THE NOTION WEAPON IN ARABIC IDIOMS
CHARACTERIZATION OF PERSONS AND OBJECTS

Ludmila Torlakova

UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

The present study is a sequel to an investigation published in volume 8 (2008) of this Journal that discussed a group of Arabic idioms that have as at least one of their components a word denoting a weapon and that describe situations or behavior. Here weaponry idioms denoting characteristics and features of people and objects are examined in order to understand their semantic structure and motivation. Since the majority of the idioms studied have been collected from dictionaries, an attempt is made to present an assessment of their current use in Modern Standard Arabic based on Internet sources.

Arabic phraseology constitutes a substantial area of investigation that can lead in multiple directions. Studying different types of phrasemes – or idioms in a broad sense1 – can help see how the world of the Arabs has been and is conceptualized through the language. In this paper I take up a different group of weaponry idioms from those considered in my previous article in this Journal.2 The expressions I will present still have as one of their components a word denoting a weapon, but the meaning of the whole collocation is to express characteristics, features or qualities of people or objects, as opposed to those of situations or behavior. My overall goal, again, is to look at the part played by this particular group of idioms, and by extension other idioms, in the Arabic language’s ability to expand itself by expressing figuratively a wider range of meanings. Furthermore, I wish to show how the new concept created from the literal meanings of the words of an expression is accompanied by many connotations and thus becomes more vivid and expressive.

Methodologically and theoretically I apply the same principals as in my first contribution. These principals are based on recent research in the

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1 It should be understood from the outset that the collocations I am here referring to as ‘idioms’ fall in some cases more properly into the broader category of ‘phrasemes’.

field of phraseology in different European and non-European languages. While not neglecting traditional approaches, they draw particularly on the field of cognitive linguistics. As Dmitrij Dobrovolskij puts it:

A cognitively based theory of idiom semantics would allow us to address all kinds of knowledge evoked by the concepts which are encoded in the lexical structure of the idiom, and it would not be necessary to restrict oneself to the literal meanings of the idiom constituents as the relevant source of motivating links.3

This study will stress primarily the semantics of the weaponry idioms considered and the motivational links between their literal and actual, phraseological meanings. An attempt will be made to summarize the connotations that accompany the new meanings acquired, based either on dictionary sources or on contemporary Internet usage. For reasons of space it will not be possible to exemplify all extensions of the meaning of an idiom, and some idioms will receive only brief attention. The variety of formal structures used in weaponry idioms will also be illustrated, and within a semantic category idioms will be presented according to syntactic structure. In order to facilitate comprehension of certain sections of this article, it will be convenient to review some essential postulates of phraseological theory that I rely on.

Phrasemes are collocations of two or more words that function as units of the lexicon of a language and whose meaning cannot be readily or fully deduced from the meanings of the constituent words.4 Idioms are phrasemes that demonstrate these characteristics in a stronger way than other types of fixed, lexicalized collocations, which is why they are considered particularly interesting objects for research. They do not form a homogeneous and uniform category of expressions, but rather an assemblage of clusters with greater or lesser ‘idiomatic’ meaning.

In the idioms presented here, which have been collected from different

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sources\textsuperscript{5} and which stem from different periods, the concept of weapon is used to build another concept on a higher cognitive level. The majority of weaponry idioms investigated here are based on images that are created by the lexical structure of the expression using known and essential qualities of a given weapon – whether it is the sharpness of the blade of a sword in ‘on the edge of a sword’ or the equal and regular shape of the feathers of arrows in ‘as similar as a feather of an arrow to a feather of an arrow’. Furthermore, the image is the basis for additional development of the meaning. Thus in the case of weaponry idioms given aspects, qualities and characteristics of the weapon or a part of it, which is a constituent of the expression, acquire new, more abstract and generalized meaning by moving from one frame or script to another ‘with the help of a restricted set of conceptual operations’.\textsuperscript{6} The new phrase expresses a whole spectrum of connotations that the equivalent single word or literal expression does not possess.

Such classes of idioms, in conformity with Dmitrij Dobrovol’skij and Elisabeth Piirainen’s theory, and using their terminology are ‘iconically motivated’. This type of motivation, according to them, is based on ‘similarity (in a wide sense)’ between the actual phraseological meaning and the literal reading of the expression creating the idiom.\textsuperscript{7} Idioms whose motivation is based on image form the largest group not only of weaponry idioms, but of idioms in general. It is important to emphasize as well that the meaning of iconically motivated idioms can be explained and understood ‘only if all parts of the image structure are taken into account’.\textsuperscript{8} This means that the semantic analysis should include not only analysis on the level of superordinate, general cognitive models but also on the level of concrete concepts and specific characteristics for every single idiom. Utilizing such analysis requires turning to different catego-


\textsuperscript{6} Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen, Figurative Language, 164.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 90.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 161.
Besides being iconically motivated, the weaponry idioms included in this study can be motivated by the use of the word denoting a weapon in its meaning as a symbol (as in “The pen is mightier than the sword”9). The motivation can also be a combination of both—based on the image created by the literal reading of the expression and on the symbolic meaning of a word. These types of motivation of the meaning of idioms, along with other elements of the semantic and syntactic structures, will be taken into consideration here in dealing with Arabic weaponry idioms denoting characteristics of persons and objects.

The idioms in the present study are separated into two semantic fields on the basis of their general meaning: (1) idioms expressing characteristics or qualities of persons and (2) idioms expressing characteristics of objects. Within these two groups they are arranged according to their syntactic structure.

**IDIOMS EXPRESSING CHARACTERISTICS OR QUALITIES OF PERSONS**

1. **Idioms with Genitive Construct (iḍāfa) Structure**

   (1) ʿawīlu l-nijādi – tall, tall of stature (lit., with a long sword belt; connotations include: strong, brave, skillful at warfare)

The pagan poetess al-Khansāʾ, who later converted to Islam and is counted among the Companions of the Prophet, used this idiom together with the rhyming expression ṭarīʿu l-ʿimādi – having a big and high tent (lit., with a high tent pole; connotations include: a leader, a prominent and respected person)10 in an elegy in which she mourns the death of her

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9 The ancient idea, in this particular form, was put in the mouth of Cardinal Richelieu by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in his play *Richelieu; Or the Conspiracy*, act 2, scene 2 [New York: Harper, 1839], 52). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_pen_is_mightier_than_the_sword (accessed March 5, 2010). Cf. the opposite notion expressed in the opening and succeeding lines of Ṭabīṣ’s celebrated ode on the conquest of Amorium by the caliph al-Mu’tasim in 223/838 at a date earlier than predicted possible by the Byzantine astrologers: al-sayfu ʿasdaqu ʿanbāʾ an mina l-kutubī // fi ḥaddihi l-ḥaddu bayna l-jiddi wa-l-laʿībi (The sword brings truer news than [the astrologers’] books; // in it’s edge is the boundary between gravity and play). Cf., e.g., Ṭabīṣ, *Diwan Ṭabīṣ* bi-sharḥ al-Khaṭīb al-Ṭibrīzī, ed. Muḥammad Ṭabīṣ (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1964–), 1:40.

10 Al-Mubarrad, commenting on the elegy, considers both expressions to
brother Ṣakhir. Together the two expressions praise Ṣakhir as a brave and prominent tribal leader. The two idioms are still quite often cited together, and in this particular case it is obvious how used together they are still closely related to an early literary source. Thus it is possible to discuss their 'intertextuality' and the significance of cultural knowledge for understanding them. In tawīlu l-nijādī it is possible to see a blending of metonymy and metaphor – the long sword belt in the frame of ‘physical stature’ serves to replace height. Being tall in the popular understanding of warfare is often connected with strength, ability, skill, bravery and experience as a warrior. The meaning of the idiom is thus metaphorically explained by the association of physical stature, and more precisely height, with the concept of a brave, skillful warrior.


11 Google (December 5, 2009) found 15800 cases of the first idiom and 15200 of the second; Yahoo (December 5, 2009) found 1310 cases of the first and 1150 of the second. The examples showed that they most often still tend to be used together. The numbers should be taken only as indications of relative popularity. It must be noted than when the number of occurrences reported of an idiom is quite large, particularly when it is in the thousands, neither Google nor Yahoo actually retrieve more than a fraction of the reported number. In the case of an idiom with somewhat over 4000 reported occurrences (‘a‘ṣi l-qawṣa bāriyyahā), Yahoo retrieved 1000 (March 13, 2010). Cf. n. 41 below. Moreover numbers may vary wildly from day to day. Google reported 385000 cases of ‘adaqqu mina l-sayf on October 25, 2009, but found only 34 on March 14, 2010.


13 Google (October 29, 2009) found 1890 cases; Yahoo (October 29, 2009) found 216 cases.

(3) jaʿbatu ḍakkwārīn/l-ḍakkwārī15 – a local gossip, full of news (lit., quiver for news; connotations include: worth watching or listening to, interesting, offering a great variety of news)

This idiom can be used for objects or things as well as persons, as numerous examples describing AlJazeera.Net show.15 It is related to the idiom (ʾakhraja mā fī jaʿbatīhī), which was discussed in my previous article on weaponry idioms, and which is widely used in political discourse for describing the behavior of politicians. Both idioms are well suited to perform their communicative and pragmatic functions. A quiver can be perceived as a container of many fascinating and dangerous things.

(4) ṣulbu/ṣalibu l-qanāṭī16 – tough, with a strong will (lit., with a sturdy lance; connotations include: strength of character, determination, ability to resist, endurance)

This idiom should be seen in connection with idioms (7) and (8) below, whose literal meanings depict the opposite image and conceptualize the opposite idea – a weak, twisted lance means frailty and inability to function or resist. Conversely, the sturdy lance is metaphorically reinterpreted and a new meaning is assigned. The actual phraseological meaning of the idiom expresses positive qualities concentrated in the semantic field of the will to withstand and to fight. In order to understand these meanings, common knowledge about warfare and the characteristics and uses of weapons, along with, in particular, the positive metonymic significance of the lance, has to be activated. Idioms such as shadīdu l-ʿaṣā (with a harsh stick) have correspondingly negative meanings.17 The meanings of ṣulbu/ṣalibu l-qanāṭī are also connected with the concept of ‘warrior’ with all its elements or ‘slots’,18 such as mastering

15 Google (October 27, 2009) found 11900/21 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 826/11 cases. Almost all uses of the idiom come from the name of a ‘script’ that allows access to all kinds of news broadcast by AlJazeera.Net.

16 Google (October 27, 2009) found 6200 cases; Yahoo (October 29, 2009) found 913 cases.


different weapons, maintaining them in good condition and the ability and determination to use them.

2. Genitive Construct Preceded by a Preposition

(5) ‘alā sinni l-rumḥī — very famous, having a good reputation (lit., on the tip of a lance; connotations include: brave, wise, well known and exposed)

Recent Internet sources show that this idiom is quite often used to describe objects and that the expression’s literal meaning is exploited heavily; although it is used in a metaphorical context. The non-traditional meanings are more likely to include ‘to show/display’, ‘to approach/be near’, ‘to proclaim loud and clear’. Both the traditional dictionary meaning and the modern meanings seem in great part, to be related to the way objects such as prey, booty and severed heads have often been displayed on the tip of a lance. Consider some examples:

wa-yuˈlinu [ḥinnā] mīna fī ’aḥādi ḥiwrāṭīhi ‘‘anā kāṭibun wāqiʿiyyun rūmāntīki’ qablā ’an yudṣfa ‘‘anā wāqiʿiyyun ‘alā sinni l-rumḥī wa-fī wāqiʿiyatī tajidu l-rumza wa-l-ʾusṭūra.20 (In one of his dialogues [Ḥinnā] Mīna says: ‘I am a romantic, realistic writer,’ before adding, ‘I am realistic to the extreme/a well known realist, but in my realism you will find symbolism and myth.’)

ḥīnā ḫānati l-sāʾatu kāna l-mawtu ‘alā sinni l-rumḥī wa-lam yakun ḫunāka khīyar.21 (When the time came, death was on the tip of the lance [near/obvious] and there was no other choice.)

‘anā wasafī, ʿuʿluḥūh ‘alā sinni l-rumḥī, wa-lā yudırrunī qṭirāḥī min 8 wa-14 ʿādhāra li-ʾannāni wasafī.22 (I am in the center [politically], I proclaim it loud and clear, and my close position to what happened on the 8th and 14th of March does not hurt me, because I am a centrist.)

(6) ‘alā ḥaddī l-sayfī — in a difficult and dangerous situation (lit., on the edge of a sword; connotations include: risky, perilous)

This idiom occupies a ‘middle position’ between describing figuratively

19 Google (October 18, 2009) found 8190 cases; Yahoo (October 18, 2009) found 115 cases.
23 Google (October 28, 2009) found 65200 cases; Yahoo (October 28, 2009) found 2240 cases.
the state of a person who is in a difficult, dangerous, even potentially deadly situation, and the situation itself. Moreover, examples like al-raṣṣu ʿalā ḥaddi l-sayf24 (dancing on the edge of a sword) and al-taʿāmulu maʿa ṣaddām ka-l-mashyī ʿalā ḥaddi l-sayf25 (Dealing with Ṣaddām is [dangerous], like walking on the edge of a sword) also describe behavior. The idiom is extensively used, not least in photo and caricature captions,26 since it offers a wide range of possible interpretations that are interconnected and allude directly to the literal meaning of the expression and the image it presents. Different, well known features of the sword are used in the process of metaphorisation of the expression as a whole. As Veronika Teliia expresses it, the meanings of idioms are diffuse,27 and different aspects are realized in different contexts. The sword is thin, fine, sharp, dangerous and deadly: thus anything related to it can be risky, perilous or harmful. The mental image produced by a literal reading of the expression shows the absurdity of the situation and the extremely hazardous exposure of one trying to stand on the edge of a sword. Thus the source scenario or frame, when it is being used to conceptualize the target frame offers several directions of activating ‘relevant conceptual material’.28 This is confirmed in practice by the use of the idiom in similar but different discourses.

3. Neither–Nor Expressions

(7) lā lī-l-sayfī wa-lā lī-l-ḍayfī29 – good for nothing, not suited for

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27 Veronika N. Teliia, Russkaia frazeologija: semanticheskii, pragmaticheskii i lingvokul’turologicheskii aspekty (Moscow: Iazyki Russkoi Kul’tury, 1996), 86. This idea can be compared with the principle that A. Langlotz calls ‘literal-scene manipulation’ (see below, p. 131).
29 Google (October 18, 2009) found 568 cases; Yahoo (October 18, 2009) found 68 cases. This idiom is often used together with one or two similar expressions that intensify and stress its meaning. For example: wa-lā li-ʿathratīn min ʿatharātī l-zamānī (nor for any of the mistakes of life) and/or wa-lā li-ghadarātī l-zamānī (nor for the caprices of fate). Cf., e.g., http://
one’s job or duties (lit., neither for the sword nor for the guest; connotations include: weak, stupid, comical, not capable of doing anything right)

I consider the motivation of this idiom to be both symbolical, based on the symbolic function of its components, and iconical, that is, based on the image it projects. The use of the sword as a symbol is common in both European and Middle Eastern cultures. A sword in the hand of a warrior is a symbol for highly valued personal qualities – bravery and courage, fearlessness and skill in warfare. The sword, indeed, provides a diverse range of connotations in a variety of contexts. Not only did skilled warriors have a special position in medieval society, the art of making a good sword was also highly respected. The second component in (7), the guest, as a single concept and related to the more general concepts of hospitality and generosity, which are among the most highly esteemed values of Arab society from pre-Islamic times to the present, has traditionally played a significant role in the ethical system of an Arab culture that developed in the harsh environment of the desert. Thus the literal meaning of the expression ‘neither for the sword nor for the guest’ triggers a whole spectrum of related images and interpretations based on cultural knowledge, experience and conventions. When the two concepts of the sword and the guest, each loaded with its symbolic and pictorial, iconic meanings, are set over against each other in a negative expression, a wide area for interpretation, supposition and conjecture is created. Considerable room for personal evaluation and judgment remains. Taken together, these things contribute to the rich expressiveness of the idiom, as well as to its pragmatic and communicative functions in different discourses.

Idiom (7) and those following in this section belong to a group of idioms that share the syntactic structure of two or more parallel negations. This cluster constitutes a readily identifiable phraseological
The syntactic pattern works together in a special and complex way with the inner form of the idiom and its actual meaning. The negative particle lā (or the verb laysa) is used before a prepositional phrase or a nominal or verbal sentence. The phrases after the negation usually express opposite or mutually exclusive notions, and thus through the disparity conveyed by neither−nor emerges the actual meaning of the idiom. It is in most cases predictable in its general semantic frame, but the exact meaning or its function in context has to be verified through contextual examples. Dictionaries of ʾamthāl (‘proverbs’, including idioms) of different Arabic dialects, as well as Internet sources, show that this phraseological model with all its potential is still productive, not only in Modern Standard Arabic but also in dialects. Examples from Classical Arabic persist in MSA as well:

\[ lā fī l-ʿīrī wa-lā fī l-nafrī \] – not good at one’s profession, good for nothing, does not know what to do (lit., neither among the camels, nor among the people)

\[ lā yusmiṃu wa-lā yughnī min jāʿin \] – useless, of little value (lit., something that does not feed and does not free from hunger, or as rendered by Pickthall in his translation of the Koran, ‘Which doth not nourish nor release from hunger.’)

Regarding the use of this structure in Arabic dialects, Anis Freyha, for example, gives twelve pure examples of the structure from Lēbnēse.

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32 Valerii M. Mokienko, *Slavianskaia frazeologiia* (Moscow: Vysshaia Shkola, 1980), 40−75. Charles Fillmore, Paul Kay and Mary O’Connor advocate the notion of ‘lexically open idioms’, which is close to the idea of phraseological model, since a given syntactic pattern accommodates particular semantic and pragmatic properties. ‘Regularity and Idiomaticity in Grammatical Constructions: The Case of *Let Alone*’, *Language* 64 (1988): 505.


34 Google (October 20, 2009) found 806 cases; Yahoo (October 20, 2009) found 1950 cases.


36 Furayḥa, *A Dictionary of Modern Lebanese Proverbs*, 552−55. There are
The following two examples are from Egyptian.37

\[ \text{\textit{lā ṭabla wa-lā fār} – neither fish nor fowl (lit., neither a drum nor a tambourine)} \]

\[ \text{\textit{lā rāḥ wa-lā geh} – of no significance (lit., [he] neither left nor came)} \]

4. Idioms with Sentence Structure

(8) \[ \text{\textit{lānat qanātuhu}}^{38} – to grow weaker, to become frail, weak (lit., his lance weakened, softened; connotations include: no longer able to fight, with a broken will) \]

(9) \[ \text{\textit{i’wajjat qanātuhu}}^{39} – to grow old (lit., his lance became twisted, crooked, bent) \]

These two idioms present almost the same image with a subtle difference in the literal meaning resulting from the use of two different verbs. It is possible to assume, however, that they remain in the same cognitive frame, though it is hard to prove this, since idiom (9) remained a dictionary item and is not used in modern discourse. Idiom (8), on the other hand, is used in MSA and allows us to define through the contexts we find it in its precise meaning and connotations. Both idioms are expressive and pictorial because their actual meanings emerge in the shift from the domain of weapons, and more specifically the \textit{lance}, to the target domain, the evocative characterization of a person who is weak, old and unable to resist or fight any more.

Consider this example:

\[ \text{\textit{wa-fī kullī marratin yazzunnūna ‘anna l-sha’ba al-filāșfīnya lānat qanātuh, kāna yahubbu min jade}}. \]

(And every time they think that the Palestinian people have become weaker, they rise again.)40

numerous other examples of the structure used as part of a longer idiom (cf. ibid., 627, no. 3514; Nizār ʿAbāẓa, \textit{al-ʾAmthāl al-shāmiyya} [Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2008], 214–15).


38 Google (October 27, 2009) found 2030 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 186 cases.

39 Google (October 27, 2009) found 4 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 6 cases.

In order to be useful and efficient as a weapon for defense and attack the lance has to be straight and sturdy. When it becomes weak or bent it is useless. Only idiom (8), referring to wear over time, is in common use. It is indeed also often used with a negative particle (e.g., \( mā lānat qanātuḥu \)), thus acquiring the opposite meaning and strongly positive connotations.

(10) \( ʿaʾti l-qawsa bāriyahā \) – rely on those who know their profession, always ask an expert (lit., give the bow to its shaper [trimmer]; connotations include: to do the right thing, to be wise and clever, and to trust professionals)

(11) \( ʾakhadha l-qawsa bārīḥā \) – the right, deserving, competent person has taken charge (lit., the bow’s shaper has taken it; connotations include: a good final solution has been achieved, things have settled down, the matter is in the right hands)

Idioms (10) and (11) are similar in that they both exploit the image of the bow in the hands of a skilled professional. They do not belong entirely to the semantic field of characteristics and features of persons, however, but are on the border between this and the semantic field of behavior. Both are mentioned in all major medieval collections of \( ʾamthāl \) and are currently used widely in a number of discourses varying from football to politics, though (11) is much less common. It is interesting that idiom (10) in particular survived and gained wide acceptance, despite the ‘old’ frame or setting of the literal meaning of the phrase. It can be taken as a good example of how successful the cognitive process of metaphorization has been, the end result being a vivid and expressive idiom appropriate to a wide range of circumstances in modern discourse. The target domain is making sure that one entrusts important matters to someone who knows how to handle them, finding the right man. The source domain is weapons and their production or repair.

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42 Google (October 27, 2009) found 136000 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 3510 cases.

43 Google (October 31, 2009) found 2770 cases; Yahoo (31 October 31, 2009) found 61 cases.
This process of the adaptation of an idiom to the concrete context in which it is used is quite similar to what Andreas Langlotz calls ‘literal-scene manipulation’, something he defines as an operation that ‘triggers a contextually motivated adaptation of the idiomatic meaning by adapting the literal scene for the purpose of coding the target conceptualization efficiently.’

Consider some examples:

\[ \text{During the elections . . . choose the right person/s.)} \]

\[ \text{(They say in the proverb, ‘Give the bow to its shaper,’ and I say, ‘When you wish to benefit from economic topics and economic articles, studies and analyses, you must read al-Riyadh al-iqtisadiyya [economic section of the daily newspaper al-Riyadh].’)} \]

Similar uses, mainly in titles, appear in articles on such subjects as sports, journalism, finances and health.

The following two idioms describe behavior that indicates certain characteristics and features of the subject/s.

(12) \( \text{ja’ala l-zujja quddāma l-sināni} \) – to do things backwards (lit., he put the [pointed iron] butt of the spear before the head; connotations include: to conduct oneself in an unintelligent way, not to be able to apprehend the real situation)

(13) \( \text{ramaw ‘an qawsin wāḥidatin} \) – they were united, in agreement (lit., they shot from one bow; connotations include: managing to do a difficult job together, demonstrating cooperativeness)

Neither (12) or (13) is used in Modern Standard Arabic, as Internet

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47 Google (September 15, 2009) found 3 cases; Yahoo (October 15, 2009) found 2 cases.
48 Google (October 27, 2009) found 6 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 1 case.
searches show, despite the fact that they are included in all major medie-
val collections of ʾamthāl and despite the similarity of (12), for example,
to a very useful European idiom, in its English form ‘to put the cart
before the horse’.

(14) jāʾa ka-ʾannā ʿaynayhi fī rumhaynī49 – very frightened or very
angry (lit., he came as if his eyes were on two spears; connotations
include: unpredictable, ready to fight)

This idiom is listed in al-Maydānī’s collection of proverbs, but no
examples in context are to be found, so it is not easy to guess possible
connotations or interpretations. Al-Maydānī explains this expression as
being based on the metaphor ‘the flashing of one’s eyes, as a spearhead
flashes’. The image built by the literal reading of the expression is quite
vivid, and the comparative structure contributes to the transparency of
the idiom’s meaning. Nevertheless it remained a dictionary item.

(15) ʿindahu l-sirru bi-l-miqlāʾī50 – who cannot keep a secret (lit., a
secret with him is as if it were in a sling; connotations include: not
to be confided in, unreliable, untrustworthy)

(16) huwa ʾawthaqu sahmin fī kinānātī51 – he is my best helper,
assistant (lit., he is the most dependable arrow in my quiver; conno-
tations include: reliable, trustworthy, good friend)

Idioms (15) and (16) remain only dictionary items today. The images
created by the literal meanings of the constituents are interesting and
comprehensible. The metaphors are vivid and could offer a variety of
interpretations and connotations if used in different contexts. But most
likely because of the use of a rare word or an image picturing a little
known situation, idioms (12) to (16), unlike many others, have not been
reinvented in Modern Standard Arabic.

The next two expressions employ the comparative pattern ʾafʿalu min.
In the first case the comparative is followed by a genitive construct and
in the second by a noun + prepositional phrase. Collocations based on
the ʾafʿalu min pattern and their semantic structure will be discussed in

49 Google (February 22, 2010) found 6 cases; Yahoo (February 22, 2010)
found 4 cases.
50 Google (October 29, 2009) found 6 cases; Yahoo (October 29, 2009)
found 1 case.
51 Google (November 1, 2009) found 6 cases; Yahoo (November 1, 2009)
found 7 cases.
detail under the field of characteristics and features of objects, the subject of the following section.

(17) ʾaṭwalu min zilli l-rumḥī – tall and thin (lit., taller than the shadow of a lance)

(18) ʾadyaʿu min ghimdin bi-ghayri našlīn – wretched, miserable (lit. more wretched, more miserable that a sheath without a sword)

Both idioms, for reasons unclear, remain only dictionary items.

IDIOMS EXPRESSING CHARACTERISTICS OF OBJECTS

1. Comparative Idioms with the Pattern ʾafʿalu min

In this semantic field a significant number of the weaponry idioms under study exploit the comparative pattern ʾafʿalu min. They can be defined as fixed, conventionalized or lexicalized similes that have gradually moved into the realm of phrasemes. But it should be noted that not all of them properly belong to the core category of idioms. Rather they fall into a continuum of idiomatic, less-idiomatic and almost non-idiomatic similes. Such expressions approach 1700 in number in medieval collections of ʾamthāl that include ʾafʿalu min expressions. In addition, there are a number of dictionaries, meticulously put together by medieval compilers, comprising only similes of this type. Among the great number of ʾafʿalu min similes that have as a constituent at least one word for

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52 Google (October 27, 2009) found 10 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 22 cases.
53 Google (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases.
54 This question deserves a separate study like the ones done for French (Armand G. Nazarian, Obraznye sravnienia frantsuzskogo iazyka: Frazeologizmy [Moscow: Nauka, 1965]) and Russian (Vasilii Ogol’tsev, Ustoichivye sravnienia v sisteme russkoi frazeologii [Leningrad: Izd-vo LGU, 1978]).
a weapon or object related to a weapon, I have found 17 that most likely characterize objects, in addition to the two mentioned above, (17) and (18), which characterize persons. Similes mentioning instruments that can be used as a weapon but are not primarily intended as such (stick, shears) have been excluded.

The weaponry vocabulary of these expressions is limited to well known medieval weapons or their parts or related objects – sword, blade, spearhead, bow and arrow. Like the other types of idioms with a constituent weaponry word, these similes exploit essential, familiar functions or characteristics of weapons – penetrating, piercing, fine, thin, sharp, sturdy, long. The meaning of the expressions is direct and tangible. In most cases it is easy to understand what kind of attribute is meant and why it can be ascribed to a potential subject (object or person) (comparandum, mushabbah), which is not expressed when they are listed in collections.

(1) ʾamāḍā mina l-sayfi/min sayfin – razor-sharp, keen-edged (lit., sharper than a sword)

(2) ʾamāḍā min sinānin – sharp as a needle, sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., sharper, more rapidly piercing than a spearhead)

(3) ʾamāḍā min naṣlin – sharp as a needle, sharp-pointed, piercing

57 Given some variation in the use of I. A. Richards’ terms for the main parts of a simile (topic, tenor, ground and vehicle), I make use of the Latin terms comparandum, comparatum, and tertium comparationis. These are unambiguous and match precisely the Arabic terms mushabbah, mushabbah bihi and wajh al-shabah. An overview of comparatives in general is given by Leiv E. Breivik, ‘On Comparatives in English and Other Languages’, in Toril Swan, Endre Mørck and Olav Jansen Westvik, eds., Language Change and Language Structure: Older Germanic Languages in a Comparative Perspective (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 51–73.

58 Google (October 25, 2009) found 153000/87400 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 2390/220 cases. Of the variant without the definite article there were many repetitions and instances where sayf is the first member of a construction.

59 Google (October 25, 2009) found 4310 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 169 cases. The use of this expression is very similar to the previous one.

60 Google (October 25, 2009) found 770 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 13 cases. Many of the cases have a definite noun after naṣl.
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(lit., sharper than the tip of a knife or sword, sharper than a sword)

(4) ʾamḍā minā l-sahmi/min sahmin\(^{61}\) – sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., sharper, more rapidly piercing than an arrow)

(5) ʾaṣradu mina l-sahmi\(^{62}\) – sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., more deeply piercing than an arrow)

(6) ḳamkhaṭu min sahmin\(^{63}\) – sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., more deeply piercing than an arrow)

(7) ḳamraqū min sahmin\(^{64}\) – sharp-pointed, piercing (lit., more rapidly piercing than an arrow)

(8) ḳadaqqū min ḫaddi l-sayfi\(^{65}\) – extremely fine, finer, thin (lit., finer, sharper than the edge of a sword)

(9) ḳadaqqū mina l-sayfi\(^{66}\) – extremely fine, finer, thin (lit., finer, sharper than a sword)

(10) ḳadaqqū min ḫaddi l-shafrati\(^{67}\) – extremely fine, finer, thin (lit., finer, sharper than the edge of a blade/knife)

(11) ḳaqaddu mina l-shafrati/min shafratin\(^{68}\) – extremely sharp (lit., more cutting than a blade/knife)

(12) ḳaraqqū min ḫaddi l-sayfi\(^{69}\) – exceptionally fine, thin (lit., thin-

\(^{61}\) Google (October 25, 2009) found 3740/1050 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 39/6 cases.

\(^{62}\) Google (October 25, 2009) found 92 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 13 cases.

\(^{63}\) Google (October 25, 2009) found 3 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 6 cases.

\(^{64}\) Google (October 25, 2009) found 7 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 10 cases.

\(^{65}\) Google (October 25, 2009) found 563 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 52 cases.

\(^{66}\) Google (October 25, 2009) found 385000 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 249 cases.

\(^{67}\) Google (October 25, 2009) found 7 cases; Yahoo (October 25, 2009) found 4 cases.

\(^{68}\) Google (March 13, 2010) found 0/3 cases, all links to the same dictionary; Yahoo (March 13, 2010) found 0/3 cases, all dictionary items, including 2 links to the same source.

\(^{69}\) Google (October 31, 2009) found 9 cases; Yahoo (October 31, 2009)
ner, finer than the edge of a sword)

(13) ʾasraʿu mina l-sahmi/min sahmin\(^{70}\) – faster than an arrow/a bullet, (lit., faster than an arrow)

(14) ʾadyaq min zujjin\(^{71}\) – very narrow/slim (lit., slimmer than an arrowhead/spearhead)

(15) ʾadyaq min zilli l-rumāḥ\(^{72}\) – very narrow/slim (lit., slimmer than the shadow of a lance)

(16) ʾakhaflu mina l-jummāḥ\(^{73}\) – exceptionally light (lit., lighter than an arrow without a head [used by boys to play or to train])

(17) ʾashaddu quwaysin sahman\(^{74}\) – the best choice (lit., the best bow [for shooting] arrows)

Here, despite the limited number of weaponry similes, it is possible to notice an interesting characteristic of these expressions. They are predominantly grouped in clusters\(^{75}\) of variants or elaborations on one and the same concept, which is communicated by the meaning of the adjective in the comparative form. In the case of the similes in such clusters the comparative adjectives are essentially synonymous and the words denoting weapons are few, representing the ones most used. Most likely this grouping in clusters results from the fact that the medieval compilers were gathering all established similes in circulation, whether in spoken usage, oral poetry or written texts. Their purpose was to preserve the treasure of curious, witty and eloquent expressions that re-

\(^{70}\) Google (October 31, 2009) found 7210/5490 cases; Yahoo (October 31, 2009) found 238/193 cases.

\(^{71}\) Google (October 27, 2009) found 10 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 11 cases.

\(^{72}\) Google (October 27, 2009) found 8 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 15 cases.

\(^{73}\) Google (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases.

\(^{74}\) Google (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases; Yahoo (October 27, 2009) found 0 cases.

\(^{75}\) ʾAmānī Dawūd (ʾAmthāl, 189) gives a count of the largest clusters, for example, similes with ʾasraʿu min (faster than) come to 47 items, those with ʾahmaq min (stupider than) come to 44 items and those with ʾahwānu min (more insignificant than) come to 31. My personal counts are very similar.
lected directly and truthfully long experience with harsh desert life and tribal wars.

For some similes is difficult to know how and in what context they have been used. The dictionaries do not always give examples of usage, and sometimes only a piece of poetry is cited to exemplify their figurative use. But the very fact that these similes are included in almost all medieval ‘*amthāl*’ dictionaries suggests that many have obviously been employed in different types of discourse. An impressive number are used today, as Internet searches demonstrate, for a wide variety of pragmatic purposes. Some examples are:

*al-sayfu ‘*amdā? ‘ami l-sukhriyya?* (Which is sharper, the sword or ridicule?) – title of an article that begins thus: *ya’dāru l-qawlū ‘*ahyānan ‘inna l-*kalimata ‘*amdā mina l-*sayf* (It is sometimes said that the word is sharper than a sword), and concludes thus: *‘*anna l-sukhriyya, fi l-qawli ‘awi l-*kitābati, hiya fi ‘l—an il-‘ashaddu dhakā’an wa-l-’*amdā mina l-*sayf*76* (Ridicule in oral communication or in writing is in fact wittier and sharper than a sword).

*waqifun ‘alā širāṭin ‘*adaqqa mina l-*sayf*77* (standing on a path finer than [the blade of] a sword)

*fa-ku ‘*alamin wa-*kalimatin yakānu waq‘uhā ‘*ashadda min waq‘i l-*sayfi wa-*khtirāquhū li-l-*qalhi ‘*asra‘a mina l-*sahm*78* (How many wounds, pains, and words strike harder than a sword and penetrate the heart faster than an arrow).

Some expressions in use on the pattern ‘*af‘alu min* have been ‘rediscovered’, while others are recent coinages. New cases appear in modern collections of colloquial ‘*amthāl*. Many also emerge in lists of ‘*amthāl*’ and sayings that appear on the Internet, and numerous examples in the present study come from such lists. They gain wide popularity through various Internet channels, for example, chatting rooms (*muntadayāt*).79 A number of the above seventeen similes are popular

79 For example, several sites and chatting rooms used as a greeting for the beginning of Ramadan 1430 A.H. a ‘poem’ in which several ‘old’ and ‘new’ similes are put together. Cf. http://alnumair.net/vb/showthread.php?t=111; http://www.3kalam.com/vb/members/11661-3.html; http://www.hdmut.net/vb/
and often used, most likely because of their easily recognized form and
their expressiveness. The images, moreover, are easy to understand and
easily applicable to different target domains.

The noun or the phrase which (in transcription) is on the right side,
that is, the comparatum, is considered by the language community as the
exemplification of or standard for certain features, qualities or character-
istics. But in these similes the tertium comparationis is almost consis-
tently an adjective in the comparative form, as in, ‘sharper than a razor’
rather than ‘(as) sharp as a razor’, and the standard is in fact surpassed,
which lends great vividness to the idiom and generates a significant
emotional effect. The intention is not only to make a comparison or
give an evaluation, but also to intensify or exaggerate the feature as-
cribed to the comparandum. Moreover, the weapon component adds
strength and intensity, because words like sword and arrow have strong
symbolic meaning attached to them.

Authors of collections of ‘amthāl were aware of the particular char-
acteristics of these similes and grouped them in separate lists and occa-
t277914.html (all accessed October 31, 2009; only the first and last still avail-
able May 1, 2010). The poem, which occurs in a number of versions, reads on
these two sites as follows:

(Greetings more fragrant than Cambodian oud)  
(‘Cambodian oud’ – agarwood, source of an expensive scent; ‘Goody’ –
brand name of sauces and other food products; ‘Jarir Bookstore’ – large
chain of superstores operating in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.)

80 Cf. Anna Wierzbicka’s arguments concerning the extreme intensity of
lexicalized similes that express the tertium comparationis with an adjective,
and particularly those containing an adjective in the comparative form (‘Sravnenie –
gradastia – metafora’, in Nina D. Arutiunova, ed., Teoriia metafory [Moscow:
‘Progress’, 1990], 139).

81 ʾAmānī Dāwūd expresses this particular effect of ‘af’alu min similes, re-
marking that ‘they are made not only to compare, but to shock the receiver, to
surprise him in order to awake in his soul contemplation, admiration and amaze-
ment’ (ʾAmthāl, 183).
sionally devoted separate works to them. For example, the author of one of the largest and best known collections of ʾamthāl, Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, calls them ʾamthāl madrūba fī l-tanāḥī wa-l-mubālagha (proverbs/similes coined to attain an extreme degree of exaggeration), and it is with this heading that he introduces his lists of ʾafʿalu min expressions for each letter. This intensification or exaggeration, it should be noted, is inherent in such Arabic similes, since they cannot be re-expressed idiomatically on the lower level of intensity ‘(as) sharp as a razor’.

2. Idioms with Adjectival Phrase Structure

(1) silāḥun ʾabyadu83/ʾaslīḥātun bayḍāʾu84 – cold weapon/s, cold steel (lit., white weapon/s)
This is a common expression that should not be considered a true idiom anymore, since it is the established term for weapons that do not ‘involve fire or explosions’. It may be assumed that the adjective ‘white’ is used to suggest not the color but the shiny, well polished metal surface of the weapons.

(2) siḥāmun tāʾishatun87 – false claims, lies, falsities, slander (lit., stray arrows; connotations include: bad intentions, irritating and false assertions, ungrounded accusations)
This idiom is connected with an idiom in the semantic field of behavior discussed in my previous article, ʿṭāsha sahmuhu88 – to be on the wrong track, bark up the wrong tree, be unsuccessful, fail (lit., his arrow missed the mark). The active participle of the verb ʿṭāsha (to miss the mark, to stray) is used as an attribute of siḥām to express metaphorically false, ungrounded claims meant to hurt or damage. The image created by

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82 See n. 56 above.
83 Google (October 30, 2009) found 59800 cases; Yahoo (October 30, 2009) found 14000 cases.
84 Google (October 30, 2009) found 43000 cases; Yahoo (October 30, 2009) found 11700 cases.
87 Google (October 30, 2009) found 3040 cases; Yahoo (October 30, 2009) found 681 cases.
88 ‘The Notion Weapon in Arabic Idioms’, 135, 137. Google (December 18, 2008) found 303 cases of ʿṭāsha sahmuhu and 164 of the variant ʿṭāhat siḥāmuhu.
literal meanings of the words, arrows being meant to disable or kill, is quite graphic.

(3) silāḥun dhū haddayn – a two-edged sword (lit., a weapon with two edges; connotations include: the necessity of bearing in mind both the positive and negative sides of means or measures, the dangers of a specific means)

Idiom (3) appears only in modern collections, not in the old ones. It is widely used because its actual meaning conceptualizes, not only the risky nature of a weapon with two sharp edges, but also the hazardous aspect of many means and measures that can easily prove more harmful than useful. This makes the idiom with its connotations or extensions useful in numerous different discourses. The idiom seems most likely to be of biblical origin, although the primary biblical meaning does not appear to be that of a weapon that might turn back against its wielder. While the concept of a two-edged weapon, of a treacherous issue, must have existed in Arabic, I suspect this idiom is a translation from English or French (both languages have versions in which the biblical ‘sword’ is replaced by ‘weapon’: ‘a two edged weapon’, ‘une arme à deux tranchants’). However it may not be possible totally to exclude an Arabic biblical origin.

(4) ḥadhwa l-qudhidhati bi-l-qudhidhati – identical, deceptively alike (lit., as similar as a feather of an arrow to a feather of an arrow; connotations include: difficult to tell apart, undistinguishable, following/imitating someone)

In order to understand the meaning of idiom (4), background knowledge about arrows needs to be activated, namely, that for arrows to be effec-

89 Google (October 31, 2009) found 260000 cases; Yahoo (October 31, 2009) found 114000 cases.


91 See ‘A Two-Edged Sword’, http://www.gracecathedral.org/enrichment/brush_excerpts/brush_20050913.shtml (accessed February 13.02.2010), where ‘really, really sharp’ is cited as the original biblical meaning of, e.g., the Hebrew (Proverbs 5:4) and Greek (Hebrews 4:12) for ‘two-edged’. Cf. a number of other biblical passages.

92 Google (October 31, 2009) found 1550000 cases; Yahoo (October 31, 2009) found 16400 cases.
tive weapons they have to be made with extreme care and skill, which
does not. Instead, it includes the precision with which the feathers are cut and placed to
improve stability, accuracy and trajectory. This old idiom, which pictures something that for most people at present means little, is extremely
popular today. Among the explanations is the popularity of a slightly
misquoted hadith of the Prophet about the Jews and Christians in which
the idiom, apparently erroneously, occurs, as well as the various uses the
hadith is put to and the many Internet discussions surrounding it. An
d example in which the idiom is not used in a religious context is:

CONCLUSION

Having presented weaponry idioms belonging to the semantic fields of
characteristics, features and qualities of persons and objects, and having
discussed their motivation, it is important to summarize some of the
aspects shared with the weaponry idioms considered in the previous
article and to point out some specific traits of the present group.

The constituent words denote familiar medieval weapons or their
parts. In this group of idioms, again, basic, well known qualities and

93 The hadith, as cited by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), followed by Mu-
hammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792) and subsequently popular in Salafi
circles, has the following text: la-tatba‘unna san纳a man kāna qabلاکum hadhva l-qudhhati bi-l-qudhda, ḥattā law dakhali jubra ḡabbin la-
dakhaltumāh. gālū: yā rasūla lāh, al-yahūdu wa-l-naṣārā? qāl: ja-man?
(‘Indeed you follow the custom of those who went before you as the feather of
an arrow resembles the feather of an arrow, so that if they had gone into the
hole of a lizard, you would go into it too.’ They [the Prophet’s Companions]
13, 2010). ‘Abb Hājjar Muhammad al-Sa‘īd b. Basyūnī Zaghālū, who had an
enormous collection of hadith works at his disposition, lists no example of a
hadith beginning with la-tatba‘unna containing the idiom ḥaddha l-qudhhati
[Beirut: Ālam al-Turāth, 1419/1989], 6:568b–69a). I have not consulted the 4-
volume Supplement (al-Dhayl) to this work (Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurabā’ al-
‘Athariyya, 1994).

applications of weapons are used to express figuratively new, more intricate and abstract concepts. This is how weaponry idioms contribute to the means that Arabic, like other languages, can use to expand itself and to express subtler meanings and connotations. On the one hand, the actual phraseological meaning of the idioms studied is based on the metaphoric or metonymic reinterpretation of the literal reading of the source collocation, or on a blending of the two. On the other hand, many of the idioms utilize the symbolic meaning of the medieval weapons, which is still clearly recognizable. It should be repeated that, in my opinion, the idioms studied here are to some extent more vivid and expressive than other idioms that do not have as a constituent a word denoting a weapon. Weaponry idioms exploit the inherent fear of and respect for weapons. Particularly interesting are the idioms/similes on the ʾafʿalu min pattern based on exceeding a certain standard, and thus exaggerating some given quality. They are generally elaborations on qualities of the sword, spearhead and arrow, such as sharp-pointed, piercing, cutting, razor-sharp, extremely fine and rapid.

Most of the idioms containing a word denoting a weapon have a transparent, readily recognizable meaning, though idioms with rare, archaic words are often exceptions. Still, in order to grasp the actual meaning of an idiom denoting particular features or characteristics of people and objects, one or more levels of knowledge have to be activated. The weaponry idioms addressed here, by and large, do not seem to be ‘culturally bound’ or ‘culturally specific’. Both the weapons and their qualities are well known across many different cultures and thus do not pose any difficulty for non-Arabic speakers. However, information about other constituents of certain idioms may occasionally need culture-specific amplification.

Idioms expressing characteristics or qualities of persons, including weaponry idioms, can be categorized from a semantic point of view into two groups, those with positive meaning and those with negative meaning. Some weaponry idioms (not so many) have positive meaning, denoting metaphorically positive features such as strength of character, persistence, physical strength, professional ability and cooperation.

ṣulbū/ṣalibu l-qanāṭi – tough, with a strong will (lit., with a sturdy lance)

ṭawīlu l-nījādi – tall, tall of stature (lit., with a long sword belt)

95 See my remarks above (p. 127) on the concept of guest in the idiom lā li-l-sayfi wa-lā li-l-dayfi.
ʾakhadha l-qawsa bārīhā – the right, deserving, competent person has taken charge (lit., the bow’s shaper has taken it)

ramaw ʾan qawsin wāḥidatin – they were united, in agreement (lit., they shot from one bow)

Other idioms collected here have negative meaning or can be used in negative contexts expressing negative qualities and characteristics of human beings (normal for the system of idioms in every language). But by condemning unacceptable or repulsive features of character, they advocate those that are good and praiseworthy according to the standards of Arab society. Here are some examples:

jaʿala l-zujiya quddāma l-sīnāni – to do things backwards (lit., he put the [pointed iron] butt of the spear before the head)

ʿindahu l-sīrri bi-l-miqlāʾi – who cannot keep a secret (lit., a secret with him is as if it were in a sling)

lānat qanāṭuhu – to grow weaker, to become frail, weak (lit., his lance weakened, softened)

ʿadyaʿu min ghīnīm bi-ghayri nasīlin – wretched, miserable (lit. more wretched, more miserable that a sheath without a sword)

lā lī-l-sayfi wa-lā lī-l-ḍayfi – good for nothing, not suited for one’s job or duties (lit., neither for the sword, nor for the guest)

Regarding idioms referring primarily to characteristics or qualities of objects, it is seldom possible to detect any similar division into positive and negative traits. Examples of exceptions, the first generally positive and the second negative, are:

ʾasraʿu mina l-sahmi/min sahmin – faster than an arrow/a bullet, (lit., faster than an arrow)

silāḥun dhū ḥaddaynī – a two-edged sword (lit., a weapon with two edges)

Weaponry idioms denoting characteristics and features of persons and objects are used in a wide range of discourses no longer connected with the situation that produced the idiom. However, the context often exploits the literal meaning of the source expression, since such idioms are generally transparent and clearly motivated. As with the weaponry idioms studied in my earlier article, it has to be remarked that most of the
idioms investigated here can be interpreted iconically and symbolically. The iconic motivation is based on ‘the relation between the literal and figurative readings (both of the whole word string and of the single constituents or parts of the constituents)’. The symbolic motivation is based on the same semantic features, but it is related to ‘only one single constituent (or more precisely, the concept standing behind it)’. For example:

ʾaʿti l-qawsa bāriyahā – rely on those who know their profession, always ask an expert (lit., give the bow to its shaper)

ʿalā ḥaddi l-sayfi – in a difficult and dangerous situation (lit., on the edge of a sword)

ḥadhwa l-qudhdhati bi-l-qudhdhati – identical, deceptively alike (lit., as similar as a feather of an arrow to a feather of an arrow)

Symbolic motivation is particularly evident in idioms such as the following:

siḥāmun taʾišhatun – false claims, lies, falsities, slander (lit., stray arrows)

ʾamḍā mina l-sayfi/min sayfin – razor-sharp, keen-edged (lit., sharper than a sword)

lā li-l-sayfi wa-lā li-l-ḍayfi – good for nothing, not suited for one’s job or duties (lit., neither for the sword, nor for the guest)

It is standard, as with other languages, to approach Arabic idioms primarily as examples of figurative expressions and to investigate the metaphors (or metonymies) that lie behind them. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, our ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical and ‘we typically conceptualize the nonphysical in terms of the physical.’ Employing this thesis, it is possible to recognize that in many weaponry idioms the notion of weapon or knowledge of physical experience with weapons stands behind the nonphysical, less clearly delineated image expressed (e.g., ʿadaqqu min ḥaddi l-sayfi – lit., finer than the edge of a sword). On the other hand, some idioms in this group and their meanings suggest that they derive from a concep-

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96 Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen, *Figurative Language*, 90.

97 Ibid., 96.

tual construction rather than a concept based on actual experience (e.g., ālā haddi l-sayfi – lit., on the edge of a sword). Clearly the first type is predominant with weaponry idioms describing persons and objects, as opposed to those describing situations and behavior, which were the subject of the previous article.