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I. The traditional analysis of Arabic and Persian prosody

Writers on Persian and Arabic prosody are legion, but few of them add much to what their predecessors have written. We cannot do better than to go back to the beginning, to the "Father of Arabic Prosody", al-Xalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farhūdī (or al-Farāhīdī) of Baṣra, who was born about 100/718 and died in 170/786 (175/791 or 190/806, according to other authorities). The earliest extant work to contain a statement of al-Xalīl's ideas is the ʿiqd al-farīd of Ibn ʿabd Rabbih of Cordoba (246/860-328/940). His most important successors were al-Axfaš (215/831 or 221/836) and Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿalī b. Saʿda of Balx (d. 376/986). The earliest named writer on Persian prosody is Moulana Yusef of Nišapur (d. c. 390/1000), and other early theorists were Bozorjmehr Qommi (or Qasemi) and Bahrami of Saraxs, author of the Xojaste-name. Nothing has survived of the works of these writers, while two important books of the 5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries, the Tarjoman ol-balaġe of Raduyani and the Ḥadayeqos-sehr of Rašidoddin Vaṭvaṭ deal rather with the art of poetics, rhetoric, metaphor and allusion, poetic conceits, and so on. It is not until the seventh/thirteenth century that we get the first serious work devoted primarily to the Persian

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metres. This is al-Moʿjam fi maʿayire aš̌ʿarel-ʿajam, by Šamsoddin Moḥammad b. Qeis Razi, written in 614/1217. It was quickly followed by Naṣiroddin Ṭuṣi's Meʿyarol-aš̌ʿar, written in 649/1251. Of innumerable later works, one of the most useful is the ʿaruẓ-e Seifi, written by Seifi of Boxara in 896/1491, and reference should also be made to the Resale-e ʿaruẓ of Abdorraḥman Jami, completed about 885/1480, as an example of a work by a practising poet.

European works that reproduce the theories of the oriental scholars without significant change are those by Samuel Clarke (1661), Ewald (1825) and Freytag (1830) for Arabic; and Gladwin (1801), Rückert (1827), Garcin de Tassy (1848), and Blochmann (1872) for Persian. The following account of the traditional system is a résumé of all these sources, and is applicable equally to Arabic and to Persian, though the technical terms are given throughout in their Arabic form.

Generally speaking, any given poem in Arabic or Persian is composed throughout in lines (hemistich - miṣrāʿ) of constant length and metre (wazn) (with permissible variations). These hemistichs are paired in couplets (bayt, pl. abyāt), this being the unit of verse. The classical system of prosody is based on the assumption that there are a certain number of basic (sound, sālim) metres (baḥr, pl. buḥūr), a certain number of sub-divisions of each of these categories that constitute distinct metres (and so cannot be used in the same poem), and a certain number of variations that are

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permitted within the same metre.

One of the surprising blind spots of the Muslim prosodists was their failure to recognise the syllable. Indeed they failed ever to isolate the vowel except as a function of the consonant or letter, a failure all the more surprising since they must have been familiar not only with Greek works on the subject, but also with the ideas of the Zoroastrian priests who devised the Avestan alphabet. Be that as it may, scansion (taqṭīʿ) is based on the written form, and is carried out by a process of counting letters (ḥarf, pl. ḥurūf), the general rule being that each line of a poem contains the same number of letters (with the permissible addition of one at the end). The letters are classified into vowelled (moving, mutaḥarrik pl. mutaḥarrikāt) and unvowelled (resting, silent, sākin pl. sawākin). Included in the latter are the three letters ʾ, w, and y, whether they represent consonants, long vowels or diphthongs. In Arabic verse two sākin letters may never come together (except rarely at the end of a bayt), and though in Persian this juxtaposition is common, there is no place for it in the prosodic system, and in such cases the second sākin letter is assumed for scansion purposes to be mutaḥarrik. So much a part of the system has this become that Turkish and Indian readers, when reciting Persian poetry, actually insert a short a-sound (nīm-fatḥa) after the second sākin, though of course no such vowel-sound is to be found in the original language. All sākin letters after the second are ignored.

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Muslim prosodists use the symbol o for mutaḥarrik letters and | for sākin, but while occasional reference will be made in this survey to these symbols, for the most part use will be made of the rather simpler Western signs ⏑ – (though their significance is quite distinct).

It must be borne in mind however that few lines of Arabic or Persian verse can be scanned in this way at sight. First of all it is necessary for the "spelling" of the line to be adjusted so as to include all letters that are sounded but not written, and to eliminate all those that are written but have no phonetic value. In Arabic the number of such adjustments is comparatively restricted; it includes, among letters to be added, the tanwīn, the tašdīd, alif in words like allāh, haḏā, ḏālika, and short vowels at the end of a bayt, and among letters to be omitted the alif standing for ḥamzat al-waṣl.[1] The range in Persian is very much wider, as the following table shows:

A. Letters always omitted

1. Silent v after x.
2. n after a long vowel (α, i, u) (q̇inna).
3. Third and subsequent of a cluster of sākin letters, e.g. ni:st = NiYS[T], αnjα:st = ʔaʔNJaʔS[T].

B. Letters that may be omitted

1. Initial alif (ḥamza), especially in Persian words but commonly also applicable to Arabic:

bani: ʔα:dam aʕẓα:y-e yakdi:garand
ke dar ʔα:fari:neš ze yak gouharand
(Saʕdi)

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2. mušaddad letter (taxfīf), mainly in Arabic words, e.g.

dorr - dor	keifiyyat - keifiyat
kaff - kaf	xaṣṣe - xaṣe
ḍamm - ḍam	ʔayyam - ʔayam
ḥaqq - ḥaq	ḥammam - ḥamam
niyyat - niyat	nażżare - nażare

also in some Persian words, e.g.

šabpare - šappare - šapare

3. Final h when this stands for a vowel (hāʔ maxfī - in other words, this final syllable may be scanned long or short): KiH = ke:, ke. NaʔMaH = na:me:, na:me.

4. Final w when this stands for a vowel: DuW = do:, do. TuW = to:, to.

5. Internal w in certain words: SuWY-i = su:ye, suye. XuWB = xu:b, xob.

6. va (and) may be scanned as: WuW, Wa, uW, u.

C. Letters that may be added

1. mušaddad letter, e.g. šakar - šakkar, ʔomid - ʔommid, ʔei - ʔeiy.

2. iḍāfa (-e-) may be scanned as -i or -iY = e, e:.

3. be-, na- may be scanned as: Bi or BiH = be, be:; Na or NaH = na, na:.

4. W and Y in certain Arabic words: LaHuW or LaHu, BiHiY or BiHi.

D. mutaḥarrik letters that may be made sākin (i.e., short vowel may be omitted):

1. Letter preceding pronominal suffix: goftamaš - goftamš

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ṭaqatašan - ṭaqatšan

2. Letter following verbal prefixes be-, na-, ma-.

begozarad - bogzarad (note transfer of vowel)

našekanad - naškanad

manešin - manšin

3. Letters in various Arabic words, e.g.

ḥazayan - ḥazyan ḥayaran - ḥeiran

barakat - barkat ḥarakat - ḥarkat

ʿaraq - ʿarq kafan - kafn

motavari - motvari

hadiyye - hadye takiyye - takye (tašdīd also omitted)

E. sākin letters that may be made mutaḥarrik

1. Final W, Y (representing long vowel or diphthong) when followed by a vowel (e.g. -ast, u (va):

mardanagi: va ṭabʿ - mardanagiyu(:) ṭabʿ

mei ʾast - mayast

2. Certain internal letters:

pahn - pahan ʿaṭšan - ʿaṭašan

naṣr - naṣar raḏm - raḏam

F. Transposition of sukūn and ḥaraka

golestan - golsetan gorosne - gorsone

This list does not include alternative readings that are represented orthographically (e.g. gah for gah). A list of some of these will be found in Chapter V.

Two examples, one Arabic and one Persian, will serve to illustrate the process:

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(a) Straightforward transcription:

min ʕa:šiqin ṣabbin yusirru'l-hawa:

qad šaffahu'l-wajdu ʔila: kaltami

(ʕumar b. Abī Rabīʕa)

molḥed-e: gorsone dar xa:ne-ye xa:li: por xˇa:n

ʕaql ba:var nakonad kaz ramaẓa:n ʔandi:šad

(Saʕdi)

(b) Letter by letter transcription (the Arabic ḥurūf represented by capitals, vowels and other letters not shown in the script by lower case):

MiN ʕaʔŠiQin ṢaBbin YuSiRru ʔLHaWaY (16 letters)

QaD ŠaFfaHu ʔLWaJDu ʔiLaY KaLTaMi (17 letters)

- - - - - - - - -

MuLḤiDi GuRSuNaH DaR Xa?NaHi Xa?LiY PuR XWa?N (25 letters)

ʕaQL Ba?WaR NaKuNaD KaZ RaMaẒa?N ?aNDiYŠaD (24 letters)

(c) Letter by letter transcription after "adjustment" (short vowels omitted and sākin and mutaḥarrik letters indicated by symbols):

M N ʕ ʔ Š Q N Ṣ B B N Y S R R L H W Y (11 mutaḥarrik, 8 sākin)

Q D Š F F H L W J D . ʔ L Y K L T M Y (11 mutaḥarrik, 7 sākin)

o | o | o o | o | o(|)o o | o | o o |

- - - - - - - - -

M L Ḥ D Y G R S N D R X ʔ N H X ʔ L Y P R X?(14 mutaḥarrik, 9 sākin)

ʕ Q L B ʔ W R N K N D K Z R M Ẓ ʔ ʔ N D Y Š D (14 mutaḥarrik, 9 sākin)

o | o o | o | o o o | o | o o o | o | o | o |

A Persian verse composed by a prosodist provides a more extreme example:

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(a) neš̌ast sarvar-e ʔahl-e karam be-majles-e xα:ṣ

do xˇα:n se xˇα:n do se xˇα:n xˇα:st xα:n ce xˇα:n ke naxˇα:st

(b) NiŠ̌aST SaRWaRi ʔaHLi KaRaM BiMaJLiSi XaʔṢ (22 letters)

DuW XWaʔN SiH XWaʔN DuW SiH XWaʔN XWaʔST XaʔN CiH XWaʔN KiH NaXWaʔST (42 letters)

(c) N Š̌ S T S R V R ʔ H L Y K R M B M J L S X ʔ Ṣ
(15 mutaḥarrik, 8 sākin)

D X ʔ S X ʔ D S X ʔ X ʔ S X ʔ C X ʔ K N X ʔ S
(15 mutaḥarrik, 8 sākin)

o o | o o | o o o | o | o o | o o | o o o

Particular metres are distinguished according to the sequence of mutaḥarrik and sākin letters (which can be re-interpreted in practice into the sequence of short and long syllables - see below). To facilitate identification (and for other reasons that will become clear), the sequence of letters is broken up into units (aṣl, pl. uṣūl) as follows:

(i) sabab (pl. asbāb), "rope"

(a) sabab xafīf = one mutaḥarrik and one sākin, e.g.

(Arabic) Ku-N = kun

(Persian) ʔa-Z = az

(b) sabab taqīl = two mutaḥarrikāt, e.g.

(Arabic) La-Ka = laka

(Persian) Sa-Ri = sar-e

(ii) watad (watid, pl. awtād), "peg".

(a) watad mafrūq = one mutaḥarrik, one sākin, one mutaḥarrik, e.g.

(Arabic) Qa-B-La = qabla

(Persian) Ku-W-Yi = kuy-e

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(b) watad majmūʿ (maqrūn) = two mutaḥarrikāt, one sākin, e.g.

(Arabic) La-Qa-D = laqad

(Persian) Bi-Ku-N = bekon

(iii) fāṣila (pl. fawāṣil), "section".

(a) fāṣila ṣuġrā = three mutaḥarrikāt, one sākin (i.e. sabab ṯaqīl + sabab xafīf), e.g.

(Arabic) Qa-Da-Mi-Y = qadamī

(Persian) Bi-Ra-Wi-Y = beravi

(b) fāṣila kubrā = four mutaḥarrikāt, one sākin (i.e. sabab ṯaqīl + watad majmūʿ), e.g.

(Arabic) Ḍa-Ra-Ba-Hu-M = ḍarabahum

(Persian) Na-Gu-Ḏa-Ri-Y = nagoẓari

The Dorre-e Najafi[2] adds the following:

(i) (c) sabab mutawassiṭ = one mutaḥarrik, two sawākin, e.g. (Arabic) Ḍa-ʔ-L(-LuN) = ḍāllun

(Persian) Ya-ʔ-R = yar

(ii)(c) watad kuṯrā = two mutaḥarrikāt, two sawākin, e.g.

(Arabic) Ta-Ḍa-ʔ-L(-La) = taḍālla

(Persian) Fi-Ra-ʔ-Z = feraz

(iii)(c) fāṣila ʿuẓmā = five mutaḥarrikāt, one sākin (i.e. sabab ṯaqīl + fāṣila ṣuġrā), e.g.

(Arabic) Ḥa-Ra-Ka-Tu-Ha-ʔ = ḥarakatuhā

(Persian) Bi-Na-Di-Ha-Ma-Š = benadihamaš

Of the above, (i)(c) and (ii)(c) are peculiar to Persian verse, while (iii)(b) and (c) are only found in Arabic verse. In general the fawāṣil are of little practical value, since they are merely combinations of uṣūl from the other two

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categories.

It may help to illuminate this somewhat puzzling scene if the various figures in it are represented also in the guise of European notation. For this purpose a mutaḥarrik consonant (i.e. consonant + short vowel) is to be regarded as a short syllable (⏑), and a mutaḥarrik plus sākin (i.e. consonant + short vowel + consonant, or consonant + long vowel) as a long syllable (–):

(i)	(a) o|	–
	(b) oo	⏑ ⏑
	(c) o||	–⏑
(ii)	(a) o|o	– ⏑
	(b) oo|	⏑ –
	(c) oo||	⏑ –⏑
(iii)	(a) ooo|	⏑ ⏑ –
	(b) oooo|	⏑ ⏑ ⏑ –
	(c) ooooo|	⏑ ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ –

Equipped with these units, we are now in a position to form the feet (rukn, pl. arkān, or juzʔ, pl. ajzāʔ) that go to make up a line of verse. In order to avoid repetition of the clumsy terminology, formulae (afāʿīl) were devised to represent the feet, using the three letters familiar for this kind of purpose throughout Arabic grammar – f, ʿ, and l.

Ten basic feet are recognised, two consisting of five letters (two uṣūl), known as xumāsī, and eight of seven letters (three uṣūl), known as subāʿī:

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