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The relationship between the Iraqi band and free verse*

A band is one of the forms similar to free verse. Its structure is based on a specific, though important rule in Arabic poetry. It deviates from the rigours of a single rhythm and rhyme in one poem, and uses techniques similar to free verse. The essential feature of band structure is the abandonment of the principle of monorhyme. The movement from one rhyme to another is clear in the following band poem by the creator of the Iraqi band Ma'tūq Ibn Šihāb al-Mūsawī (also known as Ibn Ma'tūq al-Mūsawī, 1616-1676):

šarisun yahğumu fī bīđi đibā l-Hind, 'alā l-usdi,
fa-yağzū šarafa l-mağđi, wa-yu'fī bidara -'ayni,
fa-yašrī durara l-ħamđi, mina r-rifđi,
iđā sāra sarā đ-đu'ru ilā naħwi a'ādih,
wa-in ħalla ĩawā l-fahru bi-nādih, ġanā n-našra,
lahu l-azraqa wa-l-asmaru fī safkihimā l-aħmaru, [...]¹

Variation of rhymes also appears in the following band of 'Abd ar-Ra'ūf Ibn al-Ĥusayn al-Ġadħafašī (1655-1701):

a-lā yā ayyuhā l-ħādī, taraffaq bi-fu'ādī,
wa-ħbisi r-rakba wa-law ħalla 'iqālun,
fa-kalīmu š-šawqi qad ānasa barqa l-ġarbi,
min naħwi ħumā l-ħubb, fa-żannu n-nūri
fī t-ťuri bi-ğinhi l-layli nārā. fa-ğadā yaqtabisu
n-nāra ka-mā žanna bi-na'layhi funūdī²

* The frequently used term which was popular among Arab critics, which was connected with the new poetry and which appeared at the end of the 1940's is *'r ħurr* ('free verse'). Although this new poetry departs from the rigours of Classical Arabic, it is based on the arrangement of feet. In order to avoid complications, throughout the study the term "free verse" will be used.

¹ 'Abd al-Karīm ad-Duğaylī, *Al-Band fī āl-adab al-'arabī, ta'riħuhu wa-nuṣūṣuhu*, Baghdad 1959, p.9.

² Ibid., p.10.

The same movement from one rhyme to another can be observed in a free poem by the precursor of this form in Arabic poetry, the Iraqi poet Badr Šākīr as-Sayyāb (1928-1964). The poem is entitled *Huđīnī* (“Take me”) and it comes from the collection of poems *Manzil al-aqnān* (“The house of slaves”):

Fa-wā lahfa qalbī ‘alayki !
 wa-darbin ramānī ilayki !
 amā ta‘lamīna bi-annī aštahīki l-bāriḥa
 ašimmu ridā‘aki ḥattā ka‘annī
 saqīmun ya‘ūdu ilā dārihi yatanaššaqu ġidrānahā³

The above rule also applies to other free poems by such Iraqi poets as Nāzīk al-Malā‘ika (1923-), ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī (1926-), as well as to a number of other poets. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī moves freely from one rhyme to another in the following poem entitled *Kābūs al-layl wa-an-nahār* (“The nightmare of the nights and days”) from his collection of poems *Al-Kitāba ‘alā aṭ-ṭīn* (“Writing on clay”):

taḥlumu l-arḍu bi-mīlādi nabīyyin
 yamla‘u l-āfāqa ‘adlan,
 taḥlumu l-arḍu bi-mīlādi l-fuṣūl,
 wa-anā aḥmilu fī š-šāri‘i ġuṭṭa,
 li-uwārīhā, idā mā habaṭa l-laylu,
 bi-mabġan aw ḥadīqa,
 wa-bi-maqhan aw bi-ḥammārati nūr,
 muḥfiyan waġhī ‘ani Llāhi wa-‘anki,
 ḥaġilan sakrāna abkī.⁴

Additionally, the poets of free verse, especially both precursors – Badr Šākīr as-Sayyāb and Nāzīk al-Malā‘ika – created their own rhyme constructions which were considered as rules; however, the poets of the band move from one rhyme to another without consistent rules.

It is important to note that the Iraqi band and free verse are based on arrangement of feet, and not according to the classical idea of unity of two hemistichs. They also retain the oldest rules of the equal length of hemistichs. Contrary to classical poems which are arranged according to equal number of feet in each hemistich, the structure of the band and free verse is based on different and various numbers of feet. This is clear, e.g. in the following band of Ḥusayn al-‘Isārī (1737-1785):

³ Badr Šākīr as-Sayyāb, *Dīwān Badr Šākīr as-Sayyāb*, Beirut 1971, p. 244.

⁴ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, *Dīwān ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī*, vol. II, Beirut 1979, p. 465.

Sayyidu r-Rusli wa-afḍal,	(2 feet)
akmalu l-ḥalqi wa-aḡmal,	(2 feet)
Aḥmadu l-qā'imu bi-l-ḥaqqi	
naḍīran wa-bašīrā ...	(4 feet)
...wa-man ṭahharahum Rabbu-ka min qāḍūrati	
r-riḡsi sirāran wa-ḡihārā. ⁵	(6 feet)

Unequal number of feet also occurs in the following band of Muḥammad Ibn al-Halfa al-Ḥilli (d. 1831) :

ayyuhā l-lā'imu fī l-ḥubbi, da'ī l-lawma 'ani ṣ-ṣabbi,	(4 feet)
fa-law kunta tarā l-ḥāḡibiyya z-zuḡḡā ⁶ ,	(3 feet)
fuwayqa l-a'yuni d-du'ḡi,	(2 feet)
awi l-ḥadda ṣ-ṣaqīqiyya,	(2 feet)
awi r-rīqa r-raḥīqiyyā	(2 feet)
awi l-qadda r-rašīqiyya llaḍī qad šābaha l-ḡuṣna	(6 feet)
'tidālan wa-n'iṭfā. ⁷	

The poem of Badr Šākīr as-Sayyāb entitled *Iram ḍāt al-'imād* ("Iram of Many Columns") from his *dīwān Šanāšīl Ibnat al-Ḥalabī wa-Iqbāl* ("The balconies of Al-Ḥalabī's daughter and Iqbāl"), also displays an unequal length of hemistichs and differing number of feet:

min ḥalali d-duḥḥāni min sīkāra,	(3 feet)
min ḥalali d-duḥḥān	(2 feet)
min qadaḥi ṣ-šāyi wa-qad naššara,	
wa-hwa yaltawī izāra	(5 feet)
li-yahḡiba z-zamāna wa-l-makān	(3 feet)
ḥaddaṭanā ḡaddu abī fa-qāla: yā ṣiḡār	(4 feet)
muqāmīran kuntu ma'a z-zamān	(3 feet)
nuqūdiya l-asmāku, lā l-fiḍḍatu	
wa-n-nuḍḍār. ⁸	(4 feet)

Unequal number of feet and unequal length of hemistichs also appear in one of the first free poems of Nāzīk al-Malā'ika entitled *Al-Kūlirā* ("The Cholera"):

⁵ 'Abd al-Karīm ad-Duḡaylī, op. cit., p. 31.

⁶ The poet here makes a grammatical mistake, because he failed to eliminate "nūn" in the dual *al-ḥāḡibiyya*, because there is no genitive construction (*iḍāfa*). Also the plural *az-zuḡḡa* cannot be an adjective to the dual *al-ḥāḡibiyya*.

⁷ 'Abd al-Karīm ad-Duḡaylī, op. cit., p. 67.

⁸ Badr Šākīr as-Sayyāb, op. cit., p. 602-603.

ṭala‘a l-fağr	(1 foot)
işgi ilā waq‘i huṭā l-māšīn	(3 feet)
fī šamti l-fağri, işgi, unzur rakba l-bākīn	(4 feet)
‘ašarātu amwātin, ‘iṣrūna	(2 feet)
lā tuḥṣā, işgi li-l-bākīn. ⁹	(2 feet)

It is evident that most of the first free poems were composed in the metre *ramal*, which also occurs in the band form side by side with *hazağ*. The main reason for this may lie in the fact that the metre *ramal* is melodious, and provides various metrical and musical possibilities, giving the poet more freedom of choice.¹⁰ For example, the following band of Muḥammad Aḥmad az-Zaynī (d.1801) begins with a *ramal*, which leads to the following melody:

yā ṣadā ṭibi nasīmin marra fī rawḍīn wasīmin,
fa-šafā qalba saqīmin, (ramal)
in talaṭṭafta wa-aḥsant [...], etc.¹¹

For the sake of comparison, this internal partition of the melody is given in the ensuing innovative poem of the romantic Egyptian poet Aḥmad Zakī Abū Šādī (1892-1955). The poet uses the metre *ramal*:

ğaza‘a ṣ-ṣabbu wa-li-l-ḥuzni l-‘amīq fī sabīlak
law‘atu d-dunyā fa-man hādā yuṭīq li-maṭīlak¹²

The rhythmical arrangement resulting from the use of the metre *ramal* is also encountered in the first free poem of Badr Šākīr as-Sayyāb, which was published in 1947 (the year which is generally known as the time of the first published free poems in Arabic poetry), entitled *Hal kāna ḥubban?* (“Was it love?”) from the *dīwān: Azhār wa-asāṭīr* (“Flowers and legends”):

⁹ Ḥannā ‘Abbūd, *Tawra fī aš-šakl am tawra šakliyya?* in: “Al-Mawqif al-Adabī” no. 109, Damascus 1980, p.24.

¹⁰ The oldest Arabic poems were composed in the metre *ramal* used three metrical forms of it:

1. fā‘ilātun fā‘ilātun fā‘ilun: -v--/-v--/-v- x2

2. fā‘ilātun fā‘ilātun fā‘ilāt: -v--/-v--/-v- x2

3. fā‘ilātun fā‘ilātun fā‘ilātun: -v--/-v--/-v- - x2

In the course of time, this metre acquired new forms, among them the foot fā‘ilātān -v-ō (used in band).

¹¹ ‘Abd al-Karīm ad-Duğaylī, op. cit., p. 27.

¹² Aḥmad Haykal, *Taṭṭwwur al-adab al-hadīṭ fi Miṣr*, Cairo 1983, p. 347.

hal tusammīna llaḍī alqā hiyāmā?
 am ḡunūnan bi-l-amānī? am ḡarāmā?
 am yakūnu l-ḥubbu nawḥan wa-btisāmā?
 am ḥufūqa l-aḍlu‘i l-ḥarrā, idā hāna t-talāqī
 bayna ‘aynaynā, fa-aṭraqtu farāran bi-ṣṭiyāqī
 ‘an samā’in laysa tasqī-nī, idā mā?
 ḡi’tuhā mustaṣqīyan, illā awāmā.¹³

The band and free verse also use enjambment. In this case, the particular nature of the Arabic classical verse is broken. In general, the metrical structure of the band and of free verse is characterised by relative metrical freedom.

In spite of the similarities noted above, band cannot be considered as free verse, because there are some important differences between both genres. Free verse is based on systematic arrangement of identical feet (representing the same metre) in one poem, while band uses two metres. In band there never appear more than these two metres. In free verse, however, more than ten metres out from the Arabic sixteen are used. In the metrical structure of Arabic free verse does not exist the arrangement: *mafā‘ilun mafā‘ilun mafā‘ilun fa‘ūlun*, etc., a pattern which Nāzik al-Malā’ika attributed to the band. (This pattern is presented below).

Nāzik al-Malā’ika is the best-known authority among poets and critics who think that the Iraqi band is very similar to free verse. She also asserts that the two forms have the same prosodical structure, based on different length of the hemistichs. She states that the band form is based on one prosodical circle: the *muḡṭalab* – the “numerous” or “borrowed, imported” circle.¹⁴ From this circle two metres are used: *ramal* and *hazaḡ*. We would rather suggest, however, that Nāzik al-Malā’ika carries her argument too far when she stresses that the band has laid the foundations for the later appearance of free verse. In her opinion, the band form belongs to the category of free verse.¹⁵

The opinion of Nāzik al-Malā’ika has its sources in her idea that there are some common elements which link the band with free verse. She stresses the internal proportions of poetic melody in the band. In other words, she thinks that there might be a direct link between the last foot in the fragment of the *ramal*: fā‘ilātun: - v - - (mostly: fā‘ilātān: - v - - o) and the incomplete

¹³ See the whole poem in: Badr Šākir as-Sayyāb, op. cit., p. 101-103.

¹⁴ N. al-Malā’ika, *Qadāyā* ... , p. 202.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.12.

foot of the *hazaġ*: fa'ūlun: v - - . These feet appear alternatively: the first fragment of the *hazaġ* begins, and then finishes with the foot fa'ūlun; then the foot of the *ramal* begins, etc.

Here follows the metrical pattern which Nāzik al-Malā'ika applied to the band:

mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	mafā'īl	
mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	mafā'īl
mafā'īlun	mafā'īl		
mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	fa'ūlun	v - -

fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun
fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun			
fā'īlātun				
fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun	fā'īlātān	- v - -	

mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	mafā'īl	
mafā'īlun	mafā'īl		
mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	mafā'īl
mafā'īlun	fa'ūlun	v - -	

fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun	
fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun	fā'īlātun
fā'īlātun	fā'īlātān	- v - -

mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	mafā'īlun	mafā'īl
mafā'īlun	mafā'īl		

....., etc.¹⁶

For further illustration, the quoted below band of Bāqir Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥusaynī (1763-1803), which begins with the metre *ramal*, presents such a metrical partition as shown above.

innamā asnā hadāyā ṭafīqat ṭaḥṭariqu l-bīd,

- v - - / - v - - / v v - - / v v - - o

(*ramal*)

¹⁶N. al-Malā'ika, pp. 202-203.

fā'ilātun fā'ilātun fa'ilātun fa'ilātān	
	(The last foot is: fa'ilātān)
wa-tuḡrī šiqāqa ṣ-ṣummi ṣ-ṣayāhīd, bihā l-qubbu l-manāḡīd ...	(hazaḡ)
=	
[...] wa-li-l-wašli marā'in , v - - v / v - -	(hazaḡ)
mafā'īlu fa'ūlun	(Its ḍarb is fa'ūlun)
wa-ilā Llāhi iltimāsan bi-du'ā l-iḡwāni sā'ī...	(ramal)
... n-l-humāmayni l-imāmayni l-ḡawādayn . - v - - / - v - - / - v - - o	=
fā'ilātun fā'ilātun fā'ilātān	
mina l-qawmi l-ulā qad šarra'ū d-dīna l-ḡanīfiyya, wa- sannū subula n-nahḡi l-ḡaḡiqiyyi ...	(hazaḡ) =
[...] maṣābīḡu d-duḡā, bābu r-raḡā, sufnu n-naḡā, ahlu l-ḡiḡā ara'ā l-	=
warā ḡārā, idā mā d-dahru ḡārā v - - - / v - - - / v - -	=
mafā'īlun mafā'īlun fa'ūlun	
li-ḡanābi l-māḡīdi l-mawlā llaḡī ṭāwala aflāka l-ma'āni bi-ma'ānih ,	(ramal)
v v - - / - v - - / - v - - / v v - - / - v - - / v v - - o	
fa'ilātun fā'ilātun fā'ilātun fa'ilātun fā'ilātun fa'ilātān	
wa-sārat ka-masīri l-badri fi l-barri wa-fī l-baḡri ayādīh, karīmun yahibu l-alfa li-rāḡī-h, wa-yar'ā ḡurmata ḡ-ḡayfi idā ḡalla bi-nādīh, etc. ¹⁷	(hazaḡ) = =

It is obvious that the above metrical rules of Nāzik al-Malā'ika may occur in some bands, while in other poems this arrangement does not occur, especially when the ḍarb of hemistich is fa'ūlun v - - (hazaḡ). Sometimes fā'ilātān - v - - o (ramal) is not encountered. This situation is caused by the difficulties

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 208-210. (See also all band in: 'Abd al-Karīm ad-Duḡaylī, op. cit., p. 44-46.)

these rules, which require considerable concentration and attention from the poet. For example, Ma'tūq al-Mūsawī begins the following band with the metre *ramal*, ending his fragment with the foot fa'ilātān: v v - - o thus preparing ground for the rhythm in the foot of the metre *hazağ* (when these two feet appear alternatively as in the pattern of Al-Malā'ika). In some hemistichs, he moves to *hazağ*, and then returns to the *ramal*. The foot fa'ūlun v - - does not appear in the band, with the exception of the last verse. Here are some successive fragments of this band:

malikun bal malakun kawwana-hu Llāhu mina n-nūr, v v - - / v v - - / v v - - / v v - - o	(ramal)
fa'ilātun fa'ilātun fa'ilātun fa'ilātān	
fa-wallā-hu 'alā l-ḥalqi, v - - v / v - - -	(hazağ)
mafā'īlu mafā'īlun	
wa-nādā-hu rafa'nā-ka 'alā t-ṭūr, v - - v / v - - v / v - - o	=
humāmuna maḥati z-zulma mawāḍiḥi siwā zulmi ğufūni l-muqali l-ḥūr. v - - - / v - - v / v - - v / v - - v / v - - v / v - - o	=
wa-hadda min ayādī-hi la-nā abniyata t-tibri, v - - - / v - - v / v - - v / v - - -	=
fa-sayyadna ma'ālī-hi 'alā aḡniḥati n-nasri v - - v / v - - v / v - - v / v - - -	=
wa-anbat-na bi-wādī-hi rayāḥīna qanā l-ḥaṭṭi, v - - v / v - - v / v - - v / v - - -	=
wa-amma-na mawālī-hi mina l-qaḥṭi, v - - v / v - - v / v - - -	=
wa-dallal-na la-hu ṣ-ṣa'b, v - - v / v - - o	=
wa-sahhal-na la-hu l-wa'r ... v - - v / v - - o	=

Then the poet continues in the metre *hazağ*, and says:

... wa-fī l-ğāhi lahu niddun wa-asbāhun šafā
l-anşula fī l-būsi mina š-šūsi dama r-Rūs,
v - - v / v - - - / v - - - / v - - v / v - - v / v - - v / v - - o (hazağ) mafā'īlu
mafā'īlun mafā'īlun mafā'īlu mafā'īlu mafā'īlu mafā'īl

(Its *ḍarb* is not fa'ūlun)

wa-ğalā fi zulami l-ğahli mina l-ḥazmi bi-fānūs,
 v v - - / v v - - / v v - - / v v - - o (ramal)
 fa'ilātun fa'ilātun fa'ilātun **fa'ilātān**
 fatan zawwağa-hu l-mağdu 'aḍārā-hu wa-mā anbata
 fī wağnati-hi s-sinnu 'idārā.¹⁸
 v - - v / v - - v / v - - v / v - - v /
 v - - v / v - - v / v - - (hazağ)
 mafā'īlu mafā'īlu mafā'īlu mafā'īlu
 mafā'īlu mafā'īlu **fa'ūlun**

(Its *ḍarb* is fa'ūlun)

The following band of Naṣr Allāh Ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥā'irī (d. 1743) begins with the metre *ramal* (one verse), and moves to the metre *hazağ* till the end of the band, using fa'ūlun (v - -) as the last foot; and the above arrangement is not repeated in exact form:

ḥabbaḍā l-ustāḍu min mawlan maḍīdi z-zilli li-ḍ-ḍayf, (ramal)
 (The last foot is fā'ilātān - v - - o)
 sari'un ḥīnamā yad'ūhu muḍṭarrun, (hazağ)
 ṭawīlu l-bā'i fī baḍli n-nadā l-wāfiri li-l-'āfi =
 wa-fī qaṭfi ṭimāri l-maḍḥi min alsinati n-nāsi ... =
 [...] fa-kam aḥraqa min qalbin, =
 wa-kam afraḥa min 'aynin, =
 wa-kam albasa min ḡismin ṭiyāba
 s-suqmi sufran zararathā l-admu'u l-ḥumr ... =

The poet ends the band as follows:

[...] fa-lā zālat riyāḍu l-'izzi tazhū bika mā barqun **anārā**.¹⁹
 v - - - / v - - - / v - - v / v - - - / v - - =
 mafā'īlun mafā'īlun mafā'īlu mafā'īlun **fa'ūlun**
 (The last foot is fa'ūlun)

It is also to be observed that the foot fā'ilātān (- v - - , *ramal*) does not appear in the following band of 'Alī Bālīl (d. 1772), even though the foot fa'ūlun (v - - , *hazağ*) is used at the end of it:

tāratan yuṭnā 'alayhi bi-lisāni l-ḥāli ḥamdun, (ramal)

¹⁸ Abd al-Karīm ad-Duğaylī, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

(The last foot is not fā'ilātān)
 ilāhun aqdara l-ġayṭa 'alā l-inbāti bi-d-ḍāt,
 wa-arwā bi-l-hawā wa-n-nāri mā ayna'a inbāt,
 wa-ağrā bi-lisāni l-qawli šukran kullamā marrat (hazağ)
 bi-hi r-rīḥu raḥā'an wa-dawā s-saylu nḥidāran
 karaman min qibali ṣ-ṣāni 'i lā tadrīhi
 ḥaddan lā wa-lā tuḥṣīhi **ḥaṣrā.**²⁰

(The last foot is fa'ūlun)

Recognizing the connection between the two feet: fā'ilātān (- v - -) and fa'ūlun (v - -), Nāzik al-Malā'ika expressed the view that she wanted "to illustrate a specific pattern for the band in order to help those poets who intended to use it"²¹. Moreover, although Nāzik al-Malā'ika argued that there is a close relationship between the band and free verse, she also added that "free verse cannot be a descendant of the band, despite many similarities between them"²². We share this opinion of hers.

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²⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

²¹ Nāzik al-Malā'ika, op.cit., p. 202.

²² Ibid., p. 14.