



## BAĤR-E ṬAWĪL

**BAĤR-E ṬAWĪL**, a type of Persian verse generally consisting of the repetition of a whole foot (*rokn*) of the meter *hazaj* (∪ – – –) or of a whole foot of the meter *ramal* (– ∪ – –) or of permissible variations of the two. The difference between *baĥr-e ṭawīl* and other metrical poetry, such as the *robāʿī* (quatrain), *qaṣīda* (ode), *ġazal* (lyric), *mosammaṭ* (stanzaic verse), *matnawī* (rhymed couplets), etc., is that in the latter types, the poet is permitted to use four or six or at most eight feet per line, while a line of *baĥr-e ṭawīl* can contain up to twenty or even more feet. Another basic difference is that the number of feet in *baĥr-e ṭawīl* varies from line to line of a particular poem, whereas in other forms of rhythmic verse the number of feet in the first line has to be maintained throughout the entire poem. There is some disagreement among prosodists as to whether both defining characteristics, namely, hypermetricality and variation in the number of feet per line, have to be met before a poem is classified *baĥr-e ṭawīl*. Some would exclude a poem by 'Abd-al-Wāse' Jabalī on grounds that it fails to meet the second condition, i.e., a foot of *hazaj-e makfūf* (∪ – – ∪) and one of *ramal-e maqṣūr* (– ∪ – ∪) recur twice in each line. The poem begins:

*ayā sāqī al-modām marā bāda deh tamām*

*zanam yak nafas be kām ke kas-rā ze kāṣ o ʿām*

*dar īn manzel ay ġolām omīd-e qarār nīst*

(*Dīvān-e 'Abd al-Wāse' Jabalī*, 2 vols., ed. D. Ṣafā, Tehran, 1339-41 Š./1960-62, II,



pp. 639-40).

Another characteristic that distinguishes *baḥr-e ṭawīl* from other metrical verse is that each line ordinarily culminates in a word ending in a syllable containing the long vowel *ā*, a *qāfīa* (rhyme), and a *radīf* (refrain) of *rā*. Of course, *baḥr-e ṭawīls* exist that rhyme in a different manner and that lack a *radīf*. Internal rhyme also sets *baḥr-e ṭawīl* apart; often within a line one finds mono- and polysyllabic rhyme schemes as well as secondary *qāfīa* or *qāfīa* and *radīf*.

The diction used in *baḥr-e ṭawīl* poems is simple and direct as a rule. Because it does not force the poet to complete his thought within the confines of a hemistich or a line and allows as much metrical space as necessary to express a point, *baḥr-e ṭawīl* became popular on all levels of society. Moreover, with its successive internal rhymes, *baḥr-e ṭawīl*, when recited, produces the kind of inviting and prolonged melody in the reciter that listeners find engaging.

*Baḥr-e ṭawīl* is not as old as other verse forms; the earliest extant specimens date back to the Timurid period (9th/15th century) (P. N. Kānlari, “Qadīmtarīn baḥr-e ṭawīl,” *Soḵan* 22/11-12, 1352 Š./1973, pp. 1140-41). It is likely that *baḥr-e ṭawīl* was introduced for recreation and novelty of form, and as a forum for the poet’s virtuosity, the same factors which had motivated such master poets as Manūčehrī Dāmḡānī (d. 432/1040) to create the *mosammaṭ* and Mas’ūd-e Sa’d-e Salmān (438-515/1046-1121) the *mostazād*. *Baḥr-e ṭawīl*’s special features, which were elaborated by Safavid poets, made it a popular medium among professional story tellers (*naqqālān*, *ma’rakagīrān*) who used it to stir the emotions of their audiences. An example of *baḥr-e ṭawīl* is found in the Safavid period romance *Amīr Ḥamza-ye Šāḥebqerān* (Tehran University, Central Library ms. no. 2612) in which a foot of *ramal-e maḳbūn* (∪ ∪ – /∪ ∪ –) recurs (*šanam-ī lāla-‘edār-ī, be raveš bād-e bahārī, be negah āhū-ye čīnī o be qad sarv-e karāmān o be-roḳ čūn mah-e tābān o dahan ḡoṇča-ye kandān o lab-aš la’l-e Badakšān o zanaḳdān čō namakdān o . . .*). During the Qajar period, the form served the purposes of reciters of Shi’ite martyrologies and passion plays (*ta’zīa*), thereby bringing new life to their calling (e.g., M. Honarī, *Ta’zīa dar ḳūr*, Tehran, 1354 Š./1975, pp. 148-54). Since the Constitutional era, *baḥr-e ṭawīl* has become a popular vehicle for experimentation with political and social themes; taking advantage of the form’s capacity to arouse interest, satirists would cloak their warnings about the state of Persian society in wit and occasional mild ribaldry (see, e.g., various issues of the weekly paper *Tawfīq* and A. Ḥālat, *Baḥr-e ṭawīlhā-ye Hodhod Mīrzā*, Tehran, 1354 Š./1975).



Specimens of Arabic *baḥr-e ṭawīl* (adapted from Persian) date back to the 11th/17th century when Iraqi poets produced what they called *band*.

*Baḥr-e ṭawīl* is also the designation of a meter in Arabic prosody (و – – و – – –) hardly ever used by Persian poets. Šams-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. Qays Rāzī, who quotes three Persian lines in this meter, observes that they are mere imitations of Arabic poetry since the meter does not suit “sound poetic taste” (*ṭab‘-e salīm*) in Persian (*al-Moʿjam fī ma‘āyir aš‘ār al-‘ajam*, ed. M. Qazvīnī, rev. M.-T. Modarres Rażawī, Tehran, 1336 Š./1957, pp. 71-72).

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