



BALĀĠAT

BALĀĠAT (Arabic *balāġa*), one of the most general terms to denote eloquence in speech and writing. Its etymology is usually based on the meaning “to reach” of the verb *balaġa*. Therefore *balōġa* “to be eloquent” is taken to mean: to be able “to convey” the intended meaning effectively, and in an attractive manner, to the mind of a listener or a reader. A person of whom this can be said is called *balīġ* (plur. *bolaġā*). This predicate is more properly used to qualify speech (*kalām*) but, according to the classical theory, only at the level of syntactic units. To single words the cognate concept of *faṣāḥat* (purity of language) should be applied. The delimitation of *balāġat* and *faṣāḥat* was often discussed in Arabic literary theory. Sometimes they were regarded as synonyms or at least as largely overlapping concepts. The prevailing opinion was, however, that the latter referred to the wording (*lafẓ*) and the former to the semantics (*maʿnā*) of speech. Nevertheless the two remained closely related to each other: an utterance could never be said to be *balīġ* if it was not at the same time *faṣīḥ*, i.e., free from any faults of pronunciation, grammar, or lexicon.

In pre-Islamic Arab society, eloquence was important to the orator (*kaṭīb*) as well as to the oral Bedouin poet. Early *adab* works reflect this emphasis on the good style of the spoken word. One of the points discussed was whether the orator might use gesticulations to add force to his words or not. At the same time eloquence was recognized as an ideal familiar to other nations as well. Foreign traditions—of the Persians, the ancient Greeks, the Byzantines, and the Indians—provided some of the many definitions which became current in



Muslim literature. Jāhez even quotes prescriptions concerning eloquence from a *ṣaḥīfa* which was brought to Baghdad by Indian scholars during the vizierate of the Barmakid Yaḥyā b. Kāled (*Bayān* I, pp. 92-93).

In the Arabic works on literary theory, eloquence was mainly discussed with regard to written works, both in prose and in poetry. A justification for the study of *balāġat* was found in the doctrine of the *eʿjāz* (inimitability) of the Qurʾān. The text of the Qurʾān was considered to possess the characteristics of *eʿjāz* in the most perfect form. To be familiar with their rules was therefore a prerequisite to the understanding of the meaning of the Revelation in the Qurʾān. The eminent place of the study of good style in Muslim education, as well as its close link with the study of the Arabic language, were also based on this doctrine.

Various definitions of *balāġat* were attempted but none of them can be said to have reached the status of a standard formulation. It remained a rather vague notion which lent itself to many applications. One finds, for instance, under the heading of ‘Abd-al-Qāher Jorjānī’s *Asrār al-balāġa* (The secrets of eloquence) a treatise on imagery and the figurative use of language, but in the Persian textbook *Tarjomān al-balāġa* of Rādūyānī it encompasses all figures of speech and is used as an equivalent of *badīʿ*. Abu’l-Ḥasan Rommānī (d. 384/994), an early writer on *eʿjāz*, drew up an inventory of ten parts (*aqsām*) of *balāġat* which comprises besides the use of various types of figurative speech a number of general stylistic criteria (“Nokat,” p. 70). The notion of concision (*ijāz*), under the condition of clarity of expression, is often mentioned as a basic rule of *balāġat*. It has a counterpart in the ability to expand without tediousness. Other aspects of eloquence are conformity to the circumstances (*entehāz al-forṣa*) and attention to the proper arguments (*al-baṣar fi’l-ḥojja*).

Eventually the branches of literary criticism which developed within Muslim civilization became known collectively as the science (*‘elm*) or art (*ṣenā‘a*) of *balāġat*. In this usage it comprises primarily two disciplines: the *‘elm al-ma‘ānī*, studying the role of syntax in literary style, and the *‘elm al-bayān* (qq.v.) which deals with the theory of similes, metaphors, and tropes. Their rules provide the foundation for the use of rhetorical embellishment, which is the subject of a third discipline, the *‘elm al-badīʿ* (q.v.). This classification of literary theory became prevalent in the eastern part of the Muslim world from the 8th/14th century onwards as far as Arabic literature was concerned.

Although Iranians (especially ‘Abd-al-Qāher Jorjānī and Abū Bakr Yūsof



Sakkākī K̄vārazmī) made important contributions to the scholastic study of Arabic eloquence, most Persian textbooks are no more than practical guides to the use of figures of speech in the ancient tradition of *badī*. Šams-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. Qays however enters briefly upon the general principles of eloquence. He stresses the preference of concision over expansion and relates the following definition: “the critics have said: *balāġat* is good words with the right meanings, and *faṣāḥat* means that the words are free from difficulty. *Balāġat* appears in three kinds of expression: concision (*ijāz*), balance (*mosāwāt*), and expansion (*baṣṭ*.” (*Moʿjam*, p. 370).

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*EI*², s.vv. “Balāgha,” “Faṣāḥa,” “I’djāz,” and “al-Ma’ānī wa’l-bayān.”

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