

TEMPORAL AND GEOGRAPHIC EXTENSIONS OF ANDALUSI STROPHIC POETRY: *MUWASHSHAH*, *ZAJAL*, CAROLAND SONNET

Ed Emery [Universitas adversitatis]

My interest in this paper is to visit some of the outer limits of the *zajal* and *muwashshah*. It would be useful to have a cartography of these sung-poetic forms, both geographically and diachronically, in the process of their diffusion outwards from the time and place of their creation (al-Andalus, c.960 AD). In other words, their territorial spread and their historical periodisations. Equally it would be useful to attempt to identify the points where those forms reach the outer limits of their viability – where they are *not* taken up as models; where they are *abandoned* as models; or where they *transmute* into something else.¹

Song is quintessentially ephemeral. There are huge difficulties in mapping song – and particularly ancient song – and the ways in which it transits within cultures and between cultures. For such a mapping we lack even the most elementary tools and concepts. When a song-form such as the *muwashshah* or *zajal* circulates, its circulation is predicated on a multiplicity of variables which in our science remain largely unexamined, generally unproblematised, and lacking even in adequate terminology. For instance, in our discipline we habitually use the term *mu'arada* and its rough terminological equivalent *contrafactum*, sometimes translated as “pastiche”. However, as we all know, these terms are but poor attempts at encompassing the reality of poetic emulation, social deference, musical sharings, agonistic performance, technical bravura, linguistic game-play and nostalgic recuperation that constitute the poetic experience and exuberance of *muwashshah*.²

My intention here is indicative rather than exhaustive. “Andalusi strophic poetry” (the Arabic and Hebrew forms of *muwashshah* and *zajal*) is explored in terms of its outer extensions, under four headings: (a) *zajal*/*muwashshah* continuities in early European poetry; (b) the specific case of the sonnet; (c) the *détournement* of secular Andalusi poetry to religious ends; and (d) the *zajal* in the present day.

(a) Transmissions into early Europe – the “Arabic” thesis

Abu-Haidar has argued that there is little thematic transmission and transmission of imagery between the songs and poetry of al-Andalus and those of the troubadours.³ His was a strategic intervention in the ongoing debate which examines potential Arabo-Judaic influences on early “European” music. To this we have to add S.M. Stern’s short shrift for the “Arabic” thesis, where

he says: "I am strongly inclined to think that the majority of the proofs adduced in order to demonstrate that Western poets and Western writers at the beginning of the Middle Ages had knowledge of Arabic poetry or other forms of Arabic literature, and that they made use of their knowledge in their works, are lacking in validity."⁴ This he supplements (approvingly) with a quotation from Dozy: "We consider this question to be a completely idle one. We would like never to see it discussed again."⁵ Discourse thereby dead and buried.

At the same time, however, we know that there was a great importation of Arabic musical instruments into early Europe. The transition from *ud* to lute is well-known. Christopher Page's listing in the *Oxford History of Music* adds further examples: "During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries [...] new instrument names [...] began to make an appearance. These new words had no charisma; they were based on the usages of current vernacular speech and were directly tied to instruments in daily use, such as *viella*, *quitarra sarracenicica*, *rubeba*, *guiterna*, *liuto*, *cistolla*, *naccara*, and many more."⁶ The Arabic parentage of at least some of these instruments is self-evident.

One could answer both Abu-Haidar and Stern by saying that although *thematic* material (images, words, concepts, love formulations etc) do not cross borders, the same is not necessarily true of song *structures* and their associated *musics*. Good tunes and good rhythms travel well – and do so even between cultures that are at war with each other.⁷

Indeed, as regards Page's list, one could venture that it is unreasonable to suppose that the wholesale importation of this Arab instrumentarium was accompanied by a hermetic and equally wholesale exclusion of the Arabic musical repertoire (or Arabo-Judaic in the case of Andalus) associated with those self-same instruments. In other words, we might reasonably assume that the instruments brought some elements of their musical repertoire with them. And this might be particularly true in an era predating the dominance of tempered scales, when European music and Arabic music had a shared basis of modal forms.

It is certainly the case that we have very little musical notation from the medieval period that would offer proofs of transmission. We also have very little evidence regarding possible migrations of Andalusian musicians in early Europe. However, as a starting position it seems reasonable to err on the side of the possibility rather than the impossibility of such musical transmissions. For instance, it is not unreasonable to imagine musicians pursuing the kind of trajectory followed by the Jewish savant, poet and prolific writer of *muwashshahāt*, Abraham Ibn 'Ezra, whose twelfth-century travels took in Andalus, North Africa, Egypt, Provence, Lucca, Rome and even London.

Temporal and geographic extensions of Andalusí strophic poetry

So what of the transfer of poetic forms, as opposed to thematic content? In medieval European culture there is an insistent presence of the AABBBB verse form that characterises the Andalusí form known as *zajal*. It is closely associated with popular street manifestations and with “low-life” culture. *Laudes*, *ballate*, mystery plays,⁸ pilgrim song, execution song, carols, political diatribe etc. In Spain it is the characteristic form of the *Cantigas de Santa María*.⁹ In Italy it is known as the jongleur-form (*giullaresca*), and is familiar stuff in schoolbooks.¹⁰ For instance we find it in the medieval *ballata*-writer Jacopone da Todi. Thus:

Que farai, fra Iacovone?
Èi venuto al paragone.

Fusti al Monte Pelestrina
anno e mezzo en disciplina:
loco pigliasti malina,

donne hai mo la prescione. [etc]¹¹

In English literary criticism, however, the form seems to pass unobserved and curiously nameless. In a dismissive aside Stern comments that “the search [for Arabo-Andalusí influences] was widened even further, and finally took in English carols.”¹² Curiosity aroused, we turn to the English carol tradition, and a casual trawl produces examples of poetic forms which even the most determined gainsayer might accept as “*zajalesque*” in terms of their versification. For instance:

I am as light as any roe
To praise women where that I go.

To unpraise women it were a shame,
For a woman was thy dame.
Our Blessed Lady bereth the name
Of all women wher that they go. [etc]¹³

These *zajalesque* verse-forms are in fact widespread. Their immense popularity in medieval England is attested by the fact that they appear in 195 out of the 500 extant English carols in Greene’s “*The Early English Carols*”.¹⁴ It also has a substantial presence in the early 14th-century *Red Book of Ossory*,¹⁵ and is later found in that most popular of early English tunes, “*Greensleeves*”.¹⁶ This is a field that awaits exploration.

Since the initial AA header is a non-repeating refrain, the individual BBBA verses are in a sense separate from the initial refrain. It would be no surprise to discover that the BBBA has an independent life of its own. This

is indeed the case in both the Italian and the English popular traditions. For instance we have an English pilgrim song in “*zajalesque*” form describing the travails of the sea-crossing to Santiago de Compostella:

Men may leave all gamys That saylen to Seynt Jamys; For many a man it gramys When they begin to sayle.	A sack of strawe were there ryght good, For some must lyg them in theyr hood; I had as lefe be in the wood, Without mete or drink.
For when they have taken the see, At Sandwyche, or at Wynchylsee, At Bristow, or where that hit be, Theyr hearts begin to fayle. [...]	For when that we shall go to bedde, The pump was nigh our beddes hede, A man were as good to be dede, As smell thereof the stynk. ¹⁷

The simple BBBA form is arguably a dangerously narrow database on which to generalise about origins and circulations of verse forms.¹⁸ However, were we to find examples with the BBBA preceded by a more complex “header” strophe, in the manner of Andalusí strophic poetry, we would perhaps be on firmer ground. Such a possibility is provided by another nautical song in the English tradition, “The Rambling Sailor”. Here we have the characteristic “*zajalesque*” tercets, the final refrain, and a header rhyming in ABAB (“bold” and “too” are quasi-rhymes in the sung version).

I am a sailor stout and bold,
Long time I have ploughed the ocean
To fight for my king and country too,
For honour and promotion.
I said: “Brother sailors I will bid you adieu.
I will go no more to the seas with you,
I will travel the country through and through,
And still be a rambling sailor.”¹⁹

With this song (apparently eighteenth-century), and with others,²⁰ we are fortunate in having extant music, which may repay detailed examination. It is a pity that research in this area appears to be practically non-existent, because even Stern, having opted to “desist from pursuing this problem further”, admits that the problem of potential Arabo-Andalusí derivations is “of fundamental importance”.²¹

Given the lack of extant musical notation,²² it may turn out that rhythm is a more interesting area of research than melody. In modern *zajal* performance the stronger element appears to be *rhythm* (hence the use of percussion instruments such as *darbukka* and frame drum). Following this line of approach we might usefully examine the *zajal/laude* connection in terms of the

historical performative practices of Sufi parades, comparing them with the performance practices of the medieval guilds of *laudisti* which organised Marian processions in Italy in the mid-1200s, and the later processions of the flagellants,²³ although again we may find ourselves in a field of pure surmise.

It also seems natural to separate out two trends in the transmission of *zajalesque* forms – on the one hand literary forms, on the other popular and folk forms (problematical terms, of course). It is not surprising to find *zajalesque* forms circulating widely within popular culture, and a thorough-going trans-European inventory would probably bring in multiple examples. However we must accept that their survival in a pure form in literary milieux is less likely, given that medieval poets had a taste for evolved forms and artful complexity, and also given the transition away from oral culture to scribal culture and to poetry-as-writing.

(b) Sonnet

Let us assume (as seems to be the case) that the *zajal* form originating in al-Andalus radiates outwards and (passing via vectors as yet unresearched) becomes very popular in Europe. In the broadest terms this proposition seems to have been accepted for the relationship between the *zajal*, the *cantigas* and the *laudes*. Necessarily we then have to ask ourselves whether the more evolved and literary forms of the *muwashshah* (i.e. the multi-variegated forms characteristic of the later period²⁴) do not also exhibit a spread into Europe. My proposal – on which I have not yet been able to do the work – is that the *muwashshah* should be explored side by side with the (equally multi-variegated) genre of the *canzone*, and possible influences should be examined.

As a practitioner and devotee of the noble new art of the “*excellētissimus*” *canzone*, Dante Alighieri sets out its parameters and antecedents in *De vulgari eloquentia*.²⁵ In spirit and intention the book shares much with Ibn Sana’ al-Mulk’s guide to the art of the *muwashshah*, the *Dar al-Tiraz*, and a comparative study of the two would be instructive. However there are also lexical curiosities at the level of poetic terminology. For instance the word *stanza* (room, verse), introduced by Dante as a neologism in his “naming of parts” for the *canzone*, is lexically equivalent to the Arabic *bayt* (room, house, verse);²⁶ his “*frons*” is lexically close to the Arabic *matla’*; the term “*caudato*” in Dante and Antonio da Tempo (“*sonetto caudato*”),²⁷ echoes the Arabic “*mudayyal*” of Ibn Sana’ al-Mulk; and the “*volta*” characteristic of both *canzone* and sonnet has to be set alongside its lexical equivalent “*dawr*” in the *muwashshah*.

Shifting the focus, and still in the area of literary transmission, let us now turn to the sonnet. In my view there is an arguable case for locating the

roots of the sonnet in the *zajal* / *muwashshah* poetic forms of al-Andalus.²⁸

Current opinion is that the sonnet-form relates back to Provençal epistolary verse-forms known as *tenzone* or *tenso*.²⁹ These were poetic interchanges (apparently taking place in real time, like Arabic competitive poet-teering, but later enacted via the extended time of written correspondence) which debated philosophical and ethical propositions, and which sometimes took the form of a contest of invective. It is worth noting that in an early manifestation of *tenzone* available to us (in the poetry of the troubadour Marcabrun) the *tenzone* has the *zajalesque* BBBA form.³⁰ This in itself opens the possibility of a genetic relation between the sonnet and *zajal* / *muwashshah* forms mediated via the *tenzone*.

Moving from the general to the specific, there are significant instances in which the sonnet appears to share formal and performative characteristics with Arabo-Jewish Andalusī strophic poetry. I present the case summarily, since this is not the place to pursue an entire thesis.

The first evidence is morphological. In a broad sense, sonnets *look like* verses of *muwashshahāt*. Prior to the emergence of the canonical 4+4+3+3 format of the sonnet, the on-the-page format in which the sonnets were recorded in manuscript is visually similar to the physical structure of written-out *muwashshahāt* (at least as we have them today). For instance in the Escorial ms. of the sonnets of Guittone d'Arezzo the sonnets have their initial 8 lines written out across 4 lines, and the two sets of tercets written out across 2 lines.³¹ The impression of similarity is reinforced when one finds particular later-period variants of the *muwashshah* having a form that one might call "proto-sonnet". One example is the *muwashshah* no. 14 of Ibn al-'Arabi, printed elsewhere in this volume [see pp. 346-7 below]. Disregarding the *matla'*, the individual verses offer a sonnet-like rhyming structure of ABABAB CDE CDE. There is nothing probative here, merely food for thought to establish a field of possibility.

If one then goes further and examines the structural constants of both *muwashshah* and sonnet, additional similarities emerge. For instance, the early "Sicilian" sonnet indulges in excesses of internal rhyming and internal fragmentation of the poetic line. This is precisely a characteristic of the later-period *muwashshah*. Below I reproduce one of the early Italian sonnets produced "at the court of Federico II" by the notary Giacomo da Lentini (taken by Italianists to be the inventor of the sonnet). It is striking how he strives after the kind of internal rhyming and assonance that characterises Arabic and Hebrew poetry of the period. One would almost say that Giacomo is trying to write like an Arab.³² By way of indication I have set his sonnet next to a *muwashshah* verse from Abraham Ibn 'Ezra.

Giacomo da Lentini [fl. c.1210-1260]:

1. Eo viso – e son diviso – da lo viso
e per aviso – credo ben visare;
però diviso – viso – da l'aviso,
ch'altr' è lo viso – che lo divisare.
2. E per aviso – viso – in tale viso
de lo qual meno posso divisare.
Viso – a vedere quell' è paraviso,
che non è altro se non Deo divisare;
3. N'tr' aviso – e paraviso – non è diviso
che non è altro che visare in viso,
però mi sforzo tuttor avisare.
4. E credo, per aviso, – che da viso
già mai meno poss' essere diviso
che l'uomo vi 'nde possa divisare.³³

Abraham Ibn 'Ezra [b. 1092/93, d. 1167]:

'ani, 'ani / be-tokh 'ani
u-mahani – kemo 'oni
be-yam 'oni / we-hinnani
be-ḥanneni / lema 'ani / ke-'vot.³⁴

As commented by Weinberger, Ibn 'Ezra is engaged in the technique of paronomasia (Ar. *tajnis*), a punning play on words similar in sound but disparate in meaning, which is used in conjunction with intensive alliteration and assonance.³⁵

Another key element is the clear structural distinction between the opening section and the body (*aghṣan*) of the Arabic strophic verse. This is matched by a similar stylistic requirement in the Italian sonnet, where there has to be a marked change of tone in the tercet section (*volta*).³⁶ “The *volta*, initiating a ‘turn’ or change in tone, mood, voice, tempo, or perspective – a shift in focus, a swerve in logic, a change of heart, a moment of grace – occurs after the eighth line, or in the space between the eight and ninth lines.”³⁷

A further structural constant of the *mūwashshah* is the quotational impulse of the outgoing line (*kharja*) of the *mūwashshah* / *zajal*, as defined by the stylistic requirement for *verba dicendi* (“he/she/it said”).³⁸ This has a precise equivalent in the sonnet’s own impulse to quotation and proverb, with early Italian sonnets similarly having *sententiae* or proverbial statements as their closing lines.³⁹

Further on the quotational content of these poems, among Jewish writers

of *muwashshahāt* there is a tendency to introduce quantities of Biblical and religious quotation into their poems. "Like so many Spanish-Hebrew conventions, the use of Biblical phrasing was brought over from Arabic literature, where it was based on the Koran and was known as *iqtibas*, literally the lighting of one flame from another."⁴⁰ We find this technique highly developed in the sonnet, in the terms outlined by Antonio da Tempo in his *ars poetica*, the *Summa artis rithmici vulgaris dictaminis* (AD 1332).⁴¹

Beyond structural similarities, however, both sonnet and *muwashshah / zajal* have to be located in terms of their *social ethos*. Here we find similarities at the meta-level of performative context (competitive rhyming, agonistic bravura, peer dialogue, codes of deference etc), all of which need to be taken into account. A critical similarity is that both genres function as a means of social interchange between peers (e.g. as vehicles of peer-group consolidation between fellow poets) or in relations implying deference to persons of higher social status. The currency for this interchange is *mu'arada*, the copying of the rhyme, versification and possibly content of a poem created by a fellow poet. The intensity of the *tenzone* sonnet-exchanges between Dante and his fellow poets speaks for itself.⁴² As a discipline, the writing of rhyming strophic verse in both *muwashshah / zajal* and sonnet is seen by its practitioners as a difficult art in which to excel,⁴³ in a domain that is often as much public as private. Literary mountaineering. This is a calculated and self-conscious display of virtuosity, rising to the challenge of one's fellow poets, and loss of face arises out of not being able to respond adequately.

Still within the area of social ethos, mention should be made of the treatment of the beloved. In both sonnet and *muwashshah / zajal* there is much that has to do with relations between men and women (and, in Arabic and Jewish Andalusī poetry, relations between men and men).⁴⁴ Nothing new in this, of course. What is noteworthy, however, is the shared taste for an artificially constructed mysticism of discourse. This is accompanied by the interpretation of dreams as a thematic constant. And in particular a tendency towards identifying the figure of the beloved with the figure of the divine. And hence contemplations on divine love (see below). These are big questions, and cannot be dealt with here. So allow me to conclude with a minor sideways glance at Arab-mediated Greek geometrics – the intriguing possibility that the eventual canonical 11/14 form of the sonnet (number of syllables / number of lines), might be related to the medieval value for Greek *pi*.⁴⁵

To summarise: Italian Studies has assumed that the sonnet was created by the notary Giacomo da Lentini, and that its existence is parallel to, and entirely separate from, the Arabic and Jewish poetic traditions. Since these genres have so many features in common, it is reasonable to ask whether the separation really is so total, and whether there may be possible crossovers.

(c) The *détournement* of secular poetic models to religious ends

In one of the key transformations of Andalusī strophic poetry, the focus of the love discourse is consciously shifted from earthly love to divine love. In some poets the shift is explicit and purposive – seeking to draw men away from fleshly concerns towards the divine. In others the process may be more complex: an inner process of poetry wherein the already hazy definition of gender of the beloved sits alongside an additional indistinctness of whether an earthly or a divine beloved is being addressed. In yet others the transition may be a result of personal crisis and the abandonment of former lifestyles.

For instance, in his early days Moshe Ibn ‘Ezra (c.1055–after 1135) wrote Hebrew-language *muwashshahāt* that were erotic, and in one case apparently homoerotic.⁴⁶ He then renounced these as youthful sins and turned to the writing of religious *muwashshahāt*⁴⁷ – hence an instance where the usages of *muwashshah* reached an outer limit of acceptability (indeed the poetry of renunciation became a genre in its own right, *mukaffir*).

The Sufī divine Ibn al-‘Arabi of Murcia (1165-1240) knew at first-hand the dangers of a lack of clarity about gender definitions and divine/human attributes of love – the text of the *Tarjuman al-ashwaq* is devoted entirely to rebutting those who criticised his love poetry for its apparently erotic content.⁴⁸ In that volume he glosses his own poems as texts addressing the divine moment. He was also, as we are told, the first to take the essentially secular form of the Arabic *muwashshah* and consciously redirect it for devotional purposes.⁴⁹ Ibn al-‘Arabi’s fellow Sufī poet al-Shushtari was the first Arab poet to make major use of the *zajal* for religious themes.⁵⁰

However in Jewish strophic poetry the religious redirection of the *muwashshah* was under way well before the time of Ibn al-‘Arabi. All the major Jewish poets in al-Andalus, including Ibn Gabirol and Abraham Ibn ‘Ezra, wrote *muwashshahāt* in the religious mode – with Ibn ‘Ezra writing more than two hundred.⁵¹

The same secular/spiritual ambiguity exists likewise in relation to wine poetry (a genre also taken up by the Jewish poets of Andalus), where the legitimacy of wine-drinking is in play. The ambiguity becomes doubly ambivalent when, as in the Sufī poets, the celebration of “wine” is used as a metaphor for the celebration of divine union, as in the poem below.

The religious use of *tawshih* is well represented in the following devotional *muwashshah* by Ibn al-‘Arabi. Note (a) the use of the wine motif; (b) the tension between rational inquiry and unconditional faith; and (d) the alternating charge of carnal and divine in the strikingly erotic final line. This is a famous *kharja*, used in Hebrew-language *muwashshahāt* by Abraham Ibn ‘Ezra and Todros Abulafia, and in the *zajal* No. 62 by Ibn Quzman.⁵²

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“Sa’altu juda faliqi al-sabah, hal li min sarah”

by Ibn al-‘Arabi of Murcia (1165-1240)

0. I asked the generosity of the creator of the dawn: // whether there will be any release for me,

1. And he said: “No, because you are effect,
And responsible for the affairs of your kingdom;
Not everything that someone says meets acceptance;

Bodies and souls have come, // trying to depart in the evening.

2. He who believes in the blessed encounter will have it,
And in the skills of the adversary will find it;
He who is like him cannot avoid it.

We said to him: “These human likenesses // are oppression and relief.”

3. He who believes in rationality is not a companion;
Because a companion is one who believes in the tradition;
I say to everyone who says to me “Tell me”:

“Fill up glasses for him in a row // in the remote house.”

4. Friend, in wine the soul finds comfort –
Say it in eloquent speech,
Between censors and councillors,

By God, in my opinion he who drinks wine // is not committing a sin.

5. The fragrance of my Beloved carries a moistness;
Since my wish is that which he shows,
I declare: “My urge and my desire,

My beloved, if you have eaten apples, // come and breathe on me, *Aaah.*”⁵³

In modern times...

The *muwashshah*, with its associated “Andalusi music”, has become part of the classical music scene of the Arab world. These days it evokes images of propriety, family concerts, cultural nostalgia and acceptable behaviours. However the art of *tawshih*, in its extension into our own times, also has a more raucous and earthy quality in the form of the *zajal*, the form pioneered by Ibn Quzman in al-Andalus.

The thousand-year-old Arabic tradition of strophic competitive (agonistic) poetearing is still very much alive in societies such as Lebanon, where improv-

ised *zajal* performances by professional reciters feature as an element of rite-of-passage events such as weddings. In fact *zajal* is elevated to the status of Lebanese national culture, featuring at local festivals and on television programmes where poets vie in poetic improvisation, sometimes spoken, sometimes sung, and generally to a musical accompaniment.⁵⁴ There are websites dedicated to this art (some created by expatriate Lebanese communities in Canada, France and Australia), where visitors can download films and recordings of live *zajal* performances, as well as reading *zajals* and composing their own *zajal* poetry on-line.⁵⁵

There is a stylistic proximity between the art of the *zajal* and Black American rap. Hence it is not surprising to see the growth of a distinctive Arabic rap genre embodying elements of Black hip-hop, particularly among young Palestinians, where it takes a fiercely political turn. This develops alongside the *zajal* poetry which was a foundational element in creating the culture of the two Palestinian *intifadas*. In Israel, for example, the Lod-based Palestinian group Dam have updated the *mu'arada* tradition of their Andalusī forebears by taking the Israeli-Jewish nationalistic song “Born Here” and putting their own words to it, performed in both Hebrew and Arabic.⁵⁶

Hence *zajal* also functions in the Arab world as a vehicle for political statement and trenchant social comment. A particularly notable example is the poetry of the Egyptian poet Ahmed Fuad Negm, as performed by the blind singer and *ud*-player Sheikh Imam of Cairo. During the 1970s, recordings were issued of these poems – for instance by the French company Harmonia Mundi – along with underground cassette recordings, and they fast acquired the status of dissident anthems. Banned by the authorities, of course. A much-loved favourite is his song about President Nixon’s visit to Cairo in May 1974. It is noteworthy partly for its Sufi rhythms, and partly for the fact that it is a “laughing song”. The translation is reproduced here, and the Arabic text and transcription are in the Appendix below.

"Nixon's Visit to Cairo – May 1974": a *zajal* by Ahmed Fuad Negm, as sung by Sheikh Imam (1918-95)⁵⁷

Translation:

You arrived, Papa Nixon, // the wideboy of Watergate,
And they loaded you with many honours // those sultans of *ful* and oil,

And they opened for you a wide road from Rās at-Tīn to Mecca,
So that from there you could head off to Akko
And so that people could say: “He has done the pilgrimage.”
It was a real travelling circus.
Your blessing, family of the Prophet.

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The day of your arrival your agents had prepared for you
A nice ceremony of exorcism,
Which had all the whores fluttering about,
And the pederasts and the hypocrites,
And Sheikh Shamhūresh⁵⁸ in person
Possessed the priestess; there were lots of processions
Which were followed by a procession of spiders,
All ranked in order of importance,
Of course.

The people who invited you told you
“Come and eat some sweets and pastries,”
And since you are a bit naïve,
You thought we were an easy prey.
You were sinking,⁵⁹ they wanted to give you support,
You undesirable partner.
I spit in your face,
In the guise of a blessing.

Listen to this, and remember it,
Even though you're not going to be around for long:
I won't say either welcome, or not welcome,
I won't tell you “Come” or “Go away”,
But they do say that Egyptian flesh
Is corrosive for whatever it touches,
fed as it is on *koshari*,⁶⁰
Beans with oil and *abu zeit*.

It was a real travelling circus,
Your blessing, family of the Prophet.

To conclude this paper, it remains only to cite (by way of ironic counterpoint) one of a set of the only *zajals* I know to have been written in English. It was written, in unrhymed form, by a staff member at the American University of Beirut:

easy to lead a biblical life in a biblical land
i leave my office to find a locust singing in the hall
mo wrestles for months with a mystery disease
before he up and leaves me to wrestle his students
another american teacher gets a gun waved at him

neither hello nor adieu
blooms the helicopter music
*mcdonalds bombed again*⁶¹

Appendix: Arabic text

نيكسون بابا

شرفت يا نيكسون بابا يا بتاع الووترجيت
عملوا لك قيمة وسيما سلاطين الفول والزيت

فرشوا لك اوسع سكة
من راس التين على مكة
وهناك تنفذ على عكا

ويقولوا عليك حجيت
ما هو مولد ساير داير
شي لله يا صاحب البيت

جواسيسك يوم تشريفك على كيفك نصبوا الزار
تتقصع فيه المومس والقارح والمدار

والشيخ شمهورش راكب
ع الكوبيا وعات يا مواكب
ويواقم الزقه عناكب

ساحبين على حسب الصيت
طبعاً

عزموك فقالوا تعال تاكل بقبون ومريسه
قمت انت لآذك مهيف صدقت ان احنا فريسه

طيت احقوك بالزقه
يا عريس الغفله يا خقه
مات وشك خد لك تفه

شوبش من صاحب البيت

خدمتي كلام بيقا لك ولو انك مش حتميش
لا حقول املا ولا جهلا ولا تيجي ولا ما تجيش

بيقولوا اللحم المصري
مطرح ما بيسري بيهرى
وده من تاثير الكشرى

والفول والمسوس ابو زيت
والله ده مولد ساير ناير
شي لله يا صاحب البيت

Transcription from recording:

1. sharafti ya Nixon baba //
ya bta' il-waterrate
'amalū lak qīma wa-sīma //
salatīn el-ful w' el-zeit [Repeats]

farashu lak awsa' sekka
min Ras et-Tīn 'ala Mekka [Repeats]

wa hināk tinfid 'ala 'akā
wiqūluu 'alik hagīt (ha-ha-haa)

mā huw mulid, sāyir dāyir
shī lāh yi sahb el-beit

2. gawasiisaki yum tashrifak //
'ala kayfak nasabuu el-zaar
tataqassabi' fīihu el-mūmis //
w' il-qāreh w' il-mindār [Repeats]
[Aside] hubba-hubba-hubba

w' il'shikh Shamūrish rākib
'a il-kud ya wa hāt ya mawakib [Repeats]

wi bawaaqi iz-zaffa 'ana'akīb
sahbīn 'ala hasab il-sibt (tab'an)

mā huw mulid, sāyir dāyir
shī lāh yi sahb el-beit

3. sharafti ya Nixon baba //
ya bta' il-waterrate
'amalū lak qīma wa-sīma //
salatīn el-ful w' el-zeit

(farashū) farashū lak awsa' sekka
min Rās et-Tīn 'ala Mekka

(wa hināk) wa hināk tinfid 'ala 'akaa
wiqūlū 'alik hagīt (ha-ha-haa)

mā huw mulid, sāyir dāyir
shī lāh yi sahb el-beit

4. 'azamūka fa-qālū ta'ala //
ta'akul banbun wa-harīsa
qumt' inta 'ilinak mahyaf //
sadaqti in ihna farīsa [Repeats]

tabbīt lihquk bil-zaffa

ya 'arīs il-gaflah ya kheffa
hāt wi-shak khud lak taffa
shūbash min sahb il-beit

mā huw mulid, sāyir dāyir
shī lāh yi sahb el-beit

5. sharafti ya Nixon baba //
ya bta' il-waterrate
'amalū lak qīma wa-sīma //
salatīn el-ful w' el-zeit

(farashū) farashū lak awsa' sekka
min Rās et-Tīn 'ala Mekka

(wa hināk) wa hināk tinfid 'ala 'akā
wiqūlū 'alik hagīt
[Aside] (ha-ha-haa)

mā huw mulid, sāyir dāyir
shī lāh yi sahb el-beit

6. khud minni kalām yibqā lak //
wa-law innak mush hat'aish
lā haqūl ahlan wa lā gahlan //
wa lā tīghi wa lā tagīsh [Repeats]

bi-qūlū 'l-lahm el-musri
matrah mā biyesri bīhrī [Repeats]

wi da min ta'thīr il-kushari
w'-il fūl w' il-sūs abu zīt

w' illah mulid sāyir dāyir
shī lāh yi sahb el-beit.

7. sharafti ya Nixon baba //
ya bta' il-waterrate
'amalū lak qīma wa-sīma //
salatīn el-ful w' el-zeit

(farashū) farashū lak awsa' sekka
min Rās et-Tīn 'ala Mekka

(wa hināk) wa hināk tinfid 'ala 'akā
wiqūlū 'alik hagīt (ha-ha-haa)

mā huw mulid, sāyir dāyir
shī lāh yi sahb el-beit.

NOTES

1. A striking case is the Rome-based Jewish poet Immanuel Romano c. 1265–c. 1330, who eschewed the *muwashshah* that had been the stock-in-trade of his Andalusí poetic forebears, and chose to write sonnets instead, in both Hebrew and Italian.
2. In research into medieval strophic poetry, the most obvious analytic shortcoming is over-concentration on textual aspects and shortage of comment on the musics.
3. J. Abu-Haidar, “The lack of metaphorical affinity between the *muwaššahāt* and the early Provençal lyrics”, in F. Corriente and A. Sáenz-Badillos (eds.), *Poesía Estrófica. Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional sobre Poesía Estrófica Árabe y Hebrea y sus Paralelos Romances (Madrid, diciembre de 1989)*. Madrid, 1991, pp. 11-22.
4. S.M. Stern, “Literary connections between the Islamic world and Western Europe in the early Middle Ages: did they exist?”, in *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry: Studies by Samuel Miklos Stern, selected and edited by L.P. Harvey*, OUP, Oxford, 1974, p. 214.
5. *ibid.*, p. 220.
6. C. Page, “Instruments and instrumental music before 1300”, *New Oxford History of Music*, OUP, Oxford, 1990, p. 474.
7. In an exemplary study Adela Peeva researches the inter-ethnic circulation of the Turkish song known as *Üsküdar* through the mutually conflicting cultures of the Balkans, with each faction rewording the song and claiming it as part of their own exclusive national heritage. [*Whose is this Song?*, dir. A. Peeva, Bulgaria, 2003.]
8. Complex dialogic forms of BBBA are contained in the two shepherds’ plays in the Wakefield mystery cycle. *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*, ed. A.C. Cawley, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1958, pp. 29-63.
9. “Bien puede decirse que el Laudario Iacopónico es, despues de las Cantigas Alfonsinas, la colección lírica más zejelesca de la Romania”, Menéndez Pidal cited in Roncaglia, Aurelio, “Nella preistoria della lauda: ballata e strofe zajelesca”, in *La metrica*, ed. R. Cremante and M. Pazzaglia, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1972, p. 313. The meaning of this in terms of “Arabic influences” is much contested. However if words are to be believed, there is no reason to doubt the contiguity of the court of Alfonso X with Arabic culture. “[Alfonso X] fece costruire a Murcia una scuola superiore in cui, sotto la direzione dell’erudita musulmano ar-Ricoti, studiarono cristiani, ebrei e musulmani.” [A. Paltrinieri, *Il ‘Libro degli Inganni’ tra oriente e occidente: Traduzioni, tradizione e modelli nella Spagna alfonsina*, Le Lettere, Torino, 1972.]
10. The dialogic form known as *contrasto* is particularly suggestive of *zajalesque* crossovers. See the “Castrá fiorentino”, the “Contrasto della Zerbitana” and Cielo d’Alcamo’s “Rosa fresca aulentissima” (one of the earliest extant Italian vernacular poems) in Gianfranco Contini, *Poeti del Duecento*, Classici Ricciardi-Mondadori, Milano-Napoli, 1995, vol. I / i, pp. 177, 915 and 919.
11. Contini, *op. cit.*, vol. 2 / i, p. 97.
12. Stern, “Literary connections...”, p. 211.
13. “A Woman is a Worthy Thing”, in R.L. Greene (ed.), *The Early English Carols*, OUP, Oxford, 1977, p. 234. Although the *zajalesque* forms appear insistently in pre-Reformation England, associated with carolling, popular dance and the mystery plays, they seem to disappear thereafter. This might be explained by disapproval of their

Marian and Catholic associations.

14. R.L. Greene, *op. cit.*

15. R.L. Greene, *The Lyrics of the Red Book of Ossory*, Medium Aevum monographs V, Blackwell, Oxford, 1974.

16. *English Melodies from the 13th to the 18th Century*, ed. Vincent Jackson, Dent, London, 1910, pp. 227-33.

17. "Sea Song", in *Ballads and Ballad Poems*, ed. Guy Pocock, J.M. Dent, London and Toronto 1921, pp. 52-5. Pocock gives no information about this carol, but it appears to be of some antiquity.

18. One well-examined early example of BBBA in the European tradition is the *Pos de chanter m'es pres talentz* of Guillaume IX of Aquitaine (1071-1127), which survived into the 1300s and for which Jeanroy provides a fragment of musical notation. The poem is examined by Gregor Schoeler in his "The origins of the poetic forms of the troubadours: the liturgical and Arabic theories", in Corriente and Sáenz-Badillos, *op. cit.* pp. 325-36:

Pos de chantar m'es pres talentz,
Farai un vers, don sui dolenz:
mais non serai obediens

En Peitau ni en Lemozi etc

19. *Oxford Book of Sea Songs*, ed. Roy Palmer, OUP, Oxford, 1986. A ballad-sheet song, apparently modelled on an earlier Irish song "The Rambling Suiler" (beggar).

20. E.g. the ballad "A Caveat against Cutpurses" in Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, ed. E. M. Waith, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1963, pp. 105-111. Here too we have an annotated tune, the Elizabethan "Packington's Pound" (in Michael Raven (ed.) *English Country Dance Tunes*, Market Drayton, 1999, p. 67).

21. Stern, "Literary connections...", p. 214

22. "So far as I know, we have no information on the manner in which the Arab *muwashshah* was sung." Stern, "Literary connections...", p. 208.

23. My own conjecture is that the Dominicans, coming from Spain and establishing a strong presence in Bologna (a founding locus of both *laudes* and sonnets), may prove to have been a vector of transmission.

24. By the "later period" I refer to the likes of Ibn al-'Arabi and Abraham Ibn Ezra, where the verse forms of the *muwashshah* are multi-variegated. In Ibn al-'Arabi's case they reflect development in popular song. Within the Jewish tradition the evolutions of complexity are so intense that variation away from the standard form become the norm rather than the exception.

25. Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, ed. and trans. Stephen Botterill, Cambridge Medieval Classics, CUP, 1996.

26. "This word [*stanza*] has been invented solely with respect to the art [of the *canzone*, namely] a room able to hold, or a receptacle for the whole art." *The Latin Works of Dante Alighieri*, J.M. Dent, London, 1904, pp. 97-8.

27. "De sonetis caudatis et eorum forma", in Antonio Da Tempo, *Summa artis rithimici vulgaris dictaminis*, ed. Richard Andrews, Commissione per i Testi di Lingua,

Bologna, 1977, pp. 22-4.

28. The link between sonnet and *zajal* was first posited in 1956 by Silvestro Fiore, *Über die Beziehungen zwischen der arabischen und der frühitalienischen Lyrik, Kölner Romanistische Arbeiten*, vol. 8, Köln, 1956. pp. 77-82. This suggestion seems not to have been taken up by research. My thanks to Gregor Schoeler for this.

29. P.G. Beltrami, "The sonnet", in P. Hainsworth and D. Robey, *The Oxford Companion to Italian Literature*, OUP, Oxford, 2002.

30. "Amics Marchabrun, car digam / un vers d'amor, que per cor am / q'a l' hora qe nos partiram / en sia loing lo chaunz auziz // ", the same BBBA form as William IX's "Pos de chantar" in Note 18 above. (*Marcabru: A critical edition*, ed. S. Gaunt, R. Harvey and L. Paterson, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge 2000, pp. 98-103.) Another verse-format of the *tenzone* appears in the related *partimen* form described in J.H. Marshall, "Deux *partimens* provençaux du chansonnier T", in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Aurelio Roncaglia: a cinquant' anni dalla sua laurea*, Mucchi, Modena, 1989, pp. 809-17.

31. H. Wayne Storey, *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyrics*, Garland, New York and London, 1993. p. 175.

32. The early passion for extensive rhyming is abandoned when its intricacies become so overly stylised as to prevent the transmission of meaning.

33. Sonnet no. IX, in C. Salinari, *La poesia lirica del Duecento*, UTET, Torino 1968.

34. L.J. Weinberger, *Jewish Hymnography: A literary history*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, London and Portland, 1998, p. 100.

35. *ibid.*

36. In the *canzone* "we understand by *diesis* a transition from one ode to another, (This when speaking to the common people we call *volta*)". Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

37. P. Levin (ed.) *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 2001, p. xxvi.

38. Ibn Sana' al-Mulk, in T. Rosen, "The Muwashshah", *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. M.R. Menocal, R.P. Scheindlin and M. Sells, CUP, Cambridge 2000, p. 168.

39. For instance Guido Guinizelli's, "Fra le altre pene...", Contini, *op. cit.*, p. 478. We also find Petrarch writing *canzoni* which build backwards from a final line that is a quotation from another poet. (Thanks to Pat Boyde for this observation.)

40. P. Cole, *Selected Poems of Shmuel HaNagid*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, pp. xviii-xix.

41. For instance in poem no. 1, *Da Tempo*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11,

42. Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1967, pp. 2-19. The poets were Dante, Cavalcanti, Dante da Maiano *et al.*

43. Note Ibn Quzman's sense of his own bravura, Moshe Ibn 'Ezra's quest for a new poetics in his *al-Muhadara wal-mudakara*, and Sáenz-Badillos at p. 231 of this volume.

44. Whether by nature or by excision, in early Italian literature the homoerotic tradition of Arabic and Jewish Andalusī poetry does not seem to be reproduced. To my know-

ledge the only extant sodomitic sonnets are those of Cecco Nuccoli.

45. Thanks to Wilhelm Pötters for this observation. Such mathematics place us in a major area of Arabo-Judaic scientific discourse. Since the mystical value of numbers is a constant of Arabic, Jewish and Christian religious literature, it is possible that mathematical readings of our strophic poetry might pay dividends. We should not forget that the poet Abraham Ibn Ezra, for instance, was also a mathematician and astrologer. (For the analytic potential of a geometric deconstruction of a poetic text, see W. Pötters, "The Circle of Love: Poetry and Mathematics in Dante's *Divine Comedy*", seminar paper for the Italian Department, University of Cambridge, 31 October 2005.)
46. "The treacherous fawn", in T. Carmi (ed.) *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981, p. 325.
47. Moses Ibn 'Ezra, *Kitab al-muhadara wal-mudakara*, ed. and trans. Montserrat Abumalham Mas, Instituto de Filología, Madrid, 1985 (2 vols.).
48. *The Tarjumán al-Ashwáq*, ed. and trans. R.A. Nicholson, Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1978.
49. F. Corriente, "La poesía estrófica de Ibn Al-'Arabi de Murcia", in *Sharq al-Andalus* (3), 1987, 19-24. His *muwashshahāt* were mostly based on popular songs of his day. "These poems [in the *Tarjuman*] include the love-poems which I composed at Mecca [...] I have used the erotic style and form of expression because men's souls are enamoured of it, so that there are many reasons why it should commend itself." *Tarjumán al-Ashwáq*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
50. F. Corriente, *Poesía estrófica (cejeles y/o muwashshahat) atribuida al místico granadino ash-Shushtari (siglo XIII d.c.)*, Instituto de Filología, Madrid, 1988, p. 2.
51. I. Levin, "A survey of the *muwaššah* and its various strophic variations in the religious Hebrew poetry in Spain, in Corriente and Sáenz-Badillos, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
52. S.M. Stern, "Studies on Ibn Quzman", in *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.
53. Arabic text and transliteration in Corriente and Emery, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-7.
54. "I grew up watching [*zajal*] poets on TV sitting in front of a *Mezza* banquet (with *arak*) and improvising verses against each other. Most of the time they would be tooting their own horns in a display of literary machismo. I used to watch them with my dad and grandpa and brother during the war. They were very funny and witty and musical. Sometimes we'd all shout in unison 'alllaah' when a really potent verse is uttered, and my mom and grandma used to shake their heads and roll their eyes."
55. See for instance <<http://molubdo.blog.mongenie.com/>> and <<http://www.alzajal.com/index.asp>>.
56. Andy Kershaw Programme, BBC Radio 3, 30 January 2005.
57. Source: *Le Cheikh Imam Chante Negrin*, Le Chant du Monde [Le Nouveau Chansonnier International], 1976: LDX 74543.
58. Reference to an exorcism ceremony.
59. Reference to the Watergate scandal.
60. Food of poor people.
61. Jason Iwen at http://www.knockjournal.org/1_2/zajal_introduction.htm