Some remarks on the present-day tradition of Andalusian Muwaššaht in North Africa

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16. Brigitta Thornberg, Études sur l’Hymnologie Mozarabe, Studia Latina Stockholmensia, 1962, mantiene que la relación de instrumentos musicales que cita este himno no refleja las costumbres de la época, como cree Pérez de Urbel, sino que es una recopilación de instrumentos tomados de diversas fuentes literarias. Es un trabajo erudito.
18. Thornberg, op. cit., 11-14, recuerda la amistad de Eulogio y Alvaro y como después que el primero enseñó al segundo la métrica cuantitativa, éste se mostró desdénoso con la poesía rítmica; p.136: después de escribir a Juan de Sevilla sobre el empleo de los clásicos en 851, Alvaro no volvió a escribir versos rítmicos. Pérez de Urbel, op. cit., p.60, cita a San Julián de Toledo, que consagraba la poesía rítmica como fruto de la pereza y de la ignorancia. Moseh ibn Ezra ya viejo, se arrepiente de haber compuesto poesías amatorias y moxañas.
21. Concilios viiiginti e hispano-romanos, edición preparada por José Vives, con la colaboración de Tomas Marín Martínez, Gonzalo Martínez Diez, Barcelona y Madrid, 1963. Debo agradecer a mi gran amigo, catedrático de Filología Latina de la Universidad de Barcelona, el Dr. Virgilio Yuval.
25. al-Andalus, 21 [1969], 303-338.

Some Remarks on the Present-Day Tradition of Andalusian Muwaṣṣahat in North Africa

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Some years ago I came into contact with the present-day tradition of Andalusian muwaṣṣah in North Africa, in three main ways: firstly, when a colleague at the University of Amsterdam, Leo J. Plenckers, asked me to consider the texts of his musical recordings made in Algeria;² secondly, when I was asked to look at an anonymous fourteenth-century Maghribi manuscript of songs which was being catalogued at the Leiden University Library;³ and thirdly when my attention was drawn to a Hebrew book with liturgical music, published in Tunis at the beginning of this century, in which religious songs were listed according to the melodies of Arabic muwaṣṣahat andalusiyya.⁴

The Leiden manuscript and the Hebrew song-book, as well as a modern Algerian anthology of Yalas and Ḥafnawī,⁵ which is based on interviews and interrogations of traditional musicians about the old repertoire, give a good insight into the texts of modern Maghribi muwaṣṣah songs in all their variants.

Leo Plenckers’ view about the relationship between music and the text of the muwaṣṣahat is that although an a priori relationship between music and text is not necessarily in general, in these Maghribi muwaṣṣahat such a link seems to be provable. He believes that the texts of the muwaṣṣahat are set to music according to fixed musical patterns. The nucleus of such a pattern is formed by a long syllable preceded by a short one. The long syllable always coincides with a comparatively strong beat of the melody and the preceding short one with a comparatively weak beat. All remaining syllables are placed on alternating weak and strong beats, with the syllable immediately preceding the short one having a strong beat, and the syllable immediately following the long one having a comparatively weak beat. On the other hand, it should be noted that earlier Plenckers demonstrated the likeness between the musical form of the modern muwaṣṣahat and that of the medieval Cantigas de Santa María.⁶

No notation of Arabic music in the Middle Ages is available. The earliest information we possess is a notice by a European traveller about a song of the muwaṣṣah repertoire, which he had heard during a trip in North Africa in the eighteenth century.⁷ We may suppose, however, that the musical tradition of the muwaṣṣahat must be a very old one, imported by musicians...
and singers who originally came from al-Andalus and emigrated to the Maghrib because of changing political circumstances. Thus present day Maghribi music may tell us something about an old musical tradition which may have its roots in the Middle Ages, as may also be concluded from the similarity with the music of the Cantigas de Santa Maria. Nowadays, however, the tradition risks being forgotten through the impact of modern life and the possible influence of music from other areas, including western music. Thus recordings of the old musical tradition are of crucial importance. The Algerian anthology of Yalas and Ḥāfnawī is apparently an attempt to preserve that old tradition, though clearly a printed book, without musical notation, has serious limitations in that respect. The collection was apparently made by interviewing old musicians and asking them about the old texts. I should emphasize, however, that there is a possibility that the original medieval musical tradition developed into a totally different one, long before the eighteenth century, when the first muwashshāt of this tradition was written down in western musical notation. This development could perhaps have taken place at the court of Alfonso el Sabio of Castile and Leon, 1252-84.

In this paper, however, I wish to consider the possibility that the present-day recordings of so-called Andalusian muwashshāt can shed light upon some questions involving muwashshāt tradition, especially with regard to the performance of the songs, despite the fact that only a handful of ancient muwashshāt figure in the modern collections. I am less pessimistic than Stern, who over twenty years ago made the observation, 'We have lost perhaps a chance which could have been taken a century or a half a century ago to observe the last phases of the living tradition of the Andalusian music.'²

I shall deal with several aspects of the musical tradition of the muwashshāt in North Africa in order to allow you to assess its value in the context of the different problems connected with the older Andalusian stanzaic poems. In what follows I shall therefore touch on their language, themes, formal structure, and matters connected with performance and imitation.

The anthologies usually give the complete surviving version of the poem, consisting of five or six couplets. Complete muwashshāt in the classical Andalusian form are not found, though pieces by Ibn Baqī‘, Ibn Zuhri, Ibn Sahl and Ibn al-Khaṭīb are preserved in part.³ The poems are arranged according to melodic notes and rhythmic modes.

However, when it comes to performance, the basic point to note is that the muwashshāt are always put to music in fragments. This may be an indication of a change in tradition, as Tanḥūm Yemsallī implies that in his experience the whole of the muwashshāt was sung.⁴ On the other hand, in the classical Kitāb al-‘Aghānī the musical pieces are normally only three or four line fragments of poems which are in reality much longer. Usually only two ‘couplets’ of a muwashshāt are used in any one musical performance.

The units which are sung during a performance are mostly the combination of maqṣūra and dawr followed by a qaṣīr (the terms normally used by the musicians in preference to gusn and simf). Sometimes there is no maqṣūra, in which case the poem falls into the qaṣīr ‘bald’ category, well-known in the classical Andalusian muwashshāt. In the terminology of the musicians the maqṣūra (and the qaṣīr) consists of two musical phrases, which are different from those of the dawr, followed by a third, called ṭuṭi‘, which is similar to the musical phrases of the dawr.

Fragments of different poems of the same melodic modes (tab‘, tub‘) are combined with each other to make up a nawba ‘suite’. The sequence consists of a succession of five movements (fajl, fūṣūl) or five rhythmic modes (miẓān, mawāzīn) in the following order: muṣāddar, baṭa‘iḥi, ṭuṭi‘, ṣinīrīf, khālī.⁵

- The tempo of the songs becomes faster as the performance of the nawba progresses. Whereas the muṣāddar and baṭa‘iḥi are sung with a slow cadence, based on a binary rhythm, the ṭuṭi‘ is faster and can have a ternary as well as a binary rhythm, and the ṣinīrīf and khālī are even faster and always with a ternary rhythm. Particularly at the end of the khālī there is a sensible acceleration of the rhythm.

The themes of these muwashshāt are the same as those of the classical Andalusian muwashshāt: the love themes that are common to all periods of Arabic literature; pre-Islamic themes such as the weeping of the lover over the remains of the encampment of the beloved’s tribe; the erotic themes of the poetry of ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘a (644-711), with the well-known obstacles to love of the wāṣi‘ ‘slanderer’, āḏīl ‘reprocher’, ḥāsid ‘jealous person’ and raǧīb ‘watcher’; ‘Udhri elegiac motifs about the weeping of the lover on the frustration of his longings and being far away from his beloved; and the drinking or garden scene, in which the passion of the lover is directed towards the pourer of the wine, be it a boy or a girl servant. These themes are not much built up rhetorically, unlike later non-stanzaic poetry. In the corpus of modern Maghribi muwashshāt one normally finds only the barest form of the motif, e.g:

Separation of my beloved clothed me in thinness.⁶

The language of the modern muwashshāt collections varies. Sometimes it appears to be almost classical. At others dialectal features are prominent throughout, particularly with the imperatives, the rendering of diphthongs (which may vary according to individual singers), and the elision of ḥamza.

This language mix may be reasonably viewed as Andalusian dialect with a strong leaning towards the classical language, sometimes with the influence of modern Maghribi dialects because of the background of the singers giving the performance. From time to time these singers deviate from the original text, either for reasons of performance, or because they no
longer understand the original meaning of the text, or because they fall back on their own dialect.

With the Leiden manuscript one has the impression that in many places the language has moved in the direction of dialect. This can be seen from the way that, for example, *sabab* is written as *sabdb*, with a long second syllable, a change typical of western Arabic dialects.

Yalas and Ḥafnawī, on the contrary, appear to give a more balanced view of the original song texts, especially from the point of view of the use of classical Arabic. Sometimes, however, the nature of the rhymes makes a classical reading impossible, and a dialectal reading highly probable. This can be clearly seen in words that have a short final syllable in classical Arabic but require a long syllable for rhyming purposes. Perhaps the most obvious dialect features in the texts are interrogatives such as *hā, hā, 'a/;* the combination *lasbad* (classical *Id budda*); and the intermittent disappearance of the fourth form of the verb, through the elision of *hamza*, as mentioned above.

I should now like to turn to some of the material recorded by Plenckers, and comment on some texts of special interest. I shall pay particular attention to thematic points, language, formal structure and performance.

My first text, no.1 in Plenckers' collection, is interesting from the thematic point of view, because it contains a dawn finale comparable to the same theme in some early Andalusian *kharjas* and in troubadour poetry. The initial part of the Arabic text is as follows:

1. *layālī surūr | fī ḫusni zamānī |
2. *Inna-hā tamūr | 'an kulli insānī |
3. *Bitnā fī surūr | fārḥān wa-salwānī |
4. *Fa-faṭqānā 'l-ṣabāḥ | isrā' li-ajli |
5. *Lās yā ṣabāḥ | farragta li 'amli |
6. *Bī-'llāhī yā ṣabāḥ | ijma' li 'amli |
1. Nights of joy in the goodness of time
2. They will pass away for every human being;
3. We were passing the night in gladness and joy.
4. In the morning we woke up; I was hastened to my fate;
5. Why, o morning, did you separate me from our rendez-vous?
6. By God, Morning, bring us together again!

In the first three lines in particular, we can perceive an isosyllabism, which corresponds with the musical notes. It should be noted, however, that there are considerable variations between lines 4-6 as given above and the versions to be found in Yalas and Ḥafnawī and in other recorded versions.

The next text, Plenckers no.5, has a description of a drinking scene in a garden as morning is approaching. In fact, most of the themes in Plenckers' collection are connected with drinking.

There are two variant texts, one of them also being found in part in Yalas and Ḥafnawī. The first variant goes as follows:

1. *Rayta 'l-riyāda qad labas | ṭawban jadid min nuwur | yā mawlāya fī min ṣarāb mā nādīg |
2. *Ḥawla-hu 'l-banāsaf wa-l-āṣ | ḥabq ma'da jullānīr | yā mawlāya fī min ṣarāb mā nādīg |
3. *Idā yāshammu 'l-nafas | yahāt 'l-misk mā'a 'l-'uqqār | yā mawlāya fī min ṣarāb mā nādīg |

I saw that the gardens have clothed themselves in a new covering of white flowers; o my lord, there are drinks for us to taste there.

2. Around them are violets, myrtle and basil, together with pomegranate blossoms; o my lord, there are drinks for us to taste there.

3. When they give out breath, they are like musk together with wine; o my lord, there are drinks for us to taste there.

The variant recording has another refrain:

*Yā mawlāya, fī ṣarāb mā [a]ladda-hu* o my lord, there are drinks; how delicious they are!

In Yalas and Ḥafnawī's text there is no addition of the kind *yā mawlāya* etc. The text itself is also slightly different. Thus the second and third lines are:

2. *Ḥawla 'l-banāsaf wa-l-āṣ | wa-'ābaq ma'da jullānār |
3. *Idā yahubbu 'l-nāsim | naṣummu miskā 'l-zahāri |

2. Through the violets, myrtle and the fragrant flowers together with pomegranate blossoms,
3. When the wind blows [through them], we sniff the musk of the flowers;

Line 2 contains a variant that is classical Arabic rather than dialectal, āṣ instead of yās. Also, there are no additions and no attempts to make the first hemistichs rhyme with each other. This approach is possible only by treating long and short syllables as having no difference at the end of the hemistich: *labas* (for *labis*), yās, *nafas*.

Sometimes, however, the singers appear not to pay much attention to the original rhyme, especially when its meaning has become obscure to them. Text no.67 represents a stanza whose musical performance produces in various respects a text that is different from that collected by Yalas and Ḥafnawī. This latter is apparently nearer to the 'original' text of the muwaššāh. For each line I give first the recorded text, then that collected by Yalas and Ḥafnawī (variants being indicated by Roman characters):

1. *Guzayyili sukxr nābah | mišā 'l-'uyūn mugannījāt |
   li-dā 'l-gazīl 'aqīl jārah*
In the recorded version, a new repetitive element fi dā ‘l-gazāl ‘aqlī rahīb has been inserted into line 3 to correspond with li-dā ‘l-gazāl ‘aqlī jarāt in line 1. The same is true of the repetition of mālā ‘l-uyūn al-mugannijat in the same two lines.

The substitution of nashar for naskur (i.e. ‘I will stay awake’ instead of ‘I will get drunk’) is interesting. This is a well-known conventional substitution which is made during the performance to avoid falling foul of the strictures and sanctions of Islamic Law in its prohibition of the drinking of wine. The substitution is something of a pun and a joke. It will be seen again in the recorded text of poem 106, which I shall deal with below. There sushār is substituted for sukkār.

The last important change in the recorded version is the extension of the first half of line 4. That constitutes a break in the scheme of the line. This is apparently due to the performance: the singer is describing how he is becoming drunk with passion in the presence of those two red apples, i.e. the cheeks of the beloved. He then remembers other vital parts of her body: two pomegranates (her breasts) and two little peaches (her nipples). The diminutive takhwēkhatān, formed by the prefixing of ta- is thought to be due to Berber, an influence normally overlooked when we think about the muwashsh, whatever the period might be.

These two stanzas of text no.67 give a clear insight into how dramatically a poem can be changed textually due to reasons of the performance or possible forgetfulness on the part of the singer. However, the musical performance maintains the original structure which is lost in the text.

Among the poems that are in highly classical language is text no.18. This has the initial letter and the rhyme letter in ‘ayn, and can also be represented as organised round an eye. In the Leiden manuscript, the poem is represented as a square, whereas Yalas and Ḥafnāwī represent it as a circle or an eye on the cover of their book. Representation of Arabic poems in a pleasing visual pattern. The text of the poem goes as follows:

In this poem, lines 1 and 3 are to be considered as adwār with a changing rhyme, whereas lines 2 and 4 are the aqfāl. At least, this is musically so, because in principle the rhymes of lines 2 and 4 correspond with those of the respective adwār, the only recurring element being āḥ yā gazālī. This is certainly true for the Yalas and Ḥafnāwī version, which seems to be the original.

In what sense does the musical performance deviate from the supposed original one collected by Yalas and Ḥafnāwī? First of all, the symmetry of the poem is destroyed through the loss of the rhyme in certain cases and the elimination of the repetitive phrase āḥ yā gazālī. In my view, the loss of the rhyme is due to the singer’s ignorance of the meaning of jarāt or to the oddity of this word in rhyming with nabāt — a rhyme that is not possible in classical Arabic, though, as already mentioned, long syllables do frequently rhyme with short ones in the muwaṣṣāl genre even in the classical period. Another possible reason for the change in the text is imperfect recollection of the original by the singer.

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1. ‘ajarat lil-ñāṣirīna zabyaturan | layta-hā fi wasatiqalbi tari’ti’u
2. ‘atarat fī sa’ri-hā [vl. min ‘aynī-hā] 1i’d [vl. ḥina] khaṭarat | tarakat qalbi wa‘aynī tadm’m’u
3. ‘amadat ‘alā qaṭti bi-alhāzi-hā [vl. bi-alhāziqan lahā] | ka‘l-suyūfī l-murhaftafī talma’u
4. ‘amalat fī wasatiqalbi 1īrqaṭan | yā ṭura ayyāmā l-wiṣāli tari’i’u
4. And do not say that shame is covering him. Take both my eyes, but do not take the apple of my eye.

[The eyes of shyness were winking; the light of my eyes was upon them.]

5. Oh, who will heal our drunkenness? Let us take the opportunity of a pleasant drink!

We can again see in line 3 of 106b the change from ‘drinking’ (suqdh) to ‘awake’ (suhurr). The latter is, of course, very close to sukkär ‘drunk’, which is clearly what is meant, despite the euphemism. Yalas and Ḥafnawi have another variant in line 4. It is bi-khamri mūzīl al-kasal. In the second section of line 5 both the recordings are virtually impossible to understand, and I have had to restore the text in both versions by using that found in Yalas and Ḥafnawi.

The repetition of a word in each hemistich of 106b and eight out of the ten hemistichs in 106a should be noted, as it gives an insight into the relationship between the syllables and the music. The basic pattern seems to be of three syllables followed by two syllables, followed by repetition of these two, and then the three syllables again.

The Hebrew adaptation of the song was perhaps made by a Jewish singer who was also a singer of the Arabic song. Certainly, the syllabic scheme outlined above fits with no great difficulty. The Hebrew text runs as follows (with the repeated syllables in Roman characters):

1. El, ḫus ‘al ‘iri w-ḫurban-ah | ḥarbu-ḥa ‘oyvim lo kad-dat
2. Le-beti shaknah ‘anannah | we-gorban hat-tamid shabat
3. Yaš’iṣa ‘ale kull-anah | laqhu ‘ereq ḥalab zebat
4. Hinni-ni dim’ati tizzal | ‘al teherash ‘el dim’ati

We may translate this as follows:

1. God have compassion on my city (Jerusalem) and her ruins; | enemies have destroyed her illegally.
2. Upon my house (Jerusalem) a cloud is dwelling [Job 3:5] | and the daily sacrifice has ceased to exist.
3. They are mocking with all these things [Gen. 42:36] | and have taken a land flowing with milk [and honey] (the land of Israel).
4. Look at my tears flowing; | hold not your peace at my tears [Psalm 39:13]
5. And send to me a Messiah who redeems | at the words of my wailing.

As the Hebrew poem has the same rhyme and rhythm as the Arabic poem, it is clearly just as much of a muḥāraḍa of the Arabic poem as the Hebrew muḥāraḍas of the Andalusian period were of Arabic originals. The syllables in bold type in the Hebrew version are the ones that have to be repeated. There are a number of places where I have had to eliminate the shewah na’ or mobile, but this is sometimes legitimate in Hebrew poems that are based on
Arabic models. In other cases the shewah na' is long, in the way that we have seen syllables lengthened in the Arabic poems.

It is possible to argue that these modern muwaṣṣāhāt have a metrical basis in the Khalītān system and identify them as being ramal or rajaz etc. That may well be their origin. It certainly seems likely when one considers them in relation to the music. Plenckers’ theory about the combination of text and music (the musical setting of the text) gives strong evidence for it.

As far as the total tradition is concerned, the recordings are an eleventh-hour collection, and the time span between them and the period of the classical Andalusian muwaṣṣāh is very great. Nevertheless, Plenckers’ success in showing the link between these modern versions and the virelai makes links with the classical muwaṣṣāh not implausible. It is an area that clearly requires much more work — and conference sessions at which the wine circulates.

NOTES

1. See the dissertation of L.J. Plenckers, De muziek van de Algerijnse muwaṣṣāh, Amsterdam 1989; for musical recordings and texts, see pp.155-165 and pp.164-169. I wish to express my gratitude to him for providing me with copies of the recordings, together with musical notations, necessary for this paper.


10. See Plenckers, Les rapports ..., p.93.

11. The Arabic text is: al-bu’du kašāni muḥāl

(Plenckers no.12, Yalas and Ḥašnāwī, I, p.134.)

There are many plays on the theme of emaciation in both stanzaic and non-stanzaic Arabic poetry.

12. For example, qum dir al-zuṭjī fī quum adīr al-zuṭjī, Plenckers no.86, Yalas and Ḥašnāwī, I, p.241.