VIII

PROSODY AND LANGUAGE: A SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC OVERVIEW

In this chapter and the next, I shall present a broad view of Nabaṭi poetry in its specific linguistic and literary contexts. No one who has studied Nabaṭi poetry can fail to note its striking resemblance to classical Arabic poetry. Their affinity was remarked upon more than six hundred years ago by Ibn Khaldūn, who asserted that the bedouin poets of his time, though their diction had deviated from that of their ancient predecessors, followed very closely the ancient modes and themes (1967:1125). Socin wrote of the Nabaṭi poetry which he himself had collected from Najdi informants residing in Mesopotamia that it was "a direct continuation of the ancient Arabic art of poetry according to content, form, and language" (1900–1901:III, 46). Ibn Khamīs (1958:94–174) discusses some of the thematic correspondences between Nabaṭi poetry and classical Arabic poetry and points out that these correspondences stem from the fact that, in addition to their historical relationship, the two poetries are products of the same physical and human conditions.

At the same time, it is abundantly clear that Nabaṭi poetry presents many linguistic and prosodic divergences from classical Arabic diction. It is obvious that the language has undergone many changes, which have produced corresponding changes in poetic diction in general, and in prosodic techniques in particular. The prosodic relationship of Nabaṭi poetry to classical Arabic poetry is a critical question which has not hitherto been fully examined. I shall deal with this question in the present chapter, first presenting a synchronic description of the most significant linguistic and prosodic features of Nabaṭi poetry, and then moving to a discussion of the historical process that eventually led to the transformation of poetic diction in Arabia from "classical" to "vernacular."

147

The Prosodic Characteristics of Nabaṭi Poetry

Before we can discuss the relationship of Nabaṭi prosody to classical prosody, it is necessary to analyze the metrical structure of Nabaṭi poetry itself and to devise a method for its scansion. Such an analysis must, however, be preceded by a preliminary discussion of some phonological aspects of the vernacular diction in which Nabaṭi poetry is composed and recited, and of the ways in which this diction diverges from that of classical Arabic.

Phonological Observations

The diction of Nabaṭi poetry and that of classical Arabic poetry are the two ends of one and the same poetic idiom which is based on, but of course more polished than, the spoken language of Arabia. This poetic idiom has changed slowly and gradually through time as a consequence of changes affecting the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of the spoken language. In the following pages, I shall be mainly concerned with sound changes in the language, specifically those affecting short vowels and the glottal stop, which triggered a realignment in the syllabic structure of the spoken language which, in turn, contributed to the development of the specific prosodic structure of Nabaṭi poetry and its divergence from classical prosody.

Needless to say, there are dialectal differences and variations in pronunciation between the various regions and tribes of Arabia, but for our purposes these variations may be considered negligible since they rarely affect the syllabic structure. In this work, Nabaṭi poetry is transliterated and scanned according to the pronunciation rules of the dialect of ʿUnaizah,[1] my home town, which is famous for its outstanding Nabaṭi poets. T. M. Johnstone has characterized the dialect of ʿUnaizah as:

> . . . a stable dialect and therefore particularly well suited to throw light on problems of the phonology of the Nejdi dialects as a whole. This stability results partly from the fact that there has not been, at least until recently, any substantial influence of prestige dialects from outside the area, and partly from the fact that the Nejdi dialects are regarded by their speakers as preserving many important features of Classical Arabic which have not been so preserved in other dialects. A certain pride also is felt in the colloquial poetry, al-shiʿr al-nabati, which is composed in a poetical 'Nejdi' dialect. (1967a:1)

The following is an inventory of the consonants in the dialect of ʿUnaizah:

$ʾ$ = ء	x = خ	$š$ = ش	f = ف	h = ه
b = ب	d = د	$ṣ$ = ص	$g, ǵ$ = ق	w = و
t = ت	$ḏ$ = ذ	$ṭ$ = ط	$k, č$ = ك	y = ي
$ṯ$ = ث	r = ر	$ḍ$ = ظ	l = ل	
j = ج	z = ز	$ʿ$ = ع	m = م	
$ḥ$ = ح	s = س	$ġ$ = غ	n = ن	

The classical sound $ḍ$ (ض) has merged with $ḍ$ (ظ), and q (ق) has been replaced by g. In certain phonetic environments, mainly in the contiguity of the high front vowels i and $ī$, the voiced velar stop g and its voiceless counterpart k are fronted to voiced and voiceless affricates $ǵ$ and $č$ respectively.[2]

In addition to the three long vowels $ā$, $ī$, $ū$ of classical Arabic, the dialect of ʿUnaizah has two or more, $ē$ and $ō$, which are reflexes of the classical diphthongs ay and aw. In the dialect, these two diphthongs appear only as the terminal elements of a final syllable, and in most cases as reflexes of the old $ū$ and $ī$: $gūlaw$, "say (m.p.)!"; $gūlay$, "say (f.s.)!"

Except in some pronominal forms and before a geminate bilabial, the short, high back vowel u has been fronted and completely assimilated to the front vowel i,[3] which leaves the dialect with primarily two contrastive short vowels: the high vowel i and the low vowel a. These two vowels behave differently in open syllables, as I will explain below. But first, the syllable must be defined.

A short syllable consists of a consonant followed by a vowel CV and a long syllable consists of a consonant followed by a long vowel $C\bar{V}$ or a short syllable closed by a consonant CVC. A syllable always begins with a consonant. In case the utterance begins with a vowel, a glottal stop which is concomitant of vocalic onset takes the place of an initial consonant.

In an initial open syllable, the high vowel i is elided,[4] thus giving rise to initial consonant clusters (a feature not permitted in classical Arabic): $flān$ (so and so), $rjāl$ (men), $ʿgad$ (knots), $ḏbiḥ$ (he was slain). In a medial open syllable the vowel i is elided only if the initial consonant of this medial syllable is identical with the consonant closing the preceding syllable, which gives rise to a cluster of three consonants. This applies to all the active participles of the second verbal form: $mdarrsīn$ (teachers),

mrawwḥāt (they [f.] are going). But if the aforementioned consonants are not identical, then the medial three-consonant cluster is not permitted and, instead of elision of the vowel *i*, a metathesis takes place whereby the vowel moves forward one consonant: *misilmīn* (Muslims), *takitbīn* (you [f.p.] write).

The low vowel *a* is raised to *i* in an open syllable: *jibal* (mountain), *ǧidam* (foot), *giʿūd* (young male camel), *giṭaʿ* (he cut), *ḏibaḥ* (he slew). The raising of the low vowel does not take effect when it is:

1. Preceded by a guttural (*ḥ x ʿ ġ h '*): *ḥadab* (fringes), *ġadīr* (pond), *xarūf* (lamb), *ḥamād* (hard plain), *'akal* (he ate)
2. Followed by a long syllable the initial consonant of which is a guttural or a sonorant (*l m n r w y*) and the vowel of which is *a*, *ā, ē,* or *ō*:[5] *waʿad* (he promised), *daxal* (he entered), *walad* (a youth), *dahab* (gold), *salām* (peace), *saḥāb* (clouds), *sahēt* (I forgot), *banāt* (girls), *darā* (he knew)

The vowel *a* is homorganic with gutturals and its behavior is strongly influenced by them. Gutturals not only inhibit the raising of *a* to *i* but also the copy vowel *a* is introduced after the guttural when a guttural closes a nonfinal syllable the vowel of which is *a: laḥam* (meat), *šaʿar* (hair). The copy vowel is not introduced when:

1. The guttural is followed by a short high vowel which is elided: *taʿbat* (she became tired)
2. The guttural is the last radical in the stem: *ṭalaʿnā* (we went out, left)
3. The form is an elative: *aḥlā* (sweeter), *axḍar* (greener)
4. The form is the perfect of verbal form IV: *aġdā* (he lost)
5. The form is the active participle of verbal form I: *taʿbān* (he is tired)

In addition to the elision of short high vowels in open syllables, the short vowels marking mood and case have also been deleted, giving rise to final consonant clusters. If the last consonant in this final cluster is a sonorant, an epenthetic vowel *i* is introduced to break up the cluster: *ḍabiy* (deer), *ġaziw* (a raid), *šiʿir* (poetry), *ʿajil* (swift), *najim* (star), *xašin* (coarse). The anaptyctic vowel is not inserted when the consonants in the cluster are both sonorants: *jirm* (stature), *garn* (horn, century). In continuous speech, the anaptyctic vowel disappears when the final consonant cluster is followed by a vowel or by a word that begins with an initial consonant cluster. Hence the word for foot, *rijil*, becomes *rijlēn* (feet), *rijl al-walad* (the boy's foot), *rijl mḥammad* (Muḥammad's foot).

In other cases, however, the anaptyctic vowel appears even in a nonfinal position: *rijil mūsā* (Mūsā's foot).

In addition to the above-mentioned vowel changes, the glottal stop *hamzah* has also undergone changes that have profoundly affected its syllabic status. In classical Arabic, the glottal stop functions as a consonant that can open or close a syllable anywhere in the utterance. In the vernacular, it has either been assimilated to an adjacent vowel or has been changed to *w* or *y*, or has been deleted altogether, except in a very few restricted positions or in cases of direct lexical borrowings from literary Arabic. All these changes are determined by the phonetic environment; but since the glottal stop, like any other consonant, can occur in a wide variety of environments, it is very difficult to exhaust all the possibilities or to formulate a general rule that would cover all the cases. Here I can only point out the most frequent changes that the glottal stop has undergone in the dialect of ʿUnaizah.

When it closes a syllable, the glottal stop drops and the preceding vowel is prolonged if it is not already long: *bčā* (crying), *xaṭā* (wrong-doing), *ardā* (worse), *garā* (he read), *birī* (he became cured), *rās* (head), *dīb* (wolf), *lūlū* (pearls). If it can be assumed that the long vowels *ī* and *ū* are really *iy* and *uw*, then it can be stated that a glottal stop after a long high vowel or a diphthong drops and the last element of the vowel or the diphthong is geminated: *biriyy* (innocent), *suww* (evil), *šayy* (a thing), *fayy* (shade), *ḍaww* (fire), *xaṭiyyih* (wrong-doing), *mruwwih* (altruism, manliness). When the glottal stop opens a syllable in a noninitial position, it changes to *y* unless the preceding vowel is *u*, in which case it changes to *w*: *gāyim* (standing up), *dyābih* (wolves), *ryih* (lung), *fwād* (heart), *lūlwih* (a pearl).

An initial open short syllable that begins with a glottal stop that is not part of the root is frequently dropped, especially if the following syllable is also open (but see exceptions 1 and 2 below): *gāmih* (staying), *rādih* (will), *ʿamā* (blind), *xaḍar* (green), *hawaj* (rash). Therefore, the citation form for the word *family* is *ahal*, but when this word is linked to another word following it, causing the second syllable to be open, the first syllable drops: *hal al-bēt* (people of the house). If the initial glottal stop is the first radical of the root, it drops only when the next two syllables are both open in the old form: *klituh* (she ate it [m]). When the initial glottal stop is the first radical of the root it is preserved in a few cases: *akal* (he ate), *axaḍat* (she took), but it usually changes to *w*: *wilif* (he became used to, fond of), *wimar* (he ordered). The glottal stop always changes to *w* in the passive voice and in the second and third verbal forms: *wčil* (it was eaten), *wakkal* (he gave to eat), *wākal* (he ate with). To avoid the initial glottal stop, the functions of the fourth verbal form have

frequently been relegated to the first or the second forms: *dār* (he caused [something] to turn), *ṭāʿ* (he obeyed), *mawwat* (he put to death), *nawwax* (he caused [a camel] to kneel), *dammā* (he caused to bleed), *dannā* (he brought [something] near).

Short syllable sequences, although permitted in classical diction, are avoided in the vernacular. When two short syllables follow each other and the vowel of the second syllable is *i* (i.e., *CVCi*––), the vowel of the second syllable drops and its consonant closes the preceding syllable and makes it long: *dibḥat* (she was slain), *šarbat* (she drank). In case the vowel in both syllables is *a* (i.e., *CaCa*––), the vowel of the first syllable drops while that of the second remains: *ćdibat* (she lied), *mġarib* (sunset) (this last example illustrates the stability of the copy vowel introduced after a guttural: it is the old *a* which drops while the new one remains). If this type of sequence of two short syllables is in a medial position (i.e., –*CaCa*–), either vowel may drop: *istaʿjal/istʿajal* (he rushed), *ištaġlat/ištġalat* (she worked). A sequence of two short syllables is, however, unavoidable under any of the following phonetic conditions:

1. When the imperfect of the first form of a verb whose first radical is a guttural is conjugated with the first person singular: *aʿarif ⁓ a ʿa rif* (I know)
2. When the imperfect of the fifth and sixth verbal forms is conjugated with the first person singular: *atigallab ⁓ a ti gal lab* (I toss and turn), *atimēwat ⁓ a ti mē wat* (I pretend to be dead)
3. When nunation is suffixed to a noun of the form *CaCaC: waladin garm ⁓ wa la din garm* (a gallant lad)
4. When the definite article *al* is prefixed to a noun that begins with a vowel which is not syllabically linked to the following consonant: *al-aṣāyil ⁓ a la ṣā yil* (the thoroughbreds), *al-asad ⁓ a la sad* (the lion).[6]

Scansion

Previous scholars who tackled the prosody of Nabaṭi poetry failed to provide a satisfactory method of scanning this poetry. The long discussion by Socin (1900–1901:II, 52–70) is rather fuzzy and unrevealing. Ibn Khamīs (1958:56–66) and Sh. al-Kamālī (1964:76–104, 156–177) do no more than throw their hands in the air after identifying a few Nabaṭi meters with classical ones. The most interesting observations were made by Wallin (1852:193) and C. de Landberg (1895:17 ff.). They noted that short vowels, which are elided when Nabaṭi poetry is recited, are usually restored to their original positions when the poetry is chanted or sung. Both hinted at the necessity of restoring these vowels to discern metrical regularity, but neither demonstrated in a systematic manner how this

was to be done; and the distorted verses in their collections betray their lack of sensitivity to Nabaṭi meter. As I have shown above, the elision of these vowels gives rise to consonant clusters which are permitted in ordinary conversation and poetic declamation. To enunciate the elided vowels while reciting would make the poetry sound stilted, but it is almost impossible to sing or chant Nabaṭi poetry without these vowels. The restoration of these vowels is also necessary for metrical regularity, as I will show below.

The meter of Nabaṭi poetry, like that of classical Arabic poetry, is quantitative. It is determined by the number of short and long syllables to a foot and the manner in which these short and long syllables are concatenated. A Nabaṭi poem consists of anywhere from a few to a few hundred (but on the average from twenty to forty) monorhyming lines, with each line divided into two usually equal hemistichs and all lines having the same meter. In Nabaṭi poetry, the hemistich (not the verse) is the maximum unit of scansion, the syllable the minimum unit. Metrically speaking, the hemistich is not a collection of words but a collocation of short and long syllables. In scanning, word boundaries must be disregarded completely, and the hemistich taken as one unit of continuous utterance. When a word in noninitial position begins with a vowel, this vowel becomes syllabically linked to the final consonant of the preceding word: *rāᶜ al-hawā* �థ *rā ᶜal ha wā* (the man of passion), *šift al-ġaḍī* ⇢ *šif tal ġa ḍī* (I saw my beloved), *rabᶜat al-bēt* ⇢ *rab ᶜa tal bēt* (the man's part of the tent). In case the preceding word ends with a long vowel, the long vowel is deleted: *ćimā aḍ-ḍārī* ⇢ *ći maḍ ḍā rī* (like a hungry wolf), *ᶜalā al-finjāl* ⇢ *ᶜa lal fin jāl* (on the cup).

When Nabaṭi poetry is scanned or chanted, all consonant clusters must be resolved except those at the very beginning or the very end of the hemistich. To resolve these clusters, a metathesized or elided vowel is restored back to its original position to form an independent short syllable with the preceding consonant: *misilmīn* ⇢ *mis li mīn* (Muslims), *sarrḥah* ⇢ *sar ri ḥah* (take it [f.] to pasture), *al-mdāwī* ⇢ *al mi dā wī* (the medicine man), *damᶜ ᶜēnī* ⇢ *dam ᶜi ᶜē nī* (the tears of my eyes), *tġannī ṭyūr al-mā* ⇢ *ti ġan nī ṭi yū ral mā* (the waterbirds are singing). Restoration of elided vowels cancels out the anaptyctic vowel which is introduced to break up final consonant clusters. The anaptyctic vowel is retained only at the very end of the hemistich. For example, the scansion of the word *al-ᶜaṣir* (the afternoon) is *al ᶜaṣ ri* in medial position but *al ᶜa ṣir* in final position.

The prosodic structure of Nabaṭi poetry, in harmony with that of the spoken language, does not allow short syllable sequences except in those very restricted and phonetically conditioned cases that were specified at the end of the previous section. Otherwise, the short syllables in the hemistich must be separated from one another by no less than two but

no more than three long syllables, as we shall see below. Therefore, when the restoration of the elided vowels yields two short syllables, these two short syllables are automatically reduced to one long syllable by dropping the vowel of the second syllable and linking its consonant to the preceding syllable to close it and make it long. For example, the utterance *jibt slāḥī* (I brought my weapon) scans as *jib tis lā ḥī* but not as **jib ti si lā ḥī*. More examples: *jāb ᶜyāluh ⁓ jā biᶜ yā luh* (he brought his children), *ḥinnā ᶜnizih ⁓ hin naᶜ ni zih* (we are of the ᶜAnazah tribe), *tigl rmikih ⁓ tig lir mi kih* (as a grown female horse).

The metrical form of a Nabaṭi poem is a syllabic matrix to which all the verses conform. Therefore, when we come across an utterance that can be scanned in more than one way in an individual hemistich, we choose the one that conforms to the metrical form of the specific poem. For example, an utterance consisting of a word with a final closed syllable followed by a word with an initial consonant cluster, such as *šaggag ṭyābuh* (he tore off his garment [out of extreme passion]), may be scanned in two ways: we can restore the elided vowel after the initial consonant of the second word—*šag gag ṭi yā buh*—or we can reduce the final closed syllable in the first word to a short syllable and link its terminal consonant to the initial of the second word—*šag ga giṭ yā buh*. Another example: when we have an utterance consisting of a word with a final long vowel followed by a word with an initial consonant cluster, such as *ṣirnā frag* (we became divided into small groups), we may scan it either as *ṣir nā fi rag* or as *ṣir naf rag*.

A final consonant cluster is permitted at the very end of a hemistich. An initial consonant cluster is permitted at the very beginning of a hemistich. In this position, a long syllable with an initial consonant cluster may be counted as just one syllable, or the initial consonant may be counted as an independent short syllable; this is determined by whether the first foot of the meter of the poem begins with a short syllable or a long one. A word like *ḥṣānī* (my horse) may thus scan, depending on meter, either as *ḥṣā nī* or as *ḥi ṣā nī*. If the initial syllable with the initial consonant cluster is short, it may be counted, again depending on the meter of the poem, either as short (e.g., *gdibat ⁓ gdi bat* [she seized]), or as two short syllables reduced to one long syllable (e.g., *mtawallᶜin ⁓ mit wal li ᶜin* [burning with passion]).

By observing these scansion techniques, the verses of a poem, from first to last, become arranged into strings of syllables which are collocated in such a way that the short syllables and the long syllables of all the verses align themselves perfectly in vertical columns. By so arranging the verses, we will find that in many instances syllables are unambiguously long or short with each syllable falling into its expected column. The

postulated cases will also fall in their expected columns along with the clear-cut cases. For example, consonants that are followed by elided vowels and that are expected to form independent short syllables will always fall in the same columns with consonants that are followed by unelided vowels.

To demonstrate the validity and applicability of the scanning techniques outlined above, here is a short poem composed by ʿGāb Ibn Siʿdūn al-ʿWājī lamenting the departure of Nūt, his sweetheart. First, I shall transliterate the poem with interlinear translation; then I shall transliterate the poem syllabically according to the scansion techniques outlined above. So that the reader can readily see the working of these techniques, elided vowels will not be supplied; their places will be left as blanks which can be filled simply by inserting the vowel *i*.

1   *yā-nūt ʿannā ḏʿūnikum lēh šalat // yaḥēf tamm frāginā yā-ḥabībī.*
    O Nūt, why did you load your camels and depart with your tribe?
    I am sorry to see you leave, my love.

2   *zamliḉ maʿ al-ḥazm al-mšarrif tikālat // waggaft arāʿīhin w-galbī ġaḏībī.*
    With a broken heart, I stood watching your pack camels climb the high hill.

3   *ʿigbiḉ ʿyūnī b-ad-dmūʿ istaxālat // damʿī ʿalā xaddī niṭar fōg jēbī.*
    My eyes became clouded with tears that ran over my cheeks and fell to my lap.

4   *ʿigbik ʿalay yā-zēn al-ayyām mālat // irjaʿ w-ʿālij ḍamrī ya-ṭibībī.*
    Since you have gone, O beautiful lady, my happy days have left me; come back, O my physician, and cure my heart.

5   *wi-diyārinā min ʿigib fargāk sālat // min damʿ ʿēnī gām yidrij šiʿībī.*
    Since you have gone, rain has poured upon our territory from my tears, which have flooded the land.

6   *win ḉan fargākum ʿala al-galb ṭālat // nanṣāk fōg mnaṯṯrāt as-sibībī.*
    Should you stay away much longer, we will come to you on swift mares.

7   *nāṣalk lō min dūnik al-gōm ḥalat // min fōg gibbin yarhajinn al-ḥarībī.*
    Even though the men of your tribe come between us, we will reach you on slender mares which will frighten the fleeing foe.

8   *law ḉān dūnik girraḥ al-xēl jālat // lāzim yijībik ḥaddinā min niṣībī.*
    Although full-grown horses with riders try to keep me from you, with luck I shall have you to myself.

This poem scans as follows:

-	-	ᵕ	-	-	-	ᵕ	-	-	ᵕ	-	-
1 yā	nū	t	ᶜan	naḍ	ᶜū	ni	kum	lē	h	šā	lat
yā	ḥē	f	tam	m f	rā	gi	nā	yā	ḥa	bī	bī
2 zam	liĉ	ma	ᶜal	ḥaz	mal	m	šar	rif	ti	kā	lat
wag	gaf	ta	rā	ᶜī	hin	w	gal	bī	ġa	ḍī	bī
3 ᶜig	biĉ	ᶜ	yū	nī	bad	d	mū	ᶜis	ta	xā	lat
dam	ᶜī	ᶜa	lā	xad	dī	ni	ṭar	fō	g	jē	bī
4 ᶜig	bik	ᶜa	lay	yā	zē	na	lay	yā	m	mā	lat
ir	jaᶜ	w	ᶜā	lij	ḍā	m	rī	yā	ṭi	bī	bī
5 wid	yā	ri	nā	min	ᶜig	b	far	gā	k	sā	lat
min	dam	ᶜ	ē	nī	gā	m	yid	rij	š	ᶜī	bī
6 win	ĉā	n	far	gā	kum	ᶜa	lal	gal	b	ṭā	lat
nan	ṣā	k	fō	g m	naṯ	t	rā	tas	si	bī	bī
7 nā	ṣal	k	lō	min	dū	ni	kal	gō	m	ḥā	lat
min	fō	g	gib	bin	yar	ha	jin	nal	ḥa	rī	bī
8 law	ĉā	n	dū	nik	gir	ra	ḥal	xē	l	jā	lat
lā	zim	yi	jī	bik	haḍ	ḍi	nā	min	ni	ṣī	bī

The Metrical Structure of Nabaṭi Poetry

The first step in determining the meter of a Nabaṭi hemistich is to divide it into its constituent syllables. Then the syllables are grouped into larger units of metrical measurement called feet. A foot is a unique combination of one short syllable and two or three long syllables.[7] The procedure followed to discover metrical feet is quite simple. First, we find simple meters in each of which only one type of short and long syllable combination repeats itself; this combination is isolated and identified as a foot. After examining all the simple meters and identifying their feet, we then proceed to analyze complex meters as combinations of two or more of the already identified feet.

The following is an inventory of fifty-one metrical patterns (grouped into meter classes) which I have been able to identify in Nabaṭi poetry. Each metrical pattern will be represented by one hemistich illustrating its use.

A.   1. *agūl an-niṣāyiḥ wa-aᶜidd al-fiḍāyiḥ*
B.   2. *yā-rjāl al-ḥamiyyih*

       3. *ya-llah al-yōm yā-rawwāf*
       4. *yā-mjallī tisammaᶜ l-ᶜōdin fiṣīḥ*
C.   5. *ᶜalāmih marr ᶜajlān*
       6. *ġarīmin b-al-hawā rūḥī*
       7. *sigā ṣōb al-ḥayā miznin tahāma*
       8. *anā mā-nīb haddārin miṯil nāsin yahaḏrūn*
       9. *salāmin sālmin mihdīh lik yā-gāyd al-ġizlān*
D.   10. *yōm šāf al-ġāwyāt*
      11. *fazz galbī fazz galbī*
      12. *yā-salāmī yā-salām allah*
      13. *kill šayyin ġēr rabbik w-al-ᶜamal*
      14. *rawwaḥan miṯl al-giṭā ṣōb aṯ-ṯimīlih*
      15. *bint šēxin mā yiḥīd aṭ-ṭēr ᶜan mandātih*
      16. *lī ṯalāṯ snīn aᶜaddil fíć y-al-ᶜēn aš-šiġiyyih*
      17. *ya-hal al-ᶜērāt bāćir ćān marrētu ṭawārif xillī*
E.   18. *yā-rabbinā mā min miṭīr*
      19. *yalᶜab ṭarab w-al-hamm mā jāh*
      20. *yā-ḏ-al-ḥamām allī sijaᶜ bi-l-ḥūn*
      21. *yā-galb lā tiyyis walā tirtāᶜī*
      22. *hāḏī ᶜnēzih mā nibīᶜ ah b-az-zihīd*
      23. *ya-dḥēm yā-maškāy šīlaw ᶜadl al-amṯāl*
F.   24. *anā hāḏ mā bī nōḏ barrāg*
      25. *al-aᶜmār sifnin w-as-snīn bḥār*
      26. *al-ayyām mā xallan ḥadin mā ćawannih*
      27. *bidā al-ġīl min jafnih jifā laddat rgādih*
      28. *xalūjin tijidd al-galb b-aᶜlā ᶜwālhā*
G.   29. *gāl min wallaf jawābin ṭarā lih*
      30. *lā tikāṯar jayyitī yā-niḏar ᶜēnī*
      31. *yā-hal al-bistān min faḏlikum ᶜingūdī*
      32. *ya-llah innī ṭālbik ya-mṭīb allī ṣibar*
H.   33. *ᶜaddēt b-al-mistiġillī*
      34. *yā-mill galbin ᶜalā mīhāf*
      35. *yā-sidritin gāᶜat al-ġirmūl yizzíć*
      36. *ḥayy allah allī yiġīb w-yisriᶜ ar-riddih*
      37. *in ćān hāḏī miṯālībik gaharnā ar-rḥīl*
      38. *yaḥḥōl anā min jrūḥ al-galb w-al-ḥibb yaḥḥōl*
I.   39. *yā-ᶜalī ṣiḥt b-aṣ-ṣōt ar-rifīᶜ*
      40. *yā-ḥamāmin ᶜalā al-ġābih yinūḥi*
      41. *yōm ᶜaddā ar-riġībih rās masḏūbih*
      42. *yā-ḥamāmih ġarībih ᶜind bāb as-salām*
      43. *ams fī sūg m-adrī ᶜarriḏat lī ġazālih*
J.   44. *dibaḥnī b-at-tiġillī lih ᶜzūmin giwiyyih*
K.   45. *yā-ᶜēn ya-llī gilīlin nōmahā min ćamm lēlih*

    46. ʿayyant kisrā w-gēṣar ʿazzalaw w-al-kill bāsih šidīd
L.   47. yā-ǧārʿ ad-dammām gim w-igriʿih
    48. nāḥ al-ḥamām b-ʿālyāt al-migāṣir
    49. ʿādat ʿalā allī b-al-hawā sabbal al-ḥibbih
M. 50. yā-hal al-fāṭr allī fōgahā min kill dašnin jidīdin ǧalī
N. 51. māniʿ xayyālin b-ad-dakkih

To show the relationship between these metrical patterns, I will convert the above hemistichs into short and long syllables. Each hemistich consists of a string of short and long syllables with the short syllables separated from each other by no less than two but no more than three long syllables. The only exception is hemistich 51 which is made up of long syllables only, thus making it impossible to divide it into feet. The fifty-one hemistichs group themselves into fourteen meters, each having from one to eight variants. The variants of a meter all share the same foot or combination of feet, but they are different in length, that is, in number of syllables. In addition of syllables to the shortest variant may be even, as in class E, or there may be jumps and leaps. The gaps created by these jumps and leaps are accidental and not formal. They may be the result of incomplete sampling or they may represent neglected (*muhmal*) variants. The syllabic breakdown of the meters is shown on the following page.

The scansion techniques explained in the previous section are consistent with the way the poetry is chanted or sung. But the above metrical inventory is a formal classification for which there is no equivalent classification employed by the poets themselves. Nabaṭi poets, except perhaps for those few among them who are literate, are not and need not be consciously aware of the metrical structure of their compositions—even though in many cases, as we shall see shortly, this structure may correspond to that of a classical literary metrical scheme.

The way Nabaṭi poets regulate the rhythm of their compositions is quite different. If a Nabaṭi poet wishes to determine whether his verse is metrically sound (ʿādil) or broken (maksūr) by recitation, he can make sure by singing it. The way a verse is sung or chanted is called ṭarg (beat rhythm) or šēlih (raising of the voice). When one hears a new poem one may ask "wiššū h-aṭ-ṭarg" ("What is this rhythm?") or "wišlōn šēlitah" ("How is it sung?")

In much the same way as the fifty-one hemistichs given above can be grouped into metrical classes based on syllable arrangement, Nabaṭi poets arrange them into melodic categories. The most famous melodies are mashūb, marbūʿ, hlālī, xmīšī, ṣxarī, hjēnī, sāmrī, ḥōṭī, and ʿarḍih. The first five categories are usually sung individually to the accompaniment of the ribābih (the one-stringed, fiddle-like instrument). The sixth is sung

```
A.   1.   ∪ – –      ∪ – –      ∪ – –      ∪ – –

B.   2.   – ∪ –      – ∪ –      –
     3.   – ∪ –      – ∪ –      – –
     4.   – ∪ –      – ∪ –      – ∪ –      – ∪ –

C.   5.   ∪ – – –    ∪ – –
     6.   ∪ – – –    ∪ – – –
     7.   ∪ – – –    ∪ – – –    ∪ – –
     8.   ∪ – – –    ∪ – – –    ∪ – – –    ∪ – –
     9.   ∪ – – –    ∪ – – –    ∪ – – –    ∪ – – –

D.  10.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ –
    11.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –
    12.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    –
    13.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ –
    14.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –
    15.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – –
    16.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –
    17.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – –

E.  18.   – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –
    19.   – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –    –
    20.   – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –    – –
    21.   – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –    – – –
    22.   – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –
    23.   – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –    –

F.  24.   ∪ – –      ∪ – – –    ∪ – –
    25.   ∪ – –      ∪ – – –    ∪ – –      –
    26.   ∪ – –      ∪ – – –    ∪ – –      ∪ – –
    27.   ∪ – –      ∪ – – –    ∪ – –      ∪ – – –
    28.   ∪ – –      ∪ – – –    ∪ – –      ∪ – ∪ –

G.  29.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      – ∪ – –
G.  29.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      – ∪ – –
    30.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      – ∪ – –    –
    31.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      – ∪ – –    – –
    32.   – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      – ∪ – –    – ∪ –

H.  33.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      –
    34.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      – –
    35.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      – – ∪ –    –
    36.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      – – ∪ –    – –
    37.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      – – ∪ –    – ∪ –
    38.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      – – ∪ –    – ∪ –    –

I.  39.   – ∪ –      – ∪ – –    – ∪
    40.   – ∪ –      – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      –
    41.   – ∪ –      – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      – –
    42.   – ∪ –      – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      – ∪ –
    43.   – ∪ –      – ∪ – –    – ∪ –      – ∪ – –

J.  44.   ∪ – – – ∪ – – ∪ – – – ∪ – –

K.  45.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –
    46.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    – ∪ – –    ∪ –

L.  47.   – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      – ∪ –
    48.   – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      –
    49.   – – ∪ –    – – ∪ –    – ∪ –      – –

M.  50.   – ∪ – – ∪ – – – – ∪ – – – ∪ – – ∪ – – –

N.  51.   – – – – – – – –
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The syllabic breakdown of meters.

either to the accompaniment of the *ribābih* or while riding on thoroughbred camel mounts (*hijin*). The last three categories are sung collectively to the accompaniment of drums (*ṭbūl*). This melodic classification does not in any way correspond to or accord with the metrical classification worked out above. Poems of different meters are grouped in the same melodic category even though they are sung differently. For example, hemistichs 14, 34, 36, and 43 are all *hjēnī*, and hemistichs 22, 30, 32, 40, and 41 are all *ʿarḍih*. Moreover, an individual poem may belong to several melodic categories although it has only one meter. For example, hemistich 7 is classed both as *ṣxarī* and as *sāmrī*, hemistich 34 as both *hjēnī* and *sāmrī*, and hemistich 46 as *mashūb*, *marbūʿ*, and *hōṭī*.

Relationship of Nabaṭi Metrics to Classical Prosody

Although the prosody of Nabaṭi poetry exhibits some differences from that of classical Arabic poetry, the two are generically related, and their differences can be explained as the result partly of linguistic changes and partly of a general tendency toward symmetry and simplification of the metrical paradigm.

Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, who lived in the eighth century A.D., was the first to formulate the metrical system of classical Arabic poetry.[8] He posited five metrical circles, each containing from two to nine ideal metrical forms. A metrical circle is a circle consisting of a specific number of long and short syllables combined in a specific manner. The meters of a circle are formally related to each other. By starting to count from one point on a circle, one of its meters is obtained; the others are likewise derived from it by changing the starting point. The total yield of the five metrical circles is twenty-two ideal meters, including six "neglected" (*muhmal*) meters. These six are accidental gaps in the metrical system because they are not employed by classical poets even though there are no formal constraints to prevent their use.

The number of classical meters actually observed is much larger than the number of ideal meters from which they are derived, so to speak, through formal rules. Several variants can be derived from the ideal form of a meter by changing the syllabic structure of the last foot of the first hemistich (*ʿarūḍ*) and the last foot of the second (*ḍarb*). These changes are called *ʿilal* and they are binding: whatever changes the poet introduces in the *ʿarūḍ* and *ḍarb* of the first verse of a poem he must continue to adhere to throughout the remainder of the poem. The verses in a poem are all of the same meter throughout, and the two hemistichs of every verse are metrically similar except for the *ʿarūḍ* and *ḍarb*, which are usually different. Because of this probable difference, it is not possible

to identify exactly the meter of a classical verse without knowing both of its hemistichs in order to know its *ʿarūḍ* and *ḍarb*.

In addition to the *ʿilal* there are other syllabic changes called *ziḥāfāt*. Whereas the *ʿilal* are binding and affect only the *ʿarūḍ* and *ḍarb*, the *ziḥāfāt* affect the remainder of the verse, called *ḥašw*, and are optional poetic licenses. Unlike the *ʿilal*, the *ziḥafat* do not affect all the verses of a poem in the same way and are not binding but may be varied.

In Nabaṭi prosody, the general tendency toward symmetry has resulted in eliminating the difference between the last foot of the first hemistich and that of the second; the two hemistichs of a Nabaṭi verse are metrically identical except in those verses which are composed in the classical *ṭawīl* meter. For this reason, I consider the hemistich, rather than the entire verse, to be the maximum unit of metrical measurement in Nabaṭi poetry; the syllable is the minimum unit. No classical poem is free of *ziḥāfāt*, but in Nabaṭi poetry they are rare and affect only the initial syllable of a hemistich, which can be optionally reduced from long to short or, if already short, deleted altogether. As a matter of fact, those *ziḥāfāt* which permit the deletion of one or two short syllables, the substitution of two short syllables by a long one, and the reduction of a long syllable to a short one in the contiguity of another short syllable are all inapplicable to Nabaṭi poetry because they all presume the unconditioned permissibility of a sequence of two short syllables, a feature which is avoided in Nabaṭi vernacular. In cases where the phonetically conditioned sequence of two short syllables discussed in the preceding pages may affect a verse in a Nabaṭi poem, one of these two short syllables will always fall in a column of corresponding short syllables, but the other will fall in an adjacent column of long syllables. But this is a phonetically conditioned, not an optional, syllable substitution, and therefore cannot be considered a *ziḥāf*. The rules of *ziḥāfāt* in classical poetry are based on division of the feet of a classical meter into smaller units of syllable combinations called *asbāb* and *awtād*. But since the *ʿilal* and *ziḥāfāt* rarely apply to Nabaṭi poetry, it suffices to divide the feet of Nabaṭi meters simply into short and long syllables.[9]

The avoidance of sequences of two short syllables has also resulted in the disappearance of two classical meters, *al-wāfir* and *al-kāmil*, from the metrical inventory of Nabaṭi poetry, since two of the feet of these meters, namely *mufāʿalatun* and *mutafāʿilun*, include a sequence of two short syllables. Five more classical meters, all of the *al-muštabih* circle— namely *as-sarīʿ*, *al-munsariḥ*, *al-xafīf*, *al-muḍāriʿ*, and *al-muqtaḍab*—have no correspondences in Nabaṭi poetry. In these matters—uniquely among the classical meters—five short syllables are separated from one another by four long syllables. It is perhaps this anomaly that led to the disappear-

ance of these meters from Nabaṭi poetry, since in Nabaṭi meters short syllables are separated from each other by no more than three but no less than two long syllables.

The meters of the last five hemistichs (47–51) in the metrical inventory presented above do not correspond exactly to any of the classical meters. We may consider the meter of hemistichs 47–49 as an adaptation of the classical ṭawil meter, differing from it only by the absence of an initial short syllable. It is not possible to determine the meter of hemistich 50 because there is more than one way in which it can be divided into feet and none of the possible divisions corresponds to any classical meter. Hemistich 51 cannot be divided into feet since its constituent syllables are all long.

Despite these differences between the metrical structures of Nabaṭi and classical Arabic poetry, a cursory examination of the Nabaṭi metrical inventory will show that many classical meters are still being used: al-mutaqārib (1), al-mutadārak (2–4), al-hazaj (5–9), ar-ramal (10–17), ar-rajaz (18–23), aṭ-ṭawīl (24–28), al-madīd (29–32), al-basīṭ (33–38), and al-mujtaṭṭ (45–46). The meters al-mumtadd (39–43) and al-mustaṭīl (44), which belong to the al-muxtalif circle, are used by Nabaṭi poets even though they are neglected (muhmal) in classical poetry. Some of the classical meters used in Nabaṭi poetry have been made longer (e.g., al-hazaj (8–9) and ar-ramal (15–17). A Nabaṭi hemistich can be as long as it is possible for a singer to chant in one breath; and as far as I have been able to determine, breath seems to be the only limiting factor on length. Hemistich 50 has a sum total of twenty syllables; the longest hemistich in classical Arabic poetry is fourteen syllables.

Rhyme

Turning now to the rhyme scheme of Nabaṭi poetry, we also observe both similarities and differences with respect to classical Arabic poetry. In a classical poem, only the second hemistichs of the verses rhyme throughout, never the first, whereas a Nabaṭi poem usually has two rhymes, one for the first hemistichs and a different rhyme for the second. Not infrequently, the rhyming consonant, ar-rawiyy, of the first and second hemistichs is the same while the preceding vowel, ar-ridf, is different. For example, the first hemistichs may rhyme in -ūb/-ōb and the second in -īb/-ēb. As a result of the monophthongization of diphthongs, ū and ō can serve interchangeably as ridf, as can ī and ē. Certain blemishes, such as iqwā and sinād, against which medieval prosodists warned post-classical poets, are not applicable to Nabaṭi poetry due to the shedding of case endings and the leveling effect of centralizing high and low vowels.

The Historical Development of
Classical Arabic Poetic Diction

The continuity between ancient Arabic poetry and Nabaṭi poetry, and the exact nature of their historical relationship are matters that are obscured by their linguistic differences—the most salient feature, which distinguishes one from the other. The problem is made more complex by the fact that the diction of ancient Arabic poetry was elevated from its origins as a poetic vernacular to a highly esteemed literary language, which continues to the present day to be employed by cultivated poets as a medium of composition. This may lead one to ask how it is that popular poetry composed in the vernacular can be considered the descendant—or even a near relation—of classical Arabic poetry, which is traditionally viewed as the perfect model of literary excellence. And even should we accept the proposition of the descent of Nabaṭi poetry from classical Arabic poetry, does this proposition in any way modify our view of postclassical and neoclassical Arabic poetry composed in "literary" Arabic? To answer these questions it is necessary to take a few steps backwards in history in order to review the development of the Arabic language and to trace briefly the transformation from "classical" to "vernacular" of the poetic diction of Arabia.

As has already been noted, the diction of Nabaṭi poetry and that of classical Arabic poetry may be considered as the two poles of a single poetic idiom deriving from the spoken language of Arabia. This poetic idiom underwent many developments in the course of time—developments that resulted from parallel changes in the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of the spoken language. It may be assumed that originally the degree of difference between the spoken language and the poetic idiom of ancient Arabia was probably no greater than that between the language spoken in Arabia a few decades ago and the diction of vernacular poetry. The diction of ancient Arabic poetry, or what we now in retrospect call "classical" Arabic, was essentially a polished form of the language spoken by the people in their daily intercourse, as is the case today with the vernacular diction of Nabaṭi poetry. It was, as Gibb puts it, a "standardized poetic idiom based on the spoken dialects but distinguished from them by refinements of vocabulary, inflections and syntactical articulation" (1968:10). The poets of ancient Arabia were popular, illiterate poets who did not go to institutions of higher learning in order to learn "classical" or "correct" Arabic, but who acquired their poetic diction in the same way that modern popular poets learn their own poetic idiom: by listening to and interacting with their peers and elders.

It was not until the Arab conquest of neighboring nations and the spread of Islam outside Arabia that the structure of spoken Arabic began to deviate radically from that of classical Arabic, the function of which was by then changing from that of a poetic vernacular to that of a literary language in which fluency was acquired through formal education and rigorous training. After the Arabs took up residence in the newly con-quered territories and mingled with the native populations, their speech began, as a result of their exposure to other languages, to diverge signifi-cantly from that of the ancients. But this linguistic change did not mean the disappearance of the classical tongue. Because it had been captured at a given moment and utilized as the medium of divine revelation, classical Arabic was destined to sanctity, permanence, and prestige as the language of faith and learning. Early Muslim philologists felt that it was a religious duty to preserve and study classical Arabic as spoken by the Prophet and his companions, and they scrupulously collected and examined examples of it. The resulting corpus consisted chiefly of the poetry of the desert Arabs among whom the classical poetic diction had appeared and flourished in circumstances that promoted its continuity. It was on the basis of this corpus that the philologists systematically formulated the grammatical rules and prosodic principles of classical Arabic. In this way there came to be two varieties of Arabic used in urban centers: the relatively stable and uniform classical language, and the colloquial Arabic, which was subject to local and temporal changes. These structurally and functionally different varieties of Arabic have coexisted side by side up to the present time.[10]

Classical Arabic language and classical Arabic poetry remained throughout the ages the models for literary and poetic expression.[11] The grammatical rules of the classical tongue and the prosodic principles of classical poetry came to be viewed as obligatory in the literary composi-tions of scholars, scribes, the literate elite, and the court poets whose daily intercourse was in colloquial Arabic. However, in response to the changing life-styles and social milieus of the rapidly developing Muslim civilization, postclassical Arabic poetry began to diverge from the classical tradition in its social function, thematic content, and general outlook.

The heroic spirit and social function of the classical poetic tradition persisted among the desert Arabs, who continued to live under the same socioeconomic conditions that had prevailed in ancient Arabia, and whose relative isolation gave them some immunity from foreign influences. Life in the Arabian desert was but briefly interrupted by Islam and but lightly touched by its developing civilization. Desert knights and tribal poets continued to celebrate their valor and gallantry and the virtues of their tribes in verses which spread swiftly throughout the desert. Long after it had become a literary language among the urban population, classical

Arabic endured as a poetic vernacular and medium of popular artistic expression in Arabia. When the language of the urban masses became "contaminated" by foreign influences, illiterate bedouins served as native informants from whom the early philologists of Basrah and Kufah collected samples of classical poetry and usage.

The Rise of Nabaṭi Poetry

While the grammatical rules and prosodic principles of the classical tradition were being maintained and emulated by the scholars and poets of Muslim capitals, they were undergoing inevitable transformations in their native land, the Arabian desert. Bedouin speech slowly began to yield to some of the changes affecting the speech of city Arabs. The majority of desert poets lacked the education and formal training necessary to master and perpetuate the classical grammar and prosody. They were not aware of, and hence not bound by, the rules formulated by the philologists, and, even if they were aware of these rules, they lacked the scholarly training that would enable them to apply them. Furthermore, unlike postclassical urban poets whose compositions functioned as an elite literature which only the educated upper classes could appreciate, desert poetry continued to be composed on public occasions to fulfill public functions. Desert poets played significant social roles as the agents of public opinion and as the articulators of the social norms and cultural values of their society; therefore, their diction was continually adapting to parallel the changing language of their illiterate audiences.

At the same time that these linguistic developments were taking place, Arabia was becoming more and more cut off from the rest of the Arab-Muslim world. After the Arab conquest of Syria and Mesopotamia, the sway of the Arab-Muslim empire shifted to those ancient centers of civilization and away from Arabia, which came to be neglected by the caliphs. A few centuries after the death of Muḥammad, Arabia had lapsed into political anarchy and was veiled by a second jāhilīyah[12] from the rest of the world. Although the northern reaches, coastal fringes, and the ḥajj routes remained somewhat familiar because they were well traveled, intractable nomads and the forbidding barrenness of the desert rendered the interior of Arabia virtually inaccessible to outsiders.

These linguistic and sociopolitical factors contributed to the gradual isolation of the poetic tradition of the Arabian desert from the mainstream of Arabic literature. For the philologists, the desert Arabs became unapproachable, and useless as informants because their manners and speech had become "corrupt." The poetic diction of the Arabian desert eventually diverged so much from classical Arabic that it became difficult for the literary pedants in urban centers to understand it. Those pedants shunned

this truly authentic poetry; and even when it did reach their ears, they frowned upon it and may even have suppressed it as they did other forms of vernacular lore. As a result of this attitude on the part of medieval Arab scholars, we now have no written sources on the poetic tradition of the Arabian desert at this critical period in its long history, and poetic examples from that period are scarce.

Ibn Khaldūn, with his usual acumen, was the only one among the medieval scholars to write on this topic. He noted that the poetic diction of the Arabian desert was changing because the speech of the desert Arabs itself had changed from what it had been in the ancient past.[13] Despite this linguistic change, the poetry of the desert, wrote Ibn Khaldūn, retained its vigor and eloquence—contrary to the dogmatic claims of the philologists of his time:

> Most of the professed scholars of this age, especially philologists, disapprove of this [vernacular] poetry when they listen to it and shun its composition when they hear it recited, claiming that their taste disdains it because it is not eloquent, since its language has lost case inflections. But the real reason is lack of competence in the dialect in which this poetry is composed. Were they to possess the necessary competence, their taste and natural feeling would testify to the eloquence of this poetry, provided that their disposition and perception be not warped. Case inflections have nothing to do with eloquence. Eloquence is the conformity of expression to the thing expressed and to the situation at hand, no matter how subject and object are marked, since these can be easily deduced through syntactic relation, as is the case in their [the desert Arabs'] dialect today. As for meaning, it is based upon conventions agreed upon by the speakers. If the speaker knows these conventions and if the expression [he uses] conforms to these conventions and is appropriate to the situation at hand, then eloquence is achieved regardless of the grammarians' rules. (1967:1126)

His insightful observations notwithstanding, what Ibn Khaldūn has to say about the poetry of the Arabian desert is too sketchy and too general. The examples he provides are very few and lack both commentary and background information. They suffer from metrical irregularities, which may be attributed in part to typographical inaccuracies and the ignorance of modern editors concerning this poetry. Moreover, since the language of these examples is somewhere between classical Arabic and modern vernacular, we have no clear idea of its actual pronunciation and proper scansion.

After a gap of more than two hundred years, we begin to find more poetic examples in a better state of preservation than those given by Ibn Khaldūn. By the end of the sixteenth century, we begin to hear of poets such as Rashīd al-Khalāwī, Abū Ḥamzih al-ʿĀmrī, Giṭan ibn Giṭan, and others who are still remembered (al-Faraj 1952:I, 6–7). The compositions of these and later poets have survived in manuscripts, and some have been recently published in anthologies.

The paucity of sources makes it difficult to trace the gradual development of the poetic tradition in the Arabian desert. Furthermore, the subtleties of the linguistic process, the accumulative results of which came to be the chief distinguishing feature between the classical diction and the vernacular, make it practically impossible to set a point in time where classical and vernacular diverged. It is perhaps more appropriate to divide the poetic tradition of the Arabian desert into stages. Examples from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (i.e., early examples of what is now collectively referred to as Nabaṭi poetry) approximate more recent vernacular poems in morphology and syntax but contain classical idioms and lexical items that are not employed by later Nabaṭi poets. These examples are all in classical meters (ṭawīl, rajaz, hazaj, and basīṭ), and their rhyme scheme follows the classical pattern in that only the second hemistichs rhyme. They also contain many motifs, themes, and images that have become less popular among later poets.

Thus we see that the formal correspondences between classical Arabic and modern vernacular poetry go beyond accidental similarities or the mere influence of an early tradition on a later one. The roots of the latter can be unmistakably traced back to the former, and the divergences that distinguish the two traditions from one another do not imply any categorical difference between them. Their divergences are the outcome of the slow incremental diachronic changes that are inevitable in any living tradition. These changes do not imply in any way a serious break between classical and vernacular poetry. Vernacular poets inherited the classical tradition and continued to develop it through time. Certain thematic and formal conventions were enriched and made more complex, but others have become less popular or have been replaced by new ones. Employing the same formal principles and compositional devices of their ancient predecessors, vernacular poets continued to discover new themes and explore new compositional techniques without interrupting the continuity between their poetry and that of the ancients.