A HEBREW *MUWASHSHAḤ* WITH AN ARABIC *KHARJA* FROM THE GENIZAH

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In presenting a recently discovered Hebrew *muwashshaḥ* and its Arabic *kharja* from the Genizah, I would like to state beforehand that my main concern is not so much to discuss or to hypothesise around the content, the meaning or the missing words in the fragment.

My intention is first and foremost to discuss the poem from the point of view of its versification and the problem of "scansion".

In so doing, allow me to quote Professor Jawdat Rikābī's statement from the introduction to his crititical edition of Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's important *ars poetica Dār aṭ -Ṭirāz*.[1]

"What characterises this poetic form [of the *muwashshaḥ*] is the freedom of scansion. A freedom which will guide a musical ear, and not *'arūḍ* in the strict sense, as Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk clearly says."

The statement is corroborated by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk himself with the words "wa-mā lahu 'arūḍ 'illā talḥīn", followed by "wa-lā ḍarb 'illā ḍarb", literally: "there is no prosody except for the rhythm, and no metre except for the beat". Many scholars have dissociated themselves from these seemingly paradoxical words. Martin Hartmann in the strongest terms. Others, such as Emilio García Gómez and Samuel Miklos Stern, were puzzled, mainly because Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk fails to exemplify and substantiate his claim.

Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, being an Easterner, was not born and raised with the Andalusian song tradition. But from his vantage point in Cairo he was well-acquainted (as was his contemporary Maimonides) with the musical genre, from performances by visiting poet composers. Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, furthermore, had an intuitive sense of how to distinguish an authentic *muwashshaḥ* and a genuine *kharja* from artificial ones. He expresses his appreciation of the crucial and all-embracing artistic quality of the *kharja*, when he describes it as the "salt, sugar, musk and amber" of the *muwashshaḥ*.

This notion is expanded in *Dār aṭ -Ṭirāz*:

> The *kharja* comes to the poet spontaneously – before he deals with metre and rhyme – when he is unrestrained and free, genial and disposed for entertainment. Then word and rhythm come to him that will stir the heart and please the ear, impress the soul and sweeten the

> taste. Only then does he build the *muwashshaḥa* upon it. Because he found the basis, secured the tail and built upon it the head.[2]

Subsequently we learn that the *kharja* constitutes a rhythmic "jump" (*waṯb*) in relation to the *muwashshaḥ*-body the modal parts of which are regulated by "the tightening [and relaxing] of the strings" on the lute during performance.[3]

In short, words and music were conceived as agents for the changing rhythmic modes (*ḍūrūb* and *mizān*), guided by "the musical ear" of poets and performers.

The fragment from the Cambridge University Library's Taylor Schechter Collection, marked T.S. Ar. 42.119, contains a Hebrew *muwashshaḥ* of a "prehistoric" type.[4]

It is a rather unrefined drinking song in the *nunc est bibendum* style, which may provide a clue as to the "invention" and popular technique or *Sitz im Leben* of the Hispano-Arabic and Hispano-Hebrew strophic song.

Random Hebrew letters at the top of the fragment suggest that the fragment is a loose page of a larger compendium.

The poem, which has not as yet been published, consists of a *muwashshaḥ*-body in Hebrew with a *kharja* in Arabic.[5]

Structurally the poem follows the "perfect" (*tāmm*) *tawshīḥ* architecture, i.e. a *maṭla'*, five stanzas including *ghuṣn* (*bayt*) and *simṭ* (*qufl*), and a *kharja* in a "foreign tongue".

In other respects, such as rhyme and metre, the *muwashshaḥ* exhibits noticeable deviations from the "normative" rules.

Several words and passages of the fragment are illegible and require advanced infrared reading equipment to be deciphered.

The legible parts reveal a succession of lines devoid of the usual division into stanzas with independent rhymes (*aġṣān / abyāt*), and stanzas with common rhymes (*asmāṭ / aqfāl*).

The opening verseline, the *maṭla'*, and the last, transitional segment plus the *kharja* indicate a common end rhyme in — lā. And throughout the poem ... לה , ...לי , ...לא play a dominant rôle.

Attempted transcription of the legible parts of ms T.S.Ar. 42.119:

מושח

שתו ..... הנעימו תחלה בת חתן וכלה

[משקה]..... [משיח] .....

עלה העין ..... יסובב .....
תחלה ושתהו ימלה שתו אחי שתו יין
מרוקח ולא למדות ו דבר משקה

עלה קח הלא חתן [נשוש] בינה בקולה [ופתור]
מתפלה הלא דני[ם] היו[ם] משירי[ם]

ושוש בינים ירקדו שכורים [.....]
נמכרו כ[חן] ותלח [.....] מסבת

יגלה עזוב כל דיות ישלחו לי לעלי
ישורר לי בלשון ישמעאלי אלי חי אללה

בדר תגלה עלי גצן תלאלא

The caption מושח indicates that the poem is considered as belonging to the *muwashshaḥ* genre. The subsequent Hebrew letters are blurred but seem to exhibit a *yōd*, a *mēm* and a *nūn* suggesting a Yemenite origin.

Although the Jews of Yemen were in close religious and cultural contact with Andalusia and Egypt before and during the Golden Age period, the present specimen does not fall under any of the known and technically more advanced classes of Yemenite strophic poetry, among which the "double *muwashshaḥ*" enjoyed a special *vogue* and of which other forms were predominantly imitations of *muwashshaḥāt* by Andalusian Hebrew poets (mainly those of Yehuda Halevi).

It seems more likely that the the poem under discussion is of Egyptian or Andalusian origin and belongs to the corpus of anonymous Hebrew poetry from the Fustat Genizah published by Ḥaim Schirmann [6] most of which bear the imprint of a stage that in the words of S.M. Stern "takes us back to the period of the evolution of the *muwashshaḥ*, when things were as yet in a fluid state and when half-formed features, in the various stages of their development, might allow us to make deductions as to the process by which they first emerged ..... It is (says Stern) hardly to be expected that the *muwashshaḥ* sprang fully armed from the inventive mind of a single poet".[7]

The first three lines of the present anonymous poem are difficult to decipher, but the opening word שתו imp. pl. "drink") leaves no doubt as to the popular genre. The last three words (בת חתן וכלה "bride and groom") are well known *topoi* in the context of the biblical *Song of Songs* and of medieval love poetry, but here referring to the fact that the song is destined for a marriage party. A poetic genre which was strongly condemned as "idle utterance" in a responsum by Maimonides.

> From this responsum by Maimonides we may infer that the genre also had a considerable diffusion in Egypt.[8]

The wine theme is emphasised in the poem's subsequent lines:

> lines 4-5: "[.....] drink it and pour: drink friends drink seasoned wine, no limits, tell the cup-bearer... "
>
> lines 6-7: "he shall come forward and the groom shall be merry with us and [leave the praying ...?] should we not dance and sing..."
>
> lines 8-9: "and be joyful and dance, drunk from wine [....]"
>
> lines 10-11: "... [let us] send for Ali (?) who shall compose [a song] in the tongue of Yishmael to the one living G-d (?)"
>
> *kharja*: "The moon shines [through] the branch twinkling"

In the absence of a consistent rhyme it is difficult to determine whether the line is broken into shorter stanzaic elements. It was, however, a habit among scribes to record the Hebrew *muwashshaḥāt* without taking the sequence of the strophic structure strictly into account in writing.

For my present purpose the last strophe preceding the *kharja* is tentatively broken into smaller word and syllabico-rhythmic entities e.g.:

יגלה .....
עזוב כל דיות
ישלחו לי לעלי
ישורר לי בלשון ישמעאל
אלי חי אללה
בדר תגלה
עלי גצן תלאלא

Syllabic scansion (last strophe)	'azōb kōl diyōṯ	5 syllables	
	yishleḥū lī le 'alī	7 syllables	
	yeshōrer lī lashōn yishm 'a'ēl	9 syllables	
	'elī ḥay 'ēllāh	5 syllables	
(*kharja*)	badru tajlā'	4 syllables	
	'alā ġuṣnī talā'lā'	7 syllables	
Rhythmic scansion (last strophe)	'azōb kōl diyōt_	(arsis)	8/8
	yishleḥū lī le 'alī	(thesis)	12/8 = 7/8+5/8

	yeshōrer lī lashōn yishm 'a'ēl	(arsis)	16/8 = 7/8+9/8
	'elī ḥay 'ēllāh	(arsis)	8/8
(*kharja*)	badru tajlā'	(thesis)	7/8
	'alā ġuṣnī talā'lā'	(arsis)	12/8 = 7/8+5/8

The line ... עזוב כל דיות etc. indicates that the poem lies in the borderland between oral and literary tradition, the singer declaring: "Away with all that ink", or literally "Leave the inkhorns", followed by, "and inspire me with the language of Yishmael", i.e. the *kharja* in Arabic.

We find here many of the musical preconditions for a *muwashshaḥ* as given by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk in his *Dār at-Ṭirāz.*

The old Hebrew *muwashshaḥ* specimen reflects an echo from the tradition of the biblical *Shīr ha-Shīrīm* (Song of Songs), which was essentially strophic and which had occasional recurring refrain-like and song-like segments concluding the poetic sequences. Alliteration rather than rhyme is an integral part of the versification system.

In substitution for rhyme, the strophes are linked by their rhythmic constituents.

The rhythmic links in their turn are constituted by word clusters. And thus the latter enter into a contrapuntal and/or syncopational relationship mutually, as well as with the Arabic *kharja*, which according to Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk constitutes the overall "point of departure" (*coda* or *refrain*) of the *muwashshaḥ* (here echoing the famous *zajal*-like poem *Badru tamm, šamsu ḍuḥa, ġuṣnu naqā*... etc. by Ibn 'Ubāda al-Qazzāz).[9]

Although Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk refrains from giving examples of *tawshīḥ* in its earliest forms, he stresses the importance of the "moment of inspiration" when creating a perfect *muwashshaḥ-kharja* composition.

He claims that the *kharja* comes first in the creative process, and that the transition from the *muwashshaḥ* to *kharja* must constitute "a jump". But he also declares himself incapable of registering (i.e. scanning) all the circulating metric patterns according to *awtād* and *asbāb*, (alluding to the quantitative Khalilian system).

Simply because they "do not have *'arūd* – but [obey] *talḥīn* as a guiding principle".[10]

The *muwashshaḥ* in its primitive form was determined by the music (*talḥīn*) and the beat ("lā ḍarb 'illā ḍarb"). This is furthermore emphasised by stressing the importance of the instrumental accompaniment exemplified in *Dār aṭ -Ṭirāz* with reference to the puzzling *urġun* instrument, instead of the more commonly used lute (*al-'ūd*).

Being less restricted than their Arab compatriots in terms of normative versification rules, there is nothing peculiar in the fact that the Jews recorded their songs in an authentic style. Thus the early Jewish *muwash-shaḥāt* may confirm the (unsubstantiated) prosodic theory by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk allowing for an alternative approach to the metric question. [11]

Finally, the rhythmic pattern of the present Genizah poem demonstrates an interchange of even (regular) rhythms with irregular rhythmic patterns, which may have been enforced by subdividing the rhythmic *mora* (the quaver) into lesser units (e.g. semiquavers). As for example the 8/8 of the first stich of the transitional strophe and the subsequent ending in 5/8 rhythm of the *kharja* may indicate.

The musicologist A. Sendrey speaks of "organised" irregularity in his analysis of Hebrew Biblical versification, which "infuses the text with an almost strophic character". It is this same organised irregularity that ("in a roundabout way") was an underlying rhythmic factor during the initial stage of the strophic tradition in Al-Andalus. [12]

NOTES

1. Dār aṭ-ṭirāz, *Poétique du* Muwaššaḥ *par Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk*. Ed. Jawdat al-Rikabi, Damascus, 1949, pp. 8-9, with reference to Arabic text p. 35.

2. Op. cit., p. 32.

3. Op. cit., pp. 35-6.

4. The fragment was kindly brought to my attention by Dr G. Kahn, The Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, Cambridge University Library.

5. According to the latest communication with the Genizah Unit (ref. Catalogue of Baker and Polliack comprising the entire T-S Arabic series).

6. Anonymous Hebrew *muwashshaḥāt* belonging to this "prehistoric" category in Haim Schirmann, *New Hebrew Poems from the Genizah*, Jerusalem, 1965, pp. 295-374. Many of which are fragmentary.

7. S.M. Stern, *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry*, Oxford, 1974, pp. 19, 62 and 76.

8. I. Adler on Maimonides and music in: RISM 1975, p. 240. W. Bacher, *Aus dem Wörterbuche Tanchum Jeruschalmi's*, 1903, pp. 24-5.

9. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima. Prolégomènes d'Ebn-Khaldoun*. Beirut, 1967, vol. III, p. 391. A.R. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, 1943, p. 392 and M. Hartmann, *Das Muwaššaḥ*, 1897, p. 89.

10. Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, *Dār at-ṭirāz*. édition critique. Ed. Jawdat al-Rikābī, 1949, p.

35. Hartmann (op.cit. p. 104 n. 3) calls "lā ḍarb 'illā ḍarb" "fade Wortspielerei". E. García Gómez is confounded but less condemning ("Estudio del *Dār at-ṭirāz*", in: *Al-Andalus*, xxvii (1962), n. 71): "aqui hay un juego de palabras intraducible, porque ḍarb significa tambien 'ejecución musical' o, más concretamente, 'la acción de tocar por percusión [de ḍrb=golpear] un instrumento de cuerda'". See also Jawdat al-Rikābī in the introduction to his edition of *Dār at-ṭirāz*: "car ce qui caracterise cette forme poetique c'est la liberté dans la scansion, liberté que doit d'ailleurs guider une oreille musicale, *non* un 'arūḍ strict comme les dit clairement Ibn Sanā al-Mulk." See also, A. Jones, *Romance Kharjas in Andalusian Arabic Muwashshah Poetry*, 1988, pp. 11-12. And O. Zwartjes, *The Andalusian Xarjas: Poetry at the Crossroads of Two Systems?*, 1995, pp. 135 and 141.

11. García Gómez recognised, however, op.cit., p. 49, n. 50, that "aqui [in the prosodic section of the *Dār*] nos conserva restos de una tradición preciosa". Cf. also Dwight Reynolds' study "Musical Aspects of Ibn Sana' al-Mulk's *Dār at-ṭirāz*" contained in this volume.

12. A. Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 1969, p. 251: "The characteristics of the Hebrew verse are determined originally by the Hebrew *word* and thus, in a roundabout way, become normative for the Hebrew verse. In accordance with their beginning and end, therefore, Hebrew versification shows 'rising' ('ascending') rhythms, having iambic character [in musical notation = quaver>crotchet] or anapaestic [quaver>quaver>crotchet], without falling however, into the rigidity of the classical quantitative verse feet. Musically speaking, this would indicate that the Hebrew song phrase generally starts with an up-beat, that is with one or several unaccented pick-up notes."

Sendrey also refers to E. Sievers (*Metrische Studien*, 1901), who "maintains quite correctly that the changing metre suggests a popular device, while the even verses may point to a more developed stage of poetry". (Sendrey, p. 250)