations which are inanimate by nature, animals could interact through their movements, sounds and gestures, which are coordinated outcomes of their reason, thought and feelings. This satisfies the notion of grace that is very much needed by human.

Indeed, animals have enriched our linguistic experience. Although Arabic linguistic corpus such as proverbs do sometimes reflect some negative connotations associated with certain animals like the dog, wolf or snake, such associations in poetry were occasional and not a phenomenon. Rather, much of Arabic poetry reflected the Arabs' adoration for these animals. The more dependent the Arabs were on certain species, the more their adoration for them. In addition, they often compared the characteristics of significant people and animals in their lives to some other animal species. In the Arabic rhetoric, the object being compared to is usually deemed as possessing more intense attributes than the object subjected to comparison. To illustrate, when a man is compared to a lion in courage, the intensity of courage is higher in the lion than the man. This implies the degree of admiration Arabs had for animals.

If animals are so significant for human happiness, then it is only fair that man exercise the responsibility-right relationship imposed by the vicegerent-subject roles with full accountability. Such ensures that both animate creatures live harmoniously.

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APPENDIX A

Imru' al-Qay's Description of his Horse

.بمنجرد قيد الاوابد هيكل
 كجلمود صخر حطه السيل من عل
 كما زلت الصفواء بالمتزل
 إذا جاش فيه حميه غلي مرجل
 أثرن الغبار بالكديد المركل
 ويلوي بأثواب العنيف المثقل
 تتابع كفيه بخيط موصل
 وإرخاء سرحان وتقريب تتفل
 بضاف فويق الأرض ليس بأعزل
 مداك عروس أو صلاية حنظل
 عصاره حناء بشيب مرجل
 عذارى دوار في ملاء مذيل
 بجيد معم في العشيرة مخول
 جواحرها في صرة لم تزيل
 دراكا ولم ينضح بماء فيغسل
 صفيف شواء أو قدير معجل
 متى ما ترق العين فيه تسفل
 وبات بعيني قائما غير مرسل

وقد أعتدي والطير في وكناتها
 مكر مفر مقبل مدبر معا
 كميت يزل اللبد عن حال متنه
 على الذبل جيش كأن اهترامه
 مسح إذا ما السابحات على الوني
 يزل الغلام الخف عن صهواته
 درير كخذروف الوليد أمره
 له أبطلا ظي وساقا نعامة
 ضليع إذا استدبرته سدفرجه
 كأن على المتنين منه إذا انتحى
 كأن دماء الهاديات بنجره
 فعن لنا سرب كأن نعاجه
 فأدبرن كالجزع المفصل بينه
 فألحقنا بالهاديات ودونه
 فعادى عداء بين ثور ونعجة
 فظل طهاة اللحم من بين منضج
 ورحنا يكاد الطرف يقصر دونه
 فبات عليه سرجه ولجامه

APPENDIX B

Tarafah's Description of His Camel

بعوجاء مرقال تروح وتغتدي	وإني لأمضي المهم عند احتضاره
على لاحب كأنه ظهر برجد	أمون كالألواح إلا ران نصأها
سفنجة تيري لأزعر أربد	جمالية وجناء تردي كأها
وظيفا وظيفا فوق مور معبد	تباري عتاقا ناجيات وأتبع
حدائق مولي الاسرة أغيد	تربعت القفين في الشول ترعي
بذي خصل روعات أكلف ملبد	تريع إلى صوت المهيب وتقي
حفافيه شكا في العسيب بمسرد	كأن جناحي مضرحي تكنفا
على حشف كالشن ذاو مجدد	فطورا به خلف الزميل وتارة
كأهما بابا منيف ممرد	لها فخذان أكمل النهض فيهما
وأجرنة لزت بدأي منضد	وطي محال كالحني خلوفه
وأطرقسي تحت صلب مؤبد	كأن كناسي ضالة يكنفها
تمر بسلمي دالج متشدد	لها مرفقان أفتلان كأها
لتكتفن حتى تشاد بقرمد	كقنطرة الرومي أقسم رها
بعيدة وخذ الرجل مواراة اليد	صهايبة العثون موجدة القرا
لها عضداها في سقيف مسند	أمرت يداها فتل شزر وأجنحت
لها كتفاها في معالي مصعد	جنوح دفاق عندل ثم أفرعت
موارد من خلقاء في ظهر قردد	كأن علوب النسع في دأياها
بنائق غر في قميص مقدد	تلاقى وأحيانا تبين كأها
كسكان بوصي بدجلة مصعد	وأتلغ هاض صعدت به
وعى الملتقى منها إلى حرف مبرد	وجمجمة مثل العلاة كأها
كسبت اليماني قده لم يجر	وخذ كقرطاس الشامى ومشفر
بكهفي حجاجي صحرة قلت مورد	وعينان كالمأويتين استكنتا
كمكحلي مذعورة أم فرقد	طحوران عوار القذى فتراها
لهجس خفي أو لصوت مند	وصادقتا سمع التوجس للسرى

APPENDIX B - Continued

كسامعتي شاة بحومل مفرد	مؤللتان تعرف العتق فيهما
كمرداة صخر في صفيح مصمد	وأروع نباض أحد ململم
عتيق متى ترجم به الأرض تزدد	وأعلم مخروت من الأنف مارن
مخافة ملوي من القد محصد	وإن شئت لم ترقل وإن شئت أرقلت
وعامت بضبيعتها نجاء الخفيدد	وإن شئت سامي واسط الكور رأسها

APPENDIX C

Farazdaq's Encounter with a Wolf

دعوت لناري موهنا فأتاني	وأطلس عسال وما كان صاحبا
وإياك في زادي لمشتركان	فلما دنا قلت ادن دونك إني
على ضوء نار مرة ودخان	فبت أقد الزاد بيني وبينه
وقائم سيفي من يدي بمكان	فقلت له لما تكشر ضاحكا
نكن مثل من يا ذئب يصطحجان	تعش فإن عاهدتني لا تخونني
رماك بسهم أو شبة سنان	فلو غيرنا نبهت تلمس القرى
أخيين كانا أرضعا بلبان	وأنت امرؤ يا ذئب والغدر كنتما
تعاطى القنا قوما هما أخوان	وكل رفيقي كل رحل وإن هما

APPENDIX D

The Trait's of Dogs

إن رد السرور يا قوم صعب	تاه قلبي وأين مني قلب
أنا مستسلم له وهو حرب	شردته خيانة من صديق
مبطن بغضة وباده حب	مضمر للنفاق والقلب له
فقال أتى به أنت كلب	قلت يوما له وأرمضني منه
قال للسلب قلت ما به سلب	قال للمدح قلت ذا أمر سلمي
وعن الحي في دجى الليل ذب	شيمة الكلب حفظه لولي
ساهر المقتلين يحنوه سغب	يحفظ الجار للحوار ويمشي
خائفا هلكتهم يخاليه صب	يرقد النائمون أمنا ويمسي
ويجيب اللهيف والنار تحبو	وترى الكلب في المهامه عوننا
وإلى الصوت في دجى الليل يصبو	وتراه يباح القوم خوفا
ولما شتمه وما فيه سب	فلماذا بنخسته الحظ قل لي

