

## Preface

The past two decades have seen a dramatic growth of interest in the cultural legacy of Islamic Spain, al-Andalus. Two areas in particular, poetry and music, have received special attention from the academy. On the literary side, discussion has dealt (at times acrimoniously) with the origins and historical significance of the two Andalusī strophic poetry forms, the *muwaššah* (pl. *muwaššahāt*) and the *zajal* (pl. *azjāl*). Building on the work of Martin Hartmann (1897), Emilio García Gómez (1943) and Samuel Miklos Stern (1974), scholars like Federico Corriente (1980, 1988 et al.), Alan Jones (1980, 1988, 1991), James T. Monroe (1986, 1987, 1989) and others have advanced the field to the point that we now have a fairly rich and nuanced understanding of these distinctive poetic forms and their linguistic characteristics. Even if some aspects of this poetic legacy remain on the table for discussion, scholarship has created a much clearer picture of its significance than when Hartmann first pointed out the interesting linguistic promiscuity of some of these poems. If the scholarly community might be said to have come up short in any way, it would be in the production of readable English translations that could make the delights of Andalusī strophic poetry available to a wider audience. A notable exception is James T. Monroe's useful student anthology, *Andalusian Strophic Poetry*. Beyond the world of scholarship, though, Andalusī strophic poetry has not yet received its due as one of the world's great poetic traditions.

The same cannot be said of the musical aspect of the Andalusī cultural legacy. One calls to mind first the recordings by Eduardo Paniagua and his family who, along with Luis Delgado, took the "early music" approach in attempting to reconstruct (perhaps *represent* is a better word) the Arabic, Christian and Jewish musical styles of al-Andalus, drawing upon a handful of written documents from the era but also taking hints from the music of contemporary descendant traditions, such as *al-Āla* in Morocco, *al-Ġarnāṭī* in Algeria, and the Syrian/Lebanese *muwaššahāt*. But beyond these more scholarly efforts, "Andalusian Music" is also becoming a bona fide sub-genre of World Music, with CDs by North African groups and singers like Amina Alaoui and Francoise Atlan finding their way into many of the better music shops in Europe and the United States alongside those of Delgado and the Paniaguas. Through these recordings the musical-poetic legacy of al-Andalus is beginning to acquire a wider audience, which shows at least the power of music as an "international language" capable of contributing to the survival of a poetic tradition.

<sup>1</sup> I will be using *Andalusī* here and throughout to mean "Arab-Andalusian" from the Middle Ages, as distinct from both *Andalucí* (referring to things from the modern Spanish province of Andalucía) and *Andalusian* (referring mainly to the modern North African musical-poetic traditions).

It seems to me, though, that a further link can be made here, one that underscores the role of music in the production and presentation of Andalusī *muwaššahāt* and *azjāl* in the Middle Ages. Although the scholarly community is not in complete agreement as to whether these strophic poems were *originally conceived* as such, literary and other evidence leaves no doubt that they did at least come to serve as song lyrics in al-Andalus. Thus, after a long period of interest in the linguistic, structural and metrical aspects of these poems, scholarly attention to the role of music in the Andalusī poetic legacy is on the upswing, as shown by the wealth of papers on music-related topics presented at the third and fourth conferences on the *muwaššah*, which were held at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London in 2004 and 2007. (The proceedings of the earlier conference have recently been published in a volume entitled *Muwašshah: Proceedings of the Conference on Arabic and Hebrew Strophic Poetry and Its Romance Parallels*). In short, if the parallel musical legacy of al-Andalus is left out, the tale of the Andalusī strophic poetry is far from complete. The present work is meant in part as a contribution to the discussion surrounding this dual heritage.

However, this book looks beyond the narrow confines of Andalusī literary or musical studies, embracing both aspects of this double cultural legacy as manifested today in this Moroccan musical-poetic tradition to explore the complex relationship between written poem and oral-musical rendition as they function historically and culturally within the boundaries of *al-Āla*. The argument first assesses what I refer to in Part One as the “standard narrative” of its history. It then revises and complicates that narrative by emphasizing the shifting social and economic contexts surrounding and supporting *al-Āla* as part of the musical heritage of al-Andalus, from its semi-legendary birth in ninth-century Cordoba, through a middle period when it became established within rather different social conditions in North Africa, and into the modern era in which the social and economic bases of the tradition have been radically transformed by processes associated with modernization. Through examining *al-Āla* in these terms, I seek to place its history on a more substantial footing, and also to underscore the significance of changes in society and economy in the evolution of cultural traditions generally.

Part Two of this book reorients the discussion along more theoretical lines, proposing a “value theory of tradition” and using it to analyze the social-economic history of *al-Āla* presented in Part One. In essence, I am arguing that the social and economic relations surrounding the Andalusī musical heritage can together be described in terms of *value*, that is, the importance attaching to meaningful action within social context. Doing so enriches our understanding of how continuity, preservation and change have produced the contemporary *Āla* tradition. Moreover, the

analysis that emerges from this discussion helps to explain how and why cultural traditions like *al-Āla* change and decline, and therefore helps to account for the somewhat precarious status of *al-Āla* in Moroccan society today.

Parts One and Two, taken together, thus use *al-Āla* as an in-depth test case for talking about writing and performance as social-cultural forms through Graeber's three domains of value, the social, the economic and the linguistic. (Chapter 5 in Part One takes up this third domain by exploring the role of oral processes in forming the textual corpus that defines the contemporary tradition, and what that reveals of the tradition's history.)<sup>2</sup> In this way, the voice and the pen are shown to engage complementary values, which allow them to coexist within the boundaries of the contemporary *Āla* tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> For those readers interested in the third of Graeber's analytical domains of value, the linguistic, my other work on this subject, *Pen, Voice and Context* (forthcoming) offers a thorough discussion of this topic as part of a critical translation of one of the large musical suites of *al-Āla*, *Naubat Ramal al-Māya*.