

## THE “ROMANCE” *KHARJAS* IN RETROSPECT

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“It is fitting then for us not to be ashamed to acknowledge truth and to assimilate it from whatever source it comes to us, even if it is brought to us by former generations and foreign peoples. For him who seeks the truth there is nothing of higher value than truth itself; it never cheapens nor abases him who searches for it, for it ennobles and honours him.”<sup>1</sup>

In this extract, Al-Kindī expresses a number of dicta that are relevant in the context of *muwashshah* and *kharja* studies and, in the process of what follows, I shall be drawing attention to his observations.

Uncontroversially, one can say that *muwashshah* studies were initiated in the nineteenth century, although one should not neglect the renderings into English verse of a selection of Arabic poems including one each by Wallāda and Al-Mut’amid from al-Andalus, by John D. Carlyle, the Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, in 1796.<sup>2</sup> The great Orientalist Von Hammer knew about the *muwashshah* and the *zajal* in the 1830s, and Grangeret de Lagrange mentioned the *muwashshah* in his *Défense de la poésie orientale* published in the *Journal Asiatique* in 1826, but Martin Hartmann published what is acknowledged to have been the first book devoted to a study of the genre, in 1897.<sup>3</sup> The attention of Arabists to the genre by and large languished subsequently until the middle of the twentieth century and the publication, in 1948, of Stern’s “Les vers finaux”. This study contained an instructive subtitle: “une contribution à l’histoire du *muwaššah* et à l’étude du vieux dialecte espagnol ‘mozarabe’”.<sup>4</sup> This albeit tentative foray into the minefield, together with the discoveries of *kharjas* in Arabic *muwashshahāt*, opened the way to a plethora of interpretative studies, and to widespread exploitation of the genre. The basic “truth” was that the *kharjas* were revealed to be linguistic hybrids, vernacular Arabic with some Romance transliterations. The assimilation of that truth proved to be far from straight-forward, however. In the ensuing fifty years a whole new genre was spawned. The *muwashshahāt* were, for the most part, disregarded, as full attention was focused on the nature and significance of the *kharjas* themselves. Their identity as fortuitously surviving snippets of popular Romance poetry was asserted and then established. A new chapter in the history of traditional Peninsular lyric had to be written. Interpretations of the texts of the *kharjas*, initially provisional, mysteriously became definitive, and the canon of nascent Castilian literature was amplified.

I would in no way impugn the scholarship of Latinists, Romanists, philologists, anthologists, and historians of literature who, primarily from the

1950s through to the 1970s, strove to understand and assess the significance of the texts that had materialised so miraculously. The conclusions that these scholars reached, and the claims that they made, were on the basis of transcribed versions of the *kharjas*. In the 1980s heated polemic was generated, as theories were debated and discounted, all of them reliant on what one could describe as second-hand source material. The need to produce the Arabic-language texts in facsimile form was a pressing one, and was met by the Arabist Alan Jones's palaeographical analysis, published in 1988.<sup>5</sup> Jones had already challenged some of the accepted versions, and the hypotheses to which they gave rise.<sup>6</sup> For me, an indispensable *sine qua non* for *kharja* studies is the presence on the printed page of the text in its earliest manuscript form. A transcription into Arabic characters is as subjective and as prone to debate as a transliterated version. When, as Jones's study demonstrated, the cluster that constitutes the *kharja* is frequently so corrupt and impenetrable, it is absolutely essential that those who seek to evaluate them should be aware of the problems attendant on their interpretation. Jones's purpose was to assemble a base text for further study through the application of palaeographic and linguistic criteria; he deliberately states that "these texts are not claimed to be definitive. Given the state of the manuscripts, that would be absurd".<sup>7</sup>

Since the 1990s there have been three major books devoted to the *kharjas*, which in chronological order are *Las jarchas mozárabes. Forma y significado*, by Álvaro Galmés de Fuentes in 1994, *Love Songs from al-Andalus. History, Structure & Meaning of the Kharja*, by Otto Zwartjes in 1997, and *Poesía dialectal árabe y romance en Alandalús*, by Federico Corriente also in 1997.<sup>8</sup> Arabists such as Kennedy, Schippers, Latham, Schoeler, Hanlon and notably Jareer Abu-Haidar, this list being neither exhaustive nor inclusive, have also made telling contributions.<sup>9</sup> By highlighting the work of some Arabists in this way, I do not seek to create the impression that their work collectively supersedes that of others, or that it is, even notionally, more important. The purpose, rather, has been to expose what has been a long-running and nagging tension in *kharja* studies. I refer to what might in modern parlance be called an "attitude problem" between Arabists and Romanists, both, in certain contexts, regarding the other as ill-equipped to understand the implications of the *kharjas*. Corriente has recently summed up the situation succinctly as follows: "Los arabistas han carecido, en general, de conocimientos serios de filología románica, y los romanistas, de profundidad en sus conocimientos de filología árabe, lo que sin necesidad de distorsión ideológica, es ya bastante grave y tiene, ... la consecuencia de que las lecturas de las *xarajāt* con texto romance estén a menudo muy influidas por el menor conocimiento del castellano y el árabe clásico".<sup>10</sup> The temptation to take an exclusivist stance is a powerful one, and it is one which a number of scholars have, over the years, found hard to resist. Yet, if one insists that a fellow-worker in the field is deficient in his or her

knowledge of a particular discipline and for this reason, impugns his or her scholarship, progress is likely to be impaired. The logical corollary of this line of thought is that in *kharja* studies, the minimum qualifications required would be a thorough knowledge of the Arabic language, written and spoken, and the conventions of Arabic verse-forms, on the one hand, together with an equivalent mastery of the Romance vernacular and popular lyric on the other, not to mention Latin and skills in philology, palaeography, musicology, oral literature and so on. This I find to be patently absurd, yet at times, the lack of any sense of collective endeavour has blighted scholarship in this field. Perhaps because some scholars have felt inhibited by the demands that they feel are being made upon them if they are to contribute effectively, and perhaps because of the realisation that some of the problems inherent in *kharja* scholarship are unlikely ever to be solved, there has been a noticeable falling-off in the number of articles and studies on the subject compared to the heyday of the 1980s. The trend of recent scholarship has been away from the *kharjas* to the genre of the *mawashshah*, and in particular, the musical aspect. Before considering this, I would like to reflect on a notable exception to the general tendency to refrain from entering the fray.

I am referring to a remarkable recent article by Samuel Armistead, published significantly in the *Journal of Arabic Literature* [2003], entitled "*Kharjas* and *villancicos*", where the relationship between the two is explored and found to be "intimate".<sup>11</sup> If one were to seek a contemporary benchmark in *kharja* studies, then this would fit the bill. Although I have no wish to engage in a public critique of this article, I should say that I find the approach that is adopted profoundly depressing. The author's abstract begins with the assertion that "Scholarship surrounding the *kharjas*... has been characterized by bitterly acrimonious polemics, sometimes involving even personal *ad hominem* criticism". Whilst scholars have criticised, sometimes passionately, the interpretations and the stances taken up by others – a feature of scholarly debate in many disciplines – rarely have they over-stepped the mark. What has characterised *kharja* scholarship, it seems to me, has been the quest to make sense of a fundamentally enigmatic primary-source corpus. It is evident that Armistead is profoundly involved with the issues about which he writes, and this has led him to speak, often in very robust terms and dismissively, of those views with which he disagrees.<sup>12</sup>

There are some tendencies in Armistead's article to which I would like to draw attention, without impugning the author's erudition in any way. The first is subjectivity. In essence, I have no quarrel with a subjective approach; readability is often enhanced proportionally thereby, but a *parti pris* approach towards the *kharjas* is akin to adding fuel to the fire. If one were to posit that the *kharjas* as interpreted show "an intimate relationship" with Castilian *villancicos* and *cantigas de amigo*, then one could have no objection,

because that would be a self-validating academic exercise. The point is, however, that the *kharjas* as interpreted may or may not bear a resemblance to the meaning encapsulated in the source versions available. Hence any consideration of their significance has to be undertaken within a context of uncertainty. The base of evidence is sandy ground, and in all cases I would therefore advocate the formula: if the reading of the Arabic manuscript text is such and such, then the consequent interpretation may be made. It goes without saying that there is likely to be subjectivity at every stage. Arabists might favour a reading based on an Arabic text. Romanists may be influenced by their familiarity with traditional verse. It seems to me that both approaches are entirely justified, always providing that the *modus operandi* is clearly revealed. If one is less than scrupulous with this procedure, then the subjective element could run riot. Galmés de Fuentes articulated this as follows: “En todo caso debemos operar con enorme cautela a la hora de interpretar las jarchas romances, guiándonos siempre por criterios filológicos rigurosos, y no por intuiciones vanas”, a sentiment with which I wholly concur.<sup>13</sup> Arbitrary alterations to the texts, in his opinion, can only lead to the “desprestigio de las jarchas mozárabes” [the discredit of the Mozarabic *kharjas*].<sup>14</sup>

An example will help to demonstrate both procedural as well as interpretative pitfalls. The *kharja* chosen, in a *muwashshah* by Ibn ‘Ubāda, probably, is preserved in the *‘Uddāt al-Jalīs* of Ibn Bishrī.<sup>15</sup> It is the one that contains the memorable second couplet, in the rendering of Joan Corominas into Castilian [1953]: “Qué haré, madre? El alfaneque se me va a llevar!” or, in Armistead’s version in English [2003]: “What can I do, O mother? A falcon will carry me off!”<sup>16</sup> In the intervening fifty years, *alfaneque*, the key word as far as Armistead is concerned, enabling him to draw alluring comparisons with the Castilian tradition of popular verse, has been almost by consensus, though not unanimously, discarded. Scholars have striven to make sense of the cluster *fā’*, *alif*, *nūn*, *qaf* with a break, then *bā’*, *dāl*, then another break and finally, *lām*, *bā’*, *alif*, *rā*. Various proposals have been made, including Fahd’s *fāniq bad lebār*, where *fāniq* is seen as an elision of *fā* plus *ān* (= *ayn*, where) plus *q*, giving the following plausible version in French: “Pour où donc devrais-je m’envoler?”<sup>17</sup> García Gómez proposed a version of the final line entirely in Romance: ¡*Fēn, qe bado lyorāre!* in Spanish rendered as: “¡Ven, que voy a llorar!”<sup>18</sup> Corriente suggested: *YA NON PÓDO LEBÁRE*, rendered as: “Ya no puedo soportar”.<sup>19</sup> The hybrid version of Sola-Solé: *fāniqī bad lebare*, was based on an abstruse Arabic root *fanaqa*, meaning to mollycoddle a child, producing the Spanish version: “El que me mima va a marcharse” [he who pets or pampers me is about to leave].<sup>20</sup> Galmés is the one interpreter to have stayed with the falcon, but with two proposed options, either, “El alfaneque [=el halcón] se va a elevar”,

or "se va a volar".<sup>21</sup> Finally, it is instructive that Alan Jones should have observed that: "tinkering with the text to a marginally greater extent than hitherto enables one to produce a straightforward Arabic text: fa-‘ttaqī biya ‘l-bāri, ‘Fear God in dealing with me, *i.e.* ‘have pity on me’."<sup>22</sup>

The above excursus into the quicksandy intricacies of *kharja* interpretation has not been undertaken to denigrate the extraordinary labours of individual interpreters, but rather to demonstrate both differences in procedure and end-product. It would not be unjust to say that, in this instance at least, Armistead is *parti pris*. There are some most attractive snippets of popular verse featuring "azores" [goshawks], and the presence of "alfaneque" in a *kharja* cements this particular link between the *kharjas* and the *villancico*. I do not seek to call into question the procedure he adopts, but I do seek to draw attention to the consequences of adopting it. Here, and it has to be said, elsewhere in his article, Armistead chooses, quite understandably, the particular reading of a *kharja* text that suits his argument. He opts, sometimes for one interpreter's rendering, and sometimes for another, all the time in pursuit of the end goal of demonstrating "consistent and abundant parallels". Armistead has not been alone in using the *kharja* texts to support a hypothesis. One thinks of the immense scholarly labour of Gerold Hilty on the *ġelos* topos in the *kharjas*, but the traffic in recent years has not been all one way. The corpus of *kharjas* has revealed the likely presence of Romance words and phrases, but the texts themselves are also susceptible to alternative renderings. There is no reason, according to what preceptive information is extant, why more solutions should not be proposed on the basis of an Arabic text. Jones reminded his readers of the possibility of this in the case of the *kharja* fragment just discussed. It would not be popular in some circles, but neither would it be an unjustifiable academic exercise. To persist in looking for Romance words and phrases in Arabic clusters that are in some instances so defective as to render the prospect of definitive solutions ephemeral, is akin to fastening a clock's pendulum on the upstroke. As the pendulum is released, and the possibility of Arabic readings of enigmatic texts is not dismissed out of hand, so the balance may gradually be restored.

In the recent and most welcome bibliography, compiled by Heijkoop and Zwartjes, and published this year 2004 by Brill, the authors identify what they consider to be the "main topics for actual scholarly debates".<sup>23</sup> Three of the five relate to music, and it is clear from current scholarly activity, that the focus is moving away in this direction. However, to discuss the musical aspect of the *muwashshahāt* is as conjectural an exercise as the reconstruction of the texts of the *kharjas*, or even more so perhaps, as no contemporary notations survive. As Tova Rosen has written: "Since no notation is left, theories about the music to which muwashshahs were performed are based on conjecture".<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as Alan Jones has

pointed out: “All conjectures based on these traditions [he is referring to medieval Iberian music and to “present-day north African music”] must therefore be untested and untestable”.<sup>25</sup> My own view is that, initially, *muwashshahāt* composed as they were in Classical Arabic, with their *kharjas* in the vernacular idiom, were a *salon* form of poetry, composed to be recited. It seems to me, nonetheless, that there is interest and value in drawing analogies, particularly because of putative links with troubadour verse. However, to assume that the *muwashshahāt* were designed to be sung is as perilous an assumption as some of the interpretations proposed for the *kharjas*.

In compiling this retrospective, I have considered the proliferation of *kharja* scholarship over roughly a fifty-year period. The publication of facsimile texts seems to me to have been a notable landmark, but the texts in their earliest known format do not seem to have acted as the stimulus to further scholarship that was anticipated. Rather, they seem to have had a dampening effect on subsequent studies, with the exception of Armistead by whom they have been disregarded. In a way, Armistead’s article is like stoking fuel on dying embers. He brings the *kharjas* such as he interprets them to life. His role is that of the poet appreciating poetry and castigating those whose readings are, in his opinion, unpoetic. As Al-Kindī said: “For him who seeks the truth there is nothing of higher value than truth itself.”

Is there a way forward? Apart from presenting revised interpretations of the *kharja* texts, perhaps on the basis of interlingual homonyms, an approach that I personally favour, the outlook seems bleak. The *kharjas* will retain their mysteries, although the subjective pursuit of solutions will continue.

## NOTES

1. Al-Kindī, Preface to *Metaphysics* (trans. M. Guidi and R. Walzer), quoted in H. J. Winter, *Eastern Science. An Outline of its Scope and Contribution*, London: John Murray, 1952 [dedicatory page].
2. J. D. Carlyle, *Specimens of Arabian Poetry, from the Earliest Time to the Extinction of the Khalifat, with some account of the authors*, Cambridge: printed by John Burges printer to the University, 1796. Carlyle provides, first the Arabic texts, then the translations, with the sections being separately numerated. The final “song in the rhythm of the original” contains adjacent musical notation.
3. Martin Hartmann, *Das Arabische Strophengedicht, I. Das Muwaššah*, Weimar: Felber, 1897, 258 pp.
4. Samuel M. Stern, “Les Vers finaux en espagnol dans les *muwaššahs* hispano-hébraïques: une contribution à l’histoire du *muwaššah* et à l’étude du vieux dialecte espagnol ‘mozarabe’”, *Al-Andalus* XIII (1948), 299-346. Although I am aware of the extra dimension, sometimes crucial, of the Hebrew-language *kharjas*, these and the scholarship attached to them are not considered in my survey.

*The "Romance" kharjas in retrospect*

5. Alan Jones, *Romance Kharjas in Andalusian Arabic Muwaššah Poetry. A Palaeographical Analysis*, Oxford Oriental Institute Monographs, No. 9, London: Ithaca Press, 1988.
6. Alan Jones, "Romance Scansion and the *Muwaššahāt*: An Emperor's New Clothes?", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 11 (1977), 36-55.
7. Jones, *Romance Kharjas*, p. 18; his ensuing two sentences are as follows: "A high number of subjective judgments are inevitably involved, and many of these will naturally be challenged by others. I simply hope that in going through the texts very carefully and in drawing on my knowledge of Arabic palaeography I will have provided a fair infrastructure for further studies."
8. The publication details of these works, the titles of which are given in full in the text are as follows: for Galmés de Fuentes, Barcelona: Crítica (Grijalbo Mondadori), 206 pp; for Zwartjes, *Medieval Iberian Peninsula. Texts and Studies* 11, Leiden: Brill, 385 pp; and for Corriente, *Biblioteca Románica Hispánica II. Estudios y Ensayos*, 407, Madrid: Gredos, 386 pp. Corriente's work has the subtitle: (*Cejeles y xarajāt de muwaššahāt*).
9. Philip F. Kennedy, "Thematic Relationships between the *Kharjas*, the Corpus of *Muwaššahāt* and Eastern Lyrical Poetry", in *Studies on the Muwaššah and the Kharja: Proceedings of the Exeter International Colloquium*, ed. Alan Jones and Richard Hitchcock, Reading: Ithaca Press for the Board of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, 1991, pp. 68-87; Arie Schippers, "Style and Register in Arabic, Hebrew and Romance Strophic Poetry", in *Poesía estrófica. Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional sobre Poesía Estrófica Árabe y Hebrea y sus Paralelos Romances (Madrid, diciembre de 1989)*, Editores F. Corriente y Á. Sáenz-Badillos, Madrid: Facultad de Filología. Universidad Complutense, Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Árabe, 1991, pp. 311-24; J. D. Latham, "*Man li bi-rašan*: Comments on the Metre of an Andalusian *Muwaššah*", in *Poesía estrófica, ibid*, pp. 217-24; Gregor Schoeler, "The Origins of the Poetic Forms of the Troubadours: the Liturgical and Arabic Theories", in *Poesía estrófica, ibid*, pp. 325-35; K. D. Hanlon, "A Sociolinguistic View of *Hazi* in the Andalusian Arabic *Muwašshah*", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 60 (1997), 35-46; J. A. Abu-Haidar, *Hispano-Arabic Literature and the Early Provençal Lyrics*, Richmond: Curzon, 2001, 266 pp.
10. "Arabists by and large, have [shown] insufficient understanding of Romance philology, and Romanists lack any depth in their understanding of Arabic philology. This ... is quite serious and means that readings of *kharjas* with a Romance text are frequently much influenced by the mere knowledge of modern Castilian and of Classical Arabic" [this free rendering is the present writer's], Corriente *op. cit.*, p. 73, n. 7.
11. Samuel G. Armistead, "*Kharjas* and *villancicos*", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 34, 1-2 (2003), 3-19, at p. 3.
12. For example, Armistead, *art. cit.*, p. 5, n. 3, & p. 13, n. 28.
13. Galmés de Fuentes, *op. cit.*, p. 89: "In every instance we need to exercise extreme

caution when it comes to interpreting Romance *kharjas*, always being governed by strict philological criteria, and not airy intuitions.”

14. Galmés de Fuentes, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

15. Alan Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-6; the *kharja* is no. 6 in his numeration.

16. J. Corominas, “Para la interpretación de las jarýas recién halladas (MS. G. S. Colin)”, *Al-Andalus* XVIII (1953), 140-8, at pp. 141-2; Armistead, *art. cit.*, p. 14. Cf., also, my “Some Doubts about the Reconstruction of the *Kharjas*”, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* L (1973), 109-119, at pp. 116-17.

17. T. Fahd, Review of Klaus Heger, *Die bisher veröffentlichten Harġas und ihre Deutungen*, Tübingen, 1960, in *Bulletin Hispanique* LXIV (1962), 263-8, at pp. 264-5.

18. Emilio García Gómez, *Las jarchas romances de la serie árabe en su marco*, Madrid: Sociedad de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1965, 433 pp., at pp. 87-8.

19. Corriente, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-8.

20. J. M. Sola-Solé, *Corpus de poesía mozárabe (las harġas andalusies)*, Barcelona: Hispam, 1973, pp. 126-8.

21. Galmés, *op. cit.*, p. 35, who includes these two lines in the category of “versos o frases seguras y otras muy probables” [p. 34], “lines or sentences [whose interpretation] is certain or most plausible”.

22. Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-5; Jones also made “a very tentative” alternative suggestion: **fānte yu nu? lebāri**, on the grounds “of the apparent presence of other forms” of the latter word in both the Arabic and Hebrew series.

23. Henk Heijkoop and Otto Zwartjes, *Muwaššah, Zajal, Kharja. Bibliography of Strophic Poetry and Music from al-Andalus and Their Influence in East and West, The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World*, volume 21, Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. xv-xvi.

24. Tova Rosen, “The Muwashshah”, in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, edited by María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells, Cambridge: University Press, 2000, pp. 165-89, at p. 171.

25. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 11.