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Meters and Formulas : The Case of Ancient Arabic Poetry

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1. Introduction

The phrase “Ancient Arabic poetry” stands here for poetry attributed to poets who probably lived between the end of the fifth century A. D. and the end of the seventh, whose poems were brought down to us through written recensions established by Arabic scholars between the eighth and tenth centuries. Although their genuineness remains under question, most specialists now acknowledge that the poems at hand, despite the fact that they were obviously more or less distorted during transmission and collection, can be considered, on the whole, as representative of the poetic tradition of this period.¹

The use of writing, as it seems, had for long been known among the Arabs and other people of the area, as shown by Nabatean and Palmyrenian writings, by those of Qaryat al-Faw or, later on, by the stele of al-Namāra².

¹ The genuineness of ancient Arabic poetry was radically contested by Margoliouth (1925) and Ṭaha Ḥusayn (1926, 1927), who relied on historical and contextual arguments mainly, and thus neglected the analysis of the poems themselves. On the contrary, Blachère (1952-1966), taking the linguistic, metrical and stylistic detailed analysis of the poems as a starting-point, and submitting them to a drastic critical examination, tends to consider what was brought down to us as representative, on the whole, of the ancient poetic tradition. This point of view does not rule out the existence of forgeries and distortions. But specialists now consider that the problem of genuineness can only be resolved step by step, through a careful analysis of each line and each poem, and after the whole corpus has been submitted to a detailed textual criticism.

² Between the Ist century B.C. and the IIIrd century A.D., Palmyrenians and Nabateans used local variants of imperial Aramean, whereas their native tongue was probably Arabic. For what concerns the inscriptions of Qaryat al-Faw and al-Namāra, see especially Robin (1991). Before the inscriptions of Qaryat al-Faw (Saudi Arabia) written in Sabeen script (IInd century B.C.) were discovered, the inscription (in Nabatean script) of al-Namāra (Syria), a funeral

But it was probably restricted to specific usages — dedications, commemorative and funeral stelae, contracts or pacts, diplomatic correspondence, etc. —, whereas literary works were not written down except under extraordinary occasions: as far as the Arabian Peninsula is concerned, the famous versified hymn of Qāniya (first century A.D.) constitutes the only exception to this rule³. Similar situations can be found elsewhere: let us just mention the well-known cases of Touareg in North Africa and of Irish in the time of the Ogham tradition. There is no doubt, thus, that poetic practice among the Arabs before the rise of Islam was purely oral. To the historical and transhistorical proofs, we can add some formal features — a finite repository of traditional themes, conventional similes, and formulas, common to all poets — which are usually held to be characteristic of oral poetry.

2. The verse-patterns of ancient Arabic poetry

Ancient Arabic poetry is versified, ruled by quantitative meter and monorhyme, without any further constraint on verse order or grouping. In a way, each poem is an open form, the completion of which is left in the poet's hands; all lines share a same verse-pattern and a same rhyme and they are not grouped into stanzas, so that their number is theoretically unlimited. But this simplicity is balanced, in a way, by the great number and the extreme variety of the available verse-patterns. The scanning of more than 38,000 lines attributed to a hundred poets of the period under examination has enabled me to give a quite complete picture of verse-patterns in use, as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 (Paoli 1997: 401-402).

All these verse-patterns share common structural constraints⁴. Leaving verse-ending aside, we can observe that they all rely on a binary alternation between free metrical positions and fixed metrical units, which are both in very limited number. There are two types of free positions: x (– or ∪) and X (– or ∪∪). Two successive such positions are forbidden, except at the beginning

stela dedicated to a certain Imru' al-Qays, 'king of all the Arabs', dated 328 A.D., had long been considered the oldest written record of Arabic.

³ This inscription, discovered in Yemen (1973), was written down at the end of the first century A. D. Its twenty-seven lines are rather short and almost equal in length, and they all end with the same two rhyming letters (ḥ-k). The precise meaning of this hymn dedicated to the sun (*šams*) is rather uncertain. A lot of textual problems remain, due to the fact that the language in use, neither Arabic nor South Arabian, has not yet been attested elsewhere. For a reproduction and short presentation, see Robin (1991:122-125).

⁴ The only exception concerns *rağaz* verse-patterns (Rj), which constitute a specific metrical class, as well as the rare *basīṭ mağzū'* (Bm).

Table 2. Verse-patterns of ancient Arabic poetry (part 2)

	H1				H2			
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F1	F2	F3	F4
(24) H	[U--]x	[U--]x	////	////	[U--]x	[U---]	////	////
(25) Rj-1	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	////	////	////	////	////
(26) Rj-2a	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	x[-]	////	////	////	////	////
(27) Rj-2b	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	x[-]	////	////	////	////	////
(28) Rj-3a	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	////	////	////	////	////	////
(29) Rj-3b	xx[U-]	x[-]	////	////	////	////	////	////
(30) Rj-3c	xx[U-]	x[U-]	////	////	////	////	////	////
(29) Rjd	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	////	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	xx[U-]	////
(30) R-1a	x[U--]	x[U--]	x[U-]	////	x[U--]	x[U--]	x[U--]	////
(31) R-1b	x[U--]	x[U--]	x[U-]	////	x[U--]	x[U--]	x[U-]	////
(32) R-2	x[U--]	x[U--]	x[U-(-)]	////	x[U--]	x[U--]	x[U-]	////
(33) Rm-1	x[U--]	x[U--]	////	////	x[U--]	x[U--]	////	////
(34) Rm-2	x[U--]	x[-]	////	////	x[U--]	x[-]	////	////
(35) S-1	x ^A x[U--]	x[U-]	[-U-]	////	x ^A x[U--]	x[U-]	[-U-]	////
(36) S-2	x ^A x[U--]	x[U-]	[-U-]	////	x ^A x[U--]	x[U-]	[-U-]	////
(37) S-3	x ^A x[U--]	x[U-]	[-U-]	////	x ^A x[U--]	x[U-]	[-]	////
(38) S-4a	x ^A x[U--]	x[U-]	X[-]	////	x ^A x[U--]	x[U-]	X[-]	////
(39) S-4b	x ^A x[U-]	x[-U-]	X[-]	////	x ^A x[U-]	x[U-]	X[-]	////
(40) Mn	x ^A x[U--]	x[-U-]	[UU-]	////	x ^A x[U--]	x[-U-]	[UU-]	////
(41) X-1	x[U--]	x[-U-]	x[U--] or [---]	////	x[U--]	x[-U-]	x[U--] or [---]	////
(42) X-2	x[U--]	x[-U-]	x[U--]	////	x[U--]	x[-U-]	x[U--]	////
(43) Xm	x[U--]	x[-U-]	////	////	x[U--]	x[-U-]	////	////
(44) Xs	x[U--]	x[-U-]	x[U--]	////	////	////	////	////
(45) Mt-1	[U-]x	[U-]x	[U--]	[U-(-)]	[U-]x	[U-]x	[U--]	[U--]
(46) Mt-2	[U-]x	[U-]x	[U--]	[U--]	[U-]x	[U-]x	[U--]	[U-]
(47) Mt-3	[U-]x	[U-]x	[U--]	[U--]	[U-]x	[U-]x	[U--]	[U-]

List of symbols

H1/H2	first / second hemistich	F	foot	/////	absence of foot
[]	fixed metrical unit	x	variable position (U ou -)		
U	short syllable	X	variable position (UU ou -)		
-	long syllable	x ^A x	linked variable positions (which cannot simultaneously be realized as short syllables)		
-	extra-longsyllable				
T	<i>ṭawīl</i>	H	<i>hazaġ</i>	X	<i>ḥafīf</i>
B	<i>basīṭ</i>	Rj	<i>raġaz</i>	m	<i>maġzū'</i> (short)
Md	<i>madīd</i>	R	<i>ramal</i>	s	simple (<i>mašṭūr</i>)
W	<i>wāfir</i>	S	<i>sarī</i>		
K	<i>kāmil</i>	Mn	<i>munsariḥ</i>		

These numerous verse-patterns are unequally employed. More than three quarters of the lines were composed according to verse-patterns of *ṭawīl*, which is by far the most common one (38,69 %), *wāfir* (14,03 %), *kāmil* (12,2 %) and *basīṭ* (11,89 %). Then come *mutaqārib* (6,5 %), *ḥafīf* (4,39 %), *rağaz* (3,55 %), *ramal* (2,23 %), *kāmil mağzū'* (1,86 %), *sarī'* (1,8 %), *munsariḥ* (1,47 %), *hazağ* (0,48 %) and *basīṭ mağzū'* (0,31 %). The remaining verse-patterns are very rare and some of them are used in a few lines only, as is the case for *wāfir mağzū'* (Wm), *kāmil-2b* (K-2b), simple *kāmil* (Ks), *ramal mağzū'-2* (Rm-2), simple *ḥafīf* (Xs) and *mutaqārib-2* (Mt-2). What will be said in the following pages mostly concerns the four main meters and their derived long verse-patterns: *ṭawīl* (T-1, T-2 et T-3), *basīṭ* (B-1a, B-1b, B-2a et B-2b), *wāfir* (W) and *kāmil* (K-1, K-2 et K-3). In particular, the short patterns of *basīṭ* (Bm) and *kāmil* (Km), which undergo specific processes, will be left aside.

3. The formulaic style of ancient Arabic poetry

Up to now, the formulaic style of ancient Arabic poetry has received but little attention. The contributions of Monroe (1972) and Zwettler (1978), who deserve credit for having brought it to light, undertook to prove that the Arabic poetic tradition was an oral one. Applying a statistical approach to a sample of well-known lines, they were able to estimate the ratio of formulaic units with a fantastic precision: Monroe, for example, concludes that the four samples he has analysed contain 87,54 % of formulaic expressions. However, these authors did not try to proceed to a systematic and detailed analysis of formulaic style; in particular, they did not pay attention to the interaction between formulas and verse-patterns, which plays, in my view, a main role in the creative process of verse composition.

The only author to be aware of this phenomenon is Bauer (1993a, 1993b), who devoted two papers to the initial formulas used in the traditional introduction to the *nasīb* (erotic prelude) of the *qaṣīda*, viz. *ḍikr al-aṭlāl*, the evocation of the deserted encampment of the beloved's tribe⁵. In my own exhaustive inventory of initial *ḍikr al-aṭlāl* formulas, which basically corresponds to that of Bauer (Paoli 1997: 629), I have classified the formulas according to the verse-patterns they match with. This classification is reproduced in table 3, where N is a common noun, NP a proper noun, and

⁵ The poet is facing the deserted encampment of his beloved's tribe and the evocation of the encampment logically leads to the description of the beloved herself. Whether *ḍikr al-aṭlāl* must be considered as a part of the *nasīb* or not remains under question, since in some ancient poems, it is immediately followed by *raḥīl* or *ḥikma*. For further discussion, see R. Jacobi (1996) for example.

where N [- -], for example, means that the noun begins with two long syllables. Finally, a noun is [+def] if it is preceded by the definite article (*d-dāra*); otherwise, it is [-def] (*dāran*)⁶.

Table 3. Introductory formulas of the *ḍikr al-aṭlāl*

<i>ṭawīl</i>	<i>wāfir</i>	<i>mutaqārib</i>	<i>kāmil</i>	<i>basīt</i>	<i>sarī</i>	<i>ḥafīf</i>
<i>li-man</i> + N [-def]	<i>li-man</i> + N [-def]	<i>li-man</i> + N [-def]	<i>li-man</i> + N [+def]			<i>li-man</i> + N [+def]
' <i>afā</i> / ' <i>afat</i> + NP or <i>min</i>	' <i>afā</i> / ' <i>afat</i> + <i>min</i> +NP		' <i>afati</i> <i>d-diyāru</i>			
' <i>a-min</i> + N [-∪]	' <i>a-min</i> + N [- -]	' <i>a-min</i> + N [-∪]		' <i>a-min</i> + N [∪ -]	' <i>a-min</i> + N [∪ -]	
' <i>arāftu li-</i>	' <i>arāfta</i> + N [- def]	' <i>arāfta</i> + N [+def]				
' <i>a-ta'rifu</i> + N [-def]	' <i>a-ta'rifu</i> + N [- def]		' <i>a-'arāfta</i> <i>min</i>	<i>hal ta'rifu</i> + N [+def]	<i>hal ta'rifu</i> + N [+def]	<i>hal 'arāfta</i> + N [+def]
<i>li</i> + NP [-]		<i>li</i> + NP [-]				
	' <i>a-lā yā dāra</i>		<i>yā dāra</i> + NP[-∪∪]	<i>yā dāra</i> + NP [-]	<i>yā dāra</i> + NP [- -]	
				<i>bāna</i> + N [+def]		
				<i>bānat</i> + NP [∪ -]		
				<i>dārun li</i> + NP [-]		

⁶ Here are some complete formulas built according to the structural patterns which appear in table 3 : *li-man ṭalalun* 'To whom do the vestiges belong...?'; *li-mani d-diyāru* 'To whom do the abode(s) belong...?'; *li-mani d-dāru* 'To whom do the abode belong...?'; '*afati d-diyāru* 'The abodes have become erased'; '*afā min Sulaymā* 'Sulaymā has left [a place]...'; '*a-min Laylā*, '*a-min Nawāra*, '*a-min Rayḥānata*, '*a-min 'Ummi 'Awfā* 'Do, of Laylā, of Nawāra, of Rayḥāna, of Umm 'Awfā...'; '*a-min 'āli Laylā* (Do, of Laylā's tribe...?); '*a-min rasmi dārin* 'Do, of the traces of an abode...?'; *yā dāra (Hindin)* 'O abode of (Hind)'; *li-Salmā*, *li-Hindin* 'Of Salmā', 'Of Hind'; '*arāftu d-diyāra* 'I recognized the abodes'; '*arāftu d-dāra* 'I recognized the abode'; '*arāftu li-Salmā* 'I recognized, to Salmā'; '*a-'arāfta dāran* 'Did you recognize an abode?'; '*a-ta'rifu rasma-d-dāri* 'Do you recognize the traces of the abode?'; *hal ta'rifu-d-dāra* 'Do you recognize the abode'; *hal 'arāfta l-ḡadāta* 'Did you recognize, at dawn, ...?'; *bānat Su'ādu* 'Su'ād has disappeared'; *bāna l-ḥalītu* 'The company has disappeared'.

3.1. Fixed and flexible formulas

The case of interrogative formulas built with the verb *'arafa* is a perfect example of the kind of alternations that can be found. The combination of the interrogative pronouns *'a-* and *hal* with a verb in the perfect or imperfect tense gives four different formulas and, thus, four different metrical patterns, each used with one or two verse-patterns, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Interrogative formulas with the verb *'arafa*

formula	metrical pattern	meters
<i>'a-'arafa</i> + N [- def, CvX+]	UU – U –	<i>kāmil</i>
<i>'a-ta'rifu</i> + N [- def, CvX+]	U – UU –	<i>ṭawīl, wāfir</i>
<i>hal ta'rifu</i> + N [+ def]	– – U –	<i>basīṭ, sarī'</i>
<i>hal 'arafa</i> + N [+ def]	– U – –	<i>ḥafīf</i>

The second column of Table 4 displays the metrical quantitative pattern of each of these four formulas. In the formulas built with particle *hal*, the noun following the verb is preceded by the definite article (*l-*), which does not happen in the formulas beginning with *'a-*. The four metrical patterns define four different 'rhythms', each of which begins with a different two-syllable sequence: one short and one long for *wāfir* and *ṭawīl* (i.e. an iambic pattern [U –]); for *kāmil*, two short syllables constituting an anapaestic pattern with a fixed following long syllable [UU –]); two long syllables (i.e. a spondaic pattern [– –]) for *basīṭ* and *sarī'*; a long syllable followed by a short one (a trochaic pattern [– U]) for *ḥafīf*. There is absolutely no ambiguity between these four formulas. But it must also be noted that each of the two formulas with an imperfect verb can be used with two different verse-patterns: that of *wāfir* and *ṭawīl* for the first one (*'a-ta'rifu*); that of *basīṭ* and *sarī'* for the other (*hal ta'rifu*). In the case of *'a-ta'rifu*, this ambiguity disappears with the next noun phrase, the choice of which depends on what verse-pattern has been chosen.

This analysis is illustrated by lines (1) and (2), which follow verse-patterns of *ṭawīl*-2 and *wāfir*, respectively⁷:

- (1) 'a- ta'- ri- fu ras- man bay- na Duh- mā- na fa-r- Ra- qam
 [∪ -] ∪ [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] - [∪ - ∪ -]
 [∪ -] - [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] - [∪ - ∪ -]
 'i- lā Dī Ma- rā- ḥī- ṭin ka- mā ḥuṭ- ṭa bi-l- qa- lam

- (2) 'a- ta'- ri-fu min Hu- nay- da- ta ras- ma dā- rin
 [∪ -] ∪∪ [- ∪ -] ∪ ∪ [- ∪ - -]
 [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] ∪ ∪ [- ∪ - -]
 bi- ḥar- ḡay Dār- wa- tin fa- 'i- lā li- wā- hā

In the case of *hal ta'rifu*, the following noun remains the same (*d-dār* 'the abode'), whatever the verse-pattern, *basīṭ* or *sarī'*; it is only the second part of the hemistich that enables us to identify the correct verse-pattern without any ambiguity. Examples (3) and (4) seem to support the idea that *sarī'* (line 4) can be considered, in a way, as a shortened form of *basīṭ* (line 3)⁸:

- (3) hal ta' -ri- fu-d- dā- ra qaf- ran lā 'a- nī- sa-bi -hī
 - [- ∪ -] - [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] [∪∪ -]
 - [- ∪ -] - [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] [- -]
 'il- la-l- ma- ḡā- nī wa- 'il- lā maw- qi- da-n- nā- ri

- (4) hal ta'- ri- fu-d-dā- ra 'a- fā ras- mu- hā
 - - [∪ - -] ∪ [∪ - - ∪ -]
 - - [∪ - -] ∪ [∪ - - ∪ -]
 'il- la-l- 'a- tā- fīy- -ya wa- mab- na-l- ḥi- yam

⁷ (1) Ka'b b. Zuhayr (1950: 38, line 1): 'Do you recognize a trace, between Rahmān and al-Raqam, and down to Dū Marāḥīṭ, as if it were drawn by a calamus?'; (2) Bišr b. Abī Ḥāzim (1960: 219, line 1): 'Do you recognize the traces of Hunayda's abode, in the two Ḥarḡ of Dārwa, up to their sand-hills?'

⁸ (3) Ibn Muqbil (1962: 102, line 1, *basīṭ*-1b): 'Do you recognize this deserted abode, with no friend, nothing left there except the remains of the encampment and of the fireplace?' (4) Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (al-) (1976: 229, line 1, *sarī'*-2): 'Do you recognize this abode whose traces have been erased, all but the stones where the pot was propped and the places where the tents were set up?'

Though the alternations found for other kinds of formulas are not as systematic as the one presented above, they all define a clear-cut opposition between verse-patterns starting with an initial fixed metrical unit (*ṭawīl*, *wāfir*, *mutaqārib* et *hazaġ*) and those beginning with a free position or two interdependent free positions (*kāmil*, *basīṭ*, *sarī*, *ḥafīf* and *ramal*). The case of formulas beginning with *li-man* is of utmost significance: if the following noun is not preceded by the definite article, the verse-pattern belongs to the first class; otherwise, that is if the noun is preceded by the definite article, it belongs to the second class. Likewise, the noun following *'a-min* can begin with a long syllable or with a short one. In the first case, the verse-pattern starts with a stable metrical unit (*wāfir*, *ṭawīl* or *mutaqārib*). In the other case, it is one of the *basīṭ* or *sarī* verse-patterns.

Another formula regularly employed in *dīkr al-aṭlāl*, usually to introduce the *nasīb* proper, that is the remembrance of the beloved, will help us deepen the study of formulaic paradigms. The poet, after a short presentation of the deserted encampment of the beloved's tribe, punctuates his discourse and says: 'I stopped there', *waqaftu fī-hā*, *waqaftu bi-hā* or *wuqūfan bi-hā*, as in the fifth verse of Imru' al-Qays's *Mu'allaqa*, which appears under (5) below:⁹

- (5) *wu- qū- fan bi- hā ṣaḥ- bī 'a- lay- ya ma- ṭiy- ya- hum*
 [∪ -] - [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] ∪ [∪ - ∪ -]
 [∪ -] - [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] ∪ [∪ - ∪ -]
ya- qū- lū- na lā tah- lik 'a- san wa- ta- ġam- ma- li

The formula *waqaftu bi-hā* is metrically and semantically similar to the previous one, as can be seen in line (6):¹⁰

- (6) *wa- qaf- tu bi- hā min ba'- di 'iš- rī- na ḥiġ- ġa- tan*
 [∪ -] ∪ [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] - [∪ - ∪ -]
 [∪ -] - [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] ∪ [∪ - ∪ -]
fa- la'- yan 'a- raf- tu d- dā- ra ba'- da ta- wah- hu- mi

⁹ (5) Ibn al-Anbārī (1964: 25): 'And my comrades, stopping their mounts close to me and telling me: Don't let sadness overwhelm you; get over your pain!' This line also appears in Ṭarafa's *Mu'allaqa* with a different rhyme, so that the last word (*taġammali*) is replaced by another one (*taġalladi*) which has the same meaning.

¹⁰ (6) Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (1992: 35, line 4): 'I stopped there, after twenty pilgrimages [years], and I could hardly recognize the abode, unless in imagination.' The poem to which this line belongs is one of the famous *Mu'allaqāt*.

The quantitative structure of this second formula (⊔ ⊔ ⊔) is metrically ambiguous, so that it can be used not only in a line of *ṭawīl*, as shown in (6), but also at the beginning of lines of *wāfir* and *mutaqārib*. This possibility is illustrated by lines (7) and (8):¹¹

- (7) *wa- qaf- tu bi- hā l- qa- lū- ṣa-'a la-k- ti- 'ā- bin*
 [⊔ -] ⊔ ⊔ [- ⊔ -] ⊔ [- ⊔ - -]
 [⊔ -] ⊔ ⊔ [- ⊔ -] - [- ⊔ - -]
wa- dā- ka ta- fā- ru- ṭu š- šaw- qi-l- mu 'an- nī
- (8) *wa- qaf- tu bi- hā 'u- ṣu- lan mā tu- bī- nu*
 [⊔ -] ⊔ [⊔ -] ⊔ [⊔ - - ⊔ - -]
 [⊔ -] ⊔ [⊔ -] - [⊔ - - ⊔ - -]
li- sā- 'i- lu- hā-l- qaw- la 'il- lā si- rā- rā

Moreover, by means of a slight modification, the same formula can fit other verse-patterns, that of *kāmīl* for example, where an initial conjunction (*fa-*) should be added and the preposition *bi-* changed to *fī-*. The resulting formula is *fa-waqaftu fīhā*, as in line (9):¹²

- (9) *fa-wa- qaf- tu fī- hā kay 'u- sā- 'i- lu- hā*
 ⊔ [- ⊔ -] - [- ⊔ -] [⊔ ⊔ -]
 - [- ⊔ -] ⊔ [- ⊔ -] [- -]
ḡaw- ḡa l- la- bā- ni ka- miṭ- ra- qi-n- nab- 'i

The formula of line (9) can also be employed, after conjunction *-fa* has been deleted, with verse-patterns of *basīṭ*, as in the second line of al-Nābiḡa al-Ḍubyānī's *Mu'allaqa* which is reproduced under (10):¹³

- (10) *wa- qaf- tu fī- hā 'u- ṣay- lā- nan 'u- sā- 'i- lu- hā*
 - [- ⊔ -] - [⊔ -] - [- ⊔ - ⊔ ⊔ -]
 - [- ⊔ -] - [⊔ -] - [- ⊔ - ⊔ ⊔ -]
'ay- yat ḡa- wā- ban wa- mā bi-r- rab- 'i min 'a- ḡa- di

¹¹ (7) Nābiḡa al-Ḍubyānī (al-) (1985: 125, line 3): 'I stopped there, [mounting] my young she-camel, and I was plunged into affliction; this is how one is seized by the pain of passion.'; (8) Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (al-) (1976: 412, line 4): 'I stopped there, at daybreak, and [the abandoned abodes] didn't give me any answer, only lines [drawn as can be on a backhand].'

¹² (9) 'Abd al-Ġalīl (1977: 220, line 6, *kāmīl*-3): 'I stopped there, in order to question them, [mounting a horse] with a large breast, as [skinny] as a stick of *nab'* [wood].'

¹³ (10) Nābiḡa al-Ḍubyānī (al-) (1985: 14, line 2): 'I stopped there, at daybreak, to question [the abodes]; they tried to answer, but there was nobody left.'

In order to fit a formula to various verse-patterns, poets resort to a very simple process, which consists in adding such words as the conjunctions *wa-* and *fa-*, the particule *qad* and its variants *laqad*, *wa-qad*, *fa-qad*, *wa-laqad*. Particles such as *'inna*, *'innī* ‘as for myself’, *fa-'inna* ‘and as for...’ and *'ammā* ‘as for...’ should probably be added to this first list. I will call them “stop-gaps”, because they do not modify the meaning of the line fundamentally, except for its modal aspect, as happens with negation and interrogative pronouns. Such a typical introductory formula as *bāna l-ḥalītu* ‘the company has disappeared’, which is usually employed with *basīṭ* verse-patterns, can also appear with *wafīr*, by adding *'a-lā*, i.e. vocative and negation, as shown by lines (11) and (12), both composed by the same poet:¹⁴

- (11) *bā- na-l ḥa- lī- tu wa- lam yū- fū bi- mā 'a- hi- dū*
 - [- ∪ -] ∪ [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] [∪ ∪ -]
 - [- ∪ -] ∪ [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] [∪ ∪ -]
wa- zaw- wa- dū- ka-š- ti- yā- qan 'ay- ya- tan 'a- ma- dū
- (12) *'a- lā bā- na-l ḥa- lī- tu wa- lam yu- zā- rū*
 [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] ∪ ∪ [- ∪ - - -]
 [∪ -] ∪∪ [- ∪ -] ∪ ∪ [- ∪ - - -]
wa- qal- bu-ka fī-z- za- 'ā- 'i- ni mus- ta- 'ā- ru

While drawing up the inventory of formulas, we will have to deal with these particles, which Zwettler (1978), in his analysis of Imru' al-Qays's *Mu'allāqa*, deals with just as if they were ordinary formulaic components, neglecting therefore their very crucial metrical function. The case of *laqad* or *wa-laqad* followed by a perfect verb is obviously different from that of particles such as *ka-'anna* ‘as if’, which possess an important thematic function, that of bringing in a comparison. Of course, shades of meaning should be carefully examined, so that only particles that do not noticeably modify the meaning of the line be called “stopgaps”.

3.2. *Rythmical formulas and formulaic expressions*

Although Parry (1928) originally defined the formula in a very restrictive way, the range of this notion was progressively widened, so as to include more or less closely related “formulaic expressions”. According to Zumthor (1982: 117), “rather than to the lexical items themselves, we now attach

¹⁴ (11) Bišr b. Abī Ḥāzīm (1960: 54, line 1): ‘The company has disappeared, not respecting her word, sharpening your burning desire wherever they headed for.’; (12) Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (al-) (1976: 338, line 1): ‘Alas ! The company disappeared, before they were visited, and your heart has gone away with the palanquins.’

importance to structuring factors such as prosody, syntax or distribution of key-words". For Nagler (1974), a formula is a "Gestalt" which constitutes, in the poet's mind, the underlying model of a set of formulaic expressions related by rhythmical, phonetic, syntactic, lexical or semantic correspondences. Since formulaic style has much to do with meter and rhythm, it can be considered a part of "inner metrics", as opposed to "outer metrics". According to O'Neill (1942: 105, footnote 2), "the outer metrics establishes the syllabic framework within which the poet composes words into lines"; as far as Arabic metrics is concerned, the results of the analysis of "outer metrics" have been summed up in Tables 1 and 2. By contrast, "inner metrics" can be defined as the analysis of the rhythmic structure of words inside verse-patterns: that is to say, it has to do with the interaction between the metrical structure and the linguistic structure of lines, including all levels of linguistic organization (phonology, including stress patterns, morphology, syntax, lexicon and semantics). In sum, "inner metrics" is the rhythm of verse-instances — what Sauvanet (1992) defines as a "moving periodic structure" marked out by quantitative meter and rhyme. The verse-pattern (meter), a more or less fixed sequence of short and long syllables, defines the metrical structure of the line, whereas rhyme marks out the end of a period and the beginning of the following one, as cadence does for Western classical music. This periodic structure, common to all the lines of a poem, is "moved" by the changing linguistic rhythm of words and groups of words, which varies from line to line. In a way, each line can be considered as a "variation" (in its musical meaning) of the periodic structure; and the understanding of poetic rhythm implies a detailed analysis of all variations of a given verse-pattern. As I try to show below, formulas play an important part in these rhythmical variations, so that we have to pay attention to paradigmatic variants of proper formulas, but also to the enlarged field of the formulaic techniques and to what we may call "rhythmical formulas", i.e. combined metrical and linguistic patterns that underlie a significant number of "formulaic expressions".

In what follows, I will mainly focus on the combination of verse-patterns and word-stress patterns, in order to characterize a set of recurrent rhythmical formulas and to show how they combine with each other in a small number of prototypical verse-instances. I will just outline here the main features of this analysis, which should of course be developed into a large-scale analysis if we want to determine to what extent the prototypes defined play a significant role in poetic practice.

Under its phonetic aspect, stress relies on the prominence of one accented unit (syllable) within a sequence of syllables grouped into an

accentual unit (word). At the production level, it involves one or more of prosodic parameters, intensity, frequency and duration; in Arabic, accent is usually marked by a peak of frequency, which may be reinforced by a peak of intensity. In any case, stress does not induce lengthening, and this can easily be explained by the fact that vowel length is an important distinctive feature of Arabic phonology and morphology. Finally, in a sentence or in a line, “the succession of prominent and non-prominent syllables creates a rhythm which is determined by the temporal distance between two stressed syllables” (Boulakia 1995: 341). Stress therefore contributes to organizing discourse into rhythmic units.

Modern standard Arabic and a great majority of contemporary Arabic dialects share the following word-stress assignment basic principles (the examples chosen belong to modern standard Arabic)¹⁵:

- (a) Stress assignment is fixed by word boundaries, i.e. stress-bearing units are words possibly augmented with one or more clitics.
- (b) The domain of stress assignment is limited to the last three syllables of the word.
- (c) The last syllable of the word bears stress if it is superheavy (Cvxc): *muslimūn* ‘muslims’, *kitāb* ‘book’, *banāt* ‘girls’.
- (d) If (c) does not apply, the penult syllable bears stress if it is heavy (long, Cv) or superheavy (extra-long, Cvxc), or if the word contains two syllables only: *katabtu* ‘I wrote’, *yaqūlu* ‘he says’, *bādartu* ‘I undertook’, *mahāmmun* ‘missions’, *kamā* ‘as’, *kātib* ‘writer’.
- (e) If neither (c) nor (d) apply, the antepenult syllable bears stress: *al-kutubu* ‘the books’, *kutubu-hu* ‘his books’, *kitābu-hum* ‘their book’, *kitābu-humā* ‘their book’ (dual).

Although we do not have any direct evidence on stress assignment in ancient and classical Arabic, I will assume here that it followed the same rules.¹⁶

¹⁵ See, for example, Kouloughli (1976: 124-125). I agree with Bohas and Kouloughli (1981), who reject the rules presented by Wright (1981: 27-28) and taken for granted by most contemporary English and American linguists. These rules wrongly assign stress to the first syllable of the word if the penult and the antepenult are short.

¹⁶ The fact that Arab grammarians did not say a word about stress cannot be considered a valid argument to show that there was no word stress at all in classical Arabic. Arab grammarians didn't care about prosodic phenomena as a whole. And they also ignored syllable. But can one say that there is no syllable in Arabic or in English just because the Arab grammarians or the authors of *Sound Pattern of English* did not say a word about it? The traditional phonetic and metrical analysis of the Arab grammarians relies on a minimal unit, the *ḥarf*, which is smaller than the syllable. This theoretical choice does only mean that they

governs two nouns linked by coordination or annexion, or a noun followed by an adjective. Line (14) illustrates the first and the last cases, in the second and first hemistich, respectively¹⁷.

- (14) * * * * *
 [∪ -] ∪ [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] - [∪ - ∪ -]
 li- man ṭa- la- lun miṭ- lu-l- ki- tã- bi-l- mu- nam- ma -qi
 * * * * *
 [∪ -] ∪ [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] - [∪ - ∪ -]
 ḥa- lã 'ah- du- hũ bay- na-ṣ- Ṣu- lay- bi fa- Muṭ- -ri -qi

In these two examples, the preposition (*bayna*, *miṭlu*) is disyllabic and the complete formula has nine syllables. Such a structural formula is quite frequent, though a little bit less than formulas having seven or eight syllables, depending on the type of preposition (monosyllabic or disyllabic) and the morphological structure of nouns and adjectives employed. Let us line (15):¹⁸

- (15) * * * * *
 [∪ -] ∪ [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] - [∪ - ∪ -]
 'a- raf- tu li- Lay- lã bay- na Waq- ṭin fa- Øal- fa- 'i
 * * * * *
 [∪ -] ∪ [∪ -] - [- ∪ -] - [∪ - ∪ -]
 ma- nã- zi- la 'aq- wat min ma- ṣ- fin wa- mar- ba- 'i

The underlined formulas each have eight syllables and, though the preposition is either disyllabic (*bayna*) or monosyllabic (*min*), they both have the same stress pattern. And such is the case of the noun phrases listed in (16):

- (16) (a) *fī zuhūri l-'anāmili* 'On the fingers' back'
 (Ġabbūrī (al-) 1982: 212, line 1)
 (b) *fā-r-Rusaysu fa-'Āqiluh* 'And al-Rusays and 'Āqil'
 (Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā 1992: 114, line 5)
 (c) *Raḥraḥāni fa-Rākisā* 'Raḥraḥān and Rākis'
 ('Abbās b. Mirdās (al-) 1968: 68, line 1)

¹⁷ (13) Salāma b. Ġandal (1968: 153, line 1): 'To whom do the abodes belong, resembling an adorned book, whose time has past, between al-Ṣulayb and Muṭriqi?'

¹⁸ (14) Ṭufayl al-Ġanawī (al-) (1968: 103, line 1): 'I recognized, between Waqṭ and Ḍalfa', the abodes of Laylā, deserted encampments of springtime and summertime.'

- (d) *fa-t-ṭilā'u d-dawāfi'u* 'And the torrent running down the valley'
(Nābiga al-Ḍubyanī (al-) 1985: 30, line 1)
- (e) *Ḍū kulāfin fa-Munkifu* 'Ḍū Kulāf and Munkif'
(Ibn Muqbil 1962: 189, line 1)

Although the morphological structure and syntactical function of these examples are different, they all share the same metrical structure (the last eight positions of a hemistich of *ṭawīl*-2) and the same stress pattern. Moreover, they are all composed of two four-syllable units, the second one having one stress, and the first one having one (*dawāfi'u*) or two stresses (*bayna Waqṭin*), so that the complete formula has two or three stresses which always fall in the same metrical positions. The rhythmical shape of these formulas is shown in figure (17), where metrical positions which coincide with the formula are the last eight of the hemistich and where the facultative initial stress is put between brackets.

$$(17) \quad [\cup \quad -] \quad \times \quad [\cup \quad -] \quad \times \quad \begin{matrix} (*) & & * & & * \\ [- \quad \cup \quad -] & \times & [\cup \quad - \quad \cup \quad -] \end{matrix}$$

A certain number of formulas allow us to determine another paradigm, with seven syllables, where word-stresses fall in the same metrical positions as in the octosyllabic formulas above. All these heptasyllabic formulas have two stresses, corresponding to a three-syllable word and a four-syllable word, or vice versa, as in the two types of formulas listed in (18) and (19):

- (18) (a) *bi-Ḍāti s-Salāsili* 'At Ḍāt al-Salāsil'
(Ḡabbūrī (al-) 1982: 212, line 1)
- (b) *wa-rasmu manāzilin* 'And the traces of the abodes'
(Šammāḥ b. Ḍirār (al-) 1968: 211, line 1)
- (c) *wa-nu'yan muhaddamā* 'And a destroyed channel'
(Ḥātim al-Ṭāṭī 1990: 220, line 1a)
- (d) *kitāban munamnamā* 'An adorned book'
(Ḥātim al-Ṭāṭī 1990: 220, line 1b)
- (19) (a) *bi-burqati Ṭahmadi* 'On the hard and rocky ground of Ṭahmad'
(Ṭarafa b. al-'Abd 1975: 6, line 1)
- (b) *bi-ḥarrati Darḡadi* 'In the gloomy plain of Darḡad'
('Abīd b. al-'Abraṣ 1913: 78, line 1)

To all these formulas correspond formulas matching the beginning of the hemistich, which count five, six or seven syllables. The first type has two words, one disyllabic word and one three-syllable word, as in the introductory formula *li-man ṭalalun*. The examples listed in (20) are taken

from the first and fourth poems of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā's *dīwān* (Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā 1992).

- (20) (a) *la-hū labidun* 'It has a thick mane' (p. 45, line 38b)
 (b) *ladā 'asadin* 'Close to a lion' (p. 45, line 38a)
 (c) *wa-man yağ'alu* 'And he who puts' (p. 50, line 53a)
 (d) *wa-man yağtarib* 'And he who goes into seclusion' (p. 51, line 58a)
 (e) *humū ḍarabū* 'They (themselves) hit' (p. 103, line 21a)
 (f) *wa-'in yuqtalu* 'And if he were killed' (p. 101, line 14a)

Such formulas can ideally be combined with nine-syllable final formulas, as in the two hemistichs of line (14) above: *li-man ṭalalun* + *miṭlu l-kitābi l-munammaqi # ḥalā 'ahduhū* + *bayna ṣ-Ṣulaybi fa-muṭriqi*.

In other, more frequent cases, the final formula has seven syllables, as in the examples mentioned above, and a disyllabic word occupies the sixth and seventh positions. In many of the lines starting with *li-man ṭalalun*, the initial formula is followed by the verbs *'aqwā* 'to be deserted' or *'afā* 'to erase' or, as in line (21), by the active participle of *'afā*, viz. *'āfin*:¹⁹

- (21) $\begin{array}{cccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ [\cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & - & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ li- & man & \tau a- & la- & lun & 'ā- & fin & bi- & dā- & ti-s- & Sa- & lā- & si- & li \end{array}$

A second type of formula has six syllables, generally divided into two three-syllable words which bear stress on the penult, as shown in figure (22).

- (22) $\begin{array}{ccc} & * & * \\ & [\cup & -] & x + & [\cup & -] & x \end{array}$

The following examples are taken from the same two poems of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (1992).

- (23) (a) *tu'affā l-kulūmu* 'The wounds are being shut again'
 (p. 42, line 24a)
 (b) *li-yawmi l-ḥisābi* 'For the day of judgement' (p. 42, line 28b)
 (c) *wa-kullu muḥibbun* 'And any lover' (p. 99, line 4a)
 (d) *suluwwa fu'ādin* 'A heart's consolation' (p. 99, line 4b)
 (e) *wa-kānū qadīman* 'And they were in the past' (p. 101, line 14b)
 (f) *li-kulli 'unāsin* 'For any human being' (p. 103, line 20b)

¹⁹ (15) Ḡabbūrī (al-)(1982: 212, line 1a): 'To whom are the vanishing traces at Dāt al-Salāsīl ?'

Combined with eight-syllable final formulas, they constitute a complete half-verse, as can be seen in line (24):²⁰

$$(24) \begin{array}{cccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ [\cup & -] & - & [\cup & -] & \cup & [- & \cup & -] & - & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ ka- & raġ- & 'i-l- & wu- & šū- & mi & fī & zu- & hū- & ri-l- & 'a- & nā- & mi- & li \end{array}$$

It appears that these initial six-syllable formulas are constructed under the model of introductory formulas of the type *'arāftu d-diyāra* 'You recognized the abodes' or *'arāftu li-Laylā* 'You recognized, from Laylā...'.²¹

These few formulaic paradigms enable us to define three types of prototypical verse-instances of *ṭawīl*-2, with a break (\$) after the fifth, the sixth and the seventh metrical position, respectively. A break after the fifth position is often reinforced by another break after the seventh, as in line (21) above. These three prototypical verse-instances are represented in (25), (26) and (27):

$$(25) \begin{array}{cccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ [\cup & -] & x & [\cup & -] & \$ & x & [- & (\$) & \cup & -] & x & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ \\ * & & * & & (*) & & * & & * \\ (26) & [\cup & -] & x & [\cup & -] & x & \$ & [- & \cup & -] & x & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ \\ * & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ (27) & [\cup & -] & x & [\cup & -] & x & [- & \$ & \cup & -] & x & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \end{array}$$

The frequency of these prototypes and of all the types of formulas that were quoted up to now have to be further determined, through a statistical analysis of a large number of poems. First, a hemistich with a break after the sixth or the seventh metrical position does not necessarily imply the use of formulas such as those listed above. Secondly, a certain number of lines, the proportion of which also has to be determined, do not allow a medial break, as in examples (28), (29) and (30), which exhibit similar structural formulas in medial position:²¹

$$(28) \begin{array}{cccccc} * & & * & & * & & * \\ [\cup & -] & - & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & - & -] \\ li- & Hin- & din & bi- & hiz- & zā- & ni-š- & ša- & rī- & fī & tu- & lū- & lu \end{array}$$

²⁰ (16) Ġabbūrī (al-)(1982: 212, line 1b): 'Which resemble the lines of a tattoo on the backhand.'

²¹ (28) Ṭarafa b. al-'Abd (1975: 81, line 1, *ṭawīl*-3): 'To Hind [are] the abodes which twinkle on the barren ground of al-Šarīf'; (29) Labīd b. Rabī'a (1970: 95, line 1, *ṭawīl*-3): 'Of Hind, on the heights of al-Aġarr, traces [remain]'; (30) Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (1992: 213, line 1, *ṭawīl*-2): 'To Salmā, East of al-Qanān, do belong abodes and traces'.

- (29) $\begin{array}{cccccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & \\ [\cup & -] & - & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & - & -] \\ li- & Hin- & din & \underline{bi-} & \underline{'a-} & \underline{lā-} & \underline{mi-l-} & \underline{'A-} & \underline{ġar-} & ri & ru- & sū- & mu \end{array}$
- (30) $\begin{array}{cccccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & \\ [\cup & -] & - & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ li- & Sal- & mā & \underline{bi-} & \underline{\check{s}ar-} & \underline{qiy-} & \underline{yi-l-} & \underline{Qa-} & \underline{nā-} & ni & ma- & nā- & zi- & lu \end{array}$

It is also worth noting that lines with an initial five-syllable formula often conform to a ternary rhythmical pattern which recalls the case of Greek dactylic verses with no (masculine or feminine) caesura, in that they are composed of three progressive rhythmical groups. Examples (31) and (32) illustrate this kind of ternary rhythm:²²

- (31) $\begin{array}{cccccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & \\ [\cup & -] & - & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ 'a- & fā & Taw- & 'a- & mun & min & 'ah- & li- & hī & fa- & Ğu- & lā- & ġi & luh \end{array}$
- (32) $\begin{array}{cccccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & \\ [\cup & -] & - & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ 'a- & fā & Miġ- & da- & lun & min & 'ah- & li- & h- & fa- & Mu- & tā- & li- & 'u \end{array}$

The three rhythmic units of these lines respectively have five, four and five syllables. Another case of ternary hemistich is shown in examples (33) to (35), where the underlined formula is a variant of *ḍikr al-aṭlāl* introductory formulas with the verb *'arafa*:²³

- (33) $\begin{array}{cccccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & & * & \\ [\cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & - & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ fa- & la'- & yan & \underline{'a-} & \underline{raf-} & \underline{tu-d-} & \underline{dā-} & ra & ba'- & da & ta- & wah- & hu- & mi \end{array}$
- (34) $\begin{array}{cccccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & & * & \\ [\cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & - & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ fa- & lam- & mā & \underline{'a-} & \underline{raf-} & \underline{tu-d-} & \underline{dā-} & ra & qul- & tu & li- & rab- & 'i- & hā \end{array}$

²² (a) Ḥuṭay'a (al-) (1958: 131, line 1a): 'Taw'am has been abandoned by its inhabitants, and so for Ğulāġil' (b) 'Abbās b. Mirdās (al-) (1968: 80, line 1a): 'Miġdal has been abandoned by its inhabitants, and so for Mutālī'.

²³ Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (1992: 35, line 4b): 'I hardly recognized the abode, after I had [so often] imagined it'; Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (1992: 36, line 6a): 'And when you recognized the [place of the] encampment, you addressed yourself to its abodes and said: [...]'; Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā (1992: 39, line 15a): 'And when we reached the waterplace, [we discovered] its blue surface'.

- (35) $\begin{array}{cccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ [\cup & -] & \cup & [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & - & [\cup & - & \cup & -] \\ fa- & lam- & m\bar{a} & \underline{wa-} & \underline{rad-} & \underline{na-l-} & m\bar{a}- & 'a & zur- & qan & \check{g}i- & m\bar{a}- & mu- & h\bar{u} \end{array}$

The same rhythmical formula is also currently employed at the beginning of lines of *wāfir*, as shown by example (36):²⁴

- (36) $\begin{array}{cccccc} * & & * & & * & & * \\ [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & \cup & [- & \cup & - & -] \\ fa- & lam- & m\bar{a} & 'an & ra- & 'ay- & tu & ba- & n\bar{u} & lu- & 'ay- & yin \\ & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & \cup & [- & \cup & - & -] \\ 'a- & \underline{raf-} & \underline{tu-l-} & \underline{wud-} & \underline{da} & wa-n- & na- & sa- & ba-l- & qu- & r\bar{a}- & b\bar{a} \\ & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ [\cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & - & -] \\ ra- & \underline{f\bar{a}'-} & \underline{tu-r-} & \underline{rum-} & \underline{ḥa} & 'id & q\bar{a}- & l\bar{u} & qu- & ray- & \check{s}un \end{array}$

These occurrences perfectly illustrate the versatility of certain structural formulas. Indeed, the same formula is used in lines of *kāmīl*, as is the case in (37)²⁵:

- (37) $\begin{array}{cccccc} * & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ \cup & \cup & [- & \cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & \cup & [- & \cup & -] \\ wa- & la- & qad & \underline{qa-} & \underline{\check{t}a'-} & \underline{tu-l-} & \underline{wa\check{s}-} & la & yaw- & ma & ḥi- & l\bar{a}- & \check{g}i- & h\bar{i} \\ & & * & & * & & * & & * & & * \\ \cup & \cup & [- & \cup & -] & \cup & \cup & [- & \cup & -] & - & [- & \cup & -] \\ wa- & 'a- & ḥu-ṣ- & ṣa- & rī- & ma- & ti & fī-l- & 'u- & m\bar{u}- & ri-l- & muz- & mi- & 'u \end{array}$

In these two hemistichs, the formula is preceded by the particle *laqad*, itself preceded by the conjunction *wa-*. This pattern is extremely frequent: for an example, it appears eight times within the forty-five lines of this poem. Followed by a verb in the perfect, *laqad* only underlines the fact that the action is definitely completed, and therefore does not modify the meaning substantially.

²⁴ Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (al-) (1976: 315, lines 14 and 15a): '(14) And when I looked at the sons of Lu'ayy, I suffered passion because of close ties of kinship; (15a) I raised [my] spear when they said "Qurayš" [...]'.

²⁵ Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (al-) (1976: 49, line 4): 'I broke off [our] liaison the day when discord [became stronger]; he who is being prompt in his decisions is a man of strength and perseverance.'

4. Conclusion

The combination of verse-patterns and formulas appears to play a main role in the oral-formulaic composition of ancient Arabic poetry. In that respect, the formulaic density of the opening lines of a poem is extremely significant. In the course of an oral performance, the poet comes into contact with his audience by producing certain signals which belong to a common code. Among these, the choice and identification of a particular rhythm, through the use of specific formulas matching a particular verse-pattern, seem to fulfil a very important constructive function. The formula, subject to variations such as those presented in the first part of this paper, certainly helps the poet to establish a rhythm and helps the audience to identify it. This is the reason why I have paid special attention to the first lines of poems and, as a particular but exemplary case, that of *dīkr al-aṭlāl*.

But this constructive function should be further examined, through a large-scale analysis of the corpora. First of all, a complete database containing all lines of ancient poetry that have been brought down to us should be constituted. All lines should then be tagged, so that specific linguistic and stylistic features could be automatically identified. As far as proper formulas are concerned, their recognition does not raise any problem. As for rhythmical formulas, I propose to equal them to combined metrical and accentual patterns which may include word boundaries, as well as some morphological and syntactical features, such as the structure of the phrase, the form or tense of verbs, the use of such specific particle, etc. As for an example, formulas like *'arāftu d-dāra* and *qaṭa'tu l-waṣla* could be both represented as:

$$(38) \quad [\cup - * - + - * \cup; V, +Pf, 1sg] + [N, +def]$$

All formulas could therefore be progressively grouped into paradigms, from the most abstract, a combination of metrical and accentual patterns, to the most concrete, proper formulas, where lexical items should themselves be specified. Syllabification and identification of verse-patterns can now be easily processed, as shown by Bohas and Kouloughli (2001). As for stress, it relies on a quite simple quantitative principle, and it should therefore be possible to assign correct word-stress patterns automatically, provided that word boundaries have been marked previously.

To conclude, let us say that the detailed analysis of poetic techniques (meter, formulaic style, lexicon, etc.) should not only help us to better understand the process of poetic creation, but also to throw a new light on the history of literary forms and techniques in ancient Arabia.

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