ARABIC POETRY

A PRIMER FOR STUDENTS

BY

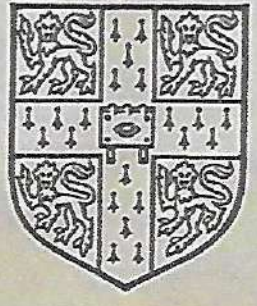
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INTRODUCTION

"The most striking feature in Arabic literature is its unexpectedness. Over and over again, with scarcely a hint to give warning of what is coming, a new literary art emerges fully-fledged, often with a perfection never equalled by later exponents of the same art. Nowhere is this element of surprise more striking than in the first appearance of Arabic as a vehicle of literature. At one moment Arabia seems, in a literary sense, empty and dumb except for some votive or businesslike inscriptions in a variety of dialects. At the next, companies of poets spring up all over northern Arabia, reciting complex odes, *qaṣīdas*, in which a series of themes are elaborated with unsurpassed vigour, vividness of imagination, and precision of imagery, in an infinitely rich and highly articulated language, showing little or no traces of dialect, and cast into complex and flexible metrical schemes that rhyme throughout the poem."[1]

"It is impossible to fix with any degree of certainty the date when the Arabs first began to practise the art of poetry. The oldest poets of whom we have any remains belong to the time of the War of al-Basûs, or shortly before that, which would place them about a hundred and thirty years before the Flight [A.D. 622]. But these are spoken of, not as the inventors of the poetic art, but as the authorities for the laws of the *Ḳaṣîdah* or ode, a form of composition which is subject to very rigid conventions as to the contents and sequence of its parts. What we possess of the distinguished poets to whom these laws were due is cast in forms which we cannot but suppose to be the outcome of a long education in the construction of verse. The number and complexity of the measures which they use, their established laws of quantity and rhyme, and the uniform manner in which they introduce the subjects of their poems, notwithstanding the distance which often separated one composer from another, all point to a long previous study and cultivation of the art of expression and the capacities of their language, a study of which no record now remains. In the earliest poems, as they now stand, when we compare them with those of fifty or a hundred years later, we can detect little that is archaic or immature. Indeed, one of the most ancient of the group, Imra-al-Ḳais, is generally esteemed the greatest of them, and was so judged of by Muḥammad himself.

[1] Sir Hamilton Gibb, *Arabic Literature* (2nd edition, Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 13.

"After this first outburst of song the cultivation of the art extended with immense rapidity. Except the distant 'Omân and Mahrah, where the Ḥimyaritic or an allied speech still survived, no part of Arabia was without its poets. The 'Language of Ma'add'—that is, the speech of the Central and so-called Ishmaelite Arabs,—had by this time taken possession of the whole of al-Yaman except the coasts of the Indian Ocean; the supremacy of the *Tubba's* or Ḥimyarite Kings over the rest of the Peninsula had passed away for ever; and in the course of the sixth century after Christ the last traces of it were obliterated when the Kings of Kindah were driven, with their people, from al-Yamâmah and Ḥajar back to their original inheritance in Ḥaḍramaut. A great uniformity of speech overspread the land, whether due, as is usually assumed, to the general observance of the Pilgrimage to Mekkah and the meeting of the tribes at 'Ukâḍh, or to some other cause. The same masculine and expressive language was heard from al-Ḥîrah on the Euphrates, under the shadow of Persia, and Ghassân in Syria, beneath the great cathedral of Damascus, to Ṣan'â and Aden in the far South, where a Persian governor ruled in the name of the Shâhanshâh, and the profession of the poet was everywhere honoured and rewarded. 'When there appeared a poet in a family of the Arabs, the other tribes round about would gather together to that family and wish them joy of their good luck. Feasts would be got ready, the women of the tribe would join together in bands, playing upon lutes, as they were wont to do at bridals, and the men and boys would congratulate one another; for a poet was a defence to the honour of them all, a weapon to ward off insult from their good name, and a means of perpetuating their glorious deeds and of establishing their fame for ever. And they used not to wish one another joy but for three things—the birth of a boy, the coming to light of a poet, and the foaling of a noble mare.'"[1]

"By the ancient Arabs the poet (*shâ'ir*, plural *shu'arâ*), as his name implies, was held to be a person endowed with supernatural knowledge, a wizard in league with spirits (*jinn*) or satans (*shayâṭîn*) and dependent on them for the magical powers which he displayed. This view of his personality, as well as the influential position which he occupied, are curiously indicated by the story of a certain youth who was refused the hand of his beloved on the ground that he was neither a poet nor a soothsayer nor a water-diviner. The idea of poetry as an

[1] Sir Charles Lyall, *Translations of Ancient Arabian Poetry* (Williams and Norgate, 1930), pp. xv–xvii. The citation is from Ibn Rashîq (d. 456/1064) as quoted by al-Suyûṭî, *al-Muzhir*, II, 236.

art was developed afterwards; the pagan *shá'ir* is the oracle of his tribe, their guide in peace and their champion in war....

"Besides fountain-songs, war-songs, and hymns to idols, other kinds of poetry must have existed in the earliest times—*e.g.*, the love-song and the dirge. The powers of the *shá'ir*, however, were chiefly exhibited in Satire (*hijá*).... The menaces which he hurled against the foe were believed to be inevitably fatal. His rhymes, often compared to arrows, had all the effect of a solemn curse spoken by a divinely inspired prophet or priest, and their pronunciation was attended with peculiar ceremonies of a symbolic character, such as anointing the hair on one side of the head, letting the mantle hang down loosely, and wearing only one sandal. Satire retained something of these ominous associations at a much later period when the magic utterance of the *shá'ir* had long given place to the lampoon by which the poet reviles his enemies and holds them up to shame.

"The obscure beginnings of Arabian poetry, presided over by the magician and his familiar spirits, have left not a rack behind in the shape of literature, but the task of reconstruction is comparatively easy where we are dealing with a people so conservative and tenacious of antiquity as the Arabs. Thus it may be taken for certain that the oldest form of poetical speech in Arabia was rhyme without metre (*Saj'*), or, as we should say, 'rhymed prose,' although the fact of Muḥammad's adversaries calling him a poet because he used it in the Koran shows the light in which it was regarded even after the invention and elaboration of metre. Later on, as we shall see, *Saj'* became a merely rhetorical ornament, the distinguishing mark of all eloquence whether spoken or written, but originally it had a deeper, almost religious, significance as the special form adopted by poets, soothsayers, and the like in their supernatural revelations and for conveying to the vulgar every kind of mysterious and esoteric lore."[1]

The foregoing quotations from three eminent authorities sum up all that is known, and much that has been speculated, concerning the origins and earliest history of Arabic poetry. It is most unlikely that more than this will ever be known, saving some miraculous discovery in the unexplored caves of Arabia of an Arabic counterpart of the Dead Sea Scrolls; and even such a remote contingency recedes still farther into the improbable when

1 R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), pp. 72–4.

it is remembered that the art of writing was little practised amongst the ancient Arabs, and that for long decades poetry was transmitted not by careful script but from mouth to mouth.[1] The abundant remains of that desert literature, saved for posterity by the enthusiastic labours of the Arab Humanists,[2] confront us with a truly astonishing phenomenon, the marvel of which familiarity can never wholly dim. There in the sandy wastes, upon the very fringes of settled civilisation, a group of scattered and perennially warring tribes united only in the possession of a common language invented, and brought to a high state of refinement without benefit of schoolmen, a form of poetry unique in its kind, of complex prosody and dazzling imagery.

The fashion which they set maintained itself virtually unaltered down to the end of the Umayyad period (A.D. 750), and though challenged by some daring spirits under the 'Abbásid Caliphate, speedily reasserted its supremacy, which at the present day is almost as absolute as ever.[3]

The relics of ancient Arabic poetry fall into two categories: the *qaṣīda* or ode (the fashion referred to in the immediately preceding quotation), and the *qiṭ'a* or "occasional" piece. Concerning the latter group, well represented in famous anthologies (such for instance as the *Kitāb al-Ḥamāsa* of Abū Tammām, an eminent poet in his own right who died in A.D. 846), two theories have been advanced: one, that they are fragments remembered out of lost longer poems, the other that they are originally independent poems composed on individual themes and in particular contexts.

It has been customary to think of poems dealing with individual themes as *kiṭ'ahs*, or parts of the *ḳaṣīdah*, as if perhaps they were derived from it. It seems to me more reasonable to consider the *ḳaṣīdah* as built up of a number of *kiṭ'ahs*. Let us recall that most of the ancient *ḳaṣīdahs* were sung, and the poet while still not warmed to his work is casting about amongst the conventionalised phrasery and themes so well known to him and his listeners that a verse can almost automatically

[1] The theory that all, or most, pre-Islamic poetry is a forgery has now been generally abandoned.

[2] For the

be produced from them. Once warmed to his task the true subject of the poem is declaimed with vigour and point. Now, I do not mean that the classical *ḳaṣīdah* of Muhammad's time was invariably produced in this way, for it seems that poets then composed by reflection, set pieces, as one would expect in a highly civilised community, and by no means relied on extempore performance alone. But the *ḳaṣīdah* form was based fundamentally on a form which arose from conditions under which poetry was composed extempore.[1]

Whatever the truth may be, there is no disputing the fact that the full-length and fully articulated *qaṣīda* was esteemed as the only valid form of "classical" poetry. The pattern of the ode had rapidly become highly conventionalised, and is as described in a famous passage from the writings of an early critic.[2]

I have heard from a man of learning that the composer of Odes began by mentioning the deserted dwelling-places and the relics and traces of habitation. Then he wept and complained and addressed the desolate encampment, and begged his companion to make a halt, in order that he might have occasion to speak of those who had once lived there and afterwards departed; for the dwellers in tents were different from townsmen or villagers in respect of coming and going, because they moved from one water-spring to another, seeking pasture and searching out the places where rain had fallen. Then to this he linked the erotic prelude (*nasīb*), and bewailed the violence of his love and the anguish of separation from his mistress and the extremity of his passion and desire, so as to win the hearts of his hearers and divert their eyes towards him and invite their ears to listen to him, since the song of love touches men's souls and takes hold of their hearts, God having put it in the constitution of His creatures to love dalliance and the society of women, in such wise that we find very few but are attached thereto by some tie or have some share therein, whether lawful or unpermitted. Now, when the poet had assured himself of an attentive hearing, he followed up his advantage and set forth his claim: thus he went on to complain of fatigue and want of sleep and travelling by night and of the noonday heat, and how his camel had been reduced to leanness. And when, after representing all the discomfort and danger of his journey, he knew that he had fully justified his hope and

[1] R. B. Serjeant, *Prose and Poetry from Ḥaḍramawt* (Taylor's Foreign Press, 1951), pp. 56–7.

[2] Ibn Qutaiba, *Kitāb al-Shi'r wa'l-Shu'arā'*, pp. 14–15. The translation is by R. A.

expectation of receiving his due meed from the person to whom the poem was addressed, he entered upon the panegyric (*madīḥ*), and incited him to reward, and kindled his generosity by exalting him above his peers and pronouncing the greatest dignity, in comparison with his, to be little.

Many thousands of poems have been composed, even down to modern times, in close conformity with the pattern as set out in the foregoing lines; so much so, that contemporary descriptions of "the discomfort and danger of his journey" have elaborated the theme afresh, only substituting for the traditional camel more up-to-date means of locomotion—the railway train, the motor-car, even the aeroplane. Out of the great mass of ancient desert *qaṣīdas*—"the general similarity in structure and content of the pre-Islamic odes may give, especially when they are read in translation, an impression of monotony, almost of bareness, mirroring with a certain rude force the uniformity of desert life, its concreteness, realism, absence of shading and of introspection"[1]—supremacy in excellence has from very early times been awarded to a small group of poems by different authors, known as *al-Mu'allaqāt* ("The Suspended Ones"). I have recently given a full account, and new translations, of these poems in *The Seven Odes*, to which the attention of the reader is invited for further information about this group in particular and the ancient poetry in general.

To this restriction of permitted themes were added other conventions no less hampering in their own way to the free play of the poetic imagination. The ode was, and is, required to open with a rhyming couplet—the couplet, called *bait*, being regarded as a unit of composition, is made up of two hemistichs or *miṣrā'*—and the rhyme so enunciated is maintained throughout the ensuing poem, which may range in length from above twenty to a hundred or so couplets. (With rare exceptions, only the opening couplet is doubly rhymed.) The rhymes are usually feminine; thus, in the poem of al-Samau'al included in this selection, we find *jamīlu*, *sabīlu*, *qalīlu*, etc.; in the poem of 'Antara, il-lay*ālī*, shim*ālī*, bi-*hāli*,

[1] Gibb, *op. cit.* p. 21.

etc. Even allowing for the extraordinary richness in rhyme of the Arabic language, the necessity of building so many identical rhymes into a poetic sequence, and of contriving that their successive occurrence should appear perfectly natural and indeed inevitable, called for virtuosity of the very first order. Since it was moreover considered a blemish to allow the structure of a sentence to run over from one couplet to the next, so that each couplet was thought of as a complete rhetorical statement, the greatest ingenuity was needed to concatenate the several statements together to create the impression of a continuous, or at any rate harmonious narration.

As if to compensate for these and the like restrictions, the poet was presented with a remarkably wide choice of rhythmical patterns, or metres, in which to express his thoughts; though once the choice was made, the same metre had to be sustained throughout the individual poem. Though the poets from earliest times employed this range of complicated rhythms with almost unvarying accuracy, their structures were first successfully analysed during the eighth century by the grammarian al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad of Basra (died *ca.* A.D. 790).

Both al-Ḥarīrī and Ibn Khallikān report that al-Khalīl had noticed the different rhythms produced by the hammering in different copper-workshops in the bazaar in Basra, and that this gave him the idea of developing a science of metre, in other words, of determining the rhythm in the structure of the ancient poems.[1]

The system and nomenclature invented by al-Khalīl have formed the accepted basis of all subsequent investigation.

It has been generally agreed, alike by ancient and modern scholars, that the earliest metre to be invented by the Arabs is that known as *rajaz*, "a measure said to correspond with the lifting and lowering of the camel's feet".[2] In the old poetry this metre was distinguished from all others by the fact that *every* hemistich

[1] G. Weil in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*[2], I, p. 669. The student is recommended to study this whole masterly exposition of *'Arūḍ*.

[2] H. G. Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music* (Luzac and Co., 1929), p. 14. This work contains valuable information on the part played by singing and instrumental music in the chanting of Arabic poetry. For a different interpretation of the basic meaning of *rajaz*, see Nicholson, *op. cit.* p. 74.

rhymed; "the more modern, on the contrary, not infrequently follow the rule of the other metres in rhyming only the second hemistich of each verse".[1] The following scheme indicates the rhythmic variations allowed in the use of this ancient, flexible and, by the most part of professional poets, despised metre.[2]

Trimeter acatalectic
∪ – ∪ – | ∪ – ∪ – | ∪ – ∪ –
≥ ∪ ∪ – | ≥ ∪ ∪ – | ≥ ∪ ∪ –

Trimeter catalectic
∪ – ∪ – | ∪ – ∪ – | ∪ – –
≥ ∪ ∪ – | ≥ ∪ ∪ – | ∪ – –

Dimeter acatalectic
∪ – ∪ – | ∪ – ∪ –
≥ ∪ ∪ – | ≥ ∪ ∪ –

Dimeter catalectic
∪ – ∪ – | ∪ – –
≥ ∪ ∪ – | ∪ – –

In this selection, the poem by Ibn al-Mu'tazz illustrates the antique convention of all hemistichs rhyming together, within the trimeter catalectic variation.

– – ∪ – | – – ∪ – | ∪ – –
lammā tafarrā l-ufqu bi-l-ḍiyā'i
– – ∪ – | – ∪ ∪ – | – – –
mithla btisāmi l-shafati l-lamyā'i

The poem by Maṭrān, in trimeter acatalectic, follows the regular *qaṣīda* rhyming scheme.

– ∪ ∪ – | – ∪ ∪ – | ∪ – ∪ –
shāda fa-a'lā wa-banā fa-waṭṭadā
– – ∪ – | ∪ – ∪ – | – – ∪ –
lā lil-'ulā wa-lā lahú bal lil-'idā

The ode by Mihyār al-Dailamī employs the same metre and rhyming scheme.

The *ṭawīl*, "one of the finest, as well as the most common, of the Arabic metres"[3] extensively employed in heroic and panegyric verse, is represented in this collection by the poems of al-Samau'al, al-Nābigha, al-Mutanabbī, Abū Firās, Ibn 'Unain, Ibn al-Fāriḍ

[1] W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (3rd edition, Cambridge, 1951), II, 362.

[2] "Between these highly developed productions and the rude doggerel of *Saj'* or *Rajaz* there lies an interval, the length of which it is impossible even to conjecture" (Nicholson, *op. cit.* p. 75). In the Muslim Middle Ages the *rajaz* was extensively employed in mnemonic manuals on grammar, medicine, mathematics, etc. Note that Arabic metrics are quantitative.

[3] Wright, *op. cit.* II, p. 264.

and al-Bārūdī. (Robert Browning in his *Abt Vogler* gave a passable English imitation.)[1] The following is the pattern of its regular acatalectic variety.

– ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – ‖ – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ –

atānī abaita l-la'na annaka lumtanī

wa-tilka llatī ahtammu minhā wa-anṣabu (al-Nābigha)

In this variety, the last foot sometimes occurs in a different form.

sharibnā 'alā dhikri l'ḥabībi mudāmatan

sakirnā bihā min qablu an yukhlaqa l-karmú (Ibn al-Fāriḍ)

The catalectic variety is as follows.

– ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – ‖ – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ –

idhā l-mar'u lam yadnas mina l-lu'mi 'irḍuhú

fa-kullu ridā'in yartadīhi jamīlú (al-Samau'al)

Another extremely popular metre is the *basīṭ*, here represented by al-Khansā', Abū Tammām, Ibn Zaidūn and al-Shidyāq. The tetrameter is the commonest form, and has this pattern.

– ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – ‖ – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ – | – ◡ –

innī ariqtu fa-bittu l-laila sāhiratan

ka-annamā kuḥilat 'ainī bi-'uwwārí (al-Khansā')

A third heroic metre is the *kāmil*, found in trimeter (acatalectic and catalectic) and dimeter. The following is the pattern of the acatalectic trimeter.

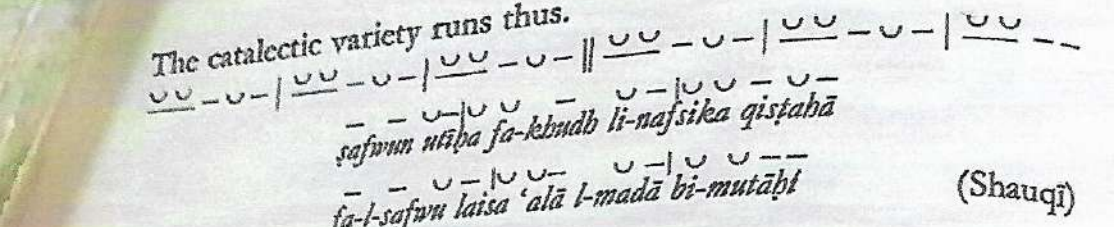
– – ◡ – | – – ◡ – | – – ◡ – ‖ – – ◡ – | – – ◡ – | – – ◡ –

al-arḍu qad labisat ridā'an akhḍarā

wa-l-ṭallu yantburu fī rubāhā jauharā (Ibn Sahl)

[1] See Lyall, *op. cit.* p. xlix.

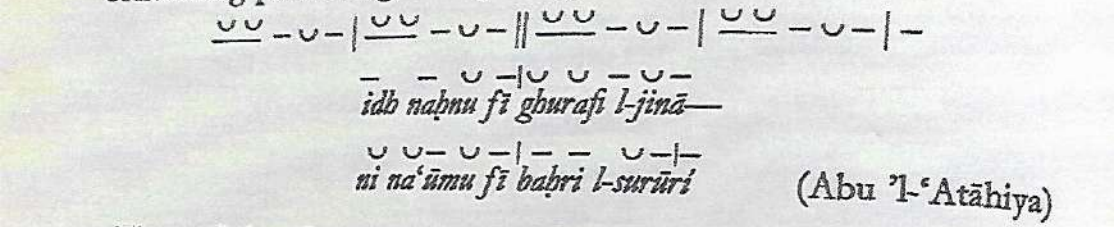
The catalectic variety runs thus.



ṣafwun utība fa-khudh li-nafsika qisṭahā

fa-l-ṣafwu laisa ʿalā l-madā bi-mutāḥī (Shauqī)

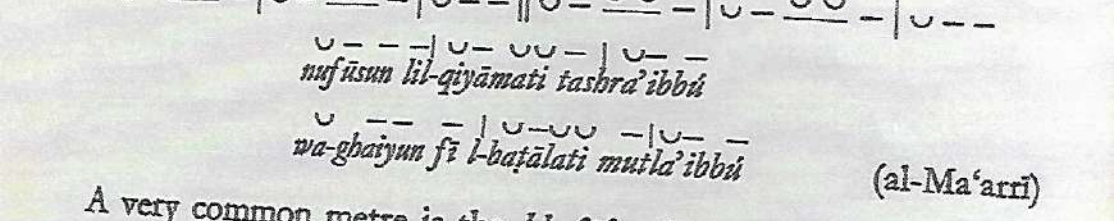
The dimeter *kāmil* as here illustrated is of the form called *muraffal* ("having a train"), so-named because a syllable is added to lengthen the second half of the verse. In the dimeter form, the last word of the first half of the verse is frequently divided, its concluding part being the opening of the second half.



idh naḥnu fī ghurafi l-jinā—

ni naʿūmu fī baḥri l-surūrī (Abu 'l-ʿAtāhiya)

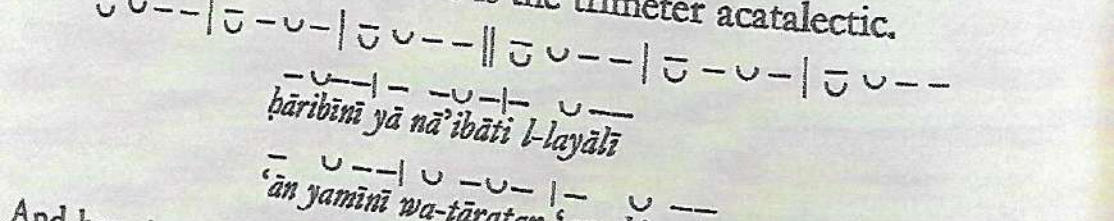
The *wāfir* is substantially a reversed version of the *kāmil*.



nufūsun lil-qiyāmati tashraʾibbū

wa-ghaiyun fī l-baṭālati mutlaʾibbū (al-Maʿarrī)

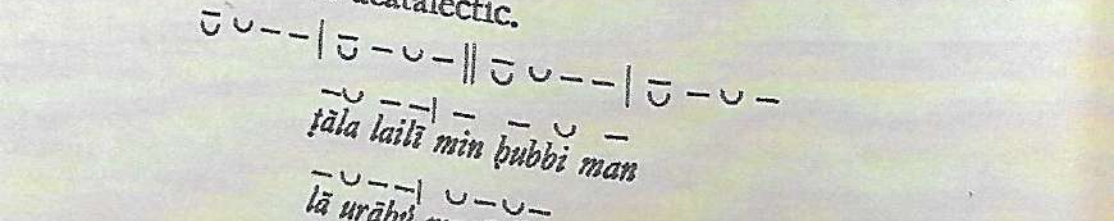
A very common metre is the *khafīf*, which is encountered in both dimeter and trimeter, acatalectic and catalectic. In this selection it is illustrated in poems by ʿAntara, Bashshār, Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Buḥturī, Ibn Zuhr (in a *muwashshaḥa*, of which more hereafter) and al-Rusāfī. Here is the trimeter acatalectic.



ḥāribīnī yā nāʾibāti l-layālī

ʿān yamīnī wa-tāratan ʿan shimālī (ʿAntara)

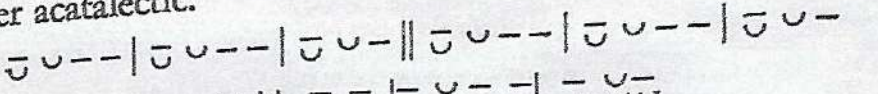
And here is the dimeter acatalectic.



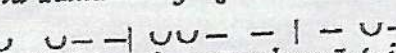
ṭāla lailī min ḥubbi man

lā urāhū muqāribī (Bashshār)

The *ramal*, here shown in poems by ʿUmar ibn Abī Rabīʿa and Ibn Zākūr (the latter a *muwashshaḥa*), also occurs in dimeter and trimeter with the same variations. The specimen given is of the trimeter acatalectic.



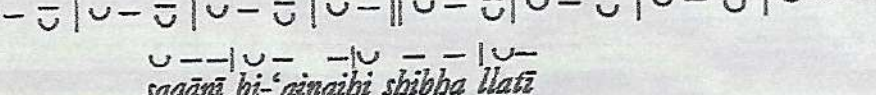
laita Hindan anjazatnā mā taʿid



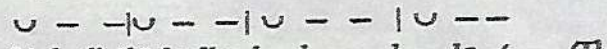
wa-shafat anfusanā mimmā tajid

(ʿUmar ibn Abī Rabīʿa)

The *mutaqārib* is a tripping measure more commonly used in Persian (it is the metre of the *Shāh-nāma* and many other epics) than in Arabic. The example offered is of the acatalectic variety.

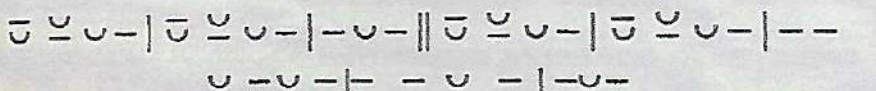


saqānī bi-ʿainaibi shibba llatī



bi-kaffaibi hādhā l-aghannu l-rashīqú (Ibn al-Khaiyāṭ)

The *sarīʿ* is a fairly variable metre.

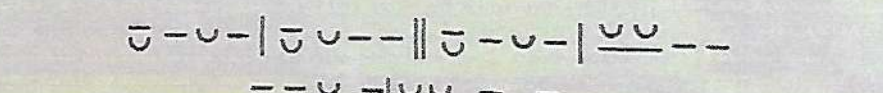


wa-ḍaifi ṭaifin amma min hājirin

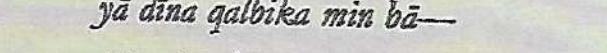


bāta bihi l-mashkuwwu mashkūrā (Ibn Khafāja)

The *mujtathth* is fairly rare in Arabic, somewhat commoner in Persian poetry. The concluding word of the first half of the verse often runs over into the second half.

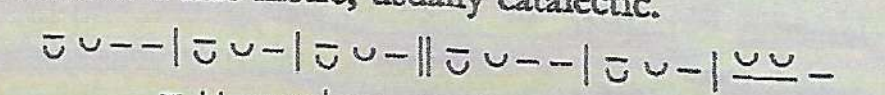


yā dīna qalbika min bā—

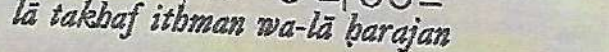


riqin yunīru wa-yakhbū (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī)

The *madīd* is a rare metre, usually catalectic.



lā takhaf ithman wa-lā ḥarajan



fa-damu l-ʿushshāqi maṭlūlu (Bahā' al-Dīn Zuhair)

Another rare metre is the *muqtaḍab*: it may be scanned in either two or three feet, the first alternative here being preferred.

⏑ ⏑ – | ⏑ – | ⏑ ⏑ – ‖ ⏑ ⏑ – | ⏑ – | ⏑ ⏑ –

– ⏑ – | ⏑ – | ⏑ ⏑ –

ḥāmilu l-hawā ta'ibú

– ⏑ – | ⏑ – | ⏑ ⏑ –

yastakhiffuhu l-ṭarabú (Abū Nuwās)

For the scansion of the other metres, and for a more detailed analysis, together with an account of the various licenses and the rules governing the rhyme, the student should consult Wright's *Arabic Grammar*, II, 350–90.

Such was, and is, the great variety of metres available to the Arab poet, so that it would be no exaggeration to say that rhythm is the most outstanding characteristic of the Arabian Muse. (Inasmuch as the subtle nuances of these variable rhythms are inimitable in any European language, it necessarily follows that all western translations of Arabic poetry, however artfully contrived, fail utterly to convey the immense range of moods expressed in his rhythmic incantations by the Arab poet.) It seems more likely, than any other theory that has been propounded, that the inspiration and precise execution of these poetical rhythms derived from the art of drumming, the most basic of all forms of music.

In the pre-Islamic period poets employed preponderantly the longer metres in their declaimed *qaṣīdas*, notably the *ṭawīl*, the *wāfir*, the *kāmil* and the *basīṭ*. This is not to say that the shorter metres were not also used, as might indeed by expected in a society which already enjoyed the seductive pleasures of lute, reed-pipe and singing-girl. But the martial virtues attracted the widest admiration in that land of perpetual feuds. With the spread and consolidation of the Islamic Empire, the lyric of love and wine came more and more into favour; princes had greater leisure than Bedouin chieftains to listen to soft music and to savour dancing and song. Hence, from the Umaiyad times of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a onwards, and especially in the Abbasid palaces amused by the like of Abū Nuwās, whilst for serious occasions the long measures of the *qaṣīda* continued to enjoy pride of esteem, more

and more songs, ancestors of the Persian *ghazal*, won for their cunning composers comparable rewards.

A change in vocabulary accompanied this change in measures. At once the glory and the baffling challenge of the ancient odes stemmed from the inexhaustible repertory of rare and numinous words at the command of the great poets. Natural endowment (*ṭab'*) required the enhancement of art (*ṣan'a*) to secure respect and recognition; it was not unusual for a poet to labour for months revising and refining a single ode.[1] It is thus not surprising that even in antiquity the learned commentators on the ancient poems were not seldom at a loss to understand the precise significance of a word or a phrase; for modern students the task of interpretation is always burdensome and sometimes intolerable. (For this reason, in the present anthology these fine but difficult poems have been omitted; the student will prefer to tackle them at a later stage; and in any case, reliable translations of a great part of the pre-Islamic poetry are readily available.) Whilst through all the succeeding centuries there has never been any lack of learned poets who loved to parade their erudition, and to give employment to exegetes, with the spread of Islam and the ever wider diffusion of the Arabic language amongst peoples who formerly used other tongues, many poets preferred a simpler diction to match the gentler cadences of the new music.

From the earliest times, the poets had vied with one another in the invention and elaboration of rhetorical figures. In the beginning these were largely confined to the metaphor and the simile, but these were marshalled and displayed in close abundance. So, Imra' al-Qais delights to dwell on the remembered charms of a former mistress.

I twisted her side-tresses to me, and she leaned over me;
slender-waisted she was, and tenderly plump her ankles,
shapely and taut her belly, white-fleshed, not the least flabby,
polished the lie of her breast-bones, smooth as a burnished mirror.
She turns away, to show a soft cheek, and wards me off
with the glance of a wild deer of Wajra, a shy gazelle with its fawn;

[1] Thus, Zuhair, author of one of the *Mu'allaqāt*, would think nothing of spending a year on a *qaṣīda*; see Shauqī Ḍaif, *al-Fann wa-madhāhibuh fī 'l-shi'r al-'Arabī*, p. 18.

she shows me a throat like the throat of an antelope, not ungainly
when she lifts it upwards, neither naked of ornament;
she shows me her thick black tresses, a dark embellishment
clustering down her back like bunches of a laden date-tree—
twisted upwards meanwhile are the locks that ring her brow,
the knots cunningly lost in the plaited and loosened strands;
she shows me a waist slender and slight as a camel's nose-rein,
and a smooth shank like the reed of a watered, bent papyrus.
In the morning the grains of musk hang over her couch,
sleeping the forenoon through, not girded and aproned to labour.
She gives with fingers delicate, not coarse; you might say
they are sand-worms of Zaby, or tooth-sticks of ishil-wood.
At eventide she lightens the black shadows, as if she were
the lamp kindled in the night of a monk at his devotions.

This immensely rich vocabulary of images, the mythology of the Jāhilī poets, was gratefully accepted by their heirs down the centuries, whose joyous care it was to enlarge the repertory and to invent ever new variations upon the well-worn and well-loved themes.

The poets [writes Ibn Ḥazm in his *Ṭauq al-ḥamāma*[1]] have wonderful skill in inventing metaphorical allusions. Allow me to quote a stanza or two of mine in this vein.

The clouds were shooting from on high
Their slender arrows through the sky;
Like drawn and molten silver thread
The rains were falling overhead.

A crescent moon in blackest night
Stooped from his firmament of light;
Proclaim the lover who attained!
The inconceivable he gained;

So inconceivable, that should
You ask, "What have you there?" I could
No words discover, and no wile
Devise for answer, but a smile.

A smile so joyous, it might seem
My happiness was but a dream,
My joy so overwhelming, too,
I doubted if it could be true.

[1] See my *The Ring of the Dove* (Luzac, 1953), pp. 247–8.

Obra doada por DAVID R. SILVA
aluno do curso de Árabe
da FFLCH/USP

This is another poem I wrote in the same mood.

You came to me, that witching time
The crescent moon climbed up on high,
Ere yet the sweet and clamorous chime
Of Christian bells rang through the sky.

My crescent moon was like the brow
Of some grave scholar, white as snow,
The instep delicate, I trow,
Of lovely maid its graceful bow.

And suddenly God's rainbow drew
Its arc across the heavens pale,
Apparalled in each dazzling hue
That glitters from the peacock's tail.

Elsewhere in the same book we find the author ingenuously boasting of his rare skill in crowding ornament.[1]

I am the shepherd of the skies,
Deputed to preserve
The planets as they sink and rise,
The stars that do not swerve.

Those, as they swing their lamps above
Our earth, by night possessed,
Are like the kindled fires of love
Within my darkling breast.

Or I am now the gardener
Of some green mead, methinks,
And through the grasses, here and there,
A white narcissus winks.

Were Ptolemy alive today,
And did he know of me,
"Thou art the maestro," he would say,
"Of all astronomy!"

A thing is sometimes mentioned on account of that which causes it to occur. In the verses I have just cited, I have compared two pairs of things with each other in one and the same stanza, the second of the poem beginning "Those, as they swing their lamps above": this is considered very unusual in poetry. However, I can also quote an even

[1] See *ibid.* pp. 39–

Obra doada por DAVID R. SIL

more perfect example of virtuosity from my own works—the likening of three, and even four pairs of things in a single stanza; both these feats have been accomplished in the piece here following.

Still yearning, and disquieted,
Still sleepless tossing on his bed,
Wits drunken and disorderly
With the coarse wine of calumny;

He shows to thee in one brief hour
Marvels defeating reason's power—
Now hostile, now the friend sincere,
Now running off, now pressing near;

As if this passion, this reproof,
To be complacent, or aloof,
Were stars conjuring, or in flight,
Fortune's benevolence, or spite.

After so long refusal, he
Took pity on my love, and me,
And I, who envied others' chance,
Am target now for envy's glance.

Together in a garden gay
With bloom we passed our happy day,
The while the bright and whispering flowers
Gave thanks to God for morning's showers:

As if the matin rains, indeed,
The clouds, and that sweet-scented mead,
Were dropping tears, and eyes bedewed,
And cheeks with roses all imbued.

Let none find fault with me or object to my use of the term "conjoining", for those who have knowledge of the stars speak of the meeting of two stars in a single degree as a "conjunction".

I have not yet exhausted my repertoire, but can cite a still more perfect example, the likening of five pairs of things in a single stanza, as in my next quotation.

She sat there privily with me,
And wine besides, to make us three,
While night profound o'ershadowing
Stretched out its long and stealthy wing.

A damsel fair—I would prefer
To die, than not live close with her;
And is it such a dreadful crime
To wish to live this little time?

It was as if myself, and she,
The cup, the wine, the obscurity,
Were earth, and raindrops, and pearls set
Upon a thread, and gold, and jet.

That is a point beyond which it is impossible for anyone to go; neither prosody nor the structure of words will tolerate more than five comparisons in the same stanza.

The writer of these comments and the composer of these verses was far more famous, and in truth gifted, as a theologian and a jurisprudent than as a poet; nevertheless he here hit upon a profound truth about Arabic poetry. To understand what the Arab poet was trying to do, it is necessary to disencumber oneself of the illusion that the poet is a kind of God-given genius, a creature set apart from other men, subject (like the artist and musician of popular imagination) to his own laws. The Arab poet is rather to be considered, and judged, as a craftsman like other craftsmen, a goldsmith of words, a jeweller of verbal images. In my *Anthology of Moorish Poetry* I have tried to explain and illustrate this topic, within the fruitful field of Andalusian verse, and the student is recommended to glance through that book, and in particular the introduction, for a fuller exposition of the variations played by the bards on the old and new themes. For the desert stock of images, astonishingly abundant to be developed out of so barren an environment, received rich reinforcement as the empire spread to embrace fertile valleys, forested plains and wooded heights, broad rivers and tumbling streams, orchards and gardens and the colours and scents of multitudinous flowers, the pale and dusky beauty of Turkish and Ethiop slave-girls, the gold and crimson sunshine of wine.

In the *dolce vita* of sophisticated affluence, the poets developed a kind of drama out of the pleasures and pains of love-making. This drama acquired its stock characters with their stock charac-

terisations: the lover and the beloved of course, and around and between them the confidant, the messenger, the spy, the slanderer, the reproacher. In due course the simple romance became a complicated allegory; the lover was metamorphosed into the poet seeking the prince's favour, his perhaps unattainable beloved; the other figures of the love-drama fitted all too neatly into the changed scenery of court-intrigue. This was followed presently by a further transformation, when the lover became the mystic and the beloved his God; how this new development worked out has been shown in my *Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ* (Dublin, 1956). As that book has now become somewhat rare, it may be useful to repeat here the analysis of how one poet (and he amongst the greatest) treated a range of conventional themes.[1]

(*a*) *Tears of blood.* It is conventionally accepted that lovers weep tears of blood.

(i) I, 11. Sleeplessness has wounded his eyelids, so that the swift-springing tears are mingled all with blood.

(ii) II, 40. Look thou upon a heart that is melted with ardent love for thee, and an eye overwhelmed in the waves of its blood-flecked tears.

(iii) VIII, 22. Surely enough is the blood that has flowed from my wounded eyelids for thee: is this that has come to pass enough for thee?

(iv) IX, 23. A passion had made my blood to flow mid the traces; it ran, a torrent, out of my eyelids, rained o'er the mountain-slope.

(v) XIII, 131. Nay, but my yearning rather is even to run, if so I may, upon an eyelid dabbled with blood, abandoning my feet.

(vi) XIV, 39. I slaughtered the sleep in mine eyelids as hospitality to the ghostly guest, and my tears flowed blood over my cheeks.

(*b*) *Fire and flood.* The poet describes himself as confronted by the double peril of fire (from his burning heart) and flood (from his brimming tears): these two threats sometimes cancel each other out.

(i) II, 5. And ah, my tears that flowed abundantly—but for the hot breaths panting from the fire of yearning, I had scarce escaped from the billows of my weeping.

[1] A full-length exposition of these themes and their elaboration is contained in the second volume of al-Nuwairī, *Nihāyat al-arab*.

(ii) XI, 21. Ye went far from me, and I saw none faithful except my tears, save only a sigh that mounted out of the hot flame of grief.

(iii) XII, 8. For out of my heart springs a flame that serveth well for a firebrand, and from mine eyes stream tears that flood like continuous rains.

(iv) XIV, 24. And naught is the sprinkling shower, but the flow of my tears; and naught the lightning-shaft, but the flaming glow of my sigh.

(*c*) *The lightning smile.* The flashing teeth of the beloved are compared with lightning.

(i) II, 28. And I pity the lightning in its night-courses, pretending to kinship with his mouth, and put to shame by the dazzling gleam of his parted lips.

(ii) VIII, 33–5. How could I forget thee, seeing mine eye, whenever a lightning-flash gleams, turneth eager to meet thee? If thou smilest behind the flash of thy veil, or if thou breathest upon the breeze thy tidings, then I am glad at heart, for the dawn of thy glittering teeth hath shone to mine eyes, and the scent of thy perfume is wafted abroad.

(iii) XIV, 46. The gleam of the lightning over the mountain-folds gave unto us (as bringing to our minds) the flash of thy teeth; and it was the best of gifts.

(*d*) *The invisible lover.* The lover is said to be wasted by grief, to such a point that he vanishes.

(i) II, 6. And welcome to the sickness I suffer on thy account, whereby I have become invisible even to myself: therein stand my proofs before the tribunal of love.

(ii) VII, 21. I concealed my love for you, and pain concealed me, until, by my life, I was well-nigh concealed even from myself.

(iii) IX, 34–5. The substance of all I have encountered and suffered for her (and in my account I have not exceeded due measure, but spoken in summary) is this: I am vanished of wasting, so that my visitor is baffled to find me; and how shall visitors see one who hath not even a shadow?

(iv) XI, 19. I have vanished of wasting even from wasting itself; yea, I have vanished from the cure of my sickness, and the cool waters that would assuage my burning thirst.

(v) XIII, 98. My mightiest yearning hath scraped away my bones, and my body has all perished, but for my two least parts.

(vi) XIV, 19. A lying imagining was the visitation of her image to him who resembled it—not substance of dream or vision.

(vii) XIV, 35. And I have come to a state—because of that wasting which hath not left one spot in me for further mischief—so that my presence is like to my absence to those who visit me.

(e) *Glances.* The beloved's glances are compared with arrows or sword-blades, piercing the lover's heart.

(i) III, 13. Refrain—may I have naught of thee!—and reject thou him whose bowels have been mercilessly wounded by wide-eyed enchanters.

(ii) V, 4. O thou who aimest, as one who aimeth the arrows of his glances from the bow of his curved eyebrows, against my bowels to transfix them.

(iii) V, 10. A sword his eyelids draw against my heart, and I see the very languor thereof doth whet its blade.

(iv) VI, 1. Guard thou thy heart if thou passest by Ḥājir, for the gazelles there dwelling have swords flashing in the orbits of their unveiled eyes.

(v) IX, 29. My people know well that I am slain by her glances: for in every limb of her she possesses a whetted point.

(vi) IX, 36. No eye hath alighted on any trace of me, nor have those wide eyes left any remaining mark of me in my passion.

(vii) XIII, 26. The arrow of the clever one of the tribe pierced me, but missed my vitals; the arrow of your glances hath scorched my bowels utterly.

(f) *Lips.* The beloved's lips are said to intoxicate, or alternatively to heal, the lover with their saliva.

(i) V, 19–20. Ice-cool are his deep-red lips, and sweet his mouth to kiss in the morning; yea, even before the toothpick's cleansing excelling the musk in fragrance and investing it with its own perfume. Of his mouth and his glances cometh my intoxication; nay, but I see a vintner in his every limb.

(ii) VI, 6. To the crimson of his lips I had recourse again, panting, as I were the thirstiest that ever came down to water, and he denied Euphrates; and none that came up from the water-hole was ever so slaked as I.

(iii) VII, 37. O how lovely is all that he delighteth in! Aye, and how sweet his saliva upon my lips!

(iv) XIII, 29. My sickness cometh from the languor of your eyelids, and my remedy is in the honeyed water of your teeth.

(v) XIII, 51–3. Ah, how I yearn for her radiant face, and how my heart thirsts for these dear red lips! By those lips alike and by her glances I am severally intoxicated: oh joy, for my double intoxication! And I perceive the very wine is inebriated by her lips' breath, and the honey, being confounded, submits to them.

(vi) XIV, 53–4. Is there not any inclination in thee towards showing compassion, and giving up that aversion which made thee turn so cruelly away from one thirsting for the water of thy lips? To moisten the thirsting throat of the sick man at his last gasp, whereby he may regain his health—that were the greatest boon.

The foregoing is but a small fragment of the large lexicon of themes and images which the Arab poet delighted to have by his elbow, or rather by heart. Out of these delicate materials he constructed with infinite patience and skill the arabesque of words and rhythms which it is so great a pleasure for the informed critic to analyse. This, however, was by no means the whole of the story. As if to compensate for the simplification and vocabulary and the abandonment of rare and outlandish words, the Abbasid poets invented a new art, the art of the *badī'*, or rhetorical figures. The morphology of the Arabic language made it comparatively easy to play tricks with words; the poets played this fascinating game to the top of their bent, so that in the end it becomes, truth to tell, somewhat tedious to follow them through the labyrinth of their tortuous inventiveness.[1] Detailed lists of these figures run to great length, and their names vary; here the principal ones only are enumerated, with illustrations drawn again from the poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ.

(1) *Jinās*. This figure, also called *tajnīs*, consists in using in close proximity two words having the same root letters but with different meanings. It is subdivided into numerous varieties.

(i) *al-mustaufī* (*al-tāmm*): complete correspondence.

ahlan bi-mā lam akun *ahlan* li-mauqi'ihí (II, 43)

(*Welcome* I cry to the hap I was never *worthy* should chance to me.)

[1] For a bibliography, see my *Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, p. 16 n. 1.

(ii) *al-mukhtalif* (*al-nāqiṣ*): the two words differ in their vocalisation,

hallā *nahāka nuhāka* 'an laumi mra'in (I, 20)

(Hath not *thy very reason forbidden thee* to reproach a man...?)

(iii) *al-mudhaiyal* (*al-zā'id*): one of the two words has an additional syllable.

fī ḥibbihī bi-lisāni *shākin shākirī* (VI, 16)

(Because he loves the beloved, upon the tongue of *complaint* and *thankfulness* all in one.)

(iv) *al-murakkab*: one of the two elements is made up of two distinct words.

jannatun 'indī rubāhā *amḥalat*
am ḥalat 'ujjiltuhā min jannatai (XIII, 64)

(A garden to me her hills are, whether *they be barren or fair* and fruitful: O may I speedily be brought to this, the first of my two Paradises.)

(v) *al-muṣaḥḥaf*: the two words differ in regard to the diacritical points of certain letters.

wa-'abarta l'ḥajūna wa-*jtazta* fa-*khtar*
-ta zdiyāran mashāhida l-autādī (IV, 14)

(And crossest al-Ḥajūn and *passest over*, and *choosest* as thy place of visitation the shrines of the holy saints.)

(vi) *al-muḍārī'* (*al-lāḥiq*): the two words differ only in respect of a single letter.

fa-bi-iqdāmi *raghbatin* ḥīna *yaghshā*
-ka bi-iḥjāmi *rahbatin yakhshākā* (VIII, 13)

(So, when *he cometh toward thee*, boldly urged by his *eagerness*, that moment *he dreadeth thee* with all the shrinking of *terror*.)

(vii) *jinās al-ishtiqāq*: two words derived from the same root.

mā-dhā yurīdu l-'*ādhilūna* bi-'*adhli* man
labisa l'khalā'ata wa-*starāḥa* wa-*rāḥā* (III, 16)

(What is it that the *reproachers* desire, in *reproaching* one who has clothed himself in profligacy, and *taken his rest* and *is at repose*?)

(viii) *al-mushābih* (*mimmā yushbih al-mushtaqq*): two words apparently but not actually derived from the same root.

'*utbu* lam *tu'tib* wa-*salmā aslamat*
wa-ḥamā ahlu-ḥimā *ru'yata rai* (XIII, 124)

('*Utbu satisfied* me not, and *Salmā betrayed* me, and the dwellers in the enclosure suffered me not to *look* upon *Rai*.)

(ix) *al-mukhālif* (*al-maqlūb*): two words with identical letters but in a different order.

wa-bi-*ladh'i* '*adhlī* lau aṭa'tuka ḍā'irī (VI, 11)

(Yet thou with thy *wounding reproach*, had I obeyed thee, wouldst work me harm.)

(2) *Ṭibāq*. This figure consists in mentioning two words of opposite meanings in the same line.

khairu l-uṣaiḥābi lladhī huwa *āmirī*
bi-l-*ghaiyi* fīhi wa-'an *rashādī ẓājirī* (VI, 7)

(The best of dear comrades is he, who *commands* me to *stray* for his sake, and *scolds* me away from the *right path* I would have followed.)

(3) *Takāfu'*. Similar to *ṭibāq*, but the opposition between the two words is only metaphorical.

mā *amarra* l-firāqa yā jīrata l-ḥai
-yi wa-*aḥlā* l-talāqi ba'da nfirādī (IV, 18)

(How *bitter* is separation, O neighbours of the sacred quarter, and how *sweet* is reunion after loneliness!)

(4) *Muqābala*. A pair of contrasting ideas elaborated in balanced compound.

minnī lahú dhullu l-khuḍū'i wa-*minhu lī*
'izzu l-manū'i wa-quwwatu l-mustaḍ'ifī (VII, 35)

(*To him I owe* the *humility of submission; his right over me* is the *pride* of *disdainful refusal*, the power of one who despises his victim's impotence.)

(5) *Tarṣī'*. Internal rhymes (*saj'*) exactly corresponding in rhythm.

arbat laṭāfatuhú 'alā nashri l-ṣabā
wa-*abat tarāfatuhu* l-taqammuṣa lādhā (V, 16)

(*Subtler is he* than the exhalation of the sweet East breeze; *he scorns in his luxuriance* to wrap him round even in the finest silks.)

(6) *Muwāẓana*. Internal rhymes with the final pair not quite rhyming.

lau tarā aina khamīlātu qubā
wa-*tarā'aina jamīlātu* l-*qubai* (XIII, 74)

(*If thou hadst seen the thickets of Qubā*, and *the lovely maidens* in their *gowns had shown themselves.*)

(7) *Mulā'ama.* Balance between pairs of phrases.

fa-min fu'ādī labībun nāba 'an qabasin
wa-min jufūniya dam'un fāḍa ka-l-diyami (XII, 8)

(For out of my heart springs a flame that serveth well for a firebrand, and from mine eyes stream tears that flood like continuous rains.)

(8) *Radd al-'ajz 'alā l-ṣadr.* The line ends with the same word or phrase as that with which it opens.

yā sākinī l-baṭḥā'i hal min 'audatin
aḥyā bihā *yā sākinī l-baṭḥā'i* (I, 12)

(O dwellers in the torrent-bed, is there to be any returning for me, whereby I may live once more, *O dwellers in the torrent-bed?*)

(9) *Ḥusn al-ta'līl.* Ingenious assignment of cause.

lā gharwa an takhadha l-'idhāra ḥamā'ilan
an ẓalla fattākan bihí waqqādhā (V, 12)

(No wonder it is, that he should have taken the hairs upon his cheek to be the suspender-thongs of his sword, seeing that he is ever smiting and slaying therewith.)

(10) *Tajāhul al-'ārif.* Feigned ignorance: the rhetorical question.

a-wamīḍu barqin bi-l-ubairiqi lāḥā
am fī rubā najdin arā miṣbāḥā
am tilka lailā l-'āmirīyatu asfarat
lailan fa-ṣaiyarati l-masā'a ṣabāḥā (III, 1–2)

(Is it a flash of lightning that shone over the mottled mountain, or do I see a lantern flickering in the hills of Nejd? Or is that Lailā of the Banū 'Āmir who unveiled her face at night, and converted the evening dusk into radiant dawn?)

(11) *Mubālagha.* Hyperbole.

'amma shti'ālan khālu wajnatihí akhā
shughulin bihí wajdan abā stinqādhā (V, 18)

(The mole upon his cheek embraces in its conflagration what man soever is passionately occupied with him, and scorneth to seek deliverance.)

(12) *Taḍmīn.* Quoting from the Koran, the Traditions, or a verse of poetry.

'*anati* l-ghazālatu wa-l-ghazālu li-wajhihí
mutalaffitan wa-bihí 'iyādhan lādhā (v, 15)

(The sun's self, yea, and the graceful gazelle submit humbly (Kor. xx, 110) before his face as he gazes about him, and take refuge and shelter in his beauty.)

fa-l-yaṣna'i l-rakbu mā shā'ū bi-anfusihim
humu ahlu badrin fa-lā yakhshauna min ḥarají (II, 38)

(And let the riders do whatsoever they will with themselves, they are the people of Badr, so that they shall fear not for any guilt.[1])

fatkun binā yazdādu minhu muṣauwiran
qatlā musāwira fī banī yazdādhā (v, 11)

(All the more sheds he suddenly our blood, picturing them that Musāwir slew[2] amongst the Banū Yazdādh.)

(13) *Talmīḥ.* Allusion, without direct quotation.

dhū l-fiqāri l-laḥẓu minhā abadan
wa-l-ḥashā minniya 'amrun wa-ḥuyai (XIII, 54)

(Dhu 'l-Fiqār is ever the cutting glance of her, and my poor heart is as 'Amr and Ḥuyai.[3])

(14) *al-Laff wa'l-nashr.* Themes are introduced one after the other, and then in turn explained.

fa-ḍu'fī wa-suqmī dhā ka-ra'yi 'awādhilī
wa-dhā ka-ḥadīthi l-nafsi 'ankum bi-raj'atí (XIV, 33)

(So that my weakness and my sickness—the latter is diseased as the judgement of my upbraiders, the former feeble as the whisper within me upon your authority that I shall return to you.)

[1] The reference is to a Tradition (see, e.g. al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta'arruf*, p. 49) according to which the Prophet promised immunity and Paradise to the heroes of the Battle of Badr.

[2] The poet refers to Musāwir ibn Muḥammad al-Rūmī, the hero whose exploits were celebrated by al-Mutanabbī in two famous odes, one of which served as a model for this poem.

[3] Dhu'l-Fiqār was the name of the sword of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib; 'Amr and Ḥuyai the names of two of his victims.

Obra doada por DAVID R. SIL

(15) *Ihām*. The *double entendre*, the more remote of the two meanings being the one intended.

kam min faqīrin thamma lā min ja'farin
wāfā l-ajārī'a sā'ilan shaḥḥādhā (v, 29)

(How many a conduit-mouth is there, that has reached to those sandy stretches seeking importunately for water, and of no little rivulet!)[1]

It has been stated earlier that the length of the formal ode varied from between about a score to a century of couplets; it should now be added that an exceptionally long monorhyme ode, the *Naẓm al-sulūk* of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, extends to as many as 761 *baits*. The possibility of composing even longer poems, reaching in some cases epic proportions, was opened up by the invention of the *muzdawij* form in which "the hemistichs of a poem rhyme together two by two".[2] (This form was the parent of the *mathnawi* which in Persian and Turkish allowed for the full development of epic poetry.) Usually this form was confined to the *rajaz* metre and to didactic verse, such as the well-known *Alfiya* of Ibn Mālik; other uses which may be mentioned are in the versification of the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* composed by Ibn al-Habbāriya (d. 509/1115) entitled *Nata'ij al-fitna*, and in a huge biography of the Prophet, *al-Fatḥ al-qarīb fī sīrat al-Ḥabīb*, by Ibn al-Shahīd (d. 793/1391). The really long poem however never came really natural to the Arabs, and the rapid change of rhyme involved has offended their aesthetic taste even down to the present day. In the classical period, the idea of unrhymed verse never arose; in the twentieth century a few experiments have been made in imitation of European models, but "free verse" has appealed more to the modern innovators whose compositions rival in obscurity the most opaque creations that the contemporary West has to offer.

To Moorish Andalusia belongs credit for the discovery and development of strophic verse, notably the *muwashshaḥ* ("the girdled"),

an arrangement in four-, five-, or six-line strophes, capable of wide variations in construction and rhyme, a typical scheme being *aa bbba*

[1] The commoner meaning of *faqīr* (here "conduit-mouth") is "a poor man"; that of *ja'far* ("little rivulet") the name of Ja'far the Barmecide.
[2] *Encyclopedia of Islam*[2], III, 800.

cccaa, &c., the final *aa* of the last strophe constituting a kind of *envoi*. The causes which led to the development of the strophe in Spain and not in the East are obscure; the influence of popular songs in Romance has long been suspected, and is reinforced by the recent discovery that in the earliest *muwashshaḥs* the *envoi* was actually in Romance. Some part may be due also to the special developments in the West of Arabic music.[1]

In the present selection two *muwashshaḥs* have been included to introduce the student to a particularly attractive variety of Arabic poetry. Needless to say, the novel form became immediately subject to the same conventions of subject-matter, image and rhetorical embellishment as those which governed the more traditional genres.

The present selection concludes with a few poems composed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; for a more extensive anthology of contemporary verse, down to about 1950, the student may like to consult my *Modern Arabic Poetry*. There he will encounter a number of examples of strophic poetry, and of other innovations within the field of rhymed and metrical verse. Later, more revolutionary developments yet await systematic study. Amongst the "modern" poems, some interest and even amusement may be stimulated by the formal ode composed in honour of Queen Victoria by that ardent Arab, Christian later turned Muslim, (Aḥmad) Fāris al-Shidyāq. The other specimens suggest the part played by the Arab poet in reviving the memory of the past glories of Islamic civilisation, and as a spokesman for renascent Arab nationalism. The Arab poet's patron was first the tribe, then the caliph, then the sultan, then the king; today it is the nation and the party and, by natural succession, the "leader".

[1] Gibb, *op. cit.* pp. 109–10. For a remarkably ingenious imitation of the technique of the *muwashshaḥ* see *ibid.* pp. 111–12.