Style and register in Arabic, Hebrew and Romance strophic poetry
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In this paper I wish to deal with the typology of strophic Hebrew Andalusian and Arabic poetry in comparison with Romance poetry (the poetic genres of the Occitan troubadours, which had a large diffusion in the Iberian peninsula) on the basis of two aspects:

1. The system of reference in the poetry. In this connection I shall look at some of Zumthor's findings1 and their adaptation to Occitan and Medieval Arabic poetry. Are his conclusions about the nature of the poetry of the trouvères (or trouvères) also valid in describing the characteristics of Medieval Arabic and Occitan poetry?

2. Closely connected to this point are the themes of poetry2. The first point to be discussed is the typology of Medieval poetry, both Arabic and Romance. Zumthor has attempted to construct a typology of the French trouvères poetry on the basis of internal, textual evidence3. Bencheikh and Van Gelder have also tried to use some of Zumthor's notions namely with respect to Arabic poetry4. In turn, I will try to evaluate these notions and their usefulness for comparing Arabic with Occitan poetry.

In his article on style and register in the poetry of the trouvères, Zumthor wanted to avoid defining style as merely rhetoric and amplification5. He looked at recurrent expressions in the semantic field,

Zumthor’s analysis is also valid for the earlier Occitan poetry, especially the love poetry which was in a sense the precursor of trouvère poetry, especially in the examples of love poetry where the poet complains about his situation: his loyal love towards his beloved, but the harsh treatment of his beloved to him; his feeling of desperation, hope and fear.

In the following section I will try to describe some Arabic and Hebrew muwaṣṣaḥāt in terms of Zumthor’s register. On another occasion this year I have already had the opportunity to make some remarks about a muwaṣṣah of Ibn Baqi (d. 540/1145) which could be described in terms of Zumthor’s register. This muwaṣṣah begins with the words ajrāt la-nā min diyār al-khillī and resembles Occitan and trouvère-like love poetry in the thematical sense: the theme of the wind as a messenger of the beloved’s country which we see in Occitan poetry expressed by Peire Vidal and Bernart de Ventadorn, is found here in an identical form.

5. ZUMTHOR, op. cit., p. 264.
6. ZUMTHOR, op. cit., p. 270.
7. ZUMTHOR, op. cit., p. 272.
8. ZUMTHOR, op. cit., p. 272.

"Can la frej'aura venta/ Deves vostre pais/
Vejaire m'es que senta/ Un ven de Paradis/ Per amor de la genta/ Vas cui eu sui aclis//"

The first three strophes clearly indicate that Zumthor’s analysis can be adapted to them:

0. Ajrāt la-na min diyār al-khillī/
Rihū l-sabā’ ‘abarātī l-dhullī/
0. From the dwelling place of the beloved, the wind of dawn leads us tears of humility.

1. Habbat hubūba –l-danā fi badanī/
wa-hassyajat mā mađā min shajātī/
tuhī tahiyat man ‘adhadhaba-nī/
jawān ‘alā kabīdī –l-mu’talīlī/
wa-kāna yawmī –l-nawwā fi ḥillīlī/
1. Languishing sighs [of the wind of day break] penetrate my being, they revive old anguishs. They bring greetings towards me from the one who torments my sick heart with love. O, may that day of departure be cursed!

wa-mā–hiyālī ‘alay-hi, qil lī!!
2. Why does Love act against me so unjustly, now that the one I love has turned himself away from me? No one could replace him in my affection. How can I bear his refusal to meet me? Which stratagem I have to use against him? Tell me!

3. ‘Ubī ‘alay-hi ‘a-rīthū ‘ābīlī/
wa-ballighī watana –l-mahbābī/
tahiyatā –l-‘āshiqī –l-makrābīlī/
wagabbīlī fī makānī l-qublīlī/
‘an-nī wa-hāyyī bi-‘arūfī –l-dalīlī/
3. Return, breeze, return to where you have come from and take greetings from a sad lover to the homeland of my beloved one. Give on my behalf

"Oy, aura dulza, qui vens dever lai/
Un mun vakyīn de lay/
Ab 1’ alen tir vas/
(‘Alay-hi, qil lī!!)"
A. SCHIPPERS

What is striking here is that the 'framework' of this Arabic poem is so similar to that of Romance poems, although it is part of a different tradition. The "I" and "now" are present in abundance in the poetry by means of the first person as well as possessive forms e.g. badani (my body), shajani (my sorrow) (strophe 1), 'alayya (against me), 'anni (away from me), istibdi (my suffering, bearing, enduring), wa'si (my rendez-vous), ihiyadi (my using stratagems), qul i (say me) (strophe 2), etc. Here again the focal point, i.e. the love-object, is referred to as a third person. The verb and its derivatives are also dominant in this poem (in favour of adjectives and substantives), but this may be a coincidence. The key-words are those pertaining to love, which appear in various guises. Hope and fear, possession and deprivation are connoted by the use of time.

I give some further examples of the register in Arabic and Hebrew strophic love poetry. I wish to deal with two poems by Ibn Mā‘ as-Samā‘ and one by Moses ibn ‘Ezra. In poem no. 1 (p. 5, sarī‘) Ibn Mā‘ as-Samā‘ stresses the injust deeds of the beloved one, but the beloved one and his killing glances can do so without being blamed. The beloved and his glances are compared with a king who rules over a people:

0. Man walā – fi umma tin amran wa-lam ya’dili//
   Yū’dhali – illā lihāza– r-rashā’t–l-akkhali//

0. Someone who reigns with authority over a people and does not practise justice, will be blamed except the black eyes of a fawn [they will not be blamed].

12. The fourth stanza of this muwāsalah is descriptive:

4. Dallin ka-fahīmi laylin ja’di//
   qad khutta fi saḥātān min warāi//
   ka-‘afati –l-nūni fawqa –l-kaddā//
   aw šawla jīn ‘akifin aw šillī//
   hamat hamā‘-bu shif’ra –l-nsalī//

4. A (coquettsl)jewenil down, curled and pitch black like the night, is painted on the smooth surface of roses, with a curve like an ‘n’ or a bent stick or an adder, whose cave is defended by the edges of a sword.

The rhetorized description of the beloved boy in Arabic literature differs considerably from the plain description of beloved women in Occitan poetry (cf. JEANROY, op. cit., I, 106, 107), which nevertheless also is very conventional.


The poet then addresses the fawn by saying:

1. Jurta ft-‘humkā‘-ka fi qalīya yā musrifūl/
   Fa-nṣīfī-‘awāṭībun an yunṣīfū ‘l-munṣīfūl/

1. You did wrong in your sentence to kill me, O extravagant person! Be just, it is a duty that the just one will be just.

Only then does the poet-lover ask compassion for the fire of his longings. The beloved one kindles the fire of temptations by his prominent appearance. When he shoots, he cannot fail to hit the shields of the hearts. ‘How would I then’, the poet-lover exclaims, ‘escape from your arrow that you sent to me, come to me, let me stay alive, do not kill me’. The poet describes his beloved one in stereotype terms: he is the splendour of the sun, he is more brilliant than the stars, he is the wishes of the poet’s soul, his endeavour, his request. He exclaims: ‘O me, would your enemies overcome, what has overcome me! My reprovers are separated from the sufferings of separation, and the one who is free from love does not ask about the one who is afflicted by it.’ Here we have the enemies of love, who have no part of it and do not understand the pains of love because they are not inflicted by it.

Love makes right wrong or in the words of the poet to his beloved one:

4. Anta qad – sayyartā bi-l-husni min ar-rushdi ghayyl//
   lam ajid – fi ‘arafa ḥubbī-ka ḥdanban ‘alayyl/
   fa-tta‘id – wa-in tashā‘ qalīya shay‘an fa-shayyl/
   ajmīli – wa-wālī-nī min-ka yada –l-mufdīlīl/
   fa-hya li – min ḥasanāli z-amani –l-mufbīlīl/

4. You made through your beauty from the right way a misleading one. I did not find in the two extremities of your love a crime against me. But be slow, when you really want to kill me, so want! Be kind and reach me from you the hand of a benefactor. [Such a hand] would belong for me to the good things of the coming time.

The glances of the beloved one are of great value, they make the poet-lover live and they reveal the love secret. The heart of the lover is in possession of the beloved, while the poet-lover sings the kharja:

5. mā-ghtadā‘ – tarfiyya illā bi-sanā‘ nāṣaray-kl//
   wa-ka-dhā – fi-t-‘ubbī mā bi’ laysa yakhhā ‘alay-kl//
   wa-li-dhā – unshidū wa-l-qalab rahfinun lādāy-kl//
   yā ‘alīyy – sallūta jafnay-ka ‘alā maqālīl/
   fa-bqa lī – qalīb bi-wa-jud bi-l-faadīl, yā ma-w’llīl/

5. My glance can only be nourished by the splendour of your eyes. So
from the love that is in me nothing is concealed from you. Therefore I
recite, while my heart is held in pledge with you: 'O elevated person, you
have established your eyelids as rulers — charged with my death. But let
live my heart and be generous with your kindness, O my refuge'.

The paradoxes of love frequently occur at the end of this type of
poem: joy together with vexation is expressed, a monologue of the
poet—lover about his situation, alternated with feigned conversations with
the beloved one. The statistics reveal the interaction between the first and
second person by the alternation of 'T' and 'you' and 'my' and 'your' and
the high rate of imperatives (1lx) and vocative particles (6x). Thus not
really so different from Occitan love poetry and trouvère poetry as
described by Zumthor.

Ibn Mā' al-Samā's poem no 2 is interesting because here the beauties
of a woman are described, and love is compared with religion. The poet
begins with the idea that love for beautiful women or wild cows is a
religion. From all these splendid bracelets a moon rises. From the
beauty of the horizons of perfection its most marvelous beauty appears. In
the rest of the poem the most beautiful woman among all women is
described using all kind of metaphors and comparisons. At the end of the
third strophe the poets tells how he cried out aloud: 'O heart belonging to
a young girl who possesses power, whose glance is more cutting than the
sharp edge of a polished blade of a sword on a most courageous hero.'

In the next strophe breasts (this time quinces) and eyes are described.
In the last two lines which form the simt the poet once again exclaims
that love for him is a religion: 'My love for her is an act of devotion, I
seek protection against this glorious pride with a fawn who pastures in
the garden with the flowers of beauty, every time I become ripe.'

The last couplet is again devoted to the lady:

5. 'afī fatu dh-dhuyālī — naqiyyatu th-thiyābī/ salābātu-l-'uqūlī — araqqu min sharābīl/ ađha la-hā nūhālī — fi-l-hubbī min 'adhābīl/ fi-n-nawm lī sharādah — wa-hukmu-hā hukmu-qidārī — kulla-mā amnāl/ — min-hā, fa-in ṭayfu-l-khayālī — zāra-nī ahja'll

5. She is decent and innocent and pure of garments. She takes away the
intelects, is thinner than wine. My emanication for her in love has become
my punishment. In sleep there is a flight for me; while her sentence is a
powerful one, the more I withdraw from her. When a phantasm of her
visits me, I sleep peacefully.

In this poem the poet speaks at length about the beauties of the lady,
and her power. For the description of his own sufferings the poet uses
only the simt of the strophes 3, 4, 5. Even here love is more an act of
devoion, a religion. So in this poem 'she' dominates, the 'T only exists as
an extension of this description.

After these three types of Arabic muwāsahāt which look very
similar to the Occitan type of love poem, we will deal with a Hebrew
Andalusian muwāsah, which describes tormented love.

The Hebrew muwāsahāt may occasionally reveal the same
tormented love as the Arabic examples. They also reveal the same
characteristics as the Occitan love poetry. Moses ibn 'Ezra', however, by
no means exclusively favours tragic love in his muwāsahāt. Who does
not remember the love adventure with a boy which he described in one of
his muwāsahāt?23. There he described how he took off the clothes of the
boy in a rendez-vous, which had been successful. It is quite in the style of
Abū Nuwas' poems of the kind, which describe how he took off the
clothes of the boy after having seduced him with wine. Moses ibn 'Ezra'
also has love muwāsahāt about elegiac and tormented love, whose
inspiration is comparable with the description of tormented love in the
poetry of the troubadours. We will consider in the following the contents
of his poem no. 255.

0. Sha açay — ēk lo nispanu — madwē lehabāl/ Sha açay — 'ofer akzarē — yitrot ke-labal/ 0. O those who ask me why the illnesses of my heart are not concealed,
ask a cruel gazelle which lacerates my heart like a lioness.

1. Et-she'on — hishqi sefanti — bēnot șela'ayl/ ki geon — appo yagorti — lurē dema'ayl/ yam se'on — širī netaft — gilu nega'ayl/ 'okeray — 'ēnay ki banu — sod ma açay habīl/ rigelu — bal-lat et-'ofri — way-yē<e>naf bīl/ 1. I have concealed the noise of my love in my interior, because I feared
his pride, were it not that my tears that I shed on the day of the outbreak
of my sorrow, revealed my blows. My slanderers are my eyes since they
revealed the secret of my thought. They spied secretly for my gazelle (2
Sam.) so that he is furious with me.

The poet describes in the next strophe that even his enemies have
compassion for him when they see the gazelle's harsh treatment of him:

IV, pp. 191–2, lines 8-12.
2. Ah<|e|>rē - man'amē yofyo - shat lēb me'odawll
ye<|e|>reh - mig-gannē lehyō - 'eni weradawll
yeh<|e|>reh - ki-sam et-sibyo - nesheq le-yadawll
sor<|e|>ray - ot i yibonnu - bi-r'at meribill/
yish<|e|>lu - fanaw u-sh'ērī - killah shehibill/

2. [To go] after the blessings of his beauty [my] heart has put its strength - while my eye plucked from the garden of his cheek its roses. He became harsh with me, so that he made his beauty his weapon. Even my enemies have compassion for me when they see my adversary; his face shines when the sparks of my passion have consumed my flesh.

3. Asefah - et orah 'ayish - li-jnē me'oroll
tarefah - bat 'ēno layish - 'issuz be-šuroll
anefah - wet-tasem dayish - libī le-sīroll
ok<|e|>bay - al-na tallīnu - ki ma'ab<|e|>šabill
ol<|e|>lu - 'ēnaw u-mzorī - ba-hem we-tubill/

3. The Great Bear [Ursa Major] has collected its light from the face of his star. The pupil of his eye could lacerate a ferocious lion by the sharpness of its steel. The eye was furious and trampled down upon my heart with its sorrow. O my lovers, do not make complaints [murmur] against me, because his eyes inflicted my grief. From them comes my illness and my recovery.

In the fourth strophe the poet describes how the hairlocks of the gazelle's head are black like his own heart which is black because of sorrow and burning pain. The gazelle's eyes unsheathen a sword on the poet's back, piercing and beating him with their glances. Finally he has become thin and meager like the gazelle's waist:

4. Mahlefot - rosho ki-lhabīl - qaderu, wel<|e|> ḫnawll
sholefot - hereb 'al gabbīl - 'ad shab ke-moťawll
dolefot - demā 'al-ošbīl - 'ēnaw ke-shinawll
ab<|e|>lay - Él yikkonu - darkē<|e|>hubill/
yahmelu - 'ēnaw li-mzorī - u-t'-ōt ke-šebill/

4. The hair locks of his head are black like my heart and his eyes unsheathen a sword on my back, so that it becomes [thin and meager] like his [i.e. the gazelle's] waist. My eyes are dripping tears because of my grief like his teeth [dripping with saliva]. Would that the ways of my beloved were directed towards me and that his eyes showed compassion with my passion and great distress.

From these four strophes we can gather that there is a suffering 'I and a 'he', the object of love. In every zinț a third category is introduced, namely, my slanderers, my enemies, my lovers. The poet personifies his eyes as slanderers. This and other features such as the comparison of the black hairs of the beloved with the blackness of his heart gives the whole poem a manneristic tone17. In this respect some poetry in Hebrew and Arabic may differ from Occitan love poetry, which in general is not that complex18.

An important feature of strophic poetry in Arabic and Hebrew in contrast to non-strophic poetry in these languages is that a certain motif such as the description of the sufferings of the lover is dealt with more extensively than would have been in non-strophic poetry. So the extension and repetition of the motif is perhaps a quality inherent within the strophicness of the poem. And this makes strophic love poems in Arabic and Hebrew look like strophic poems in Occitan poetry, e.g. when themes such as the cruelty of the beloved and the sufferings of the lover are broached.

However, a difference with Occitan lyrics occurs due to the presence in Arabic and Hebrew muwaššāḥāt of kharjas in partly colloquial Arabic, partly Romance language. These are present in two cases of the muwaššāḥāt discussed above. In these two examples by Ibn Baqi and Moses ibn 'Ezra', the poet who is suffering out of love for a boy, in the last strophe, also compares himself implicitly with a girl who suffers from love.

In Ibn Baqi's case the last strophe, including the kharja, goes as follows19:

5. wa-rubba khawdin jafā-hā li-wajdul/
wa-shaffa-hā li-baynu thuwwa-ma li-budul/
fa-'a'lanat bi-l-firdqi tashdul/
Benid, la Pasqa, ay, anu shin elllill/
Lasrandol[?!] meu corajon bor elllill.

5. Many a girl who was in love and suffered from rejection, and who had

17. This manneristic taste derives from earlier Eastern Arabic poets, cf. e. g. S. SPERL, Mannerism in Arabic Poetry, Cambridge 1989.
18. See also above note 12) about the description of beloved women in Occitan poetry (cf. JEANROY, op. cit., p. 106, 107); the difference between the mannerism of Arabic poetry and the plainness and ingenuousness of Occitan poetry becomes the more visible in laudatory poetry: compare Peire Vidal's "Mout es bona terr'Espanha" (MARTIN DE RIQUER, Los trovadores, II, 879, no. 171) with the sophisticated laudatory poems by the eleventh/twelfth century Arabic Andalusian poet Ibn Khafaja!
become thin because her beloved went away and is now far from her, declared her loneliness by singing: "Easter has come, but without him, my heart is torn due to him."

The kharja (final part) is a piece that does not fit totally into the poem, it destroys in a way the unity of the poem, because there is no longer an "I" and "now", instead there is a comparison with another lover. Sometimes the main poem even belongs to another genre than the kharja. We can see this in the case of a kharja which has been used in a Hebrew elegy by Yehudah hal-Lewi (d. 538/1143/4903) about a brother of Moses ibn 'Ezra (d. ca. 535/1140/4900)²⁰.

The last strophe of Yehudah hal-Lewi's poem goes as follows²¹:

5. Shir ah meforad be-libbi kidodll
   Yashir ke-'almah lebabah yiddodll
   Ki mo'adah ba we-lo ba had-dodll
   Venid la pasqua: adivien sin elul!
   Como-cande meu corazon por elul!

The preceding elegy is totally different from the love poetry and has another source of inspiration, but then, in the last strophe, preceding the kharja, the poet compares Moses ibn 'Ezra's distress with that of a woman in love. It is a particularity of the Hebrew strophes that precede the kharja that they often try to use the same notions in Hebrew which subsequently occur in the kharja in another language. Stern makes this very clear in his articles by translating the last Hebrew strophe and using capitals for identical notions which occur later in the kharja²².

We see how in the three lines of the last strophe that 'is a fire (on a sparkle) in my heart' is a prefiguration of the Romance phrase 'How burns my heart for him', whereas the phrase 'The appointed hour etc, is introduced. The poet now understands the female gazelle who sings like a maiden whose heart is torn due to him.' From all the above examples it appears that we have in Arabic and Hebrew poetry a similar network of lexical, rhetorical and syntactic possibilities as in Romance love poetry, except that Arabic and Hebrew poetry are sometimes more manneristic. The conventionality of the genre in Arabic and Hebrew is the same as in Occitan lyrics. The poet uses a linguistic stock which permits him to treat the topic without necessarily having experienced the passion of love himself. In particular, the strophic love poems include all the motifs which we have seen before in non-strophic Arabic love poems, but the individual motifs are often extended over different verse units. The poet can use several strophes, when dealing with his sufferings. Thus the description of sufferings in Arabic and Hebrew poetry looks sometimes like Occitan strophic poetry which deals with the same subject. However a basic difference between Arabic and Hebrew strophic poetry on the one hand and Occitan poetry on the other, is the kharja which does not exist in Occitan lyrics.

From the thematic point of view medieval Romance lyrics have many motifs in common with Arabic love poetry. Particular attention can be focussed on elegiac love poetry in which the lover suffers due to the absence of the beloved one. Amongst all of these love themes we find a number of religiously inspired motifs, for example, the theme of obedience; beseeching the beloved one; suffering from martyrdom; preferring a rendez-vous with the

beloved one to Paradise. Other themes are the obstacles to love, such as the guardian (guardador or raqib); the slanderer who reveals the secret love; the jealous person, and the reproacher. Among the themes listed by Ecker as occurring in both Arabic and Medieval European poetry are several which are to be found in love literature from throughout the world, for example, the beloved wounding with her eyes her lover's heart; or the heart of one lover being stolen by the other; the alba motif or the departure motif; the weeping of the lover; the haughtiness and cruelty of the beloved; the nobility of the character of the lover engendered by love; love as an illness; dying from love and the loyalty of the lover despite the beloved one's fickleness.

These themes are not only present in Arabic and Occitan love lyrics, but can be found in other, contemporary forms, for example, Galician and later Castillian lyrics. In Galician lyrics we find the theme of love during the pilgrimages, which again also appears in early Islamic love poetry. Indeed, the pilgrimage to Mecca was regarded by some as an excellent opportunity for meeting a lady.

However, there are certain differences between Arabic and Romance love lyrics. Post-eighth century A.D. examples of Arabic love lyrics are mingled with the wine genre. It should be noted that wine poetry is totally absent in the Occitan repertoire. In Arabic love poetry often the beloved, who is usually a male rather than female, often pours out the wine for the drinking company. Thus a major difference in the Arabic song is the presence of a boy as the love object whereas in Occitan love poetry the love object is always a woman. Although Ḥamza, one of the reciters of Abū Nuwās's Ḍīwān, counted some twenty women with whom the poet professed to be in love with, Abū Nuwās admitted to preferring male lovers to female. The description of the love object is also different in Arabic poetry compared with Occitan poetry: the description of the Arabic boy is a more concrete one whereas in Occitan love lyric the beauty of the woman is described in general, even in moral terms and there are seldom concrete descriptions other than perhaps the pale colour of the woman's face.

24. Cf. GHIAZI, op. cit., I, p. 184 ( Ibn 'Ubāda, line 1): "From the source of the blessed in Paradise...".
25. See the sources given in note 2) and see also the bibliography given in notes on pp. 20 and 22 in: MARTÍN DE RIQUER, Los trovadores, I, Barcelona (Planeta), 1975.
27. See Abū Nuwās, Ḍīwān, Wiebaden (Bibliotheca Islamica no. 20) 1972, IV [ed. G. SCHÖLER], see the preface of the mu'annathāt by Ḥamza.
28. See on this universal theme: A. T. HATTO, ed., Eos, an Inquiry into the Theme of Lovers' Meetings and Partings at Dawn in Poetry, the Hague (Mouton), 1965.
29. See however our note 18) above.
At first sight, Arabic, Hebrew and Occitan poetry have in common many motifs, themes and poetics genres. However, from some Arabic and Hebrew strophic poems, it becomes clear that Arabic and Hebrew poetry had already reached a stage of high rhetorization, and from this point of view it is not comparable to the beginning Occitan poetry. In Arabic and Hebrew love poetry, the concept of the lover's eyes which are at the same time his slanderers, is a rhetorical elaboration and combination of two stock motifs which can not be found in Occitan love lyrics. In Romance poetry we have to wait until the appearance of Baroque poetry or the Italian manneristic poets of the Seicento to make such combinations possible. In other poetic genres such as the laudatory or encomiastic genre, this fact is even clearer. The Occitan laudatory poem about the Spanish kings is derived from a different inspiration than Arabic or Hebrew laudatory passages.

Having said this, is it quite possible that the genre of the muwassahāt, due to its musical performances, became popularised to a degree that the high rhetorisation became less, and just only the common stock of motifs are mentioned without any rhetoric elaboration. This is apparently the case with many of the so-called muwassahāt andalusiyyah which are sung to this day.
