The metrics of Andalusi stanzaic poetry and their Castilian and further European imitations

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It is rather obvious that the Medieval saying "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*" is not always necessary true, although it cannot be denied that, when there is not only a time sequence but also a coincidence in places and subject matters, chances increase considerably that the newer state of affairs be a direct consequence of what had happened previously. However, even established, very serious and honest scholars feel uncomfortable at acknowledging such cause to effect relations when they clash with their ideological principles or prejudices, such as ethnical, nationalistic or religious barriers, reacting to those situations with feigned ignorance of the issue or peevish malice against those who insist on bringing it forward. For instance, we have recently seen the rather sad scenario of an otherwise very respectable fellow successfully manoeuvring to expel a colleague from the editing board of a scientific journal for having published an article contrary to an untenable hypothesis of his, which cannot surprise us too much, when we remember the time-honoured habit, in the West and the East alike, of silencing embarrassing borrowings and witnesses.

The Greeks, for instance, very seldom acknowledged their enormous debt with Egypt, whence their learned men drew most of their basic scientific notions, which they then developed into sizable bodies of knowledge, being the foundations of Western civilization, after being saved from total destruction at the hands of apocalyptical Christians by the paradoxical tolerance of Umayyad, Abbasid and other Islamic dynasties, and not because their Islamic faith prompted them to act like that, but because they were sensible and intelligent rulers. For instance, nobody seems to have inquired about the etymological origin of the apparently Greek name pi denoting the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter: in fact, and it being well-known that Greeks usually learned these notions from Egyptian scholars, it would be quite logical to surmise that "pi" is nothing but the Egyptian word *p⊇* "house; shape",[1] a clear metaphor for a number generating that circumference. Subsequently, this habit of silencing or disguising cultural and technical borrowings has become a characteristic feature of Western culture, where few people are aware that we would have no whiskey, cognac or vodka if, again paradoxically, Islam has not preserved for us the tradition of stills, already known to the Byzantine Dioscorides in the first century AD, but ignored in Western Europe until its reintroduction through Islamic countries.

But let us return to our main subject, namely the origins and development of stanzaic poetry among the Arabs and in the West, in which we must pay special attention to dates and locations of the proven facts, much more so than to vague notices and allusions. To begin with, the absence of rhyme and rhyme-bound stanzas in the Classical Greek-Latin poetry and its Low Latin early Medieval imitations is a well-established fact beyond any dispute, while rhyming already characterized pre-Islamic and subsequent Arabic poetry to this day, which can apply also to the primitive stanzaic structure of the kind of *raǧaz* with rhymed hemistichs, called *muṣarra'*, i.e., a sequence of couplets, **aabbccdd**, etc. However, a true stanzaic structure appears only in 8th century Iraq with the development of the *musammaṭ*, in which the monotony of the classical *qaṣīdah* is alleviated by the introduction of several, from three to five internal rhymes, while keeping the final invariable one, namely **bbba ccca ddda**, etc., and this is as far as the evolution of the *qaṣīdah* into a stanzaic structure went in the Islamic East.

We must look towards the West, concretely towards Al-Andalus for further developments in that direction. Here, in the Iberian Peninsula, and in spite of the *puellae gaditanae* of Roman times and the Church prohibitions of certain kinds of songs under Visigothic rule, or the certainty of liturgical Latin and Hebrew hymns used in churches and synagogues, there is no evidence whatsoever proving the survival among Andalusi Arabic or Romance speaking people of any older tradition of folk poetry, let alone preserved samples thereof of Roman or pre-Roman stock. If any such songs or poetry ever existed, and probably they did as is common in every land and nation, they had disappeared without leaving any trace in the course of Arabization, Islamization and wholesale adoption of Eastern fashions.

However, Arabic poetry did not flourish in Al-Andalus immediately after its conquest and it took nearly two centuries to see the first important Andalusi poets there, under the aegis of ʿAbdurraḥmān the Third, according to Ibn Ḥayyān (*Almuqtabis* V, fol. 29),[2] a curious and even unusual delay for such a characteristic feature of every Islamic state, which is confirmed if not altogether explained by the same author (*Almuqtabis* II, fol. 130).[3] According to his information about ʿAbbās b. Firnās, this man of kindred skills, among which astronomy and aeronautics, of Berber stock, was the first Andalusi to ever understand and explain in the ninth century to his countrymen the rules of Arabic metrics, never understood here theretofore. But why would they not understand these rules, unlike the case of other people in the East, like Egyptians, Syrians and Iraqis in many cases Arabicized in similar dates?

The answer to this question was already previously contained in our book of 1977 about the Andalusi dialect,[4] in a moment when Arabic metrics and the matching subject of stanzaic poetry were none of our concerns yet. At that time and on account of the orthographical peculiarities of Andalusi texts, we surmised that this dialect had lost the quantitative rhythm of Old and Classical Arabic, preserved by every Eastern dialect, and replaced it by a stress-based qualitative rhythm, repeating the trend already active several centuries before when Hispanic Low Latin altered in the same way the prosody of good old Latin. In the lack of quantitative rhythm, it is obvious that a metrical system based on it could not be appreciated, understood or simply felt by the ears of people who spoke a dialect with a quantitative rhythm.

What did ʿAbbās b. Firnās do in order to make Eastern metrics (*ʿarūḍ*) accessible to his countrymen? In all likelihood he devised a substitution of stress for syllable quantity as marker of the rhythm by its repetition at similar intervals. However, as long syllable slots are always more frequent than usually stressed syllables, he must have added a rule of "optical compliance" with the requirements of *ʿarūḍ*, obtained through real or imaginary writing of the lines, so that the *qaṣīdah* would be regular and acceptable even when recited in the East. Which was indeed a kind of violence to their usual pronunciation, but one of those accepted by poets everywhere, according to R. Jakobson's theory.[5] Besides, this rule was not followed in the case of less demanding stanzaic classical or dialectal poetry, as we shall see.

The results of this smart device were felt rather soon in the next 10th century, and not merely by the rise of quite a few really notable poets, authors of excellent traditional *qaṣāʾid* mentioned in the most prestigious anthologies, but also by some chronologically fitting and nearly simultaneous developments showing the success of that invention at every level of the Andalusi society and among members of the three religions practised in the country, Muslims, Jews and Christians alike. To begin with the last and least innovative case, the Arabic translation in the *raǧaz* metre of the Psalms by the Mozarab Ḥafṣ b. Albar Alqūṭī[6] exhibit some foot substitutions and other metrical irregularities not allowed in the strict rules of Khalilean verse, but

common in its "enlarged" Andalusi version, presently known by some Arab scholars as *ʻarūḍun muḥawwar*, i.e., "modified metrics". Without which *muwaššaḥāt* and *azǧāl* seem to obey no metrical rules, as a puzzled Egyptian Ibn Sanā' Almulk thought,[7] when confronted with Andalusi masterpieces of both genres, thus giving some comfort to those who favoured the hypothesis, otherwise untenable and scarcely forwarded by doubtful similarity with some old Irish poems,[8] or even by the presence of some sixty Romance *ḫaraǧāt* vs. hundreds of Andalusi Arabic ones, of a Romance and Hispanic origin for this stanzaic poetry, following the overconfident steps of Ribera and García Gómez in that direction.

The case of the peculiar adoption of traditional Arabic metrics to their Hebrew poems by Sephardic authors, starting with Dunaš b. Labraṭ under the protection of Ḥasday b. Šapruṭ, the famous Jewish minister of ʻAbdurraḥmān the Third, is indeed more conspicuous, because it provoked the criticisms of Mənaḥem b. Saruq and his disciples and left written records of their not altogether clear objections, which would not prevent the success during a couple of centuries of Hebrew poems mostly exhibiting the stanzaic structure of *tasmīṭ* and a rhythmical conversion of Khalilean metres into sequences of stressable and non-stressable syllables, in both instances imitating the additional licenses of "enlarged" *ʻarūḍ*, as practised by Muslim and Christian neighbours.[9]

But, of course, the best documented case is that of the invention of the *muwaššaḥ*, as described by the pen of Ibn Bassām Aššantarīnī in an often quoted and discussed passage of his *Ḏaḫīrah*,[10] placing this development roughly at the end of the ninth century and saying enough to gather that a folklore loving but learned Andalusi poet had the idea of alleviating the rigid patterns of traditional poetry by combining the stanzaic structure of the Eastern *tasmīṭ* with "enlarged" *ʻarūḍ*, without the requirement of "optical compliance", and the final, refreshing and even more daring addition of a final couplet in dialect, Andalusi Arabic or Romance, something already attempted by Abū Nuwās in Iraq with Persian, and which by symmetry forced the doubling of all refrains at the end of each stanza.

However, those dialectal couplets or triplets predating the invention of *muwaššaḥ* proper have their own history and deserve some attention. We have called them proto-*zaǧal*s, because they are invariably in Andalusi Arabic dialect, very short, never exceeding the length of two or three lines, therefore without any stanzaic structure yet, and can only have been the result of uneducated folk poets, who have merely grasped the rudiments of "enlarged" *ʻarūḍ*, and tried their hand at it. The oldest sample of this genre is the famous proto-*zaǧal* of the year 913, of which the first line was authored by a soldier of the rebel ʻUmar b. Ḥafṣūn, completed by the answer of one of the future Caliph's muleteers,[11] chronologically followed by the samples of the same kind contained in Ibn Quzmān's *Dīwān*. The latter poet praised himself for having composed the first full-length *muwaššaḥ*-like *zaǧal*s, which may or not be exactly and totally true, but in any case it would be prudent not to antedate that development by many decades.

The preceding historically witnessed sequence of developments provides us with hardly deniable evidence about the origin and evolution of Arabic, Hebrew and even Andalusi Romance samples of stanzaic poetry, subsequently exported to other Islamic countries and, at least in the case of Hebrew, to lands beyond the Pyrinees, such as Provence and Italy. The big question is whether the basic features of this invention, rhyme, rhyme-conditioned stanzaic structure and stressed-based rhythm could also have been borrowed in Western European countries or at least influenced their styles of verse making, something unacceptable on ideological premises to many Westerners, both lay and wise.

An open-minded scholar such as A. Nykl had no qualms at proclaiming that "if the Franks of Spain and of France could imitate the Muslims in warfare, dress and other habits, it is idle to deny that they imitated them in music and singing". He considered proven the influence of Andalusi verse and music on Guillaume the Ninth and the Troubadours of Provence, known to have roamed at least in the Iberian Peninsula, at the end of the eleventh century and beginnings of the twelfth, which may be disputable on the thematic aspects of the issue, but not altogether on the structural ones, as he pointedly says in his words; "If we compare Guillaume's, Marcabru's and Rudel's forms of poetry with the forms current in contemporary Muslim Spain, as well as in the East, we cannot fail to find considerable analogies which can only be explained by imitation or adaptation, not by independent invention".

As a matter of fact, we can concede that a syllable counting metrical system of the kind common to most modern European languages might have developed from bare Classical Latin prosody, through mere forsaking of quantitative rhythm, feet sequences, etc. However, knowing what we know about the wholesale importation by Western Europe of culture and civilization developed, if not necessarily originated in Islamic countries during the Middle Ages, it would be indeed idle to deny that the same people who came to Cordova and Toledo in order to learn astronomy, medicine, philosophy, chemistry, etc. and took back to their Northern countries the astrolabes, so many drugs, the decimal figures and the names of quite a few technical concepts, like the x for the unknown value of an equation, as well as instruments such as the still to obtain some remedies, among which the alcoholic beverages, could not equally have been acquainted and fallen in love with such artistic innovations as rhymes and rhyme-based stanzaic structures, or even with the lax stress regularities providing the rhythm of Andalusi *muwaššaḥāt* and *azǧāl*. Furthermore, even if those austere learned men, some of them priests, would had no time to indulge in such pastimes, the Muslim, Jewish and Christian minstrels, singers and dancers described by Juan Ruiz, the archpriest of Hita, as active in his days through Castile and other Christian kingdoms of Spain were more than sufficient to have carried those successful metrical and musical innovations to every corner of South Western Europe, where boundaries were even more permeable than in our Schengen space.

We shall not push this argument any further, by lack of competence in the detailed history of the literatures of each country involved, but we cannot refrain from quoting some samples of stanzaic poetry in several languages composed in Europe, from Spain to Russia, all of which are amenable to scansion with the same rules of "enlarged *'arūḍ*", which works so nicely with Andalusi *muwaššaḥāt* and *azǧāl*. Let us being with the last stanza, with an Andalusi Arabic *ḫarǧah* of a Hebrew *muwaššaḥ*, with a clear structure of *raǧaz* (*mustaf'ilun maf'ūlun*), by the famous courtier of Alphonse the Wise's, Ṭodros Abul'āfiya, who lived in the 13th century:

naf-ší- pə-dút- ham-ma ʿ-né / lév- na ʿ-né, = xóxó xxó óxó
hin-né- bə-lib-bí- hin-né / lo- maḥ-né, = xóxx óxó óxó
et- o-hă-b̲í- yit-'an-né / lo- e ʿ-né : = xxxó xxó óxó
ha-ǧár-ni- man- u-ḥíb-bu / wan-t̲a-ná ; = xóxó xóx xxó
law- lam- u-ḥíb-bu- a-ná / lam- yah-ǧár. = xxxó xxó xxó

"I would give my life for an answer, o heart in pain:
Lo, he has pitched his camp on my heart.
When my lover looks for excuses, I answer to him:
My beloved forsook me and left:
Had I not loved him, he would not have forsaken me."

We proceed next with the last stanza of the poem dedicated by Berceo, also in the 13th c. to his patron Saint Millan, a two-footed *raǧaz* (*mustaf ʿilun fa ʿūlun*):

Gon-zál-vo- fué- so- nóm-ne / que- fí-zo ést'- tra-ta-do. = *xóxó xóx / xóxó xóx*
En- Sant- Mi-llán- de- Sú-so / fué- de- ni-ñéz- crï-á-do, = *xxxó xóx / óxxó xóx*
na-tu-rál- de- Ver-cé-o / ónd'- sant- Mi-llán- fue- ná-do, = *xxóx xóx / óxxó xóx*
Dios- guár-de- la- su- ál-ma / del- po-dér- del- pecádo. = *xóxx xóx / xxóx xóx*

"Gonzalo is the name of the author of this work,
Brought up in Upper Saint Millan since childhood,
Born at Berceo, where this saint was also born,
May God preserve his soul from the power of sin."

The case is not different for the Portuguese *Cantigas de amigo* of the 13th and 14th centuries, for instance the number 1 by Fernan Rodriguez de Calheiros, a rather standard three-footed *raǧaz (mustaf ʿilun mustaf ʿilun fa ʿūlun)*, like this:

Per-du-d' ei, - ma-dre, cui-d' eu, - meu – a-mi-go (= *xóxó xóxx xóx*)
ma-car- m'el – viu, sol – non- quis – fa-lar- mi-go (= *xóxó xxóx xóx*)
e – mha – so-ber-vha- mho- to-lheu (= *xxxó xxxó*)
que- fiz- o- que- m'el- de-fen-deu (= *xóxx xxxó*)

"I think, mother, that I have forsaken my lover:
He would not talk to me, although he saw me;
My conceitedness let me forsake him,
As I did what he had forbidden."

If we move from lyrical to epic poetry, a similar scansion appears not surprisingly to be at work in the Castilian *Cantar de Mío Cid*, e.g, as reflected by its initial lines, again a two-footed *raǧaz* (*mustaf ʿilun fa ʿū[lun])*, always allowing the substitution of *fā ʿilātun* for its first foot, and shortening the second one to only two syllables, as follows:

De – los – sos – ó-jos tan / fuér-te-mién-tre- llo-ran-do = *xxxó xó / óxóx xóx*
tor-ná-va- la- ca-bé-ça / e+es-tá-va-los- ca-tán-do = *xóxx xóx / xóxx xóx*
Ví-o- puér-tas- a-biér-tas / e- ú-ços- sin- ca-ñá-dos = *óxóx xóx / xóxx xóx*
al-cán-da-ras- va-zí-as / sin- pié-lles- e- sin- mán-tos = *xóxx xóx / xóxx xóx*

"While shedding so bitter tears from his eyes,
He turned his head and looked at them;
He saw the gates open and the doors without locks,
Empty hangers without furs and cloaks".

Which is incidentally the same metre used by Ibn Quzmān in his *zaǧal* nº 17:

ya- ǧáw-ha-r al-ǧa-lá-la / ya- fáḫ-r a-lan-da-lús = xóxx xóx / xóxx xó
ṭúl- ma- nu-kún bi-ǧá-hak / las- naš-ta-kí- bi-bús = óxxó xóx / xxxó xó

"Essence of majesty and glory of Al-Andalus!
As long as I am under your aegis, I shall not complain of any ill".

However, the "enlarged" *ʿarūḍ* allows also the scansion of much later Castilian poetry, like Calderón's, as the metre *ramal (fā ʿilātun fā ʿilātun)*, with minimal licenses, e.g.:

Nace el pez, que no respira,
Aborto de ovas y lamas,
Y apenas bajel de escamas
Sobre las ondas se mira,
Cuando a todas partes gira,
Midiendo la intensidad
De tanta capacidad
Como le da el centro frío:
Y yo, con más albedrío,
Tengo menos libertad?

"Fish is born without breath,
bred from roe and mud,
And as soon as such bunch of scales
rises amidst the waves,
it runs to every side
and measures the space around
to the extent of its cold nature.
But I, though endowed with wit,
Have not the same freedom."

But even Shakespeare's verse is amenable to this kind of scansion, e.g.:

To be or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles.

Which appears to be again a three-footed *raǧaz (= mustafʿilun mustafʿilun faʿūlun*), similar to those of Hispanic romances, although the absence of rhyme in this case runs counter the Arabic models.

Going on with the experiment, we can apply also this scansion to a sample of Goethe's poetry, again without rhyme, e.g.:

Ich ging im Walde
So für mich hin,
Und nichts zu suchen,
Das war mein Sinn,
Im Schatten sah ich
Ein Blümchen stehn,
Wie Sterne leuchtend,
Wie Äuglein schön.

"I entered the woods
Just for leisure,
Looking for nothing,
Or so I thought.
In the shade I saw
A little flower standing,
Bright like a star,
Beautiful like a little eye."

Which would be a *raǧaz manhūk,* i.e, reduced to a single foot *(= mustafʿilun),* but *muraffal*, i.e, extended with one additional syllable.

Finally, we could do likewise even with some of Pushkin's Russian poetry, e.g.:

Ljublú tebjá, Pétra tvorénye,
Ljubljú tvoj strógij, strónnyj víd,
Nevý deržávnoje tečénye,
Beregovój yeyó granít.

"I love you, Peter's work,
I love your severe and slim outlook,
The powerful flow of the Neva
And the granitic moles."

Which would be again a two-footed *raǧaz (= mustafʿilun mustafʿilun)*, also *muraffal* in penultimate stressed rhymes, with a stanzaic structure **abab**, common in Arabic stanzaic poetry.

Summing up, our contention is not and cannot be that all kinds of modern European poetry are patterned after metrical and stanzaic Arabic models, not even its Andalusi version known as "enlarged" *ʿarūḍ*, in which quantitative feet have been converted into a rhythm of intervals marked by stress, but we would simply like to invite reconsideration of some quite widespread negationist attitudes towards the Eastern contributions to our culture and civilization, particularly decisive in the Iberian Peninsula, but not totally absent from the rest of Europe.[12]

Notes:

1. See Erman & Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, Berlin, 1982, I 495.

2. See *Al-Muqtabas V* (ed. P. Chalmeta, F. Corriente & M. Ṣubḥ), Madrid-Rabat, 1979, p. 46.

3. See *Al-sifru 'tt̲ānī min kitāb almuqtabis* (ed. M. A. Makkī), Riyadh, 2003, p. 239.

4. See F. Corriente, A gramatical sketch of the Spanish Arabic dialect bundle, Madrid.

5. See his *O českom stixe preimuščestvenno v sopostavlenie s russkim* ("About Czech poetry, in special connection with its Russian counterpart"), in fact a treatise on universal prosody, of which a Portuguese translation by us and M. Sleiman was published in *Tiraz* 2 (2005) 181-271.

6. See Marie-Therèse Urvoy, *Le Psautier Mozarabe de Hafs le Goth*, Toulouse, 1994, p. iv.

7. See Ǧ. Arrikābi's edition of his *Dāru 'ṭṭirāz*, Damascus, 1949, p. 47.

8. See our paper "On a Hopeless Last Stand for the Hypothesis of a Romance Origin of Andalusi Stanzaic Poetry. Homosexuality and Prostitution in the *kharjas*", in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 40.2 (2009) 170-181.

9. See on this matter our papers "Métrica hebrea cuantitativa, métrica de la poesía estrófica andalusí y *ʿarūḍ*", in *Sefarad* 46 (1986) 123-132, and "Modified 'ar: an integrated theory for the origin and nature of both Andalusi Arabic strophic poetry and Sephardic Hebrew verse", in *Poesía Estrófica* (Proceedings of the 1st International Congress on Arabic and Hebrew stanzaic poetry and its Romance parallels, Madrid 1991, 71-78.

10. First English translation of the passage under consideration in A.R. Nykl's *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and its relations with Old Provençal Troubadours*, Baltimore, 1946, p. 387.

11. See on this subject our paper "De nuevo en torno al protocejel del año 913", in *Sefarad* 52 (1992) 69-73.

12. A partially similar Spanish version of this paper was published under the title "A propósito del *Cantar de Mío Cid*. Arabismos en el *Cantar de Mío Cid*: lexemas, remas y sistemas", in *Voz y Letra* 24.1 (2013) 99/145, with no registered reaction so far from affected quarters.