

Introduction

1. Opening doors

The musical-poetic tradition known as the Andalusian Music entered my life through a strange combination events in the summer of 2001. Certainly, I had heard the music before, resounding from the music shops and cyber cafes of Fez, where I was studying Arabic. But the tradition really entered my life by other means. One day in June of that year, I was wandering the streets of the Ville Nouvelle in desperation. I had come to Fez that summer on a grant from my graduate school to study Arabic and to develop contacts relating to my supposed dissertation topic, the cultural aspects of national sentiment in Morocco. Yet, for at least a month prior to my arrival, I had been haunted by the feeling that something was wrong. The thought was lurking in the back of my mind that somehow I had started down a long path that I had only a superficial interest in. So there I was, spending my grant money in this foreign country chasing a topic that I knew somehow I could never finish. I just did not have a passion for it; that much had become clear. I was, as I thought of it then, in the wrong place and the wrong time, and so what could I possibly do about it? As I stood by the park in front of the Tajmu‘atī Mosque, a sense of despair began to take hold of me. I looked up at the clear blue Moroccan sky and said one word aloud: “Help!”

I took a few steps, and then I was struck with an inspiration. Of course, I thought, I am indeed in the wrong place: what am I doing stumbling around the Ville Nouvelle, when I should go to the old city, the Medina! I did not know exactly what I was looking for, but somehow I knew I would find it in the spiritual and cultural heart of Fez. Immediately, I hailed a taxi and asked to be taken to Bab Bou Jaloud, the main gate at the upper end of the Medina.

The Medina of Fez sprawls across a hillside northeast of the Ville Nouvelle, reaching down to and beyond the river Wad Fas. Its bewildering maze of stucco-brown streets and alleys seems to be woven like a great, many-veined leaf around two large avenues, al-Talaa al-Saghira and al-Talaa al-Kabira, which descend from Bab Bou Jeloud down to the river, now almost completely obscured by streets and buildings. These two brick avenues serve as the main lifelines reaching from the upper end of the Medina into its vast, web-like interior.

Jumping out of the taxi, I plunged into the teeming atmosphere of the old city, oblivious to the heat, the press of the crowd, the lumbering pack animals, the pungent smells of fried fish and lamb tagine coming from the restaurants, the cloud of would-be guides and young boys hovering around me near the gate. Not knowing where to go

exactly, I simply let my feet carry me to the left and down the crowded artery of al-Talaa al-Kabira. After a few moments of expectation, eyes drinking in the rush of details, I noticed a young man, a foreigner, approaching from the opposite direction. He was rather unkempt and was wearing a Moroccan-style hooded sweater in spite of the summer heat. But what caught my eye was the fact that he was carrying a guitar on his back: music! I wanted to stop him, but before I could react, he had disappeared behind me into the crowd, so I turned and pushed my way back up the street after him. I caught up with him finally just outside the gate and, not knowing what else to say, asked him if he knew anyone who could teach me some Arabic songs. It seemed like a logical way to begin.

Together we set off in search of two American music students, two women whom he had never met, but whom a Moroccan man in a cafe had mentioned to him the night before. My new acquaintance did not have their names, nor even their address, only a “map” consisting of two lines scribbled on a scrap of paper along with the name of a street. After several false starts and about an hour of wandering, we found what appeared to be the right street. We could not find the name, but the corner looked a bit like the “map.” But which was the right house? I stopped a woman passing by with her three young children and asked about the two American women. She had never heard of them, but said we should ask “Mishmisha” [“Little Apricot”], and she told one of her sons to take us to “Mishmisha’s” door just around the corner.

I knocked, and heard a woman with a distinctly American accent shout, “Go away!” Surprised, I knocked again and explained in English that we were two American students looking for “Mishmisha.” The door opened, and the woman invited us in, apologizing, saying the neighborhood children had been pounding on her door all day and then dashing off when she opened it.

“Mishmisha’s” real name was Michelle. She was an American graduate student who had been living in the Medina for some years. Everyone knew her, it seemed, and she knew everyone. She said she had not heard of any female music students, but when I explained my mission, she suggested I visit Abdelfettah Seffar at his cultural center, Fes Hadara. He would certainly be able to help me, she said.

A day or two later, I visited Fes Hadara, an old palace that had been converted into a show place for decorative arts, especially Abdelfettah’s trade, plasterwork. It is a huge and lovely place, full of trees swaying in peaceful breezes, water fountains and shady patios. Theatrical and musical events are held there, especially around the time of the Fez Festival of Sacred Music in June. Abdelfettah told me that he hosts music lessons for children from time to time, and he offered to put me in touch with the music teacher, Omar Ghiati. I left Fes Hadara full of hope that at last I was on track.

The day I met Omar was a turning point in my academic life. Through him I was introduced to a musical and literary phenomenon that has thrived in Morocco for more than half a millennium but which has been marked by the rapid cultural and economic transformations which have overtaken nearly every corner of the globe. A new phase in the development of the tradition has begun, and this fact is not lost on the more reflective members of the Andalusian music community in Morocco. I soon realized that I had arrived on the scene at a fascinating moment in the tradition's development, a point at which a fresh insight might help clarify the processes forcing change upon the tradition and its participants.

What is more, I discovered that there is a sizable gap in the literature on this tradition. I regret to say that academic interest in the Moroccan Andalusian music tradition has been confined almost entirely to Arabic, French and Spanish scholarship. Fewer than half a dozen articles and not a single book-length work hitherto had appeared in English dealing with this or any of the North African Andalusian music traditions. This is a pity, it seems to me, because these art forms are full of surprises and rewards for the scholar, whether one looks at the music itself, or the poetic corpus which the musical tradition has helped to preserve within Moroccan popular culture.¹ Given the distinctive intellectual perspectives which they bring to bear, British and North American scholars have something valuable to contribute to the study of the Andalusian music traditions, including *al-Āla* in Morocco.

I was aware of none of this when I met Omar. In fact, the day of our first lesson at Fes Hadara, I still had no clear idea of my purpose. I simply knew somehow that a suitable topic for my research might emerge if I started learning the music familiar to the people of Morocco. Music and singing had been dear to me since childhood, so I believed that my love of music would provide the spark of passion to carry me through the years of research and writing that lay ahead. Abdelfettah gave us a room on the ground floor of his own house, adjacent to the gardens of Fes Hadara. Omar asked me what I wanted to learn, and I told him I was interested in common songs in Arabic, songs of everyday life, rather than the Westernized music from CDs that was taking over the neighborhood music shops.

Omar proved to be an amiable and patient teacher. He has a sweet singing voice and accompanies himself on the *'ūd* (the Arabic lute) and sometimes on the

¹ In addition to two survey articles on the Moroccan tradition by Philip Schuyler (1978, 1979), only three other articles have appeared in English. Dwight Reynolds has published two articles, one on the larger Arab-Andalusian music tradition in *Charting Memory: Recalling Medieval Spain* (1999), and a survey of Andalusian music in the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* volume on al-Andalus (2000); and Owen Wright offers a similar survey in *Arab-Islamic Culture in Andalusia* (1996). At the time of this writing, the first book in English on Arab-Andalusian music, Ruth Davis' book on the Tunisian tradition, *Ma'lūf*, has just been published; and two other books are in production that deal with the various Arab-Andalusian music traditions of the Mediterranean world, one by Dwight Reynolds and one by Jonathan Shannon.

darbuka (the vase-shaped Middle Eastern drum), as well. After singing a couple of songs which I was not particularly struck by, he sang a song with an absolutely enchanting melody, whose words spoke sweetly the longing of lost love:

وَجِسْمِي فَنَى ... جِسْمِي فَنَى	أَنَا قَدْ عَيَّ صَبْرِي
عَايِشَ فِي الْهَنَى ... فِي الْهَنَى	أَنْتَ يَا مَنَى قَلْبِي
يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَنَا ... بَيْنَنَا	لِقَاضِي الْهَوَى أَشْكِي
عَلَى مَنْ ظَلَمَ ظَلَمٌ	يَشْهَدُ الْعِيَادُ جُمَلًا
وَأَرْضَ الْبَعَادُ ... بِالْبَعَادُ	عَلَى مَنْ ظَلَمَ فِينَا

My patience has worn thin
 and my body has withered away...withered away
 You, the desire of my heart
 live well in good health...in good health
 To the Judge of Love I appeal
 to judge between us...between us
 All the people bear witness together
 against one who did wrong...did wrong
 Against one who did wrong to us
 so be content with the distance (between us)...
 with the distance (between us)²

When he finished singing, I exclaimed, "What was that?" I knew immediately that whatever kind of music it was, I wanted to learn it. Omar called it *al-mūsīqā al-andalusīyya* ("Andalusian music") and said he knew many of the Andalusian songs. He said it would be a pleasure to teach me some of them.

Over the following four weeks, Omar and I met about ten times. He taught me perhaps half a dozen songs, which I recorded on a portable cassette recorder, writing down the words as he dictated them. I wish I could convey the magic that seemed to embrace us in those sessions. Each new song was like a voyage of discovery, opening me to new melodic and textual dimensions of the tradition. Songs of praise of the Prophet Muḥammad, songs of golden sunsets, bright sunrises and morning breezes in meadows, and of love and the beauty of the beloved, such was the range of themes I

² As I learned later, this song is a *zajal*, which means it is a polyrhyming poem in Andalusī colloquial Arabic, that comes from a portion of the tradition called *Quddām ar-Raṣd*, which means that the melodic mode is *ar-raṣd* and the rhythmic meter is *al-quddām*. See the discussion of song types later in this chapter.

encountered in my first meeting with the Moroccan Andalusian music. Above all I was struck by the beauty of many of the melodies, as they came floating and dancing from Omar's voice and *'ūd*. There was something strangely "medieval" in them, and yet their purity and clarity gave them a timeless quality as well.

Moreover, I found the richness of much of the poetic material very pleasing. As I worked through translations of the songs I was learning, questions arose in my mind: Where exactly did these poems come from? How did they come to be set to music? How did they manage to survive into the 21st century? As a parting present near the end of my time in Fez that summer, Omar gave me a copy of an anthology entitled *Min waḥy ar-rabāb*, ("From the Inspiration of the Rabab") which he said contained most of the Andalusian songs, arranged by musical mode.

Thus, after my desperate appeal for help and a series of chance encounters, Omar had opened the door to my research for me, in both its performed and textual dimensions.

2. An overview of the tradition

The chapters that follow explore some of the historical, cultural and textual aspects of the Moroccan Andalusian music tradition, framing it within its historical and cultural contexts in order to show how its oral-performed dimension has combined with the use of printed anthologies of the texts to preserve it into the 21st century. However, let us begin with a brief outline of the tradition as it exists today, in order to introduce some of its key concepts and terminology.

2.1 *al-Mūsīqā al-andalusiyya* and *al-Āla*

The musical tradition known in Morocco today as the Andalusian music (*al-Mūsīqā al-andalusiyya*) is also known as *al-Āla* ("instrument"). The name *Andalusian music* is a relatively recent appellation, which probably came into broad use in the early 20th century, as a product of French colonial interest in the music. It carries some historical and rhetorical weight, given the cultural associations attaching to al-Andalus as a high point of Arab-Islamic culture. On the other hand, many Moroccan scholars prefer the label *al-Āla*, which appears to have been the most common name for the tradition before the arrival of the French in 1912. It does not carry the same ideological significance, but it also is not tainted by colonial associations. Its main significance lies in the fact that it distinguishes this particular tradition, whose songs are organized into suites (*nūba*, pl. *nawbāt*) characterized by certain musical modes and performed on musical instruments, from *as-samāʿ*, a similar tradition in Morocco which draws upon much the same musical and poetic resources and is organized in much the same way,