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Hispano-Arabic Literature and the Early Romance Literature

Arie Schippers

One of the genres of the medieval Arabic literature of Europe is the Hispano-Arabic *muwashshah* ('girdle poem'), a type of strophic poetry which originated in tenth-century Muslim Spain. It is characterized by its five strophes and its special rhyme scheme [ZZ]/ aaaZZ/ bbbZZ/ ... eeeZZ. This genre sometimes has Romance elements in the refrain – the *kharja* ('exit') – at the end of the fifth and last strophe. Especially *muwashshahs* with a love or a wine theme can have a Romance or vernacular Arabic *kharja*: a girl suffering from love passion who speaks to her beloved or her mother, or a drunkard who asks the way to the tavern. Especially the love themes of the *muwashshah* and the *kharja* are important in comparing the themes of Arabic Andalusian strophic poetry with the Romance love poetry as expressed in the *cansos* of the troubadours. In academic circles, however, there is no consensus whether one can speak only of some thematic and formal parallels between Arabic and Romance love poetry in general and the love lyrics of the troubadours in particular, or whether Arabic strophic literature had a real influence on the troubadour poetry.

In this article I want to sketch the present state of the "influence" question against the background of recent secondary literature on the question. The above topics will be dealt with in the light of recent standard works containing contributions from many scholars such as Jayyusi and Menocal and of monographs by, for example, Federico Corriente, Jareer Abu-Haidar and Cynthia Robinson. To get an idea of the structure of a *muwashshah* and its themes I will first comment on the leading motifs of the individual strophes of a specimen of a *muwashshah* and put the results of this discussion in the light of the analogy with themes of the *cansos* of the troubadours. A well-known *muwashshah* with a Romance *kharja* at the end of the fifth strophe goes as follows :

Ayya 'ayshin yalidhdhu mahzunu
Salabat qalba-hu'l-huru-'inu

Ayyuha'l-la'imuna fi wajdi
In amut wahshatan ila Hindi
Shahidat admu'i 'ala khaddi
Innani fi-hawa-ka maftunu

*How can I live when I suffer / and the beautiful
ladies have snatched my heart from my breast?*

*O my friends, who reproach me for my love
When I die out of love for Hind!
The tears of my cheeks are testimonies,
That I love you continuously, [o Hind !]*

Ma li-qalbi'l-hanini tahninu	<i>What comfort can there be for my moaning heart?</i>
Ayyu sabrin li-kulli muftatan	<i>What patience is there for the infatuated lover</i>
Ba'an nafsah-hu bi-la thamani	<i>Who sells his soul cheaply</i>
Fi rida kulli shadinin hasani	<i>In order to conquer his adored gazelle?</i>
Sulibat-i'l-'aqlu min-hu wa'l-dinu	<i>A lover who has lost his reason and his belief</i>
Fa-hwa fi'l-ba'i'ina maghbunu	<i>Everybody cheats him at the market.</i>
Qul li-man hayyajat tabarihi :	<i>Say to the woman, who revived my suffering</i>
« Wayka bi 'ajjili bi-tasrihi	<i>« Make haste to heal my sorrow</i>
Innani mayyitun wa-fi ruhi	<i>I am dead, I do not have any life left</i>
Bi-sihami'l-jufuni mat'unu	<i>I am wounded by the arrows of your eyes</i>
Fi thiyabi'l-nuhuli madfunu »	<i>And buried in the clothes of leanness » .</i>
Ghusnu banin 'uligtu-hu shaghafa	<i>A branch of a willow to whom I was attached by love</i>
Yazdari'l-arda tahta-hu salafa	<i>Who shows disdain for the earth on which she walks</i>
Yukhjilu'l-ghusna kulla-ma-n'atafa	<i>She covers the other branches with shame, when she bows</i>
Fumu-hu'l-durru fi-hi maknunu	<i>Her mouth has hidden pearls</i>
'Urriqat fawqa lahzi-hi nunu	<i>And black ink welled to her glance.</i>
Talama bi'l-jufuni qad fatakat	<i>With her eyes she attacks continuously</i>
Wa-ma'ani'l-hawa qad-ishtarakat	<i>And because she understands everything of love</i>
Hina ghannat li-wahshati wa-bakat	<i>She has sung my passion weeping :</i>
KOMO SI FILYOLO ALYENO,	<i>« As if a foreign son</i>
NON MASH ADORMESH A MEW SENO. ¹	<i>Does not sleep anymore at my bosom. »</i>

The prologue and the first strophe of this poem describe the sufferings of the poet-lover after the beautiful ladies have stolen his heart. In the first strophe the poet also addresses one of the obstacles to love : the reproachers. But his love for Hind is sincere : the tears on his cheeks are evidence of this. In the second strophe, he depicts the impossible situation in which the lover finds himself after he has lost his reason. In the third strophe he sends a message to his beloved, beseeching her to put an end to his amorous sufferings. The fourth strophe is a description of the beloved woman. The fifth strophe does not belong to the love story of the first four strophes, in which the poet recounts his love for Hind, an Arab lady ; on the contrary, he evokes a Christian lady who speaks Romance and loves an Arab-speaking foreigner. The poet-lover of the first four strophes compares his passion for Hind with the passion of the Christian lady for the Filyolo Alyeno.

This poem contains some motifs present in the love lyrics of the troubadours. Perhaps these are universal love motifs. Other motifs are peculiar to the genre of the *muwashshah* and are not found in the troubadour poetry. For instance, the motif of "beautiful ladies have snatched my heart from my breast"² and that of the "I am

¹ Corriente 1997, pp. 288 (A 18) ; 312 (H 7) ; Jones 1988, pp. 101-05 (no. 12) ; Jones 1992, poem no. 260 ; Stern 1974, pp. 118, 135 ; Yehudah ha-Lewi 1904, vol. I, pp. 168-69.

² Cf. Schippers 1994, p. 172 ; Ecker 1934, pp. 57-58 with examples from Bernart de Ventadorn and Arnaut Daniel.

wounded by the arrows of your eyes"³ are universal love motifs, and frequently occur also in the troubadours' *cansos*. Such other motifs as the comparison in the fifth strophe of the poet-lover's passion with that of an infatuated woman, perhaps are not to be found in the poetry by the troubadours. Also the description of the beloved in the fourth strophe is different from the conventional description of the *domna* of the troubadours.

Much has been written about the question of the relationship or non-relationship between Arabic and Romance poetry, also in connection with the troubadours. In dealing with recent secondary literature on the influence question and making an evaluation of this literature, we cannot leave unmentioned the book by Otto Zwartjes (1997)⁴. The book presents an accurate account of all the problems involved with the Hispano-Arabic *muwashshah* and its possible relationship with Romance literatures. The author concludes that the *kharjas* – even Romance *kharjas* – belong to the Arabic prosodic system. He presents a list of analogous *zajal*-like⁵ strophic poems in Late Latin and various Romance languages. Another list, for instance, gives thematic parallels between Romance and Arabic.

Many of the recent standard works on Arabic Andalusian literature deal with aspects of the influence theories, such as Salma Khadra Jayyusi's *The legacy of Muslim Spain* (Leiden: Brill 1992), where among the many contributions there are articles about Arabic literature and its influence. In the case of the strophic poetry James Monroe⁶ even postulates that the *zajal* was earlier than the *muwashshah* and that there was a musical tradition of Christian Iberian origin, based largely on *muwashshahs* and *zajals*, which has survived to the present day in North Africa. Monroe's opinion is that the direction of the musical influence was from medieval Romance to Arabic music. He also assumes possible Iberian influence on Andalusian Arabic notions of courtly love. Lois A. Giffen⁷ deals with the *Tawq al-Hamama* ("Ring of the Dove") by Ibn Hazm (994-1063), and tries to demonstrate that the origin of the courtly love of the troubadours lies in Arabic love poetry. She indicates some parallels between the themes of the *Tawq* and the troubadouresque courtly love. The article by Roger Boase⁸ on Arabic influences on European love poetry affirms that courtly love may be seen "as a comprehensive cultural phenomenon" which arose in an aristocratic Christian environment exposed to Hispano-Arabic influences. He considers the beloved's sovereignty and the lover's fidelity and submission as essential features of this concept of courtly love. He provides examples from both Provençal and Arabic poetry illustrating this concept. He sees the tradition of chaste love expressed in the *Tawq al-Hamama*. At the end he enumerates a variety of slave girls of Christian origin at Muslim courts and Muslim

³ Cf. Schippers 1994, p. 176, with an example from Raimbaut d'Aurengua, see Riquer 1975, p. 446.

⁴ Zwartjes 1997, which is based on his earlier dissertation "The Andalusian *Xarja*-s: poetry at the crossroads of two systems?", Nijmegen 1995.

⁵ *Zajal* (Sp. *Cíjil*, *zǧel*) refers to popular strophic Arabic poetry, written in vernacular, with sometimes more strophes than the five of the *muwashshah*.

⁶ Monroe 1992, pp. 398-419.

⁷ Giffen 1992, pp. 420-42.

⁸ Boase 1992, pp. 457-82.

slave girls who became lute playing singers and concubines at Christian courts to illustrate how Provençal troubadours may have been influenced by Arabic poetry and treatises of love. It is obvious that the arguments of Monroe, Giffen and Boase are exactly the ones Abu-Haidar (2001) wanted to be refuted (see below).

Another recent standard work is *The literature of Al-Andalus*, a volume in The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature series edited by Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells (2000). This volume is not a "normal" one in the series because it deals not only with the Arabic literature of al-Andalus, but also with the Hebrew, Latin and Romance literatures of al-Andalus. It is an integrated study of the medieval literatures of Spain and other southern European regions. Moreover, after almost every chapter, there is a digression on architectural objects which refer to court life. This perhaps reflects the holistic approach employed by the editors. This book certainly fills a gap in the sense that it is the first written history of Andalusian literature to deal with the Arabic Andalusian literature in connection with other Andalusian literatures, such as Hebrew Andalusian literature, some Romance literature and medieval Iberian Latin literature; also the references to the courtly setting of literature by means of the many architectural digressions are both original and useful. My impression is that the concept behind this book is a worthy one, but that this procedure has led to many lacunae. When dealing with Romance literatures, it would have been equally important to mention Occitan literature, since the troubadours lived not only in Provence, but also in northern Spain and even in Toledo.

After dealing with the standard works, we will look at three monographs written by Corriente (1997), Abu-Haidar (2001) and Robinson (2002), respectively. Corriente's work deals with Arabic dialectal poetry as manifested in *muwashshahs*, *zajals* (popular strophic poems in dialect) and *kharjas*. The book is of interest because of the Romance *kharjas* and their place within Arabic and Hebrew poems and therefore in connection with the question of the relationship between Arabic and Roman lyrics in general.

The *muwashshah* originated in Andalusia and then spread throughout the Arabic world; it was known by Arab intellectuals, though not equally appreciated by everyone. Important questions are whether the origin of the strophic poetry is Eastern Arabic or native Hispanic, taking into account metrical and strophic characteristics, the question of the nature of the *kharja* and the genetic relationship between *muwashshah* and *zajal*, and some minor questions about metre and music. Perhaps the genres of *muwashshah* and *zajal* are related to the oriental strophic *musammat* structures. Its "discovery" in Western Europe during the nineteenth century was only so for European orientalists, who until then had not known about it. We should not forget that *zajal* and *muwashshah* appeared in the tenth century in al-Andalus and ripened there in the eleventh century, and in the twelfth century the first echo of it was to be found in an anthology composed by Ibn Bassam of Santarem, and then in many other works. In the West, the *kharjas* was first discovered at the end of the nineteenth century – as Corriente says in a note – namely by Menendez Pelayo, who discovered Romance *kharjas* in 1894 in the Hebrew poetry by Yehuda ha-Levi. The rediscovery of *kharjas* in Arabic and

Hebrew poetry in the twentieth century was made by Samuel Myklos Stern in 1948 and followed by García Gómez in 1952, which prompted a huge number of publications, as illustrated by Hitchcock's *Bibliography* (1977) amplified by Hitchcock / Lopez Morillas (1996) and Heijkoop / Zwartjes (1998).⁹

Andalusi strophic poetry was developed earlier than the other West European strophic genres. According to Corriente, the Romance language used in the *kharijas* fits in with and was orientated towards the Khalilian Arabic metre, and the Romance used in the bilingual texts already had been very weakened. However, according to García Gómez, the metrics of the Andalusi strophic poetry were identical with and derived from Hispanic strophic poetry: they were accentual with a tonic accent on certain syllables of the verse.

The opposition to García Gómez' Hispanic metrical theory came from England in the 1970s and 1980s, starting with reflections on the Romance elements of the *kharijas*, made by T. Gorton, J. Abu-Haidar, A. Jones and R. Hitchcock. Corriente presents a refutation of García Gómez' and Monroe's theory of "rhythmic Romance parallels" and stresses the Khalilian Arabic origin of the metre of Andalusi strophic poetry, but with special prosodic characteristics resulting from the special accentual nature of the Andalusi Arabic dialect vis-à-vis Oriental Arabic dialects and standard Arabic where syllabic length played a dominant role.

Corriente's book is the ultimate reconfirmation of the tendency against the influence theories which at an earlier date inspired Romanicists such as Hilty to see parallels between literary motifs in the *kharijas* and those in the cansos of the troubadours, because he based himself on interpretations by García Gómez. At a later stage Hilty reversed his earlier position. Emilio García Gómez (1906-1995) was not happy with the criticism of his scholarly activities expressed by his former pupil Corriente and by the members of the "English school". Some years before his death at the age of 89, he wrote a polemic pamphlet entitled *El escándalo de de las jarchas de Oxford* with criticisms levelled at Alan Jones.

In one part of his book ("No Arabic Echoes in the Provençal Lyrics"¹⁰), Abu-Haidar deals with the lack of affinity between Hispano-Arabic poetry and the early Provençal lyrics. Arabic literature – including Arabic Andalusian strophic poetry – does not have any features in common with troubadour poetry. By comparing the terminology, language and poetic motives used in the two literatures, it is easy to demonstrate that the two worlds have a different concept of love: Provençal poetry treats love as something which ennobles, whereas Arabic poetry presents a much more realistic view. The wine theme, so much used in *muwashshahs*, does not occur in the songs of the troubadours. The flora and fauna as reflected in both literatures are enormously different, because Arabic Andalusian poetry likes to refer to the desert of the Arabian peninsula, where there is hardly any Andalusian fauna or flora present. Moreover, classical Arabic poetry is a highly elevated language within a great literary tradition, whereas the Provençal poems are written in a simple,

⁹ Heijkoop et Zwartjes 1998 will be compiled into a book, to be published at Brill, Leiden.

¹⁰ One chapter of this part was delivered as a lecture at the Madrid Congress on strophic poetry; see Abu-Haidar 1991, pp. 11-21.

everyday language which has no substantial literary tradition.

As for the *Tawq al-Hamama*, this work cannot be regarded as a treatise on courtly or Platonic love, as some have tried to demonstrate on the basis of fragments taken out of context. Ibn Hazm presents realistic descriptions of several manifestations of love, heterosexual as well as homosexual, refined as well as passionate. There is no mention of 'Udhri love, nor of the troubadours' concept of love.

Cynthia Robinson (2002) relates architectural space to court culture, and deals with courtly models of good behaviour and courtly love at the courts of tenth-/eleventh-century Muslim Andalusian kings, and considers the courts as sites of interaction between Arabic Andalusian and Occitan poetry. She says the following about the influence question (p. 279) :

It is, in fact, as Menocal remarks on numerous occasions, the lack of any *known* translation of a *specific* Arabic lyric – whether in classical or dialectal register – into Provençal which has proved the greatest impediment to broad scholarly acceptance of the “Arabist theory” [...] Since translations (or the lack thereof) have proved such a sticking point, perhaps it is time to find another word. I would propose, instead of “translation”, something like “adaptation”, or perhaps “transposition”. The entire phenomenon of Provençal court culture, which everyone agrees to have been a very “courtly”, of the earlier (of this fact, the reader has hopefully been convinced by this study) Andalusī “courtly” phenomenon into another key or register (in this case, into another language).

It is not easy to reach a conclusion about the degree to which Romance love poems and more particularly troubadour cansos were influenced by Arabic strophic lyrics, and by Arabic love poetry and love theory (as found in “theoretical” works, such as the *Tawq al-Hamama*) in general. It might be clear from the foregoing that there is a negative current, which perhaps nowadays is centred more or less on Europe, and an optimistic positive current, which is now developing especially in the United States.

Abu-Haidar's book should be seen as an exponent of the sceptics of what Corriente called the “English school” (consisting of Hitchcock, Gorton, Jones and others) who do not want to connect the Romance and Arabic traditions but to study each in its own right. He has said many valuable things about the nature of Ibn Hazm's treatise and the difference between the tradition of the Arabic poetry and that of the poetic movement of the troubadours. But his refutation is perhaps too Popperian given the fact that he refutes any possible influence of Arabic culture on that of the troubadours on the basis of the falsification of some basic ideas the supporters of the influence theory had about Arabic poetry's possible relation to Romance poetry. In the eyes of Abu-Haidar, the thematic and formal similarity of the two poetries, as seen for instance by Nykl (1946), were sometimes not very accurately presented ; the idea of “courtly love” which the supporters of the influence theory wanted to discover in Arabic poetry led in many cases to a wrong general perception of Arabic love which is often rather realistic and not “courtly” (whatever this expression may mean when its meaning is overextended) ; themes such as drinking wine and loving boys which occur so many times in Arabic poetry were ignored by the influence theory people who only saw the similarities and not

the differences. Abu-Haidar's ideas about lacking similarities between the fauna and flora or the lack of metaphorical affinity in both poetries was reason for him to reject any influence theory.

In certain aspects, Abu-Haidar's reaction goes too far. Flora and fauna in Arabic Andalusian poetry are in many cases Andalusian and not Arabian, as is the case in Ibn Khafaja's garden poetry. Moreover, a poet is not a botanical or zoological expert, and the only reason for certain poets to mention Arabian desert fauna and flora is because they add an air of nostalgia to their poetry. In translating such poetry into another language or culture, one would have to look for fauna and flora with a similar nostalgic connotation. While the nightingale plays a certain role in Persian and in troubadour poetry, in Arabic poetry the role is played by the dove. Translating an Arabic poem into Occitan would entail replacing all "doves in gardens" with "nightingales in gardens".

Moreover, comparing Romance love poetry with Arabic love poetry (instead of studying each in isolation within its own tradition) provides an insight into the similarities and differences between the two, increases our understanding of both, and prompts us to give an account of their characteristics. It has also been demonstrated that the literatures of Spain, Provence and Italy were not isolated from each other. The Hebrew poets of Provence considered their Spanish Hebrew colleagues their models. The Spanish Hebrew poets employed the themes and metres of the classical Arabic poetry. Abraham Bedersi – a Hebrew poet from Beziers – mentions in his catalogue of poets not only Hebrew poets, but also Arabic poets and troubadours. He was involved with three literatures. The same applies later to Dante Alighieri's contemporary, Immanuele da Roma (alias Manollo Guido), who wrote Hebrew poetry which still was under the influence of Arabic tradition, but also Italian poetry with themes which could easily be borrowed from Arabic.

In the passage quoted from Cynthia Robinson's book, María Rosa Menocal is mentioned as some sort of leading supporter of the influence theory. The holistic approach of relating architecture to literature which dominates Cynthia Robinson's book was also a leading device in Menocal's *Literature of al-Andalus*. The American supporters of the influence theory might have been in close contact with each other, and they form a group with an almost religious zeal to prove the cross-pollination of all these cultures and literatures in Spain, Italy and the Provence. Their beliefs and their zeal are stimulating the development of an integrated study of medieval southern European literatures. Nevertheless, one should always keep an eye open for not only the similarities but also the differences between Arabic and Romance love poetry and love theory.

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