

Towards a new theory of Arabic prosody

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FOOTNOTES

¹A line of Arabic poetry usually comprises two structurally independent sequences of feet; each of the sequences in question is called a hemistich, and the line is said to be divided. In a few cases, the line consists of a single sequence which is identical to one hemistich of a divided line; for the sake of simplicity and consistency, we shall say that in such cases the line consists of a single hemistich. We define a hemistich, then, not as a sequence of feet which always constitutes a half or a division, but as one which can (and usually does) constitute a half or a division.

²In this study, the word meter appears within quotation marks when used generically to designate the sense of regularity which often characterizes verse.

³On Level I, it is possible to define an Arabic meter as the string which constitutes a single hemistich and to stipulate that in most--but not in all--instances the meter is doubled to produce a divided line. Henceforth this definition will be adopted; it represents an economical way of accounting for the lines which al-Khalīl call almasṭuʿur and almanhuuk (see al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuhfat al-Khalīl, pp. 81-84).

⁴It was stated above that the hemistichs of a divided line are identical on Level I; such is also the case on Level II. It is thus possible on Level II to define a meter as the string which constitutes a single hemistich, and henceforth we will adopt this definition. As will be

seen later, the same definition holds true on Level III.

⁵See Shapiro's Handbook, p. 63 (italicization added).

⁶We shall talk of reduction as positioned or placed at a given point if it occurs at that point.

⁷Medial reduction is "identically" placed in two feet if it is equidistant from at least one pair of corresponding extremities; each of the following sequences illustrates this definition (a hyphen stands for a long syllable, and u stands for a short syllable):

— — u — — — u —
— u — — — u — —
— — u — — u —
— u — — — u —

⁸A hyphen stands for a long syllable, and u stands for a short syllable.

⁹The symbol ω indicates that a single long syllable has been replaced by two short syllables.

¹⁰The forms within parentheses result from the third rule of standard reduction.

¹¹See Anīs' Mūsīqā al-Shi^Cr, pp. 189-208.

¹²Two of these are included in al-Khalīl's "neglected meters": the first (which al-Khalīl calls almumtadd) is faa^Cilun faa^Cilaatun faa^Cilun faa^Cilaatun, and the second (which al-Khalīl calls almustaṭiil) is fa^Cuulaatun fa^Cuulun fa^Cuulaatun fa^Cuulun.

¹³See Anīs' Mūsīqā al-Shi^Cr, pp. 54, 55, 189-199. Almuqtadab is the meter for approximately 1% of modern Arabic poetry; on the other hand, almuḍaari^C is almost

nonexistent in modern Arabic poetry (see Anīs' Mūsīqā al-Shi^Cr, pp. 199-208).

¹⁴See al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, p. 14.

¹⁵See ^CAtīq's ʿIlm al-^CArūd wa al-Qāfiyah, p. 92.

¹⁶See al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, pp. 109, 146, 147, 225-229, 279; see also Anīs' Mūsīqā al-Shi^Cr, pp. 76-78, 90, 99, 115-117.

¹⁷See Anīs' Mūsīqā al-Shi^Cr, pp. 90, 189-208; also see al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, pp. 114, 115.

¹⁸Far from being peculiar to Arabic poetry, symmetry seems to be a universal prosodic principle. See Shapiro's Handbook, p. 63.

¹⁹See al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, pp. 59-62.

²⁰As was stated earlier, ω also patterns as a long syllable for the purposes of Level III reduction and deletion (although such patterning produces rare variants).

²¹The existence of type assonance between hemistich (x) and a given standard hemistich does not necessarily endow hemistich (x) with any of the "meter"-producing patterns which the standard hemistich has. Although the hemistichs — u — — — u — — and — u — u — u — are related to each other by type assonance, the Level I and the Level II patterns which produce "meter" in the first hemistich are not present in the second: the first hemistich is of the structure BB while the second is of the structure BA (B stands for a quadripartite foot, and A stands for a tripartite foot); besides, u is similarly positioned in the feet of the first hemistich but not in the feet of the second.

²²Each hemistich-final variant is also related to the Level II foot by type assonance.

²³See al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, pp. 85-87.

²⁴See al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, pp. 220, 222.

²⁵Unless it recurs or pervades the entire hemistich, syllabic symmetry cannot be the only source of "meter".

²⁶See al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, p. 245.

²⁷See Anīs' Mūsīqā al-Shi^Cr, pp. 156, 157. A rare exception occur in majzuu[?]u lxafiif where — u — — — u — becomes — u — — — — (see al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, p. 254).

²⁸See Anīs' Mūsīqā al-Shi^Cr, pp. 256, 257.

²⁹See, for example, al-Rāḍī's Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, p. 217. Also see ^CAtīq's ^CIlm al-^CArūd wa al-Qāfiyah, pp. 68, 70, 121.

³⁰See Wright's Grammar, Vol. II, pp. 363, 364.

³¹The term "maṭla^C" designates the first line of an ode.

³²Often the hemistich-final feet of the maṭla^C are identical. Although popular, such identity is not obligatory (see al-Sayyid's al-^CArūd wa al-Qāfiyah, pp. 19, 20).

³³On page 280 of his Sharḥ Tuḥfat al-Khalīl, al-Rāḍī cites the following lines:

masaktu qalbi lammaa	masaktuhuu ma ^C uuraa
ba ^C ḍu lquluubi ṭuyuurun	lam tastaṭi ^C an taṭiiraa

Examining the first line reveals the following:

(a) The first hemistich ends in — — — (which is derived from — u — —).

(b) Like the first, the second hemistich ends in — — — (which is derived from — u — —).

(c) The second hemistich is u - u - - -
(rather than - - u - - - -).

³⁴See Anīs' Mūsīqā al-Shi^Cr, p. 160.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

It is appropriate at this point to bring into sharper focus the observation that "meter" in Arabic poetry is invariably the result of patterning. By postulating three levels of analysis, we have identified three types of "meter"-producing patterning:

(1) The patterning which characterizes Level I is defined as the arrangement of feet in the hemistich; four arrangements occur: mere repetition, interrupted repetition, supplemented repetition, and alternation.

(2) The patterning which characterizes Level II is defined as the similar placement of reduction in all feet of the hemistich.

(3) The patterning which characterizes Level III is defined as the tendency to achieve syllabic symmetry in the entire hemistich or in a portion thereof (without violating certain restrictions).

The rules which produce Level I and Level II patterning apply to the entire hemistich; on the other hand, the rules which produce Level III patterning apply to the individual foot.¹ For this reason, the hemistichs of a divided line must be identical on the first two levels but may differ on the third level. The following is only one of many examples which can be cited for the identity and the diversity in question:

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Standard:

ω - υ - ω - υ - ω - υ -
 ω - υ - ω - υ - ω - υ -

Variations:²

ω - υ - - - υ - - - υ -
 - - υ - - - υ - - -

- - υ - ω - υ - ω - υ -
 ω - υ - ω - υ - - -

The three types of patterning defined above do not have to co-occur since each can--independently--give rise to "meter": in example (a) below, "meter" results from Level I patterning alone (the hemistich can be represented by BB, where B stands for a quadripartite foot); in (b), "meter" results from Level II patterning alone (the feet are similar as concerns the positioning of υ relative to the long syllables); in (c), "meter" results from Level III patterning alone (recurrence of syllabic symmetry is clear from the fact that both feet are symmetrical; besides, syllabic symmetry pervades the hemistich as a whole).

- (a) υ - - υ υ - - -
(b) υ - - - υ - -
(c) - υ - υ - υ -

In most cases, however, the hemistich manifests at least two types of patterning (although one type may be dominant); for example, the hemistich - - υ - - υ -

-- u - - u - manifests three types of patterning:

(1) It manifests Level I patterning since it may be represented by the sequence BABA (where B stands for a quadripartite foot and A stands for a tripartite foot).

(2) It manifests Level II patterning since the feet are similar as concerns the positioning of u relative to the long syllables.

(3) It manifests syllabic symmetry in two feet (the second and the last); besides, it may be divided into two strings each of which has a symmetrical syllabic structure (-- u -- u -- and - u - - u -).

All standard meters manifest Level I and Level II patterning; in addition, some manifest syllabic symmetry at least in a constituent part. As for variants, some manifest only one type of patterning, others manifest two, and still others manifest all three.

In addition to defining Level I, Level II, and Level III patterning, this study has defined an important feature (type assonance) which relates the strings of Level III to those of Level II.

The rules which operate on Level III (amalgamation, reduction, deletion, and compensation) are by no means arbitrary processes: they result in a type of variety which aspires to and gains from syllabic symmetry; besides, they preserve the identity of the meter by producing type assonance and by tending to retain the total duration of the standard meter.

On all levels, a meter is defined as the sequence which constitutes a single hemistich; this definition stems from the fact that the hemistichs of a divided line are the same. It will be recalled that on Level I and Level II the second hemistich of a divided line is a duplicate of the first; on

Level III the hemistichs of a divided line are often different in terms of composition, and yet those hemistichs are considered to be exactly alike because type assonance identifies them with identical strings.

* * * *

Some of the strings generated by our theory do not exist in al-Khalīl's corpus; those strings constitute latent possibilities which cannot invalidate the theory since (1) they result from general principles, (2) they are less numerous than the possibilities which do materialize, and (3) their dormancy can (at least in the majority of cases) be explained by the theory. Many (perhaps most) of the possibilities in question would have materialized but for the fact that al-Khalīl's theory became a confining factor; it is common knowledge that poets and critics alike came to regard as a mistake every deviation from al-Khalīl's rules.

This study may contain a few errors and may suffer from excessive brevity at certain points; nevertheless, it offers a useful framework for a more comprehensive analysis.

FOOTNOTES

¹On Level I, the rules are applied to generate a hemistich; in most cases, the hemistich is then doubled to produce a divided line. On Level II, a rule applies simultaneously to both hemistichs of a divided line. On Level III, a rule affects only one foot per application, with no stipulation that--if the line is divided--a later application should automatically affect the corresponding foot of the other hemistich.

²See al-Rāqī's Sharḥ Tuhfat al-Khalīl, top of p. 180.

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