

Geert Jan van Gelder (University of Oxford), “Sexual Violence in Verse: Jarir and Ji`thin, al-Farazdaq's Sister”

In many of his *naqā'id* (poems that are part of a “flyting” or exchange of verbal abuse), addressed to his opponent al-Farazdaq (d. c. 110/728), Jarīr (d. c. 111/729) mentions an incident involving the latter’s sister Ji‘thin, who by all accounts was a decent woman. An innocent scuffle is blown up grotesquely into a violent rape, even a “gang bang”, which is described in obscene, graphic detail. The aim is to hurt the opponent through his female relatives, and to amuse an audience through pornography and often inventive imagery. This kind of verbal violence was sometimes condemned by literary and other critics, but not as often and as strongly as one might imagine, even though such verbal abuse and untrue accusations of illicit fornication are obviously forbidden by Islamic (and other) standards. Obscene passages (there are many others in the poetry of both Jarīr and al-Farazdaq) are expurgated in some—not all—modern editions but not in premodern times. In studies in western languages the pornographic elements in the poetry of the great Umayyad poets are often mentioned but almost never discussed in detail or translated, for obvious reasons. To understand and analyse the phenomenon some illustrations will have to be given, using the passages on Ji‘thin as a case study.