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MUSIC IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD
A CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL JOURNEY

Edited by
SABIR BADALKHAN, ROSANNA BUDELLI AND METTE RUDVIN



Università di Napoli
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Preface

The majority of the papers in this volume were presented at the international conference “Simposio sul Pakistan e il Mondo islamico: Viaggio nella cultura musicale islamica” (Symposium on Pakistan and the Islamic World: A Journey through the Musical Culture of Islam), held in Palermo in October 2022, organized by the editors Sabir Badalkhan, Rosanna Budelli and Mette Rudvin.

The Symposium saw the light of day as the opening event for a three-year agreement launched in 2021 to conduct research and teaching activities about Pakistan, between the Department of Cultures and Societies at the University of Palermo and the Department of Asian, African and Mediterranean Studies (DAAM) at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. The latter has a long-standing tradition and international reputation for research and teaching in languages and cultures outside the Western tradition. The University of Palermo’s Department of Cultures and Societies is also positioning itself as a venue for innovative research, teaching and collaboration with countries outside Europe. This shared platform covers broad areas of interest, both diachronically and synchronically: history, politics, economics, culture, religion, archaeology, architecture, languages, art and music. While the University of Naples “L’Orientale” has covered a broad geographical area and has a centuries-old tradition of teaching Asian and African languages and cultures, the University of Palermo has a strong international profile through research and teaching in areas such as Arabic studies, international human rights, migration studies, religion and archaeology. The focus on

Pakistan was thus a good fit in both departments, given their research and pedagogical focus. Two of the authors and editors of this volume, Badalkhan and Rudvin, have close connections with Pakistan and have collaborated on research activities in the past.

Two other organizations contributed to the realization of this conference, namely ISMEO – the International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, which aims to carry out studies, training and research programs related to Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean, and the Foundation for Religious Sciences (FSCIRE), which conducts research, publishes and organizes training courses with a focus on Christianity and Islam.

Two other organizations contributed to the realization of this conference, namely ISMEO (the International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, conducting training and research programs related to Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean), and the Foundation for Religious Sciences (FSCIRE) which conducts research, publishes and organizes training courses with a focus on Christianity and Islam. Special thanks are also due to the Embassy of Pakistan and the First Secretary, Sadia Gohar, whose opening talk set the tone of the conference. The embassy organized a book exhibition as well as an exhibition of Pakistani handicrafts for the occasion, greatly appreciated by the conference participants; special thanks are also due to Fabiana D'Antonio Faraone Mennella for her help in organizational issues.

Very special thanks go to Dr Morra, ISMEO and its president, Prof. Adriano V. Rossi.

The conference began with an analysis of musical experiences in the Islamic world, the focus then shifting to the relationship between music and Islam in general, thus providing a broad diachronic and synchronic dimension to the analysis.

The present English-Italian bilingual volume will take us on a journey through various aspects of musical representation, ranging from history, philosophy, mysticism, literature, anthropology to more technical aspects of music. The volume discusses Islamic doctrines on music and illustrates the precarious balance between religion, music and society in different historical periods and contexts. It showcases musical traditions from pre-Islamic Persia to

Preface

the *qawwali* performances in contemporary New York, from devotional praises and chanting to songs and swirling dances. The universal and cosmic aspects of music also come to the fore in this volume where religion, science and music meet in search of new syntheses and tools for understanding.

Introduction

Mette Rudvin, Sabir Badalkhan, Rosanna Budelli

The semantic pairing of ‘music and Islam’ might sound incongruent to some readers, taking into account the contradictory information that reaches us from the Islamic world: on the one hand, the ubiquitous and continuous presence of music and, at the same time, an attitude of diffidence or strong condemnation by the more extremist fringes of the Islamic community. The purpose of this volume is to shed light on this controversial aspect of Islamic culture with the aim of analysing key issues related to this debate and presenting the views of various intellectuals over the centuries. Alongside these more theoretical reflections, we present a variety of musical experiences that characterize the Islamic world today.

During the late 20th century, the renowned American ethnomusicologist Hiromi Lorraine Sakata carried out important field-work in Pakistan and Afghanistan, collecting audio and video recordings of a plethora of musical performances. The results of her research are presented in numerous publications, including her most famous book *Music in the Mind: The Concepts of Music and Musician in Afghanistan* (Sakata 1983). Her invaluable testimony is crucial not only due to the first-hand knowledge of the musical heritage of these countries, but also to shed light on the way the Muslim communities involved relate to music. In a previous study, Sakata articulated a foundational caveat that is pertinent to the discussion at hand, namely that there is no analogous conception

in Islam to the Western concept of ‘church music’; thus the notion of religious music in the Muslim context is very different from a corresponding Christian one (Sakata 1994: 86). Nonetheless, ritual and spiritual forms of music, especially typical of Sufi circles, have been intrinsic to Islamic culture from the early days of Islam and have influenced vast sectors of popular music in the contemporary Islamic world.

Sakata’s early work already highlighted a paradox, namely that artistic festivities are pivotal to key spiritual events in Islamic society while, at the same time, music and musicians are held in little regard and considered with suspicion. Although the denial and prohibition of music by some scholars are not new in the Islamic intellectual landscape, their claim and application by certain extremist proponents of Islam, such as the Taliban in today’s Afghanistan, is not a representation of historical or contemporary mainstream Islam, but rather an anthropological novelty in a global context. Indeed, the crux of the discussion on music in the Islamic world starts from an interpretation of certain Quranic verses and *ḥadīth* literature that, in the opinion of some religious authorities, prohibit or condemn any form of social entertainment. Despite this exegetical caveat, music is ubiquitous across the Islamic world. As we will see in the following chapters, it plays an important role in artistic, cultural, and spiritual traditions.

1. The Sufi presence in Islamic musical traditions¹

There is one overlapping area of Islamic tradition that brings together most of the contributions in this volume at several different levels: historically, geographically, exegetically, spiritually, and artistically. Namely Sufism. Sufism can be seen as

¹ For a comprehensive discussion on Islam and Music see the series “Let’s Talk Religion” by Filip Holm. For Sufism and for details on *samā’* in particular, see the episode “What is Sufi Music? (The Sound of Islamic Mysticism)”. Holm is a scholar of comparative religion as well as a musician; the series contains videos on numerous aspects of Islam, Sufism and music in the Islamic world. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMaPYccAzfw&t=971s>.

an umbrella term representing many different schools of Islamic thought and practice. It is also, perhaps, the one that we most readily associate with the semantic coupling of ‘Islam’ and ‘music’. In many cases the Sufi movement acted as a bridge between official Islam and the traditions that had previously existed in the regions where the new religion was spreading:

Around the 11th century Sufism had taken root as far afield as West Africa, and began mingling with local folk religions. Its doctrinal openness allowed it to assimilate various aspects of the region’s established culture, naturally bringing many local musicians into its fold.²

This description also applies to the easternmost regions of Islamic expansion. Historically, the spread of Sufism has punctually followed the Islamic religion, starting from Iraq, where it originated (Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, d. 728, is considered one of the earliest Sufis), throughout North and Central Africa to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent.

The region of Sindh in south-eastern Pakistan, in particular, was once defined as the ‘gateway of Islam’ (*Bāb al-Islām*) through the Indian subcontinent: through it and to it travelled many traders, war-mongers, settlers, missionaries, artists, adventurers and empire-builders. The music of modern-day Pakistan, as well as its cultural and spiritual heritage, contains elements of the assorted pre-Islamic Indian and Buddhist civilizations that had spread before the expansion of the Muslim empires. The mix of people, cultures, languages and traditions is reflected in the chapters of this book, ranging from Indian and medieval Persian literature to the so-called *sūfīyāna mosīqī* (mystic music) and from Islamic and philosophical treatises to the legacy of the Arab slave-trade in the Indian subcontinent.

As De Zorzi reminds us in the opening chapter of this volume, Sufism is not a monolithic – intrinsically or geographically – phenomenon, but encompasses a broad range of schools with

² <https://ragatip.com/what-is-Sufism-why-is-music-so-important-to-the-Sufis/>. Website dedicated to Indian music.

their practices and rites that stretch across the globe in different forms and strains. All these currents have in common a devotional aspect that involves all strata of the population and includes the performance of music, dance and singing, often immersively engaging the audience. The importance that Sufism places on poetry as a means of expressing otherwise ineffable truths, through pure rational syllogism, can be likened to the emphasis it places on music.

Indeed, Sufism's focus on artistic expression was consolidated largely in the devotion of the most famous mystics, such as the Persian poet Rūmī, and in the veneration of the mystics' tombs which became pilgrimage destinations and meeting places for the disciples of their brotherhoods and local people: "A typical traditional place of performance is at the shrine of a Muslim saint. Here, sitting on the ground and facing the tomb of the saint, the musicians perform for the saint, his representatives, his devotees and other Sufis" (Sakata 2024).

2. *Music and Sufism: Pleasure or spirituality?*

The Sufi practices of *dīkr* (continuous and rhythmic recitation of the name of God), *samā'* (music sessions) and *raqs* (dancing) are intended to achieve an ecstatic state known as *wağd*, which means, literally, 'finding', i.e. 'to find God', a way to come into direct contact with the divine dimension (see Schimmel 1975: 179). For Sufis, as we will see in Baffioni's chapter, if music is carried out with the aim of contemplating the divine and the hereafter, then it is permissible. Music for the sole purpose of entertainment, on the other hand, was considered by Sufis themselves to be a futile pastime that could distract disciples from their goal of spiritual perfection. Regarding the question of the legitimacy of musical instruments in Sufi rituals and practices, there is some disagreement among early scholars and some, such as the Indian Nizamuddin Auliya (d. 1325) of the Chistiyya brotherhood, condemned the use of musical instruments; indeed, Nizamuddin and his modern disciples supported the following extreme position:

Sima' [sic] (to listen to Qawwali) is permissible if a few conditions are met. The singer must be an adult and not a child or a female. *The listener must only listen to everything in the remembrance of Allah.* The words that are sung must be free from obscenity and indecency and they must not be void. Musical instruments must not be present in the gathering. If all these conditions are met, Sima' is permissible. 3 (emphasis added)

In Sufism, music as well as dance are closely linked to their spiritual function. Just like the chanting of the Qur'an may be 'musical' but is not perceived as 'music', the dance-like movements of Sufis in ecstasy are not considered dance as understood in a modern sense. Quoting from Schimmel (1975): 'Those who call it "dancing" are utterly wrong' ('Alī al-Huġwīrī, d.1072); and the 13th century saint Abū Ḥafṣ Suhrawardī (d. 1234) asserts that:

Music does not give rise, in the heart, to anything which is not already there: so he whose inner self is attached to anything else than God is stirred by music to sensual desire, but the one who is inwardly attached to the love of God is moved, by hearing music, to do His will (cited in Schimmel 1975: 182).

In short, in Sufism the legitimacy of music lies in its telos, in the *intention* of the performer and listener (as described in the chapters by Baffioni, Saccone and De Zorzi). The more intense the piety of the listener's intention, the more intense the result.

3. Devotion and worship, a 'love-song' to God

Sufi music is devotional music, expressing love from the singer-performer to God. Its poetry is the expression of an indissoluble link between Man and God. But what is it about the nature of Sufism that has led to designating music to represent this spiritual bond? Where mainstream branches of Islam are generally rule-

³ Zahid Hussain Al-Qadri, "Is it permissible to listen to Qawwali?" at <https://www.thesunniway.com/articles/item/71-is-it-permissible-to-listen-to-qawwali>, published on 22 April, 2012. Visited on 20 October 2024.

based and rely on strict injunctions for human behaviour with a strong emphasis on an intrinsically hierarchical relationship between Man and God, Sufism privileges the inner, spiritual and affective relationship with God. Like the Song of Songs in the Judeo-Christian tradition, love for God is expressed through the metaphor of romantic love between a man and a woman. Even more than a human union through marriage, the Sufi 'love language' aspires to an immersion, a melting, of the performer and listeners into a union, or oneness, with a divine dimension. As such, Sufism focuses on life in the here-and-now, where Man already meets God, rather than in life after death (Anjun 2024: 80).

Sakata, describing qawwali music, again helps us to illustrate the symbols of Sufism and how people perceive them:

The term qawwali comes from the Arabic, qaul, meaning 'to speak or to say'. It refers to the musical expression of Sufi poetry, a genre of mystic religious songs intended to make the listeners more receptive to understanding the message of the songs. The song texts consist of Sufi poetry which makes love the foundation of their relationship with God. This spiritual love is often described as worldly love between man and woman. Sufi poets used worldly images to signify the mystic state and the mission of the Sufis. 'Wine', the 'cup-bearer', the 'tavern', all forbidden in orthodox Islam in their outward form, are interpreted by the Sufis as symbols of the mystic state. 'Wine' is the catalyst that brings about the meeting of the mystic's soul and spiritual vision. 'Drunkenness' is a metaphor for ecstasy excited by Divine Love. It refers to figurative drunkenness, a condition reached through ecstatic experience which enables the Sufi to discover a hidden dimension beyond his normal habit of thought. The 'cup-bearer', brings the wine of love and symbolizes the Guide or Teacher who leads the mystic to drink of Divine Knowledge. The 'tavern' refers to the heart of the mystic, or to the Sufi meeting place, a dwelling-place of love. Intoxicated ones, those who are mast or 'drunk', are lovers of God, the Sufis who have a vision of the Beloved, the Divine. Thus, Sufi poetry may appear to be profane to the uninitiated, but embodies sacred meaning to the initiated. (Sakata 1997: 167)

The 'intoxication' that Sufis can experience is achieved through the dances and ceremonies mentioned here. During the

repetitive, chant-like nature of Sufi devotional practices (*dikr*) the performer formulaically repeats the sacred name of God, accompanied by a specific ritualized breathing. In the dance of the dervish tourneurs (Sufi whirling), the master whispers into the ear of the disciple the name of God, to be recited during the ritual. *Dikr* can be practiced in a collective form with the aim of experiencing the trance that allows contact with the divine, or in an individual form, in isolation (*halwa*), to circulate the name of God within one's blood circulation (*dikr al-qalb*) (Anawati 1961: 244). During public musical performances, a small taste of personal experience is transmitted to the audience. The individual dialogue with God becomes a dialogue that includes the audience who actively participate in the meeting.

The fact that Sufi symbolic language and rituals are not only contained within the walls of the *zāwiya* but are also commonly known and understood by the masses, has captured the attention and the imagination of Western audiences and many modern bloggers. The musical blog Ragatip (2020) is one example; here they explain the significant role of music:

Sufis hold that their spiritual practices are not the cause of such knowledge, but the occasion where it may be obtained – in other words, *it is about how the direct, experiential power of particular moments can illuminate paths towards the divine. Music is so vital to this regard that some Sufis consider it to be wajib (required practice) rather than just halal (permissible). Many orders choose to visualise Allah through the methods of Dhikr-e-Qalbi ('invoking God within the beat of the heart'), chanting his name for hours at a stretch while they go about their everyday lives.*⁴ (emphasis added)

The musical performance becomes a holistic event where all parties are engaged. It is not unusual in many live performances for the audience to demonstrably show intense appreciation. In reaction to their gestures and words the performers increase the tempo of the drumbeat and the song, bringing the audience to an atmosphere of ecstatic devotion.

⁴ <https://ragatip.com/what-is-Sufism-why-is-music-so-important-to-the-Sufis/>.

In this brief introduction we have touched upon the intrinsic contradiction that exists in Islamic traditions regarding the legitimacy of music: its interdiction and at the same time its ubiquitous presence, especially in the Sufi tradition. The ‘danger’ of music lies precisely in its powerful potential for triggering worldly pleasure rather than the exegetically sanctioned *telos*, namely music that kindles a yearning for the hereafter in pursuit of the transcendental. Many of the individual chapters in this volume, summarized briefly in the following section, illustrate this troublesome conjugation in the context of the universal human experience and the desire for aesthetic pleasure through sound and word, through poetry and music. Where the first chapters in this volume focus on exegetical treatises framed in a universal cosmic scheme, on the transcendental and spiritual (De Zorzi, Saccone, Baffioni, Carusi, Budelli), the subsequent chapters take us on a journey from pre-Islamic artistic influences and playful courtly love and qawwali traditions in the Persian and Indian artistic landscapes (Norozi and Bocchetti) to an examination of manuscripts (Panzeca). Badalkhan and Rudvin take us on a geographical journey across the Indian Ocean connecting the Indian subcontinent with the African continent by way of the Arab slave-trade and Islamic expansion. In modern-day maritime communities of present-day Pakistan, we explore the socio-political dimensions of folklore and musical traditions adopted as a liberating force to offset discrimination and to recreate social identities.

4. Individual contributions

De Zorzi opened the Symposium with a keynote lecture entitled “Introduzione alle culture musicali del mondo islamico: storie, generi, solisti, incontri” (Introduction to the musical cultures of the Islamic world: histories, genres, soloists, meetings) - with which we begin these Proceedings. In this chapter the author describes musical traditions and techniques around the Islamic world. The chapter starts with a definition of Islamic music and the Islamic world, to be understood in an elastic sense as the set of musical cultures encompassing vast and varied areas. The focus of his

contribution is on cultivating ‘Art music’ (*maqām*) and Sufi conceptions underlying the ceremonial gathering of brotherhoods called *samā’* (“audition”, “listening”, “spiritual concert”). After a technical definition of ‘Modality’, which distinguishes Islamic music, De Zorzi explains the meaning of the Arabic term *maqām*, literally “place,” which, in a musicological interpretation, implies the sense of “position,” either on an instrument or on a modal scale. The author’s aim in this first part of the chapter is to provide an overview of Islamic music, considering the different modal systems that developed in this vast area, leading to the treatises written in Arabic and Persian that multiplied from the 8th century onwards. The author reconstructs the Islamic musical journey, beginning with the earliest definitions of the genres of song (*ġinā’*) up until the golden age of the Abbasid culture (8th-13th century) that gave rise to masterpieces such as the *Kitāb al-aġānī* (The Book of Songs) of al-Rāġib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1031) or the *Rasā’il* (Epistles) of the *Iḥwān al-Ṣafā’* (The Brethren of Purity), the secret brotherhood of philosophers and scientists who wrote a vast encyclopaedia in the 10th century C.E. De Zorzi then discusses how “rhythmic cycles” (*adwār*, “circles, cycles, spheres”) – described by al-Kindī (9th cent.) and then developed by Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Urmawī (1230-1294) in his *Kitāb al-adwār* – refer to relationships established between music, the human being and the cosmos. That is, music is linked with other “sciences of cycles,” such as medicine and astrology; any given musical mode has a connection with a given planet and zodiac sign, season or time of day corresponding to it. The overview continues with the Mamluk era (13th-16th c.), up to the era of modern Egypt in the 1900s and beyond. The second part of the chapter delves into the meaning of Sufi *samā’* (“audition”, “listening”, “spiritual concert”) about which De Zorzi observes: “There is no such thing as ‘Sufi music’ but the sound heard and/or practiced by Sufis, requiring another approach and ‘another ear’.”

4.1 *The Indo-Persian tradition. Devotion and entertainment coincide*

In “Strategies of devotional performance in the Sufi *premakathās*”, Annalisa Bocchetti sheds light on the narrative tradition of Sufi

vernacular love tales (*premakathās*) in early modern India, examining them as deeply performative texts where Persian, Islamic, and Indic traditions converged and were reinterpreted. Bocchetti's contribution, specifically in the Indo-Persian tradition, contains an interesting synthesis of the notion of music as simultaneously being devotion as well as entertainment. This is due to the interconnection – musically speaking – between Islam, Sufism, Hinduism and the pre-Islamic Persian literary tradition. Bocchetti further illustrates the Sufi vernacular poetic tradition that developed in northern India, enjoying aristocratic patronage. Many of the written, spoken and sung texts discussed in this volume revolve around love: courtly chivalric love, romantic love or devotional love. The *premakathas* – written in the north-Indian Awadhi language – were also following the Sufi ideal of divine love discussed above. Such texts deployed metaphors and language associated with human love and desire but also with initiatory experiences in which the hero, as in the fairy tales we know so well, must “face several trials and go through various obstacles across real and imaginary regions of the Indian landscape” symbolizing the stages of the mystical path (Bocchetti, this volume). In the storytelling recounted by Bocchetti – as in Norozi's chapter – we find poems and songs by minstrels and itinerant poets narrating stories of princes and princesses, at times reminiscent of the famed *Arabian Nights* tales. The storytelling in the accounts of both Bocchetti and the following chapter by Norozi also showcase other aspects of music – etymology, terminology and musical instruments described by the minstrels and poets. Bocchetti, correctly, focuses on the performative aspects of Indo-Persian musical traditions as they are played out in a social space. She discusses the Indo-Persian *rāga* tradition, and further sheds light on numerous aesthetic and devotional aspects of Sufi poetry, in particular intertextual, performative, historiographical, technical and functional elements. She observes how – through the plot – the poet “evokes Indian classical and folk sounds performed in North Indian courts” (ibid), and she goes on to demonstrate how both Persian and classical Indian musical traditions influenced what becomes the emerging Sufi tradition.

Nahid Norozi's chapter "Songs and music in medieval Persian Poetry (11th-13th c.)" explores the poetry and humorous wordplay of minstrels and singers in pre-Islamic Persia, in particular the poems of Ferdowsī (10th-11th c.) and Neẓāmī Gangavī (12th-13th c.). She vividly depicts the tales of lovers and musicians and shows how music, song and poetry played a prominent role in the courtly setting of Persia at banquets, celebrations, musical get-togethers, but also in every-day situations. The mood is at times leisurely and bacchic, at times melancholy or martial. We are entertained by the story of the legendary king Bahrām V who loved "hunting, music and women," and we learn of mischievous minstrels and rivalry between poets and singers. Entertaining and humorous, filled with pranks, the stories provide a sense of suspense, again reminiscent of *The Arabian Nights*. Tragic suspense is found in the extreme reverence of a minstrel, Bārbad, towards the king, when he 'cuts off his limbs' as an expression of grief when the king dies, giving us a touch of melodrama.

Providing rich detail and ample footnotes, Norozi examines the names and etymologies – in Persian and Arabic – of musical terminology and shows how ancient modes and melodies partly coincide with the *maqām* system prevalent in the Islamic areas. As with other chapters in this Volume, we learn about the names of musical instruments and how they figure in poetry and songs, suggesting the high esteem music held in the medieval period.

Returning to the complex notion of whether or not – or the degree to which – Islam permits musical expression, Carlo Saccone addresses this topic in his chapter on *samā'* (spiritual music session) and ecstasy (*wağd*) as they are presented in the works of the theologian al-Ġazālī and the Persian poet Sa'dī: "*Samā' e estasi (wağd) nelle riflessioni del teologo al-Ġazālī e del poeta persiano Sa'dī*". The notion of *samā'*, Saccone explains, refers to a form of active listening and by extension, at least for the Sufis, of "community prayer sessions with singing and/or instrumental accompaniment" and chanting (Saccone, in this

volume⁵); ecstasy, on the other hand, is the culmination of an extreme and totalizing devotional love for God. Saccone frames the question of the acceptability of music in Islam through a “latent conflict between sacred chanting ... and secular singing” (ibid). The chapter cleverly foregrounds three aspects of this dilemma, namely: the function of the music for the listener, the motivation driving the listener, and the effect produced by listening to music.

Through the works of al-Ġazālī and Sa’dī, Saccone discusses the Qur’an’s and *ḥadīths*’ views on music and how this fits into the framework of attentively listening to the Qur’an that was written partly in rhythmic and rhyming prose and therefore suited to singing and ‘psalmody.’ Indeed, one particular form of *samā’* is reciting the Qur’an by professional cantors according to complex rules. Saccone explains that the suspicion towards poetry (potentially a pre-musical form) precedes Islam and that the ancient opposition between sacred poetry (hymns) and secular poetry/singing was also articulated by the pre-Islamic Zoroastrians (who regarded poetry as a ‘suspicious art’) and “may have passed into the new Islamic religious culture as well” (ibid). One could say that in Islam, creating poetry and song was ‘competing’ with creating the word of God. “Thus, the ‘music’ of the Qur’an and the ‘music’ of poetry are also, at least potentially, in a competing relationship” (ibid). In terms of the effect music produces on the listener, *samā’* in its various forms is never “neutral or indifferent, a harmless pastime”. Rather, there is a “proper way of standing with respect to *music* and the *ecstasy* it can induce in the listener”. Listening can indeed “move the soul” (ibid).

Saccone further discusses in some detail the etymology of key terms, and shows how *wağd* (ecstasy) derives from the Arabic root that means ‘to find’ or what the soul/spiritual heart comes to ‘find’ “under the stimulus and upheaval caused by hearing or *samā’*; e.g. fear, joy, desire, exaltation” (ibid). Music – Saccone adds – plays an essential part in this, since, as al-Ġazālī tells us, “a

⁵ All translations of the quotations from Saccone’s chapter are by the editors.

mysterious correspondence exists between musical notes and man's spiritual element" (ibid).

Given these premises it goes without saying that music (*samā'*) can become an instrument of spiritual initiation, a far cry from the hedonistic enjoyment that al-Ġazālī himself observes, in several places in his treatise, among the youth of his time and harshly condemns. It was in this 'initiatory' sense that certain Sufi brotherhoods practising *samā'*, including the celebrated one founded by the Persian poet Rūmī, understood it.

Moving on to the work of the Persian poet Sa'dī, Saccone focuses again on the effects produced by listening to music or singing in a more universal or even cosmic framework. Sa'dī tells us that "the lover (the mystic) is carried away by any music of creation, not only by the secret 'harmony of spheres', but even by the sound of the beating of flies' wings, something that causes him to move excitedly in a dance that evokes the *samā'*" (ibid). The important thing is, Saccone explains, that not all listeners are able to internally experience this 'initiatory conception of the *samā'*'. Indeed it "cannot be illustrated to just anyone, but only to those who are able to 'listen,' that is who are predisposed to the love of God. In other words, the mystic who is in love with the divine Beloved cannot but benefit from the *samā'*" (ibid). However, "this is not the case for those who have degraded love", and "are victims of the basest temptations" (ibid). Saccone ends his chapter with some examples of the cosmic nature of *samā'*: all creatures, including plants and non-living entities, together with heavenly spheres, sing a hymn of universal 'throbbing' praise to God.

4.2 *Philosophy, cosmology, proportions and harmony*

A common motif in many of the chapters in this volume is chanting and music as a devotional offering in a collective cosmic setting. Music is seen as embodying the principles of harmony that underpin cosmic principles and proportions.

Carmela Baffioni's chapter "Epistle 5 of the Brethren of Purity 'On Music'" analyses references to music in the famous encyclopaedia collated by the *Brethren of Purity*, most probably in

the early 10th century. She analyzes, in some detail, an Epistle dedicated to a discussion on music encompassing technical features as well as educational and philosophical aspects. The purpose of the Epistle – Baffioni says – “is to explain what harmony is, from the knowledge of which ability in all the arts is derived” (Baffioni, this volume). What ensues is a discussion of the physical and spiritual aspects of music. If we are to connect her chapter to the question of the permissibility of music in Islam, Baffioni also confirms that the essential criterion is the motivation that drives the listener to listen to and enjoy music, whether or not it leads the listener to desire paradise, for example (where, interestingly, humans will have access to music). Much of the analysis of this chapter is devoted to harmony and sound and how they relate to each other, starting from a concrete physical – even molecular – perspective. According to this line of thought, logic is at the heart of many scientific phenomena, including music; hence, the ‘sounds of celestial bodies’ and ‘of angels who are able to sing but not to talk’.

Baffioni’s sources describe the perfection of all creatures as well as the human body as proof of the existence of “a wise Maker Who created them and Who induces the desire to ascend to the world of the spheres and to listen to and study their music” (ibid). The numerical and musical harmony that governs the laws of the Universe can also influence the human body. She notes that music can thus be therapeutic: certain technical aspects of music – for example, the four strings of the lute – correspond to the four elements of earth, fire, water and air. Baffioni shows how this was believed to have physiological and potentially therapeutic connections with a patient’s bile, phlegm and blood; music was even used for facilitating childbirth. Like Saccone, she notes how Islamic doctrine can incorporate music if the intention is right, if the effect that it produces upon the listener is to bring him or her closer to God.

Ivana Panzeca’s chapter “Notes on Avicenna’s *Mūsīqī-yi Hikmat-i ‘Alā’i* and its Manuscript Tradition” is a close reading of the witnesses that preserve the music section of the only

Peripatetic *summa* written by Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) in Persian, known as *Dāniš-nāma-yi 'Alā'ī*. The work was compiled during his stay in Isfahan, between 1021 and 1037, and was dedicated to the Kākūyid amīr 'Alā' al-Dawla. Panzeca describes some of the most significant examples of this tradition and illustrates the connections between Persia and the Indian sub-continent. A small enigma surrounds the history of Avicenna's original manuscript which was lost before the author's death and which we know about thanks to the work of his faithful disciple Ġūzġānī. After the death of Avicenna he completed the *summa* by introducing Arithmetic and, Geometry, Astronomy and Music. He also translated into Persian some excerpts from the previous works of his mentor. Avicenna's analysis of music starts from Ptolemy to the more recent elaborations by the Arab philosophers al-Kindī and al-Fārābī. From his point of view the art of music is essentially made up of two parts: the first is composition (*ta'lif*), which focuses on notes and analyses their state of consonance and dissonance; the second is rhythm, which studies the times that separate notes and the beats that follow one another, examining their harmonious or disharmonious state. The aim is to investigate compositional procedures and create melodies.

In her chapter "Apologia for music in the Ḥadīt: the Kitāb al-Samā' of Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāhir al-Qaysarānī (d. 506/1113)", Rosanna Budelli illustrates the point of view of the medieval scholar Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāhir al-Qaysarānī who argues for the permissibility of music and singing in Islam through the sources of Islamic law, namely the Qur'an and *hadīt*. His work is expressly devoted to 'listening' (*samā'*) to music, not only in its religious or mystic expression, but also in all forms of entertainment. Qaysarānī intends to unequivocally demonstrate that in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition music and singing are allowed, countering those who wish to impose an overly restrictive view of Islam. His theses turn out to be absolutely in line with modern interpretations.

Qaysarānī's work is divided into two parts: in the first, *hadīths* in favour of music, recognized as authentic, are collected; in the second, there are the traditions attributed to the Prophet of the opposite opinion, which the author proves to be false. 'But who

are those people who use the traditions of the Prophet as a pretext for condemning music?’ Qaysarānī asks. According to Qaysarānī, they are ignorant people who do not know the science of the *ḥadīth* and yet are so convinced of their opinions that they blindly criticize those who speak the truth:

With these sayings and examples, one wants to challenge those who refuse to listen to the song because of their ignorance ... Each of them, when he reads a saying written in a book, considers it appropriate to make a doctrine (*madḥab*) of it and opposes those who disagree with him. This is a serious mistake, indeed gross ignorance (*ḡahl ḡasīm*) (*KS*, 89). (Budelli, this volume)

Where most uncompromising Muslims regard the Prophet Muḥammad as inflexible and rigid, Qaysarānī describes him, along with his companions, as indulging in fun and joking and preaching a more light-hearted approach to life instead of focussing exclusively on severity and difficulties:

The Prophet, his companions, the followers of the next generation and the leaders (imām) of the Muslims ordered a light touch and advocated against difficulty and severity. They themselves liked joking and playing, not like the Qur’anic readers of our time – may God not increase them! – who authorise what God Most High has forbidden and strictly forbid what God has made lawful. (ibid)

The *Kitāb al-Samā’* responds, in a way, to the needs of both a 12th and 21st century Muslim to devote himself peacefully to listening to, or performing, music without incurring religious and social reproach.

In her chapter “Il suono del silenzio in alchimia. Il *sukūn* e l’anima razionale” (The Sound of Silence in Alchemy: the *Sukūn* and the Rational Soul), Paola Carusi focuses on a passage from the *Miftāḥ al-ḥikma* (The Key of Wisdom), a work by a student of Apollonius of Tyana. In the third treatise (*maqāla*) of this work, the topic of different types of sound is addressed. In the microcosmos (*al-‘alam al-ṣaḡhīr*), whose elements are composed of the four incorporeal natures (hot-dry, cold-dry, hot-humid, cold-

humid), sounds are linked to these four natures, the fourth being *sukūn*, silence. Linked to darkness – heavy, motionless, and close in its nature to the nature of the earth (cold-dry) – silence plays an essential role in the generation of articulated language (*nuṭq*): it is, in fact, from the expertly arranged alternation of sound and silence, of movement and stillness, that the rational soul produces the flow of intelligible speech, and the same is true for sounds, rhythm, and music.

4.3 Full circle: Sufis and music in Pakistan

Sabir Badalkhan's chapter "Music and Identity: African Musical Culture in Southwestern Pakistan" provides an in-depth description of the history and musical traditions of the Black Baloch community (Baloch of African descent) of southwestern Pakistan. Drawing on his field-work, he vividly describes the traditional ceremonies of the coastal Baloch, mostly of African descent, in which they use music to mark important events. Music also functions as emotional support in their arduous toil, a tradition that is fast disappearing due to the introduction of new working tools which are replacing the necessity for collective physical labour. Badalkhan illustrates in great detail two important song and dance genres, *viz.* *ambā* and *laywā*, the latter in particular represents the Black Baloch community and their close connection with the ancient African traditions in the region.

Badalkhan then goes on to describe another hallmark of the Black Baloch musical cultural identity, namely the footed drum, *mugulmānī*, which is played at practically all important ceremonies in coastal Makran and Karachi. Indeed, the much-loved *mugulmānī* drum is ubiquitous. It is employed during secular festivities such as *ambā* and *laywā* dances as well as in religious ceremonies at various shrines in Karachi and coastal Makran. Like Rudvin in the last chapter of this volume describing the corresponding Sheedi population in Sindh, Badalkhan illustrates how music represents a precious and tangible connection between the Baloch Black population and their African past. He also notes how these musical traditions are part of a broader

African diasporic identity in the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf. Badalkhan calls for further research on the musical traditions of the Black Baloch population in order to preserve both the tradition and the memory of what may soon be lost.

In the final chapter, “Sindhi Sufis, Sheedis and Saints: Shaping Cultural Identity through Music”, Mette Rudvin addresses the musical legacy of Sindh. The chapter begins with a description of the Sufi-inspired musical tradition before the focus shifts to the Sheedi community in the province of Sindh in Pakistan. Rudvin historically contextualises the province in its commercially and culturally lively past as a busy through road to the wealthy trading partners across the Arabian Sea. She shows how Sindh was geographically and strategically placed to function as a ‘gateway’ for material ‘products’ through trade, but also cultural and spiritual products subsequent to the Muslim conquest beginning in 711 C.E. Islam expanded throughout the Indian subcontinent through a succession of Muslim empires. The Muslim conquest was followed by a wave of Sufi travellers and missionaries, an event that has impacted the culture and spirituality of Sindh to this day.

Contemporaneously with the arrival of Islam, the Arab-African commerce and slave trade brought a small community of Africans as slaves, merchants and soldiers to south-west India (today Pakistan). They settled in this area and converted primarily to Islam and some to Hinduism and Christianity. Rudvin shows how this community - marginalised and beset by poverty till the present day - has used music to (re)create a cultural identity, establishing a continuity with their ancient African past. She observes how diasporic music has frequently had the function of maintaining a continuity with a lost past (here lost through forced displacement and geographical and cultural exile), expressing both the sadness and joys of life. For Sheedis, this cultural heritage – largely based on music, singing and dance – is maintained by preserving African words in songs, African musical instruments and musical techniques. Thus, music embodies a strong link to their African ancestry and also has a cathartic function in an otherwise economically depressed and socially oppressed existence.

An interesting aspect related to the earlier, seminal, discussion on the *telos* of musical appreciation in Islamic tradition – providing or negating legitimacy – is that in recent years Sheedis have been accused by other Pakistanis of not including sufficient – or sufficiently explicit – devotional references in their music. This accusation led to increased inclusion of religious references in their lyrics in order to protect themselves against accusations of insufficient religious zeal.

The Sheedis have created a new culturally hybrid ethnic and regional identity. Where they re-invented cultural traditions that are profoundly meaningful for their identity and provide them with social capital, Rudvin shows how both Sufi and other cultural traditions have created a lively musical landscape that has reverberations regionally in the Indian subcontinent and in the international music scene through musicians such as the internationally renowned late qawwali singer Fateh Ali Khan.

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*Introduzione alle culture musicali del mondo
islamico: storie, generi, solisti, incontri*

Giovanni De Zorzi
(Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia)

Le pagine che seguono intendono tracciare una mappa generale che agevoli gli itinerari musicali dei lettori e degli autori presenti in questo volume, per poi passare ad isolare due particolari casi di studio tra i molti possibili. Nello scriverle non mi preoccupo di definire un concetto smisurato qual è quello di “mondo islamico”, immaginando che il lettore sappia bene come una simile definizione riunisca artificiosamente dimensioni molto diverse fra loro come quella religiosa, storica, geografica, sociale, culturale. Piuttosto, vorrei segnalare sin d’ora come l’approccio complessivo sia invece quello dell’antropologia culturale e dell’etnomusicologia: quel “mondo islamico” di cui sopra non andrà inteso come un monolite statico, fissato nella sua storia e nella sua geografia, leggibile *solo* attraverso testi scritti ma una tradizione intesa in senso antropologico (ed etimologico) come *trasmissione* di cultura da una generazione all’altra in continuo mutamento.

Piace notare come gli Atti del convegno palermitano, per l’invito al quale ringrazio ancora gli organizzatori, segnino i primi passi in Italia di un approccio interdisciplinare che spero diventi sempre più capace di coinvolgere musicologi, studiosi delle letterature del mondo islamico, antropologi, sociologi, storici, storici delle religioni, storici delle arti figurative e dell’architettura.

Propongo alcuni esempi di queste possibili interazioni: sappiamo che molti generi poetici, come la *muwaššah* e lo *zaghāl* nel mondo arabo, oppure il *ghazal* in quello persiano, centroasiatico e indiano, nascevano per essere *cantati*; ora, se tra le letterature araba, persiana, turco-ottomana, centroasiatica, indiana si hanno un gran numero di testimonianze *scritte* di testi poetici nati per questo scopo, ecco però che le loro melodie ci sono giunte unicamente per trasmissione orale e costituiscono quindi un patrimonio immateriale. Questa particolarità richiederebbe dunque un doppio approccio: di tipo storico-letterario al testo (che quasi sempre nel mondo dei letterati rimane sinora silente e letto solo sulla carta) così come di tipo musicologico sulla melodia cantata, sulle procedure di esecuzione e di rielaborazione performativa del testo scritto. Allo stesso modo, esistono edifici nati esclusivamente per incontri di dervisci come il *samā'* (vedi oltre) che avevano caratteristiche architettoniche tutte proprie. Il corpus miniaturistico del mondo islamico ospita spesso scene di musica con strumenti musicali che sono diventate fonte per la ricostruzione di strumenti della musica antica. Insomma, non si può che auspicare una sempre maggiore collaborazione tra studiosi!

Mi volgo al vasto mare di musica che risuona nel mondo islamico: per non naufragare, nelle pagine che seguono mi rifaccio a dei solidi criteri generali che combinano musica e sociologia, enucleati da musicologi venuti prima di me, che permettono di distinguervi delle correnti principali.

Secondo questo schema, nella cultura di una “società complessa”¹ si hanno, con le dovute eccezioni date dai singoli casi, una corrente di musica d’arte/colta/classica, apprezzata da musicofili e mecenati, nata tra le corti e i centri di una data cultura religiosa, suonata da solisti pagati per le loro prestazioni, talora autori di determinate composizioni che possono essere trascritte (o meno) secondo varie forme di notazione, così come affiancate

¹ Si allude qui alla nota distinzione, attuata dal sociologo e filosofo francese Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), tra “società semplici” (non composte da ulteriori parti, si pensi ad esempio alle comunità di cacciatori e raccoglitori) e “società complesse” (nelle quali, invece, si ha la divisione del lavoro fra i suoi componenti e si mettono in atto processi vari di differenziazione sociale).

da trattati musicologici; vi è poi una corrente di musica “popolare”, anonima, espressione di una collettività, spesso d’ambiente rurale, trasmessa (un tempo) solo oralmente; si distingue, poi, una corrente di musica legata esclusivamente ai riti di una data cultura religiosa; una corrente di carattere devozionale, che risuona fuori da chiese, moschee e simili luoghi di culto, che usa spesso un linguaggio “secolare” per esprimere temi di natura spirituale; una corrente di musiche marziali; una corrente di generi urbani leggeri (*Urban Light Genres*), composti spesso secondo le regole della musica d’arte, ma destinati a una fruizione più “leggera”, disimpegnata, che cantano temi di varia natura.

Se il lettore ci riflette, questo schema aperto funziona benissimo anche per la ricchissima cultura musicale italiana, che forse egli/ella conosce più da vicino: anche in Italia esiste una musica d’arte che viene detta “classica”, sorta tra le corti, le dimore dei nobili, i centri ecclesiastici dai quali uscì, intorno al XVII secolo, per risuonare anche negli spazi dei teatri e nei concerti pubblici previo pagamento di biglietto, confluendo poi in quel genere amatissimo, insieme colto e popolare, che fu l’Opera lirica. Dal XX secolo a oggi la musica d’arte ha seguito poi un percorso sempre meno compreso e amato dal grande pubblico. Quanto alla tradizione popolare/rurale, si pensi a quei repertori nati per i momenti di passaggio della vita di una comunità (nascite, battesimi, matrimoni, funerali eccetera), oppure a quelle forme che sono insieme musicali e poetiche, come gli *stornelli*, oppure ai tantissimi repertori per la danza, ai canti legati al lavoro e a tantissimi altri repertori anonimi espressione di una comunità. Per un parallelo con le tradizioni dei dervisci, si pensi alla musica devozionale, confraternale, che sta tra stile colto e popolare, tra oralità e scrittura, e che risuona nei riti della devozione popolare, ad esempio la Settimana Santa. Per la musica della religione in sé, si pensi ai riti stessi, ad esempio la Messa, così come alle ore canoniche dei monasteri (*Mattutino, Vespri* eccetera) e ai generi specifici che sono sorti intorno ad essi (*Salmi, Mottetti, Laudi, Messe* eccetera). Naturalmente sarà chiara al lettore la posizione a sé stante dei repertori marziali delle bande, spesso suonate da militari. E sarà facile identificare quei generi definiti “urbani leggeri” (*Urban*

Light Genres), composti spesso secondo le regole della musica d'arte, ma destinati a una fruizione più "leggera", disimpegnata: basti pensare alla "canzone" e a quei particolari repertori nati sin dall'antichità in città come Napoli, Roma o Venezia, così come ai molti cantanti e cantautori che il lettore conosce per certo. Nel tempo, infatti, la canzone divenne sempre più autoriale e commercializzata secondo i canoni di quella musica che è oggi "popolare" (*Pop*) per l'enorme pubblico che raggiunge e per le cifre delle vendite. Se il lettore vuole continuare il gioco, può applicare lo stesso schema alle musiche degli USA, che magari conosce altrettanto bene, ma io mi fermo qui.

Nel caso specifico del mondo islamico, applicando simili criteri, distinguiamo:

- la musica d'arte, detta anche colta o classica, sviluppatasi tra la corte, i centri sufi e le dimore degli appassionati nei principali centri urbani che viene complessivamente definita *maqām*;
- la musica di tradizione popolare, anonima, sviluppatasi soprattutto (ma non solo) in ambiente rurale;
- i numerosi generi sorti all'interno di una cultura religiosa qual è l'Islam, assolutamente non definibili usando le categorie occidentali di "musica";
- i repertori e le concezioni del sufismo (*taṣawwuf*), trasversali a vari generi e stili musicali così come a vari ambienti sociali, a seconda delle aree;
- i repertori insieme marziali e cerimoniali suonati dalle molte fanfare sorte nel mondo islamico (*mehter, naqqārehāne*);
- i cosiddetti "generi urbani leggeri", presenti dall'antichità al presente, mediatizzati sin dagli inizi del Novecento.

Non potendo entrare in dettaglio nei singoli generi², scelgo di limitarmi a quei due di essi che immagino siano di più comune riferimento negli articoli dei colleghi così come tra i lettori tout court: le musiche d'arte (*maqām*) e le particolari concezioni del sufismo (*taṣawwuf*) che stanno alla base dell'incontro cerimoniale detto *samā'* ("ascolto", "concerto spirituale").

² Rinvio il lettore eventualmente interessato a una visione più "panoramica" a: De Zorzi, 2021.

*Sulle musiche d'arte (maqām) del mondo islamico*³

Le musiche d'arte del vastissimo mondo islamico vengono definite sin dal XIII secolo col termine arabo *maqām*⁴, pronunciato *mugham* nell'accezione azera e armena, *maqom* in area centroasiatica, *muqam* nell'attuale Xinjiang. Complessivamente esse risuonano in un arco spaziale e storico-culturale che va dalla Penisola iberica islamica (*al-Andalus*) alla Cina occidentale, e sono accomunate da numerose caratteristiche quali la storia, le teorie, le forme, i generi, gli strumenti, i nomi dei modi o dei cicli ritmici. Tutto ciò fa supporre una radice comune, *eppure* ogni tradizione presenta caratteri peculiari.

Il lettore islamologo/arabista/orientalista avrà già incontrato nei suoi studi una simile vastità geo-culturale, così che sembra inutile ricordare come l'Islam ebbe una rapidissima diffusione che dal VII secolo lo portò a espandersi su di un'area vastissima che, nel tempo, venne poi uniformandosi seguendo analoghi principi amministrativi, politici, burocratici, religiosi e culturali in centri anche molto distanti tra loro quali furono, per la musica d'arte, Damasco, Baghdad, Cordova, Granada, Herat, Costantinopoli, Bukhara, Samarcanda, le sei città oasi (*altīšahr*) sui bordi del Taklamakan (su tutte Kashgar), e, infine, Aleppo e Il Cairo, nei quali era attivo il circolo di un determinato Maestro o la corte dove era patrocinata una data attività.

³ Condensò qui De Zorzi, 2019: 21-54. Per la ricostruzione dei principali periodi storici del mondo islamico seguo Lo Jacono, 2003 e Bernardini, 2003. Desumo *una* storia della musica d'arte detta "arabo-islamica" da Farmer, 1929; Poché, 1995 e dall'insuperato Wright, 2001-2002.

⁴ Il termine *maqām* appare abbastanza tardivamente, sostituendo altri termini precedenti, con Quṭb al-Dīn Šīrāzī (? – 1311), che nel suo trattato enciclopedico, *Durrat al-tāğ li-ğurrat al-dubāğ fī l-ḥikma* ("La perla della corona del miglior Dubāğ sulla sagacia"), commissionato dall'Emiro del Gilān, Rostam Dubāğ b. Fīlšāh e redatto tra il 1294 e il 1306, usa al plurale il termine *maqāmāt-e mašhūr* per indicare l'insieme dei modi musicali della sua epoca. Cfr. Wright, 1978: 180-181. Per una rassegna ragionata sui termini precedenti o alternativi si veda De Zorzi, 2019: 25-26. Più in generale, sull'opera di Šīrāzī si veda Nasr, 1976: 247-253 (rist. Nasr, 1996: 216-227).

Si formò, così, una rete di centri culturali distribuiti su di un'area molto vasta. Se i centri erano distanti tra loro, il retroterra culturale di riferimento era però condiviso e accomunava artisti, scienziati e letterati che si esprimevano in arabo e in persiano riferendosi, anche in musica, a testi e maestri comuni.

Anche se il tono di questo breve articolo è didascalico e introduttivo, non posso evitare ora un necessario affondo di natura musicologica: il *maqām* del mondo islamico è uno dei tanti sistemi modali sorti sul pianeta (si pensi a quelli bizantino, gregoriano medioevale, gregoriano-rinascimentale, ottomano, cinese, indiano, giavanese, ecc.) che si basano tutti sul criterio comune della *Modalità*, assolutamente diverso da quello, più recente, della *Tonalità*, nata in contesto europeo ai primi del XVIII secolo e ora imperante sul pianeta. Capire la differenza fra *Modalità* e *Tonalità* è un punto ostico: per il momento basti aver chiaro che, nella *Tonalità*, un'Ottava è stata suddivisa, temperata, in dodici semitoni uguali fra loro mentre nella *Modalità*, e in particolare nei sistemi modali del mondo islamico, questo *non* accade perché, come si vedrà tra poche righe, essa si basa su di una suddivisione microtonale dell'Ottava.

Di alcuni termini e sistemi modali precedenti o alternativi a maqām

Vale la pena di sostare brevemente su alcuni dei principali termini che hanno preceduto *maqām* e alcuni loro sviluppi storico-culturali: a Bārbad, il trovatore attivo alla corte del re sassanide Khosrow II (591-628), viene attribuita l'invenzione di sette modi detti *khosrovanī*, trenta brani o modi secondari detti *lahn* e trecentosessanta melodie, una per ogni giorno dell'anno secondo il calendario zoroastriano, dette *dastān*; il termine rinvierebbe a *dast* ("mano") e secondo Jean During indicava la "diteggiatura" sullo strumento e, per estensione, una scala.⁵

Nel più tardo *Kitāb al-adwār* di Safi ad-Dīn Urmawi le scale modali venivano rappresentate su diagrammi circolari detti *dawr* ("cerchio", al plurale *adwār*) e i nomi delle note che le

⁵ During, 2011: 102.

componevano erano indicati sul perimetro del cerchio. In questo senso, secondo Jean During, i termini *dawr* e *adwār*, per estensione designavano la scala, il modo musicale.⁶

Insieme a *dawr* in Safi ad-Dīn Urmawi troviamo il termine *šadd* (“intonazione”, al plurale *šudūd*) ad indicare il “modo musicale”, termine che avrà successo e verrà usato a lungo.⁷

Tra la fine del XII e gli inizi del XIII secolo appare il termine *parda* (“tasto”, ma letteralmente anche “velo”), termine usato ancor oggi e divenuto sinonimo di “altezza, nota” in Iran e nella Turchia contemporanea (*perde*).

Come si scriveva poco sopra, il termine *maqām* appare abbastanza tardivamente in Qutb ad-Dīn Shirāzi (?-1311): da qui in avanti, però, il termine viene sempre più usato negli scritti musicologici, affermandosi definitivamente in Marāghī (m. 1435) che lo impiega sistematicamente per poi essere sancito definitivamente dal Congresso del Cairo del 1932.

Nella terminologia più tarda, durante il XIV e XV secolo, appaiono poi due categorie: *šu‘ab* (sing. *šu‘ba*: “ramo, sezione”), ad indicare gruppi di modi, e *tarkībāt* (sing. *tarkīb*: “combinazione”), ad indicare modi “composti” (da tetracordi diversi) che si aggiungono ai canonici gruppi di *šudūd* e *āwāzāt* già isolati da Safi al-Dīn. Nei trattati scritti dagli autori della cosiddetta scuola Sistematista, tra XV e XVI in area centroasiatica, oltre a *maqām* si trovano alcuni termini chiave quali *nağma* (“nota, melodia”), *jins* (unità sistemiche di più note quali tricordi, tetracordi, pentacordi) e *ğam’* (“insieme”) a designare l’unione di note e *ğīns* a formare una scala.

Nel mondo arabo occidentale (*mağribī*), sin dai tempi di ibn al-Khatīb (1313-1375), per indicare un dato modo musicale si è usato il termine *tb’* (plurale, *tūbū’*: “natura, carattere temperamento”) a designare l’intero sistema dei modi musicali ed è ancor oggi di uso corrente nel Maghreb.

⁶ During, 2011a: 153-159.

⁷ Nella musica d’arte ottomano-turca, il termine *şedd* indica oggi un modo trasposto.

Tra i musicisti pratici d'area mediorientale per designare un modo musicale si usa il termine colloquiale *nağm* ("melodia", al plurale *anğām*).

Sui significati del termine maqām

Come il lettore orientalista sa, il termine arabo *maqām* significa letteralmente "luogo", termine che da solo significa poco e per il quale sono sorte diverse interpretazioni: secondo un'interpretazione letterale che mette, però, in primo piano il fattore umano, *maqām* può alludere a un "luogo" fisico, simile a un palco o a una pedana, capace di riunire e porre gli interpreti poco sopra gli ascoltatori, di solito tradizionalmente seduti su tappeti, cuscini o stuoie. Va notato come la presenza d'una piattaforma/pedana/palcoscenico implichi di per sé la presenza e l'azione di interpreti che in quel luogo sono autorizzati a salire e a suonare, cantare, danzare in qualità di "esperti".

Secondo una seconda interpretazione, più musicologica, il significato di "luogo" implica quello di "posizione", sia sullo strumento che su di una scala modale, ed è piuttosto evidente in modi musicali che iniziano con un numerale persiano come *yegāh* (letteralmente "posizione uno"), *dogāh* (letteralmente "posizione due"), *segāh* ("posizione tre"), *čahārgāh* ("posizione quattro") così come anche *panğgāh* ("posizione cinque"), eccetera.

A un altro livello, come mi faceva notare il m.o Kudsı Erguner, questo "luogo" può essere paragonato anche al luogo nel quale si risiede: se io, lettore, entrassi a casa sua, entrerei nel *maqām* del lettore XYZ, dominato dalla sua personalità, dai suoi gusti, dalla luminosità, dall'arredamento; tutti questi fattori contribuiscono a formare un'atmosfera, un gusto complessivo e tipico solo di questo luogo (*maqām*) nel quale lei vive, e all'interno del quale io, muovendomi, compirei dei "percorsi" (*sayir*). Così come una dimora, ugualmente un dato modo musicale ha il suo gusto, la sua atmosfera, il suo "gusto" (arabo *dawq*), il suo "sapore/succo/ecc." (sanscrito *rasa*), che dipendono dalla disposizione interna degli elementi che lo compongono che, in un modo musicale, sono le singole note. E cambia notevolmente come vengono strutturate

queste note, se in senso ascendente o discendente, e qual è il loro centro di gravità.

Entrando sempre più nel dettaglio, la musica del *maqām* è “microtonale”, si basa, quindi, su intervalli inferiori o superiori a quelli detti “tono” e “semitono”, temperati in Occidente nella prima metà del XVIII secolo. Essa è, invece, composta da intervalli “più piccoli”, o “più grandi”, derivati dalle elaborazioni del mondo greco-ellenistico e da numerose tradizioni locali. Questa caratteristica dona una grande ricchezza di colori, sfumature e, insieme, porta all’esistenza di numerosissimi modelli scalari.

La musica del *maqām* è poi “monofonica”, essa si affida, cioè, a un’unica linea melodica (dal greco $\mu\upsilon\nu\omicron + \varphi\omega\nu\eta$, letteralmente “singolo” e “voce”) e non sono previste sovrapposizioni simultanee di più suoni di altezze diverse, i cosiddetti “accordi”, né una loro relativa concatenazione nel tempo: quindi il concetto occidentale di “armonia”, che ne deriva, non sussiste, così come non sembrano essere diffuse pratiche di combinazione polifonica, strumentali o vocali.

La musica del *maqām* è invece “eterofonica” (dal composto greco $\epsilon\tau\epsilon\rho + \varphi\omega\nu\eta$, letteralmente “diverso” e “voce”), l’esecuzione delle singole linee melodiche viene quindi affidata a *più* strumenti *diversi* che suonano all’unisono: grazie alla diversità timbrica degli strumenti, ai diversi registri impegnati (con strumenti più gravi o più acuti suonati simultaneamente) e alle procedure di ornamentazione (non simultanee) dei suonatori, si realizza l’eterofonia.

Per quanto riguarda l’aspetto ritmico, la musica del *maqām* si basa su cicli ritmici piuttosto complessi detti, con termine arabo, *īqā’* (pl. *īqā’ āl*) e retti dallo stesso principio del sistema metrico (‘*arūz*’) che si usa in poesia, basato sulla quantità delle sillabe, dove una sillaba lunga equivale a due brevi.

Oralità e scrittura musicale

Sul pianeta sono sorte nel tempo varie forme di scrittura musicale, nate soprattutto per aiutare la memoria orale. Tra gli ambienti della musica d’arte/colta/classica detta dai musicologi “eurocolta”, ossia sviluppatasi in Europa tra le classi colte,

soprattutto tra le corti e i centri della cultura religiosa cristiana, la scrittura musicale assunse, però, un'importanza fondamentale e venne fissata su vari supporti (pergamena manoscritta, carta manoscritta, carta stampata, oggi formati .pdf, oppure .jpg o di vario altro tipo). Questa importanza data alla scrittura musicale, che divenne sempre più di tipo "prescrittivo e proscrittivo", come dicono i musicologi, differenzia l'Occidente dal resto delle culture sorte sul pianeta, naturalmente prima dell'invasione mediatica occidentale e dell'attuale globalizzazione.

Nelle culture musicali del vasto mondo islamico, nonostante alcuni esempi di scrittura musicale esposti in trattati musicali, un po' come fossero ingegnosi esperimenti, la musica *non* si scriveva ma veniva soprattutto trasmessa oralmente/auralmente. Da questi esempi scritti che compaiono qua e là nei trattati musicologici del passato nasce la sensazione, personalissima e magari fallace, che si *sarebbe potuta* usare intensivamente la scrittura musicale, come si faceva d'altronde in culture molto vicine, qual era quella europea, ma che si sia *scelto* di non farlo.

In questo panorama medio-orientale e centroasiatico, improntato alla trasmissione orale, fa eccezione il caso del mondo ottomano, da sempre ponte tra Oriente e Occidente, che è ricchissimo di testimonianze scritte e di varie autonome forme di notazione sviluppatesi nel tempo: da quella originaria bizantina, alla notazione alfabetica arabo-persiana (*abğad*), alle trascrizioni in notazione occidentale fatte dal giovane Bobowski (1610?-1675?) nel XVII secolo, ai sistemi di notazione inventati da alcuni dervisci *mevlevî*, al sistema alfanumerico del principe Demetrius Cantemir (1673-1723), al *corpus* di musiche trascritte dal *mevlevî* Kevserî nel XVIII secolo, usando un sistema personale, per arrivare alla cosiddetta *Hamparsum Notası* usata dal monaco armeno Baba Hampartzum Limonciyan (1768-1839), usata correntemente sino alla fine del 1800, quando si impose la notazione occidentale su pentagramma.

Di là dall'eccezione ottomana, si noti che tra la fine del 1800 e nel corso di tutto il 1900 in moltissimi centri del mondo islamico furono fondati dei Conservatori musicali di stampo occidentale e si ebbero varie operazioni (talora discutibili) di trascrizione in

notazione occidentale del vasto repertorio orale che ci viene, così, trasmesso in forma scritta.

Note per una possibile storia del maqām

Più che da testimonianze musicali scritte su pentagramma, o in altre forme di scrittura, le fonti per ricostruire una possibile storia della musica d'arte nel mondo islamico sono di tre tipi: innanzitutto quei trattati *sulla* musica, o musicografici, che vengono fatti iniziare da al-Kindī (IX sec. d.C.). Complessivamente, tutti questi presentano caratteristiche comuni: oltre ad affrontare e nominare note (altezze), modi musicali e cicli ritmici, essi intessono una rete di relazioni tra l'essere umano, un dato modo musicale e il suo *ethos* (ἦθος), ossia quel "carattere" che è tipico di quel modo. Questi tre fattori sono poi messi in relazione con il dato pianeta, segno zodiacale, temperamento, stagione e momento del giorno che gli corrispondono.

Dal XIII secolo in poi questa rete di relazioni viene espressa in trattati, tipici di quella che viene definita "Scuola Sistematista", che vengono detti *adwār* ("cerchi, circoli, cicli, sfere") che nascono sulla scia del *Kitāb al-adwār* di Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Urmawī (1230-1294). Da un punto di vista strettamente letterario, un *adwār* era composto da una prima parte introduttiva, detta *muqaddima*, seguita da due sezioni, rispettivamente dedicate ai *maqām* e ai cicli ritmici. La *muqaddima* si apriva con un'invocazione di tono religioso seguita da una o più leggende che raccontavano le origini e i poteri sovranaturali della musica, spesso dimostrati dalla figura di grandi musicisti leggendari (Pitagora, David, Ṣafī al-Dīn, 'Abd al-Qādir Marāgī, o altri) che mettevano in luce la capacità miracolosa della musica di attrarre, ammansire o eccitare gli animali. Quindi si passava a mettere in relazione la scienza della musica con altre "scienze dei cicli", come l'astrologia o la medicina.

In secondo luogo, tra le nostre fonti dobbiamo considerare le numerosissime informazioni *sulla* musica che provengono da opere letterarie (a ribadire la necessità di un approccio interdisciplinare alla musica) composte spesso da poeti e letterati che, come di consueto all'epoca, erano *anche* musicisti.

In terzo luogo, vanno considerate le altrettanto numerose testimonianze iconografiche che raffigurano strumenti e scene di musica che si collocano nel grande campo di studi dell'Iconografia musicale.

Sono queste le tre tipologie di fonti che adotterò nei prossimi paragrafi.

Periodo Pre-Islamico

Esposte le principali caratteristiche delle musiche d'arte dette complessivamente *maqām*, passo a un approccio storico e nelle prossime pagine mi soffermerò su *alcuni* punti salienti nella storia della musica cólta del mondo islamico, che vengono intesi generalmente come la base comune dalla quale si sono poi sviluppate le principali tradizioni del mondo islamico, quella del mondo arabo, turco-ottomano, persiano e centroasiatico che qui non potrò seguire in dettaglio per ovi motivi di spazio.

Nonostante quanto potrebbe far pensare la natura dell'area, gli arabi non erano culturalmente così isolati: oltre al passaggio di idee e strumenti lungo le rotte carovaniere che attraversavano la Penisola araba, va ricordata la presenza dei regni-cuscinetto del nord, al-Ĥīra e Ġassān, attraverso i quali potevano passare, rispettivamente, influenze persiane e bizantine.

Le prime fonti testuali accennano a due generi di musica: il più antico sembra essere il *ḥidā'*, canto di carovaniere o di cammelliere, che avrà una sua lunga storia, e il *nasb*, probabilmente genere vocale maschile, senza che siano possibili ulteriori indicazioni che ci permettano di capire di cosa si trattasse. L'importanza del termine *nasb* deriva soprattutto dal fatto che esso viene citato come uno di quei generi che fanno parte del *ġinā'* ("canto"), un termine che avrà una enorme importanza nella storia del *maqām* sino al presente, e che verrà spesso utilizzato genericamente per designare la "musica". Il *ġinā'* comprende il *ḥidā'*, il *nasb*, e due altre categorie piuttosto astratte *ṭaqīl* e *ḥafīf*, "pesante" e ornata la prima, "leggera" e gaia la seconda. Va notato che i due termini arrivano, con diversi significati, sino al presente.

È probabile che questi generi/tipi “pesanti” e “leggeri” venissero eseguiti dalla *qayna* (pl. *qiyān*, *qaynāt* “schiava cantante”), figura citata in diversi testi⁸ dalla quale si può desumere l’emergere della musica d’intrattenimento nei nascenti centri urbani. Nelle prime testimonianze poetiche (a proposito di interdisciplinarietà) la *qayna* è spesso descritta mentre suona uno strumento e si noti come la figura della *qayna* rimanga centrale, anche se spesso disapprovata, nella storia del *maqām*.

Il primo periodo della musica d’arte islamica e il califfato omayyade (622-750)

Già nel 650, a poco meno di vent’anni dalla scomparsa del Profeta (632), gli eserciti islamici avevano vinto la resistenza bizantina in Siria e Palestina, conquistato l’Egitto, l’Iraq e di qui erano entrati nel cuore stesso della Persia. L’incontro con nuovi popoli e culture musicali fu determinante: penetrando in Persia, con la vittoria di Nihāvand (642 d.C.), i popoli arabi vennero in contatto con una cultura musicale molto evoluta e l’influenza dello stile persiano nel mondo arabo è ben riassunta dalla figura paradigmatica di Našīt, cantore che aveva successo a Medina col suo repertorio in persiano, al quale dovette, però, aggiungere brani in arabo.

Da questo periodo di incontri con altre culture musicali emergono i casi paradigmatici di due cantori: nel *Kitāb al-ağānī* (“Libro dei canti”) di Abū l-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī (897-967) si narra, infatti, dei viaggi che due leggendari cantanti attivi alla corte omayyade di Damasco, Ibn Miṣğāh e Ibn Muḥriz, fecero sui territori degli imperi bizantino e persiano, adottando disinvoltamente forme e generi delle musiche che incontravano a seconda del tipo di ascoltatori che avevano:⁹ una simile osservazione dimostra come non vi fossero poi differenze così radicali tra le tradizioni musicali persiane, arabe e bizantine e, in un altro senso,

⁸ Su tutti segnalo il fondamentale al-Ġāhiz, 1980.

⁹ Di là dal singolo caso di Ibn Miṣğāh e Ibn Muḥriz, per una complessiva panoramica musicale nel *Kitāb* si veda Sawa, 2018.

come, al di là di purismi di varia natura, la formazione della stessa musica d'arte araba passasse attraverso la capacità di assimilare nuovi elementi. Un termine ricorrente nell'opera è, poi, *ḡinā' mutqan* ("canto perfezionato") e fa pensare ad una musica d'arte sempre più evoluta.

Con l'affermazione della dinastia omayyade, nel 661 d.C., il centro del potere passò a Damasco, nell'attuale Siria, e ovunque nei centri dell'arte musicale aumentò la domanda di una musica di intrattenimento, sino ad allora dominio delle schiave cantanti, le *qayna*, che portò all'emergere di maschi *en travesti*, i *mukannat* (pl. arabo *mukannatūn*).

L'età dell'oro della cultura arabo islamica: i primi Abbasidi e Baghdad (750-900)

Con la sconfitta degli Omayyadi ad opera degli Abbasidi nel 750 d.C., il centro del potere si sposta a Baghdad, l'antica Babilonia, nell'attuale Iraq, città posta strategicamente tra il Tigri e l'Eufrate e da millenni in contatto con le culture dell'altopiano iranico.¹⁰ Da qui si apre quella che gli studiosi hanno definito "l'Età dell'Oro" della cultura arabo-islamica (*Islamic Golden Age*) che si concluderà con la caduta della dinastia abbaside del 1258, ad opera dei Mongoli. Di là dalle espansioni politico-militari, si tratta di una stagione di fioritura per la nascente cultura del mondo islamico ed è vano voler distinguere, come si è fatto in tempi moderni venati di nazionalismo, tra apporti legati a singole nazioni ed etnie: da qui in avanti a Baghdad si mescolano culture antiche, come quella greco-ellenistica, sasanide e bizantina, con il giovane Islam e ne nasce una cultura nuova, unica e ben riconoscibile.

Ancora una volta, il *Kitāb al-aḡānī* è una fonte preziosa di informazioni sulla vita musicale in città e a corte, dalle quali si evince il ruolo sempre più preponderante del califfo e l'immagine

¹⁰ Penso ai rapporti che si ebbero sin dal III millennio a.C. tra le società mesopotamico-babilonesi e il regno elamita, i cui centri erano diffusi soprattutto nell'attuale Iran occidentale.

di una cultura sempre più matura. Arrivano sino a noi, grazie anche (ma non solo) alla raccolta de *Le Mille e una Notte* nella quale vengono citati, i nomi di importanti musicisti come Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (742-804) e del figlio Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī (767-850), il principale compositore e musicista del suo tempo, noto anche come poeta ed esperto in filologia e giurisprudenza.

Va ricordata la figura e l'opera di Zalzal – Manṣūr Zalzal al-Dārib Rāzī (? – post 842) – suonatore di 'ūd e teorico musicale. Lo stesso Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī nel *Kitāb al-aḡānī* si dichiara suo allievo ed afferma che non esisteva un liutista alla sua altezza. Zalzal si applicò alla definizione di scale e intervalli musicali sul manico dell' 'ūd, focalizzando così la Terza neutra, detta ancor oggi *vaṣṭā-ye zalzal*, mentre una scala modale, detta Manṣūrī, porta il suo nome.

Complessivamente, il primo periodo abbaside è un periodo di grande attività culturale soprattutto grazie alla titanica opera di traduzione dei testi da varie lingue, tra tutte il greco, nella *Bayt al-Ḥikma* ("Casa della sapienza"), la biblioteca fondata dal quinto califfo abbaside Hārūn al-Rašīd (766-809) e diretta poi dal figlio al-Ma'mūn (786-833).

Anche in musica si ebbe la traduzione in arabo di opere musicologiche d'epoca greco-classica ed ellenistica¹¹: il primo frutto "autoctono" di questa stagione culturale fu al-Kindī (ca 801-864/866), filosofo, fisico, astronomo, scienziato, musicista e primo rilevante musicologo della tradizione islamica. In alcuni brevi trattati egli si occupa di musica dedicandosi soprattutto a due temi: la speculazione cosmologica e l'analisi degli intervalli e delle scale. Egli mette in relazione, infatti, le quattro corde dell' 'ūd con i quattro elementi, le quattro stagioni, i quattro punti cardinali e i quattro umori della tradizione ippocratea cercando corrispondenze appropriate tra una certa struttura musicale (una scala, una melodia) e il momento del giorno più appropriato, intessendo così una rete di quelle che gli etnomusicologi

¹¹ Per un inquadramento complessivo segnalo i fondamentali Farmer, 1930: 325-33; Rosenthal, 1966: 261-68.

chiamano associazioni extramusicali.¹² Quanto al secondo tema, egli formula un modello scalare e passa ad esplicitarlo direttamente sul manico dell' *'ūd*, strumento di riferimento per le sue elaborazioni teoriche, al quale egli aggiunge una quinta corda portandone così l'estensione alle due ottave.

al-Kindī fu anche il primo teorico ad occuparsi di ritmo e, in particolare, dell'articolazione interna dei cicli ritmici *īqā'* (pl. *īqā'āt*). Il fatto che nella sua opera ritornino termini antichi e già incontrati come *taqīl* ("pe-sante") e *hafīf* ("leggero"), potrebbe far pensare ad una suddivisione in due categorie principali dei vari cicli ritmici esistenti.

Complessivamente, secondo Owen Wright, in questo primo periodo omayyade/abbaside, fase formativa della cosiddetta cultura arabo-islamica, gli influssi della tradizione persiana furono di riferimento soprattutto dal punto di vista performativo, mentre per la formazione di una prima teoria musicale fu, piuttosto, di riferimento la sistemazione e catalogazione dei modi musicali che si ebbe nel vicino sistema bizantino detta *oktōēkhos*.

Il secondo periodo abbaside (900-1258)

Il secondo periodo abbaside è segnato da un indebolimento del potere dei califfi e da una notevole frammentazione politica che, di conseguenza, porta alla nascita di diversi centri culturali nei quali si diffondono le norme estetiche elaborate a Baghdad, la capitale, che divengono ora di riferimento per la musica di tutte le corti in area medio-orientale. Cordova, già conquistata in precedenza dagli Omayyadi, rifugio di un discendente della dinastia, conosce un periodo di fioritura e inizia a rivaleggiare con Baghdad: la figura paradigmatica di questo processo è quella, certo ampiamente mitizzata,¹³ di Ziryāb (? – m. 850? 857?),

¹² Le associazioni extramusicali tra stagioni, pianeti, momenti del giorno, umori, pianeti, sentimenti e scale o melodie, alle quali si è già accennato, sono tipiche di moltissime culture musicali, si pensi solo alla tradizione indiana, forse più nota ai lettori, e alle associazioni extramusicali tipiche del sistema modale indiano detto *rāga*.

¹³ Reynolds, 2008: 155-68.

discepolo di Iṣḥāq al-Mawṣilī, solista di liuto ‘ūd e cantante, che partì dalla Baghdad del califfo abbaside Hārūn al-Rašīd e giunse a Cordova nell’822, dove divenne sia il punto di riferimento per l’arte musicale sia un *arbiter elegantiae* che dettava l’etichetta in fatto di cura del corpo, abbigliamento, disposizione delle mense e arte culinaria.

Nel secolo successivo l’Africa settentrionale divenne terra dei califfi ismailiti Fatimidi, oppositori dei califfi abbasidi sunniti: muovendo dalla Tunisia essi presero l’Egitto nel 969 creando una nuova capitale, Cairo, mentre nei due secoli seguenti essi amministrarono i territori delle attuali Siria e Palestina, per essere poi sconfitti nel 1171 da Saladino (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, 1137-1193).

In questo secondo periodo abbaside emerge l’opera di al-Fārābī (?-950) e del suo monumentale *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr* (“Grande libro della musica”), che resterà di riferimento per tutta la storia del *maqām*. A lui si attribuisce l’introduzione del termine *mūsīqī*, calco dal greco *mousikè téchne*, fundamentalmente estraneo alla cultura originaria dell’area: il musicologo Amnon Shiloah nota,¹⁴ infatti, come i termini adoperati dai primi trattatisti di lingua araba siano piuttosto *ṣawt* e *ḡinā’*.

Circa un secolo dopo si ha l’opera di un altro grande uomo di cultura, Ibn Sīnā (? – 1037), medico, fisico, filosofo e scienziato persiano noto in Europa come Avicenna, che dedica alla musica il quarto capitolo della terza sezione dedicata, significativamente, alle scienze matematiche, della sua enciclopedia scientifica intitolata *Kitāb al-ṣifā’* (“Libro della guarigione”).

Il suo approccio alla materia segue quello di al-Fārābī e, negli spazi limitati di un singolo capitolo, rivede i principali temi della questione: si inizia con il suono come forma di espressione estetica per passare poi a un’analisi degli intervalli e delle combinazioni tra tetracordi, seguita da una sezione sul ritmo che segue l’impostazione matematica di al-Fārābī: un ridotto numero di possibilità ritmiche di base sa generare, grazie a combinazioni e permutazioni, cicli ritmici di differente lunghezza e complessità.

¹⁴ Shiloah, 1991: 86.

Il capitolo passa poi a prendere in esame gli strumenti musicali classificando aerofoni e cordofoni, ignorando però, come Fārābī prima di lui, i membranofoni. Il capitolo si conclude con la tastatura del liuto ‘ūd e con l’accenno (prezioso) ad alcuni nomi di modi musicali che erano comuni ai suoi tempi e che dimostrano l’influenza musicale della vicina Persia.¹⁵

Se la concezione neoplatonica viene ignorata da al-Fārābī e rigettata apertamente da Ibn Sīnā, entrambi aristotelici, essa riappare però nel X secolo, insieme a concezioni cosmologiche e numerologiche, nelle *Rasā’il* (“Epistole”) degli *Iḥwān al-Ṣafā’* (“Fratelli della Purità”), un gruppo di studiosi che vivevano tra Bassora e Baghdad.¹⁶ Sulla scia degli scritti di al-Kindī, essi sostengono la teoria della propagazione sferica del suono e vengono sviluppate le associazioni extramusicali tra le quattro corde dell’ ‘ūd già incontrate più sopra. Emerge la concezione del suono prodotto dal roteare delle sfere celesti, quella che Boezio nel VI d.C., definiva *musica mundana*; vengono messe in evidenza le relazioni numeriche presenti in una gamma e si sostiene l’efficacia terapeutica e morale della musica. Come si può notare sono tutti tratti di ascendenza pitagorica giunti a loro attraverso la mediazione dell’opera platonica, tratti piuttosto inediti nel mondo musicologico arabo-islamico dell’epoca.

Sempre nel secondo periodo abbaside, ma dall’area di al-Andalus, corrispondente all’attuale Penisola iberica e a parte del Portogallo e del Nordafrica, si ha l’opera di due aristotelici quali Ibn Baġġā, noto in Europa come Avempace, e Ibn Ruṣd, conosciuto in Europa come Averroè. Quanto a Ibn Baġġā (Saragozza, 1095 – Fès, 1138), sappiamo da diverse testimonianze come sia stato un compositore, un eccellente suonatore di ‘ūd e che aveva scritto un libro sulla musica, purtroppo oggi perduto, paragonabile a quello di al-Fārābī. Dopo di lui Ibn Ruṣd (Cordova, 1126 – Marrakesh, 1198), noto tra gli occidentali come Averroè, fu

¹⁵ È esemplare il caso del termine persiano *rāst*, da lui stesso tradotto in arabo con *mustaqīm* (“diritto”, “retto”). Va notato che il termine persiano *rāst* è usato ancor oggi in tutta la vasta area del *maqām*. Se il nome è lo stesso, la gamma del modo musicale è, però, diversa in ogni singola cultura.

¹⁶ Cfr. Wright, 2008.

filosofo, medico, matematico, giurisperito e giudice. Sin dal 1153 ebbe incarichi importanti come giudice e ministro (*wazīr*) nelle corti di Siviglia, Cordova e Marrakesh. Come filosofo ebbe una grande influenza in Europa e i suoi commentari ad Aristotele furono di riferimento assoluto. In particolare, nel suo commento sul *De Anima* di Aristotele intitolato *Šarḥ* (“commento”), oppure *Talqīs fi l-Nafs li-Aristūṭālīs* (“commentario medio sul *De anima* di Aristotele”) egli dedica una sezione alla teoria del suono, presto tradotta in latino e in ebraico e pubblicata a Padova in latino nel 1472.

La caduta della dinastia abbaside, la dominazione dei Mongoli e i Mamelucchi (1258-1517)

Il giovane Hülegü Khān (1217-1265), principe mongolo nipote di Gengis Khān e fondatore della dinastia Ilkhanide, nel 1258 conquista e saccheggia Baghdad, mette a morte l'ultimo califfo, e pone così fine alla dinastia abbaside, per poi avanzare verso la Siria, dove viene fermato dai Mamelucchi dell'Egitto, una dinastia militare di ascendenza turca che dominava Egitto e parti della Siria e dell'Arabia dal XVI secolo.¹⁷

In questo periodo si afferma il quarto grande autore della musicologia islamica Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Urmawī, ovvero Ṣafī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Mu‘min (Urmiya, 1216? 1230? – Baghdad, 1294); giunto a Baghdad dalla città natale per compiere i suoi studi, egli si applicò soprattutto alla giurisprudenza, alla calligrafia e alla musica, divenendo un valente suonatore di ‘ūd. Sopravvisse all'attacco della città di Hülegü Khān, che lo apprezzò come musicista, e fu poi attivo soprattutto alla corte del califfo abbaside al-Musta‘šim, per il quale compose diversi trattati sulla musica, in particolare il *Kitāb al-adwār* (“Libro dei cicli”), composto verso il 1235-36, e la

¹⁷ Sulla musica alla corte mamelucca si segnalano la recente traduzione e commento dell'opera di Ibn Kurr (m. 1357 d.C.), un teorico musicale nato al Cairo da una famiglia di rifugiati iracheni autore delle *Ġāyaṭ al-maṭlūb fi ‘ilm al-adwār wa-l-ḍurūb* (“Le vie seducenti ai modi e ai ritmi”), un trattato di carattere musicologico composto al Cairo durante la prima metà del XIV secolo. Cfr. Wright, 2014.

più tarda *Risāla al-Šarafīyya fī l-nisāb al-ta' līfīyya* (“Epistola in onore di Šaraf sulle proporzioni musicali”), dedicata a Šaraf al-Dīn Hārūn Joveynī, uomo politico, poeta e suo patrono.

A differenza dei suoi predecessori, Šafi al-Dīn ha un approccio più pragmatico alla materia e inaugura la consuetudine di analizzare modi e cicli ritmici disponendoli sul diagramma di un cerchio, o ciclo, da qui il titolo dell’opera. Il suo esempio verrà seguito nel mondo scientifico dell’epoca e nel tempo, nella tradizione persiana, ottomana e centroasiatica, l’*‘ilm al-mūsīqī* (“scienza della musica”) venne considerata come una delle *‘ulūm al-adwār* (“scienze dei cicli, dei cerchi”): per secoli musica, metrica, poesia, cicli ritmici ecc. verranno dimostrati su dei diagrammi circolari almeno sino all’arrivo del sistema educativo occidentale nel XIX secolo.

Dopo Šafi al-Dīn, la teoria musicale tenderà a rielaborare un *corpus* ormai esistente. Molti trattati successivi della cosiddetta scuola Sistemata, la scuola musicologica che a lui si rifà, sono però importanti sia per l’elaborazione delle idee sia per le informazioni aggiuntive che apportano. Va notato come tutti questi trattati nascano nel contesto della tradizione musicale orientale, e ad essa si riferiscono. La maggior parte sarà scritta in persiano, e in molti casi il contenuto corrisponde alla pratica musicale che si aveva nelle corti timuridi del XV secolo, a Samarcanda e più tardi a Herat.

Sempre procedendo in ordine cronologico, incontriamo l’opera di un maestro che oltre a essere un erudito fu un sufi, un medico, un astronomo, uno scienziato e un poeta, Quṭb al-Dīn Šīrāzī (Šīraz, 1236 – Tabriz, 1311). Come molti eruditi del tempo, egli compose un’enciclopedia che intitolò *Durrat al-tāg li-ğurrat al-dubāg fī l-ḥikma*, già incontrata più sopra, in cui mostra la sua padronanza delle scienze dell’epoca e dedica un capitolo alla scienza della musica, inserito, non a caso, nella sezione in cui si occupa delle scienze matematiche¹⁸. Il capitolo è una riproposizione di quanto

¹⁸ Sembra importante notare che anche la contemporanea filosofia Scolastica medioevale inseriva la musica tra le arti liberali del *Quadrivium*

già esposto da Šafi al-Dīn, ma è più attento alla pratica musicale soprattutto per quanto riguarda la codificazione e la descrizione dei modi musicali e dei cicli ritmici. Si noti come egli usi estensivamente il termine *maqām* che dopo di lui diverrà comune tra i teorici successivi. Soprattutto, egli conclude il suo capitolo con il migliore e più esteso esempio di notazione di tutta la trattatistica arabo-persiana. Si tratta di una canzone attribuita a Šafi al-Dīn sui versi *yā malik^{an} bihī yatību zamā-nī* (“O sovrano grazie a cui la fortuna mi arride”).

Da questo esempio luminoso passiamo al grande ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Ġaybī Marāġī (Marāġa, 1360? – Herat, 1435), che fu allo stesso tempo un polistrumentista, un compositore e un grande musicologo e teorico della musica arabo-islamica. Nei suoi scritti, Marāġī consolidò l’uso del termine *maqām*, introdotto da Quṭb al-Dīn Šīrāzī, sistematizzandone la teoria e ripartendo i modi musicali in tre categorie principali: dodici *maqām*, sei *āvāz* e ventiquattro *šu‘ab* (sing. *šu‘ba*: “ramo, sezione”). Va notato di sfuggita come la classificazione dei modi rimarrà un tema centrale per tutti i trattati composti sino al XVII secolo.

Oltre che per la sua attività di compositore, musicista e musicologo Marāġī rimane fondamentale per la sua opera di organologo: nel suo *Ġāmi‘ al-alhān* si sofferma sugli strumenti musicali e, da uomo di grande apertura intellettuale all’incrocio delle vie della seta, descrive allo stesso modo la cetra su tavola a ponticelli mobili, *jatghan*, dell’area sud siberiana così come la ghironda europea.

L’opera di Marāġī e l’impatto della scuola Sistematista si propagarono da Herat, la capitale del mondo culturale timuride nella quale visse, influenzando allo stesso modo l’Oriente (Asia centrale e India Moghul) e l’Occidente del mondo ottomano. In questo senso va ricordato che nel 1422 il suo trattato *Maqāsid al-*

(aritmetica, geometria, astronomia e musica). Una simile concezione della musica come scienza “numerica” sembra arrivare alla Scolastica dall’antichità greco-classica (si pensi solo alla scuola pitagorica e ai molti passaggi di Platone sul tema) rimeditata poi dalla cultura romana. E si è visto poco sopra come la nascente cultura arabo-islamica abbia recepito moltissimi elementi della tradizione filosofica greco-ellenistica in quel crogiuolo che fu Baghdad.

alḥān (“I significati delle melodie”) venne portato dal più giovane dei suoi figli, Abdūlaziz, al sultano ottomano Murad II con una carovana che da Herat raggiunse Bursa, allora sede della corte ottomana: nella “narrazione” che ne fanno gli Ottomani, questo omaggio viene considerato come l’“atto fondatore”, l’inizio simbolico della musica d’arte ottomana.

Il Congresso del Cairo del 1932

Ho toccato sin qui alcuni punti salienti di una *possibile* storia della musica còlta del mondo islamico, intesi generalmente come la base comune dalla quale si sono poi sviluppate le principali tradizioni del mondo islamico, quelle del mondo arabo, turco-ottomano, persiano e centroasiatico.

Posso solo accennare a un incontro epocale che si tenne al Cairo tra il 14 marzo e il 3 aprile del 1932, rimasto alla storia come il *Congrès du Caire*, che mi sembra segnare un netto stacco tra il tempo sospeso della tradizione e la “modernità”. Il simposio fu proposto al re Fu’ād I (1868-1936) dal barone Rodolphe d’Erlanger (1872-1932), pittore, musicista, musicologo e amante della musica d’arte araba, che lo curò insieme ad un altro barone, l’orientalista francese Bernard Carra de Vaux (1867-1953). Algeria, Egitto, Iraq, Siria, Tunisia e Turchia inviarono delegazioni di musicisti e musicologi tra cui vanno ricordati¹⁹ l’egiziano Muhammad Fathi [Muḥammad Fathī] (1896-1973), formatosi a Berlino con Curt Sachs, i siriani ‘Ali al-Darwish [‘Alī al-Darwīš] (1884-1952) e Tawfiq al-Sabbagh [Tawfiq al-Sabbāḡ] (1892-1964), gli egiziani Kāmil al-Khulā’ī [Kāmil al-Ḥulā’ī] (1879-1938) e Mahmud al-Hifni [Maḥmūd al-Ḥifnī] (1896-1973), i turchi Rauf Yektā Bey (1871-1935) e Mesut Cemil (1902-1963), i musicisti tunisini Mohammed Ghanem [Muḥammad Ġānem], Mohammed Ben Hassan [Muḥammad Ben Ḥasan] e Mohammed Cherif [Muḥammad Šarīf], oltre a musicologi occidentali quali Alexis Chottin (1891-1975), allora direttore del Conservatoire

¹⁹ Per una lista completa dei partecipanti, talora funzionari ministeriali, rinvio a Katz, 2015: 305-13.

National de Musique Arabe à Rabat, il grande musicologo inglese Henry George Farmer (1882-1965),²⁰ lo stesso d'Erlanger, l'etnomusicologo Robert Lachmann (1892-1939), il padre libanese Xavier Marie Collangettes. A costoro vanno aggiunti compositori e studiosi europei quali Béla Bartók (1881-1945), Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), Alois Hába (1893-1973)²¹, il musicologo comparatista Erich Moritz Von Hornbostel (1877-1935) ed Egon Wellesz (1885-1974), compositore allievo di Schönberg e noto studioso di musica bizantina.

Da un simile, sommario, elenco dei partecipanti s'intuisce la portata interculturale dell'evento al quale, purtroppo, poté partecipare solo in minima parte lo stesso d'Erlanger, gravemente malato. I partecipanti furono suddivisi in sette commissioni²² dedicate a questioni generali, modi musicali, ritmi e composizione, scala musicale, strumenti musicali, registrazioni, storia e manoscritti. Al di là dalle questioni teoriche, ogni Paese inviò uno o più *ensembles* di musicisti che lo rappresentavano²³ e che furono registrati sotto la supervisione di Robert Lachmann: la raccolta integrale delle registrazioni fu donata dal re Fu'ād I all'allora Musée Guimet e può essere ascoltata oggi in un lussuoso cofanetto in diciotto CD, corredati da un libretto scientifico completo.²⁴

²⁰ A lui e alla sua partecipazione al *Congrès* è interamente dedicato: Katz, 2015.

²¹ L'opera di Alois Hába è comunemente associata al microtonalismo, ossia all'uso dei microtoni, altezze inferiori al semitono temperato: inizialmente egli compose usando una suddivisione dell'ottava in quarti di tono ma poi anche in quinti e in sestoni di tono. La sua prima opera in linguaggio microtonale fu la *Suite* del 1915, in quarti di tono. Oltre alla composizione e alla teorizzazione microtonale, egli presiedette alla realizzazione di molti, affascinanti, strumenti musicali concepiti per produrre microtoni, conservati oggi nei principali musei della musica.

²² Per un elenco integrale dei musicologi e musicisti presenti nelle singole commissioni si veda Katz, 2015: Appendice 6, p. 323 ss.

²³ Per un elenco particolareggiato dei musicisti partecipanti si rimanda a Katz, 2015: Appendice 7, p. 328 ss.

²⁴ *Congrès de musique arabe du Caire/The Cairo Congress of Arab Music*, sous la direction de Jean Lambert et de Pascal Cordereix. Texte original de Bernard Moussali. Restauration sonore par Luc Verrier. Coffret 18 CD avec livret trilingue français, anglais et arabe, Paris BNF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France), 2015. (18 CD)

Sarebbe semplicistico voler tirare le somme di un simile titanico evento, divenuto tema di numerosi studi musicologici e di ricerche tuttora in corso: mi sembra, però, di poter notare come nel *Congrès* si incontrassero tradizioni musicali nate in una *koinè* comune e, allo stesso tempo, come si scontrassero le culture dei rispettivi nascenti Stati nazionali, ognuno dei quali si poneva come l'unico e autentico depositario di una tradizione. In particolare, la teoria sulla divisione dell'ottava in quarti di tono equidistanti fu tema di grandi polemiche: rigettata dai Turchi e, più tardi, dai Persiani, essa divenne imperante in molti paesi del mondo arabo, dove è ancora di riferimento mentre si scrive.

Intorno al samā' ("ascolto", "concerto spirituale") della tradizione sufi²⁵

samā' è un termine della lingua araba che deriva dalla radice trilittera *s-m-* la quale racchiude i significati di: "udire, ascoltare, accogliere, cercare di comprendere". Una delle derivazioni da questa radice è *samā'*, termine che può essere reso con "ascolto, audizione" e, più tardi, "concerto spirituale".

Uno sviluppo della stessa radice è il participio attivo *as-samī* ("Colui che ode", "Colui che presta ascolto") che ritorna più volte nel Corano²⁶ ed è uno dei novantanove Nomi, o attributi, di Iddio (*al-Lāh*)²⁷. Come si sa, la tradizione raccolse i nomi divini sparsi nel Corano in una sorta di collana, o di elenco, detto *al-asmā' al-husnā* ("i Nomi più belli"); il ventisettesimo di questi, *as-samī*, è, secondo l'islamologo Angelo Scarabel: "uno dei Nomi di Iddio riferiti ad attributi dell'essenza. Il senso è che nulla sfugge alla percezione divina, applicato qui a tutto ciò che ha annessione con il concetto di suono²⁸". Il termine *samā'*, insomma, pur non

²⁵ Rielaboro e condenso De Zorzi, 2021a.

²⁶ Si vedano i versetti relativi nelle *sūra* II, 127; II, 256; VIII, 17; XLIX, 1.

²⁷ Traduco qui e ovunque in queste pagine *Allāh* con "Iddio", in quanto contrazione da *al-ilāh*, ("la divinità"). *Allāh* secondo il grande filosofo, teologo e sufi Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (Tuṣ, 1058/59 - 1111), può essere inteso come il suo "nome proprio", definito anche come *ism al-dā* ("Nome dell'Essenza") mentre gli altri novantanove nomi divini presenti nel Corano sarebbero piuttosto dei qualificativi. Si veda Scarabel, 1996: 49, 108.

²⁸ Scarabel, 1996: 117.

comparendo esplicitamente nel Corano, per la sua stessa natura linguistica condivide le caratteristiche implicite nel nome divino *as-samī*.

Scendendo da queste altezze, storicamente il termine *samāʿ* compare in trattati scritti verso la metà del III secolo dell'Egira/X sec. d.C., nell'area di Baghdad, composti soprattutto in difesa di questa pratica criticata e riprovata dai teologi più miopi. Che si faceva? Dei dervisci²⁹ si incontravano per "ascoltare". Cosa? Dapprima la sola cantillazione del Corano, affiancata gradualmente, nel tempo, da poesia di carattere amoroso mistico alla quale poteva poi intrecciarsi il suono di strumenti musicali. Da questo ascolto potevano sorgere negli assorti partecipanti degli intensi stati interiori e degli irrefrenabili movimenti fisici. Progressivamente il *samāʿ* divenne una delle pratiche tipiche del *taṣawwuf* ("sufismo") e fiorirono svariati repertori e generi tra le molte confraternite sufi del vasto mondo islamico che giunsero sino al presente.

Secondo lo studioso iraniano Nasrollāh Pourjavādy³⁰ i primi scritti sul *samāʿ* appaiono circa un secolo dopo le prime cerimonie, che dunque potrebbero essere databili all'850 d.C., e reagiscono concordi ad attacchi come quello, rimasto famoso, dello studioso Ibn Abi al-Dunya (823-894) che con il suo trattato *dhamm al-malāhī* ("La condanna della distrazione") fa rientrare la musica nella categoria del *malāhī*, ossia del passatempo, della "distrazione", della "diversione"³¹ che allontana dalla vita spirituale. Secondo il musicologo Amnon Shiloah,³² questo testo verrà seguito da tutti quei trattatisti che si interrogano sulla liceità della musica. Secondo Pourjavādy tra gli autori di questo primo periodo svetta Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (937? 942? -1021), primo autore di un trattato tutto dedicato al tema, il *kitāb al-samāʿ*; autori suoi contemporanei quali Abū-Talib al-Makki (m. 996) o Abu Bakr al-Kalābādhī (m. ca. 990) inseriscono nei loro trattati

²⁹ Il termine persiano *darwīš*, così come i suoi equivalenti arabi *mišqin* e *faqīr*, significa letteralmente "povero".

³⁰ Pourjavady, 1989: 22 cit. in During, 1996: 159-60.

³¹ Cfr. Robson, 1938.

³² Shiloah, 1997: 145.

dei capitoli nei quali difendono la pratica con argomenti da giuristi e teologi, interpretando *ahādīth* (“detti”) del Profeta e massime dei primissimi maestri sufi quali Dhu’l-Nun al-Misrī (796-859). Diverso il caso di Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāġ (m. 988) che tocca il tema del *samā’* nel suo fondamentale *Kitāb al-luma’ fi’l-tasawwuf* (“Il libro degli splendori del sufismo”).

Intorno all’XI secolo si ha un secondo gruppo di trattati dedicati al *samā’*, composti, secondo Pourjavādy, senza l’affanno di dover reagire tempestivamente alle accuse dei benpensanti e dei giuristi, anche se in essi resta un evidente atteggiamento difensivo. Tra essi sveltano i passaggi contenuti nelle opere di al-Quṣayrī (986-1072), al-Huġwīrī (ca. 990-1077) e del grande al-Ġazālī (1058-1111).

Tra il XIII e il XIV secolo si ha una terza fase segnata dalle opere di Šayḥ Ahmad-e Ġam (1048-1141), Ruzbehan Baqli di Širaz (1128–1209), Naġm al-Dīn Kubrā (1145-1221), ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāšānī (1252/61-1329/35), Ahmad Tūsī (XIV secolo). Tutti questi autori, secondo Pourjavādy, tengono in considerazione l’aspetto sociale e rituale del *samā’*, argomentando razionalmente le loro difese. Nel frattempo, la lirica di lingua persiana si riempie di scene di *samā’* e di accenni al valore dell’ascolto, magari argomentati da alcuni strumenti musicali che diventano dei simboli in sé, come il flauto *ney*.

Secondo Jean During³³, dopo il XV secolo la questione del *samā’* sembra esaurita e non sarebbe stata composta più alcuna letteratura originale, ad eccezione delle continue rimitazioni sul tema fatte da chi aveva posto il *samā’* al centro della propria via, come i dervisci *Mevlevī*, meglio noti come “dervisci rotanti”, diffusi nel vasto mondo ottomano-turco, oppure come i dervisci *Čiṣṭi* indo-pakistani. Tra queste vanno ricordate le opere, ancora troppo poco note, dell’autore nord-indiano noto come Banda Nawaz Gisu Darāz (1321-Gulbarga, 1422)³⁴ appartenente alla *Čiṣṭiyya* indo-pakistana.

³³ During, 1996: 160.

³⁴ Su questo poco noto autore cfr. Hussaini, 1983; Hussaini 2001. Si veda anche Bigelow, 2004.

Se le prime tracce del *samāʿ* appaiono a Baghdad, l'incontro cerimoniale si diffuse rapidamente nelle vicine aree iranica, anatolica, indo-afgana e centroasiatica, per attecchire solo in un secondo momento in area araba.

Il samāʿ come pratica spirituale

Durante un *samāʿ* si possono avere tra i praticanti intensi stati interiori che i trattatisti sufi definirono in tre gradi: *tawāḡḡud*, *waḡḡd* e *wuḡḡūd*. Se il primo termine indica lo “sforzo”, il raccoglimento nell'ascolto, il secondo può essere inteso come “estasi” mentre il terzo come “enstasi”. In realtà, si tratta di un gioco di parole, basato sulla radice araba <w-ḡ-d> che gioca sull'ambiguità dei verbi “cercare” e “trovare”, con il quale si aggira la questione nella sua indicibilità.³⁵ Si parla spesso, invece, soprattutto nel mondo persiano, di uno stato emozionale passeggero detto *ḥāl* (“stato, stato di grazia”, al plurale, *aḥwāl*) che sopraggiunge, tocca profondamente, commuove e muta l'ascoltatore per poi andarsene così com'è venuto. Nella tradizione araba, invece, assume un'importanza centrale il concetto di *ṭarāb*, termine derivato dal greco *therapia*, sublimazione del piacere, sorta di fortissima emozione estatica; così come anche *saltāna ṭarāb*, concentrazione ed elevazione di una simile emozione estatica.

I vari stati interiori possono avere come corollario dei movimenti fisici (*raqs*) che i maestri raccomandano di trattenere e controllare finché possibile: se e quando infine si scatenano, essi rappresentano la manifestazione, l'estrinsecazione stessa dell'estasi

³⁵ Molti autori della tradizione sufi hanno trattato la questione. Una selezione molto ampia, ancor oggi insuperata, in Daring, 2013 (ed. or. 1988). Di riferimento anche: Lewisohn, 1997. Per un inquadramento della produzione trattatistica persiana medioevale, non solo di provenienza *sufi*, Fallahzade, 2005. Si rinvia il lettore anche a Ghazālī, 1999. Si tratta della traduzione dall'arabo del capitolo VII intitolato *kitāb ādāb al-samāʿ wa-l-waḡḡd* (“Libro sulle buone condotte da tenersi nel *samāʿ* e nell'estasi”) dal libro IV del monumentale *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (“La vivificazione delle scienze della religione”) composto da Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (Tūs, 1058/59 – 1111). Sembra utile questa sua distinzione: “Devi sapere che l'estasi (*waḡḡd*) si suddivide ulteriormente in ciò che insorge da sé e ciò che si ingenera a forza: questo secondo tipo di estasi è detto *tawāḡḡud*.” Ghazālī, 1999: 70.

e della benedizione (*baraka*) che con essa giunge all'intera comunità dei presenti, quasi a garanzia della bontà dello stato condiviso da tutti. I movimenti possono essere di carattere individuale o collettivo, così come possono avere, o meno, una struttura formale prefissata: in tutti i casi è emicamente scorretto definirli "danza".

Troviamo testimonianze di posture e movimenti fisici in area mediorientale e centroasiatica grazie a numerose miniature e a numerosi accenni che si hanno nelle opere di poeti e trattatisti dall'epoca medioevale in avanti. Alcune posture e movimenti fisici sono divenuti degli stereotipi nell'immaginario collettivo globalizzato, soprattutto nel caso delle cosiddette "danze dei dervisci rotanti" che nei secoli attrassero invariabilmente l'attenzione di viaggiatori e osservatori occidentali.³⁶

Più in generale va notato come, secondo la trattatistica *sufi*, tutti questi "stati" siano *precedenti* all'ascolto stesso, preesistenti e latenti nell'ascoltatore: non sono la musica, o la poesia, che producono l'estasi, come spesso si ritiene, ma esse piuttosto la rivelano, la fanno ricordare. L'estasi originaria si sarebbe avuta nella Preeternità, durante il cosiddetto *mīlāq* ("patto primordiale") testimoniato dal Corano stesso (VII:172 ss.): il Signore chiese agli spiriti (*rūḥ*, pl. *arwāḥ*)³⁷ li raccolti: *A lastu bi-Rabbikum?* "Non sono dunque io il vostro Signore?". Ed essi avrebbero risposto: *Bal, šahīdnā* "Sì, lo attestiamo".³⁸ Nella gioia e nell'estasi essi avrebbero allora accettato di incarnarsi e sarebbe iniziato quel tempo storico che giunge sino a quest'attimo presente.

³⁶ Reazioni di fronte alle cerimonie dei dervisci *mevlevī* ("dervisci rotanti") e, insieme, loro descrizioni da parte di viaggiatori occidentali in visita a Costantinopoli, spesso corredate da trascrizioni musicali, ritratti e acqueforti in De Zorzi, 2019a.

³⁷ Nella tradizione islamica permane la differenza, presente anche nel Cristianesimo originario, tra *rūḥ*, "spirito, animo" di natura divina, immateriale, preesistente (la "scintilla", la luce divina degli gnostici) e *nafs*, "anima, ego", di altra natura.

³⁸ Come nota Jean During, le affermazioni che riportano a questo "sì" (nell'accezione persiana, *bale*) costituiscono alcuni dei ritornelli e dei testi più diffusi nei canti di matrice sufi d'area iranica e ottomano-turca. Cfr. During, 2013: 40.

Secondo l'interpretazione dei sufi di questo passaggio coranico, tale riconoscimento avrebbe prodotto nei presenti uno stato di estasi e di dolcezza che è sempre presente, latente, sebbene rimosso, nell'animo umano. Nella concezione sufi, quando l'essere umano pratica il *dikr* o presta ascolto (*samā'*) riemerge il ricordo rimosso di questo "tempo prima del tempo", con la sua indicibile dolcezza, dando vita a stati estatici di diversa intensità e gradazione.

Considerazioni estetiche

Applicando quanto esposto dai primi trattatisti, è l'atto di *ascoltare* in sé ad essere l'elemento fondamentale del *samā'*. Cosa si ascolta conta meno di *chi*, *come* e *perch* ascolta, del suo grado di raccoglimento, di sincerità.

Se è vero che la pratica del *samā'* ha portato alla nascita di specifiche composizioni vocali e strumentali, di precisi generi e cicli ritmici così come alla riscoperta di dati strumenti musicali, investiti di nuova vita, è scorretto parlare di "musica sufi", come vogliono le etichette (*tag*) presenti in *Spotify* o in *YouTube* (apposte un tempo a LP, musicassette e CD): non esiste la "musica sufi" ma il suono ascoltato e/o praticato *dai* sufi. Per questo serve un *altro* approccio e un *altro* orecchio. Questi versi di Mawlanā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1273) mi sembrano piuttosto espliciti:

Nel nostro *samā'* non siamo consapevoli del suono del flauto o del tamburo,

Nel *samā'* i sufi ascoltano un altro suono, che proviene dal Trono divino.

Tu ascolti la forma del *samā'*, ma essi ascoltano con un altro orecchio.

Così come, anche:

Tu hai bisogno dell'orecchio del cuore, non di quello del corpo.³⁹

³⁹ I primi tre versi provengono dal *Divān* di Mawlanā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1273) mentre il verso isolato dal suo *Masnavī*. Entrambi compaiono in Daring, 1994: 166 (T.d.A.) senza ulteriori precisazioni bibliografiche.

Per secoli i repertori nati per il *samāʿ* vennero trasmessi oralmente/auralmente, ma in diversi casi vennero poi trascritti grazie a varie forme di notazione. In tempi più recenti i repertori vennero registrati in vari formati audio e più tardi vennero filmati, così che oggi abbiamo una mole di testimonianze sul *samāʿ*, come dimostrano le molte tracce presenti oggi nel web. Il vastissimo corpus di questi repertori può essere inteso come un patrimonio immateriale che giunge da lontano, e va notato che, nonostante le molte difficoltà, gli equivoci della *World Music*, la perdita di ogni identità culturale nel mare della globalizzazione, i repertori nati per il *samāʿ* vengono praticati tutt'ora da una confraternita all'altra nel vasto mondo del sufismo. Vanno ricordati i repertori della *Mevlevīyye*, meglio noti in Occidente come “dervisci rotanti”, formati per le cerimonie molto sofisticate dette *āym*, della durata di circa un'ora, nelle quali interagiscono musica d'arte, poesia, e movimenti fisici; restando in area turco-ottomana, va ricordato il *corpus* dei *nefes* (“soffi”, lett. “anime”) della *Bektaşīyye* a Costantinopoli, confraternita oggi diffusa tra Balcani e Turchia contemporanea, così come gli *zīkr* vocali e strumentali della *Halvetīyye*, e i repertori del ramo *Halveti-Ġerrāhi* (turco, *Cerrahī*).

Nell'attuale Iran il sufismo è molto mal visto, se non decisamente represso, e con questo anche ogni forma di *samāʿ* ma è lo stesso enorme *corpus* della musica d'arte (*radīf*) permeato in ogni sua piega del pensiero sufi, che traspare dai testi cantati, così come accade anche per tutti i testi dello *šāš maqom* centroasiatico che provengono molto spesso da autori che percorsero in prima persona, o furono idealmente vicini, ad una data via sufi.

Nel mondo indo-pakistano sveltano i repertori tipici della *Ġišīyya*, appartenenti al genere *qawwālī*. In Asia centrale, nonostante il lungo periodo russo-sovietico di repressione verso ogni forma di spiritualità, sopravvivono *zīkr* sonori, vocali (*ġahrī*) che, secondo testimonianze raccolte da chi scrive, negli anni 1940/50 potevano essere accompagnati da strumenti musicali, mentre ai confini con la Cina, tra gli Uiguri dell'attuale Xinjiang.

Ricerche ancora in corso prendono in esame le influenze del sufismo e del *samāʿ* nel mondo del Sudest Asiatico.

Nel mondo di lingua araba vanno ricordati i *dīkr* della *Šādiliyya*, le cerimonie per la *ḥadra* che si svolgono in vari luoghi dall’Egitto al Maghreb. In Marocco vanno ricordati i repertori per la *trance*, ai confini tra sufismo e culture spirituali preesistenti, degli Gnawa.

Complessivamente, questi rituali sonori richiedono allo studioso e all’ascoltatore un approccio su vari livelli (musicologico, sociologico, antropologico, letterario, poetico, storico) che tenga conto, innanzitutto, delle concezioni e delle fini elaborazioni concettuali “emiche” sorte nel *taṣawwuf* in tempi remoti, che restano sempre pienamente attive nel presente.

Ascoltando gli strumenti

Se avessi ancora spazio, lettore, le parlerei di strumenti musicali, delle loro storie, dei loro maestri: posso solo *elenicare* qui alcuni tra gli strumenti più importanti delle musiche d’arte, spesso utilizzati anche per il *samā’*. Tra i cordofoni il liuto a manico corto *‘ūd*, il liuto a manico lungo *tanbūr*, il liuto a manico lungo *setār*, il liuto a manico lungo *tār* (entrambi diffusi soprattutto in area persiana). Tra le cetre, la cetra su tavola pizzicata *qānūn* e la cetra su tavola percossa *santūr*. Tra le vielle ad arco il *kamānče* persiano e azero, il *rbāb* arabo andaluso, il *kemençe-i rûmî* ottomano, il violino eurocolto (*kemān*); le vielle ad arco a manico lungo come lo *yaylı tanbūr* ottomano e il *satō/satār* centroasiatico. Tra gli aerofoni, i flauti detti *nāy*, nell’accezione araba, *ney* in quella persiana e ottomana, *nai* nel mondo centroasiatico. Tra i membranofoni, i tamburi a cornice *daf*, *dāyre*, *bendir*, *mazhar* e i tamburi a calice *zār* o *tombak*, *riqq*, *ṭabl*, *darabukka*, insieme ai timpani *naqqare* e *kūdūm*. Tra gli idiofoni i piatti *zīl*, o *halīle*. Da tempo sono entrati gli elettrofoni nei panorami musicali del mondo islamico, ovviamente, e un capitolo a parte sarebbe da dedicare alla voce, modello di ogni strumento, e alle sue declinazioni a seconda delle aree.

Lo spazio però non c’è più, com’è giusto per un articolo, e mi congedo quindi da lei augurandole buona continuazione in questo volume.

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Epistle 5 of the Brethren of Purity “On Music”

Carmela Baffioni

(Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei; Emerita Università L’Orientale;
The Institute of Ismaili Studies)

Abstract

Music is extensively treated in the entire encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’), probably written in the first half of the 10th century. The paper will focus on part of the contents of Epistle 5, entitled ‘On Music’. They transcend the technical features of the musical discipline and are not only linked to the general approach of ‘education’ according to the Ikhwanian encyclopaedia, but to its philosophical vision that, with regard to music, combines esotericism and mystical experience.

Keywords

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, encyclopaedias, physical laws of music, spiritual value of music

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ are the authors of the oldest Medieval encyclopaedia of knowledge, which appeared at least two centuries before the best-known examples in Latin. They speak extensively and from various perspectives about music, but in the interest of brevity, I will focus on some of the more didactic contents of the Epistle devoted to music.¹ Few things are more didactic than an encyclopaedia, but for the *Ikhwān*, the aspects of

¹ I refer to Bustānī 1957. For the new critical edition of Epistle 5, with English translation and commentary in the collection of The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London), see Wright 2010. I will indicate the pages of this translation corresponding to the quoted passages.

musical teaching go far beyond the technical elements of the discipline.

At the outset, the authors observe that there is a “physical” music – singing and playing musical instruments – and a “spiritual” music – the art of harmony. The purpose of the Epistle is to explain what harmony is, from the knowledge of which ability in all the arts is derived.² Music appeals to spiritual entities – the souls of listeners – and its influence on them is spiritual. It can alleviate strenuous labour, arouse courage in battle, excite hidden rancour, soothe anger, establish peace and promote affection and love. Some music can move souls from one state to the opposite. This is why music is played at banquets and funerals, in places of prayer, at festivals, in markets, in homes, while travelling, while resting, in repose and when fatigued. It is enjoyed by kings as well as ordinary people, or as the authors say: “[... by] men and women, boys and old people, the learned and uneducated, artisans, merchants and all classes of society”.³

These words might lead us to assume that the *Ikhwān*, the aristocrats *par excellence* in Islamic thought, consider music a ‘democratic’ art. But its origin belongs to the wise. Special emphasis is placed on the use of music by religious Lawgivers, whose model is the prophet David.⁴ In this case, music is intended to promote “the refinement of hearts, submission and humiliation of souls, obedience to the commands and prohibitions of God [...], repentance of sins and return to God, [...] through the use of the Traditions of the Laws as they have been laid out.”⁵

There is thus a “good” use of music. In the absence of an absolute legal statute on the permissibility of music in Islam, the *ulama*’ often resort to the *niyya* or “intent”, as a criterion. At this point, the *Ikhwān* consider what prompted wise men – not the prophets – to lay down the Laws and make use of the religious traditions. When faced with “the auspicious and inauspicious events determined by the stars, at the beginning of conjunctions

² Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 183, 11-12; cf. Wright 2010: 75.

³ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 185, 22-23; cf. Wright 2010: 81.

⁴ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 186, 7-9; cf. Wright 2010: 81.

⁵ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 186, 11-13; cf. Wright 2010: 81-82.

and cycles – price fluctuations, sterility and fertility, droughts, plagues and epidemics, domination of the evil and the like,”⁶ those wise men found no more effective means to save themselves from such events than having recourse to the “traditions of the divine Laws” – fasting, prayer, sacrifice and invocation to God. They believed that if they implored God with pure hearts, He would protect them from what they feared, unveil the reasons for affliction, forgive them and restore them to His favour. For this purpose, they played ‘melancholic’ music intended to purify hearts and induce remorse and repentance.⁷

This indicates a belief that is far from divine in origin and a use of prayer that is at the very least utilitarian, even though the *Ikhwān*’s origin is often ascribed to shi‘ism and even isma‘ilism. But I wonder if these words do not overshadow the very shi‘i idea of *badā’*: this is a term that literally means ‘appearance’ or ‘emergence’, which in turn indicates the emergence of new circumstances that may influence a divine decision.

After this digression – an unusual one in the general context of the encyclopaedia – the *Ikhwān* introduce the kinds of music intended for various purposes: the ‘inciting’ [*mušagǧī*] kind, used in battles; the kind used in hospitals at dawn to relieve the pain of illnesses and to cure them; the consoling kind for funerals; the kind that alleviates fatigue in the strenuous work of porters, masons, sailors and captains of vessels; the kind for joyful events; the kind intended for animals (during caravan journeys or to drive animals to drink in oases, to excite them to mount, to produce milk, to enable men to catch small birds with their hands); and the kind for calming and putting children to sleep.⁸ In doing this, they propose an interesting insight into the society of the time – as so often in the encyclopaedia – and once again affirm the universal value of music.

This is followed by a series of technical definitions. With regard to the mode of perception of sounds through the faculty of

⁶ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 186, 16-18; cf. Wright 2010: 82.

⁷ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 186, 19-187, 7; cf. Wright 2010: 82-83.

⁸ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 187, 18-188, 8; cf. Wright 2010: 83-84.

hearing, for example, sounds are explained as a burst formed in the air by the mutual collision of particles. Because it is so diffuse and because its particles move so quickly, air penetrates all bodies. And when one particle makes contact with another the air between them radiates outwards in a wave-like pattern, forming a spherical figure that expands like a blown-glass vase: the more it expands, the more its movement and wave-like vibration weaken until it disappears. When the moving air penetrates into the auditory passages at the back of the brain it produces a wave-like movement, at which point the auditory faculty perceives the movement and change and hence a sound is heard.⁹

Because of its thinness, air is able to transmit each sound with its own qualities unmixed with those of another sound. Sounds are conveyed from the auditory system to the imaginative faculty located in the front part of the brain.¹⁰ The *Ikhwān* explain how the various sounds are formed by mutual collision of particles – the noise of thunder, wind and water and the sounds of air-breathing and winged animals – and conclude: “Dumb animals, such as fish, crabs, turtles and the like, are such because they have neither lungs nor wings”.¹¹ This amounts to a true encyclopaedia of nature within the musical world.

After observing the variety of musical instruments, the Epistle goes into more technical topics. In the context of the “accord and contrast between sounds”, the effect of sounds on the mixtures – or temperaments – of bodies (a salient point of the Epistle) is explained as follows:

High-pitched sounds are warm, and apt to warm and lighten the mixture of the dense humours arising from the bodily humours [al-kīmūsāt]; low-pitched sounds are cold and apt to moisten the mixture of the hot-dry humours arising from the bodily humours. And intermediate sounds between high and low pitch preserve the balanced mixture of the bodily humours.¹²

⁹ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 188, 13 and 189, 4-13; cf. Wright 2010: 85 and 86-87.

¹⁰ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 189, 15-17; cf. Wright 2010: 87.

¹¹ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 192, 5-6; cf. Wright 2010: 91.

¹² Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 195, 10-13; cf. Wright 2010: 96-97.

Harsh sounds, by contrast, are terrifying and have no harmonic relation. When they reach the listener instantaneously and suddenly, they corrupt the humours and unbalance them. The effect is instant death. Last, intermediate sounds between gentle and harsh balance the humours and delight the spirits.¹³ Every mixture of humours and animal nature has its own music. Everyone will take pleasure for a certain time in a melody for which, at another time, he feels aversion and pain, just as happens with foods, drinks, perfumes, clothes and other pleasant things, depending on the changes in the mixtures of temperaments, the diversity of natures, the composition of bodies, places and times.¹⁴ All this confirms the empiricism of the *Ikhwān* in their observations.

The foundations and laws of music are related to the numerological view of the universe contained in the encyclopaedia:

[...] the attack is like the number one, the sabab like the number two, the watid like three, the fāšila like four; and all the notes of melodies and singing are composed of these, just as all numbers are composed of four, three, two and one [the Pythagorean tetrad].¹⁵

The authors then trace similar parallels with the categories of logic: substance is like unity, and the other nine categories are like the nine units; there are the physical dimensions – substance, length, width, and depth; and there are ontological principles – the Creator is one, the Intellect is two, the Soul is three and Matter four.¹⁶

¹³ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 195, 14-19; cf. Wright 2010: 97.

¹⁴ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 196, 2-15; cf. Wright 2010: 97-98.

¹⁵ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 199, 11-14; cf. Wright 2010: 105:

“x is like 1,
x o is like 2,
x x o is like 3, and
x x x o is like 4”.

At n. 110 Wright explains: “The text here has just *ḥaraka* rather than ‘*naqra mutaharrika*’ (or ‘*ḥarf mutaharrik*’), but the ‘movement’ must be taken as appended to an understood attack, hence the use of ‘x’ as the equivalent. The following three symbolizations correspond to the terms *sabab*, *watid*, and *fāšila* respectively”.

¹⁶ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 199, 14-20; cf. Wright 2010: 105-106.

The whole ontology is summarized thus: all creatures are made up of Matter and Form invented by the Universal Soul; the Universal Soul springs from the Universal Intellect; the Intellect is originated by the Creator's command; and God originated the Intellect from nothing and informed in it all things in potentiality and in actuality.¹⁷ The didactic purpose of the epistle is now made clear: "[...] to explain to the experts in every art the unity of the Creator [...] through their art, so that [this unity] may be closer to understanding, clearer for proof and more evident for demonstration."¹⁸ The *Ikhwān* then move on to musical instruments and their construction. The most perfect instrument is the lute. Its construction is explained in this way:

[...] by way of introduction and premises, so that it may be an incitement to the souls of those who seek the philosophical sciences and study the propaedeutic matters. We shall explain to them the subtleties of wisdom and the secrets of the arts, which are all indications of the Wise Maker Who is the Creator [...], that is, He who created the artisans and inspired in them the first arts, wisdom, sciences, and knowledge; and God is the best of creators and the wisest of wise.¹⁹

This construction is based on the "perfect and noble proportion",²⁰ which enables souls to take pleasure in the sounds produced because those sounds "are comparable to the sounds of the celestial individuals" such that souls will yearn to ascend to heaven – the abode of saved souls.²¹

The sphere – the "fifth nature" in terms of the *Timaeus* – produce sounds because:

[...] it is not in opposition to natural bodies in every attribute, but only in some of them: its bodies are neither hot nor cold nor moist, but dry and harder than ruby, and they are purer than air,

¹⁷ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 199, 20-23. The passage is missing in Owen's new edition.

¹⁸ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 199, 24-200, 1; cf. Wright 2010: 106.

¹⁹ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 202, 20-203, 2; cf. Wright 2010: 112-113.

²⁰ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 203, 9; cf. Wright 2010: 113.

²¹ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 205, 17-22; cf. Wright 2010: 117.

more transparent than crystal, and more polished than the surface of a mirror: as such, they are in contact with each other, clash and rub against each other, and then ring.²²

If the movements of the spheres had no sound or music, their inhabitants would have no benefit from the hearing faculty they possess. And they cannot but possess it: if they did not have faculties such as hearing they would be deaf, dumb, and blind, like inorganic entities. But the dwellers of the spheres are the angels of God and the cream of His servants, who hear, see, understand, know, recite the Qur'an and glorify God night and day without ever tiring, producing melodies more beautiful than those of David or those of expertly constructed lutes. Unlike these, they do not possess smell, taste and touch that are needed by animals that consume food and drink and must therefore be able to distinguish between what is useful and what is harmful.²³

Thanks to the purity of the substance of his soul and the sharpness of his heart, the sage Pythagoras heard the music produced by the movements of the spheres and stars and so discovered the foundations of music. After him came Nicomachus, Ptolemy, Euclid, and other wise men. Their purpose when they made use of music in temples, places of prayer and sacrifices was to soften hearts and remind careless souls of the joy of their spiritual world.²⁴

In contrast to this, however, the *Ikhwān* explain why certain Laws of the prophets – of the prophets this time, and not of the wise – have banned music: because the use that people make of it is not in accordance with that of the wise (i.e. to arouse the memory and desire for the hereafter) but for fun and amusement and lust for worldly pleasures.²⁵ Such use can lead those people – the majority – to believe that: “[...] there is no pleasure nor grace nor joy nor gladness outside these sensible ones of which they have direct experience, and [...] the grace of Paradise is a

²² Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 203, 13-16; cf. Wright 2010: 118.

²³ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 206, 20-207, 8; cf. Wright 2010: 118-119.

²⁴ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 208, 16-24; cf. Wright 2010: 121-122.

²⁵ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 210, 16-18; cf. Wright 2010: 124-125.

falsehood.”²⁶ This passage precisely echoes Qur’an 31:6,²⁷ the only verse on which those who condemn music can rely, according to the interpretation of many traditionists.

Finally, the *Ikhwān* associate prophets with sages:

The aim of the prophets when they laid down human and divine laws and the aim of the sages when they laid down the rules of politics was not only the smooth running of worldly affairs, but jointly the wellness of religion and the world. Their utmost aim was the salvation of souls from the tribulations of the world and the misery of its inhabitants, and their union with the happiness of the hereafter and the grace of its inhabitants.²⁸

When melodies and notes reach human souls through hearing and are understood as such, they no longer need to exist in the air, just as concepts no longer need to be written on tablets once one has understood and remembered them.²⁹ Similarly, when particular souls have reached perfection, their bodies are destroyed

[...] either by natural or accidental death, or by sacrifice in the way of God [...] and those souls are taken out of those bodies as pearls are taken out of the shells, the embryo out of the womb, the seed out of its husk [tegument], and the fruit out of the peel. And another stage (*amr*) begins for them [...], just as another stage begins for pearls when they are freed from the shells and become true pearls, and so is the rule for fruits and seeds when they reach full maturity, [...] and another cycle begins again for them.³⁰

The same occurs to the souls of sacrificed animals. Therefore, when the Lawgivers allowed them to be killed in temples, it was

²⁶ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 211, 1-3; cf. Wright 2010: 125.

²⁷ “But there are, among men, those who purchase idle tales, without knowledge (or meaning), to mislead (men) from the Path of Allah and throw ridicule (on the Path); for such there will be a humiliating penalty.” Yusuf Ali 2000: 342.

²⁸ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 211, 9-13; cf. Wright 2010: 125-126.

²⁹ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 211, 14-18; cf. Wright 2010: 126.

³⁰ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 211, 20-212, 6; cf. Wright 2010: 126.

not just to eat their flesh but to free their souls from the lowest levels of the Gehenna of the world of generation and corruption, and to enable them to be transformed into human form, which is "the last gate into the Gehenna of the world of generation and corruption".³¹

We must inevitably recognize here a form of metempsychosis, or rather of *nasūhiyya*, which indicates the transition from a lower to a higher body. We note that the *Ikhwān* continue in their particular approach and in this case in doctrinal extremism as well. Later the *Ikhwān* discuss the four strings of the lute and place the instrument in parallel with a series of beings of a fourfold nature. Here is an example:

<i>zīr</i> Fire	<i>matnā</i> Air	<i>mallat</i> Water	<i>bamm</i> Earth
Strengthens the yellow bile and thins the phlegm	Strengthens blood and softens black bile	Strengthens phlegm and breaks up the thinness of yellow bile	Strengthens the black bile while calming the boiling of the blood ³²

For that reason, music has also therapeutic properties.³³ The width of any chord is equal to that of the lower chord plus one-third, in imitation of the measurement of the spheres, each equal to one and one-third times the lower sphere: in succession: the sphere of the Aether or Fire; the sphere of the *Zamharīr*; the sphere of the *Nasīm*; the sphere of Water; and the sphere of Earth.³⁴

A long discussion follows on the reciprocal proportions of chords, the relationships between the geometric solids, which have symbolized the elements since Euclid's time, and the proportions of the limbs and organs of the human body. The arrangement of spheres and stars, their measurements and

³¹ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 212, 6-11; cf. Wright 2010: 126-127.

³² Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 213, 13-19; cf. Wright 2010: 129.

³³ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 214, 1-2; cf. Wright 2010: 130.

³⁴ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 214, 9-12; cf. Wright 2010: 130 where *Zamharīr* is explained as "bitter cold" and *Nasīm* as "air".

perfect proportion with the elements and their mutually related movements and melodies will remove all doubts regarding the existence of a wise Maker Who created them and Who induces the desire to ascend to the world of the spheres and to listen to and study their music. This was the case with Hermes Trismegistus, whom the *Ikhwān* compare with the prophet Idris (cf. Qur'an 19:57) and Pythagoras.³⁵

Another well-known theme follows: that life in this world for embodied souls³⁶ is comparable to the presence of an embryo in the womb from the day of conception until the day of birth. Death is merely the separation of the soul from the body, just as childbirth is merely the separation of the embryo from the womb.³⁷ In both cases, the *Ikhwān* say elsewhere, it is a matter of bringing something to completion: the perfection of the soul for its entrance into Paradise, and that of the foetus for its entrance into the world. The *Ikhwān* then return to the laws of Arabic melodies, followed by a long chapter on the "Consideration of Fourfold Things".³⁸

According to the principle that when similar things are joined together in harmonic proportion their strengths multiply, reference is made to medicines and talismans that are based on this principle and to the "magic square" for facilitating childbirth:

[...] when the nine numbers are inscribed on it in the ninth month of gestation, at the ninth hour of labour, and the lord of the ascendant is in the ninth [house], or the lord of the ninth [house is found] in the ascendant, or the moon is found in the ninth [house], or in conjunction with a star [placed] in the ninth [house], and similar relations with the nine.³⁹

³⁵ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 225, 19-226, 4; cf. Wright 2010: 148.

³⁶ The term *mutaḡassid* is interesting: it reflects the Platonic conception of the pre-existence of souls in bodies, in open contrast to the Muslim conception and also to the *Ikhwān*'s ideas on sensation as the basis of knowledge.

³⁷ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 226, 16-18; cf. Wright 2010: 149.

³⁸ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 229, 2-232, 21; cf. Wright 2010: 154-159.

³⁹ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 232, 17-21; cf. Wright 2010: 159 where *muttaṣil* is translated as 'aspect'. Cf. Baffioni 2013: 218, n. 104.

After this long digression, the *Ikhwān* return to the various kinds of music. The last part of the epistle gives several anecdotes of philosophers and music in the form of wise sayings, followed by stories about the various influences of sounds on souls. These are of a mystical and ecstatic nature and culminate in quotations of stories from the Tradition and the Qur’an.⁴⁰ The last point to make is that the course of the Epistle is discontinuous. The so-called “didactic” parts contain elements that are alien to the subject and incorporate strong Platonic and Neo-Platonic themes.

Let me conclude by considering the treatment of music in the *Risāla al-ġāmi‘a* – the “crown of the Epistles” that clarifies their esoteric meanings, where the Epistle on music is the fourth, and not the fifth. Here the authors repeat that music was discovered by the wise and fixed by the ancient philosophers and scholars thanks to their pure and chaste souls, brilliant spirits, sound intellects and subtle minds. When melodies are in the noble proportion, they influence the souls of listeners as medicines, potions and therapy does with the body.

This is a summary of the “non-technical” part of the treatise, perfectly in line with the contents of the encyclopaedia.⁴¹ More space is dedicated to the representation of the celestial world evoked by music:

[...] the world of the heavens and the vast space of the spheres are the dwellings of spiritual beings and the habitations of the angels nearest to God⁴². They [are] the world of life and the space of rest and satisfaction.⁴³ Their inhabitants do not taste death like men and do not receive it like the souls attached to bodies [and] placed in the abode of tribulation. They [are in] the garden of bliss,⁴⁴ [from] which those who reach there derive the greatest

⁴⁰ Bustānī 1957: vol. 1, 234, 11-241, 7; cf. Wright 2010: 162-175.

⁴¹ Since the new edition prepared by Wilferd Madelung and Mourad Kacimi for the IIS is not yet published, I refer to Ġālib 1984. Reference in this case is to p. 97, 3-10. The technical part of the treatise is disregarded.

⁴² The expression *al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn* is found in Qur’an 4:172 (Yusuf Ali’s transl.).

⁴³ These words are found in Qur’an 56:89 (Yusuf Ali’s transl.).

⁴⁴ The expression *janna na‘īm* is found in Qur’an 70:38 (Yusuf Ali’s transl.).

happiness and the highest degree and reach the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass.⁴⁵

The purpose of the epistle, is therefore:

to arouse the desire of rational, human and angelic souls, purified by the propaedeutic [and] mathematical sciences, by the physical-natural, rational-spiritual and legal-metaphysical [sciences] [...] Up to there [...] they ascend with the spirits of those who avail themselves of the vision of the heart, the prophets, the truthful, the witnesses, the good and the believers that possess the secrets, and are endowed with mental vision – the people of certainty.⁴⁶

The learner is invited to attain the same level as these wise men and the gnostic, the “natural dispositions of whose sound intellects” are supported by their “acquired intellects” – that is the intellect of those who have reached the degree of a philosopher – and the “well-guiding teacher” – that is, by virtue of the direct illumination of the Active Intellect.⁴⁷ The perfection of the art and the precision of the instrument indicate the wisdom of the Maker:

[...] Whose work [is] the most solid and Whose wisdom [is] the most perfect. [The world is] an existing, innovated, originated, and invented [being], coming from nothing; [...] it has an end to which it ends, and this is the purpose. [...] The goal of the Maker [...] in His world [is] to bring it to the degree of completeness; [...] that when it receives the universal emanation and the divine generosity and rids itself of the murky stains, He [raises it] to the state of eternal duration and permanence in the noblest of states. [...] And since the goal of the musician [...] is for souls to be delighted [...], and that when the souls hear what comes from him [...] they [...] long for eternal permanence [...] easily endure calamities, this world is of little importance to them, [...] and bear witness to the higher substances. In view of this the wise worked with this instrument as they worked [...]. For this [reason] [...] we have drawn to them the attention of careless souls [...]

⁴⁵ Ġālib 1984: 97, 17-98, 5. The expression *sidrat al-muntahā* occurs in Qur'an 53:14 (Yusuf Ali's transl.).

⁴⁶ Ġālib 1984: 98, 5-11.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98, 17-99, 1.

who took them for [...] amusement and entertainment [...]. Perhaps [...] they will be awakened from the sleep of negligence, roused from the slumber of ignorance, and recover from the drunkenness of error.⁴⁸

This terminology is entirely initiatory, and it therefore appears certain that the *Ġāmi'a* should be approached only by those who have already mastered the basics of sciences as set out in the encyclopaedia, including the science of music.

Conclusions

This paper briefly reviews *Epistle 5 of the Brethren of Purity*, which is dedicated to music. The Epistle deals with the discipline of music beyond its technical aspects and the physical laws that govern it, linking it to a philosophical, esoteric and mystical vision. Music is presented as a universal art that influences individuals and societies, with applications ranging from the sacred to the secular, and with strong connections to religious law and spiritual salvation.

The first means of establishing the universality of music, as is always the case in the encyclopaedia, is recourse to Platonic and neo-Platonic numerology; however, the spirituality of the ancients (e.g. Pythagoras) also plays a key role. The esoteric meanings of music are explored in depth in the *Risāla al-ġāmi'a*, which is only accessible to those who have completed the curriculum described in the encyclopaedia. The *Risāla al-ġāmi'a*, as I trust has also become apparent from the quotations presented here, does in fact comprise the knowledge of the imams.

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⁴⁸ Ibid., 99, 9-100, 15.

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Samā' e estasi (wağd) nelle riflessioni del teologo Al-Ġazālī e del poeta persiano Sa'dī

Carlo Saccone
(Università di Bologna)

Abstract

Scopo di questo contributo è di presentare e mettere a confronto le posizioni di due grandi maestri e intellettuali dell'Islam a proposito della musica: il teologo al-Ġazālī e il poeta persiano Sa'dī. Al-Ġazālī tratta dell'argomento nel capitolo sul *Samā'* (sessione di musica spirituale) e l'estasi (*wağd*) della sua famosa Summa teologica dal titolo *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (La rivivificazione delle scienze religiose). Sa'dī nelle sue due superbe opere mistiche, *Būstān* (Il Verziere) e *Golestān* (Il Giardino). Per entrambi gli autori, la musica è un'esperienza essenzialmente spirituale: strumento di elevazione e di iniziazione per l'adepto che vuole intraprendere la via (*tariqa*) dei sufi per al-Ġazālī; sublime espressione della 'follia' del poeta che vive unicamente della passione e dell'ebbrezza che suscita in lui l'Amato, per Sa'dī. In queste opere, gli effetti della musica sulla psiche sono dettagliatamente analizzati e l'immaterialità del suono, prodotto da strumenti materiali, diventa la sofisticata rappresentazione del sottilissimo rapporto che lega il creato con il suo Creatore.

Keywords

samā', wağd, al-Ġazālī, Sa'dī

*Un giovane dalle labbra dolci come zucchero apprese a suonare il flauto (ney)
così bene che [ascoltandolo] i cuori come la canna (ney) crepitavano nel fuoco
Il padre più volte per questo si era adirato con lui
e con asprezza e fuoco [di collera] colpiva quel flauto
Una notte egli volle prestare ascolto alle canzoni del figlio
e quella musica (samā') lo sconvolse facendolo uscire di senno
Così diceva e intanto il sudore gli colava tutto dal volto:
"In me stavolta la canna del flauto ha messo il suo fuoco!"*

*Non sai tu, gli ebbri e sconvolti d'amore
perch' mai agitano le mani nella danza?
Per le intime ispirazioni si spalanca una porta nel loro cuore
e [a quel punto] la mano scrollano [incuranti] sul resto delle creature
Lecito è per ciascuno di loro danzare al ricordo dell'Amico
ch' in ogni manica [agitata nella danza] ferve una vita novella*
(Sa'di, *Bustan*, ed. Yusofi, vv. 1934-40)

Fu domandato un giorno a Maometto da un discepolo:

“O messaggero di Dio – c'è qualcosa che tu riprovi nella musica o nel canto?” E Maometto rispose: “In ciò non c'è nulla che mi trovi contrario. Di' loro però che prima di cantare e dopo aver cantato recitino il Corano!”¹

Questo detto (*ḥadīth*), viene riferito da al-Ġazālī nel prezioso trattatello *Kitāb ādāb al-samā' wa l-waġd* (tradotto in italiano con “Il concerto mistico e l'estasi”) e ci suggerisce già qualcosa di fondamentale per il corretto inquadramento del tema “la musica nell'Islam”: il dato di fondo è una latente conflittualità tra il canto sacro (ricordiamo che spesso il Corano viene salmodiato) e il canto profano.

Due sono i termini chiave che ricorrono nel titolo dell'opera, che ora andiamo a esaminare brevemente.

1. Il primo termine è *samā'*, che etimologicamente significa “ascolto” o “audizione” di canto, ritmi, musica ecc. Il termine ha inoltre una sua accezione particolare nella mistica islamica o sufismo dove com'è noto indica sedute di preghiera comunitaria con canti e/o accompagnamento strumentale di flauti e altri strumenti, o persino con danze rituali.² Sicché col termine *samā'* si è finito per indicare attività diverse: il canto, la musica, la danza dei sufi e persino, come vedremo meglio più oltre, anche la poesia.³

Una forma particolare di *samā'* è la recitazione e l'ascolto del Corano che, di norma, viene salmodiato da cantori professionisti, secondo regole complesse. Peraltro il Corano com'è noto è scritto

¹ Al-Ġazālī 1999: 31.

² De Zorzi 2021.

³ Ambrosio 2006: 123-172.

in “prosa ritmata” (*sağ'*) e frequentemente rimata, cosa che come si può intuire lo rese da subito adatto a una salmodiazione (in arabo *tartīl*) in varie circostanze. Insomma sin dal tempo di Maometto vivente il *samā'* (‘ascolto’) del canto è sentito in competizione con il *samā'* per eccellenza, quello del Corano. Giova ricordare in proposito che secondo fonti tradizionali, il giovane profeta veniva spesso a bella posta disturbato da poeti-menestrelli che distoglievano il suo uditorio dall’ “ascolto” del verbo coranico che egli andava progressivamente rivelando ai meccani. Insomma la parola di Maometto, si può arguire, entrò da subito in competizione con quella di poeti e menestrelli. E non stupisce che in questo contesto un altro detto attribuito a Maometto reciti: “La poesia è il Corano di Satana!” e del resto, proprio nel Corano, si accenna all’idea che i poeti erano ispirati dai *ğinn*, “demoni” o spiritelli un po’ equivalenti ai nostrani folletti dei boschi, che secondo gli arabi invasavano determinate categorie di persone, quattro in particolare: i pazzi, gli innamorati, gli indovini (o stregoni) e appunto i poeti. Donde pure deriverebbe la precisazione coranica: “Questa (=il Corano) è parola di un Messaggero nobilissimo (=Maometto) e non parola di poeta...” (XXI, 5), il che equivaleva a dire che Maometto era stato ispirato dall’Angelo (Gabriele) non certo dai *ğinn*.

Qui, a partire dalle figure dei poeti-menestrelli o cantastorie della Mecca, troviamo una ulteriore connessione del termine: canto e poesia rientrano in effetti a pari titolo nel *samā'*. In senso lato anzi la poesia, in virtù dei suoi aspetti ritmici e dei suoi valori sonori o eufonici, è sentita come una varietà di musica (*samā'*), anche a prescindere dall’esistenza di un accompagnamento strumentale. Anche la “musica” del Corano e la “musica” della poesia sono dunque, almeno potenzialmente, in un rapporto di competizione. Sappiamo che il pregiudizio nei confronti della poesia ha peraltro fondamento in un celebre passo dello stesso Corano:

Quanto ai poeti, sono i traviati che li seguono...Non vedi come errano per ogni valle e dicono cose che non fanno? Eccetto coloro

che credono, compiono il bene e spesso ricordano Allah... (XXVI, 224-27)⁴

Il riferimento probabile è a certi poeti-gazzettieri che riportavano in versi notizie della propria tribù, naturalmente esagerandone le imprese e se del caso insolentendo le tribù nemiche. Un passo, quest'ultimo, che peraltro andrebbe considerato insieme con le parole di un *hadīṭ* in cui si attribuisce a Maometto questa affermazione rivelatrice: "Dio ha dotato i profeti di una bella voce", che acquista tutta una sua particolare pregnanza nel contesto della menzionata competizione tra parola del profeta e parola dei poeti. Secondo certe tradizioni tra i poeti e cantastorie che disturbavano Maometto durante la sua predicazione pubblica ve n'erano anche alcuni che cantavano le gesta degli antichi leggendari re persiani e in qualche modo si contendevano l'uditorio col Profeta intento a recitare le numerose storie coraniche dei profeti.⁵

A proposito di mondo iranico vale la pena ricordare che non solo nell'Islam ma anche nella tradizione religiosa autoctona, la zoroastriana, il "canto", ovvero la poesia dei menestrelli, è sentita come arte sospetta se non additata come figlia del demonio, Ahrīman, il principio del male, colui che si oppone dualisticamente al supremo dio Ahura Mazdā.⁶ Anzi una tradizione zoroastriana non esita a proclamare: "Il demonio ama due cose: la pederastia e il canto"! In questa stessa tradizione si accusano gli eretici e gli infedeli (in particolare i manichei) di servirsi della poesia e del canto come privilegiata arma di propaganda, sicché il poeta acquista suo malgrado persino un alone eterodosso e ereticheggiante.⁷ È sintomatico il fatto che non esistano quasi documenti di una poesia profana persiana d'epoca preislamica che pure dovette avere ampio sviluppo, negli ambienti nobiliari e cortigiani, in epoca partica prima e poi sassanide. Ma occorre tener

⁴ Qui e altrove nel presente scritto le citazioni coraniche derivano da A. Bausani (a cura), *Il Corano* 1988.

⁵ Sui profeti biblici nel Corano, cfr. Tottoli 1999.

⁶ Per una introduzione all'argomento rimando a Panaino 2021.

⁷ In proposito si vedano le osservazioni di Bausani 1968: 131-563, qui: 138-142.

conto del fatto che nell'Iran preislamico la casta sacerdotale dei magi aveva sì può dire il monopolio della scrittura, e verosimilmente sembrava loro sconveniente che si dovesse “poetare” o cantare su argomento diverso da quello religioso, e a maggior ragione lasciarne testimonianza scritta.⁸

Orbene, qualcosa di questa antica opposizione tra “poesia sacra” (essenzialmente espressasi negli inni dell’Avesta) e “poesia/canto” profano potrebbe essere passato anche nella nuova cultura religiosa islamica e un indizio sembra essere il brano che riporta la parola di Maometto citato all’inizio. Ritroviamo poi, specie tra gli argomenti addotti dai dottori musulmani avversi alla “musica”, le stesse connessioni vuoi con Iblīs (il Satana coranico) vuoi con gli eretici... In questo contesto non sorprende che l'accusa di eresia, o comunque il sospetto di eterodossia, ricorra frequentemente a carico dei poeti nella storia delle lettere arabe, persiane e musulmane in generale. L'“ascolto” della musica (*samā'*) nelle sue varie forme non è dunque mai nella cultura religiosa iniziata dal verbo coranico qualcosa di neutro o indifferente, un innocuo passatempo. E il trattato di al-Ġazālī sin dal titolo ci informa non a caso che esso vuole interrogarsi sul giusto modo di porsi rispetto alla *musica* e l'*estasi* che essa può indurre in chi l'ascolta.

2. E qui approdiamo al secondo tema del trattato: infatti alla musica (*samā'*) si lega spesso secondo al-Ġazālī una qualche forma di “estasi” (*wağd*). L'“ascolto” insomma, specialmente se di suoni armoniosi, produce modificazioni nelle anime, le commuove:

Chi non rimane scosso dal loro ascolto, è come se fosse incompleto, privo di equilibrio, ignaro della vera spiritualità, e la sua natura è più volgare di quella dei cammelli, degli uccelli e di tutte le altre bestie le quali, perlomeno, risentono dell'influenza delle melodie armoniose ⁹

⁸ Sul complesso argomento è importante lo studio di Boyce 1957: 10-15.

⁹ al-Ġazālī 1999: 47.

Al-Ġazālī ci fornisce all'inizio del suo discorso una nozione molto ampia di estasi. Il termine originale (*wağd*) – apriamo una necessaria parentesi – deriva da una radice verbale araba (*wağada*) che significa essenzialmente “trovare”. Sicché l'estasi è, in linea generale ciò che l'anima, o meglio il “cuore spirituale” (*qalb*) viene a “trovare” sotto lo stimolo e il sommovimento causato dall'ascolto o *samā'*, per es.: paura, gioia, desiderio, esaltazione.... In senso più ristretto, e mistico in particolare, il *wağd* è un "trovare" speciali stati o dimore dell'anima, accuratamente analizzati da innumerevoli trattatisti sufi;¹⁰ o infine, superati anche questi stati, l'estasi può essere un “trovare” autentiche rivelazioni interiori (*mukāšafāt*) o metafisiche sottigliezze (*mulātafāt*). In tutti questi arcani “ritrovamenti” la musica ovvero il *samā'* può avere una parte essenziale, giacché, ci dice al-Ġazālī “una misteriosa corrispondenza intercorre tra le note musicali e l'elemento spirituale dell'uomo”.

Va da sé, date queste premesse, che la musica (*samā'*) può divenire strumento di una iniziazione spirituale, ben lungi dalla fruizione edonistica che lo stesso al-Ġazālī in più punti del trattato osserva tra i giovani della sua epoca (niente di nuovo sotto il sole...) e duramente condanna. E in tale senso “iniziatico” la intendevano non a caso certe confraternite sufi che praticavano il *samā'* a partire da quella celeberrima fondata dal poeta persiano Rūmī.¹¹

L'atteggiamento di al-Ġazālī nei confronti del *samā'* appare invero estremamente articolato e rivela non solo il suo spessore filosofico e teologico ma anche la tempra del giurista navigato che discetta, talora spaccando il capello, sulla liceità delle attività musicali nelle più varie circostanze. Da esperto giurista al-Ġazālī nel suo trattato dapprima scrupolosamente allinea una serie di opinioni pregiudizialmente contrarie espresse da dottori

¹⁰ Sull'argomento, rimando ad alcuni testi tradotti in italiano Ansāri di Herat 2012; al-Kalābādhī 2002; una approfondita descrizione delle tappe del cammino spirituale dei sufi è nella celebre *Risāla* di al-Qušayrī, tradotta parzialmente in G. Scattolin 1994-2000, qui vol. II: 23-194, arricchita da una introduzione e un utile lessico del gergo sufi.

¹¹ In proposito v. sopra nota 3. Sulla poesia del grande poeta persiano si veda Rūmī 1980 (continuamente ristampata) e Rūmī 2006.

(ulèma) di fama: qualche giurista – ci dice – nega persino che un uomo dedito ai piaceri della "musica" sia in pieno possesso delle facoltà mentali e quindi lo ritiene inabile a testimoniare in giudizio; qualche altro introduce un tema per noi intrigante: la donna e la musica. Stante il fatto che la professione di musicista o cantante era spesso ritenuta nel mondo musulmano sconveniente, e per una donna libera persino malfamante, si discetta se per l'uomo sia riprovevole o meno ascoltare nell'intimità della sua casa le canzoni di una schiava o concubina. Subito dopo al-Ġazālī allinea le opinioni favorevoli alla musica e al canto, tra cui anche quella autorevolissima di Maometto il quale avrebbe affermato in un noto *ḥadīṭ* che “dalla poesia ci viene la saggezza” (ricordiamo ancora che la poesia viene fatta rientrare da al-Ġazālī nel *samā'*). Ma la posizione del profeta, stando all'insieme dei detti che gli vengono attribuiti, risulta quantomeno ambigua: egli avrebbe condannato l'uso e la proliferazione degli strumenti musicali in diversi *ḥadīṭ*, e in uno sembra persino contraddire quello che abbiamo all'inizio citato affermando perentoriamente

Dedicarsi all'ascolto della musica equivale a peccare contro la religione; prendervi piacere equivale a rendersi colpevoli di miscredenza (*kufīr*).

Parole in cui sembra quasi di sentire un'eco della menzionata tradizione zoroastriana, forse ancor più contraria dell'islamica alla musica. Ecco al-Ġazālī, direi significativamente, non riporta questi *ḥadīṭ* contrari al *samā'* e senz'altro dichiara la sua intenzione di voler dimostrare la piena liceità della musica e del canto in base alla tradizione. Come si diceva, al-Ġazālī ragiona volentieri col metro e lo scrupolo dello studioso di *fiqh* (giurisprudenza), distinguendo e classificando tutta una serie di fattispecie in cui il *samā'* è da considerarsi lecito o illecito. Talora egli ci delizia con osservazioni spiritose: ad esempio, egli osserva, se si prestasse ascolto a certi dottori rigoristi che dichiarano lecito soltanto il canto (ossia la salmodiazione) del Corano, allora egli conclude “anche il canto degli usignuoli sarebbe da proibirsi, dal momento che quegli animali non cinguettano il Corano!”.

La linea di discriminazione, potremmo dire un po' riassumendo il suo articolato discorso, non è tanto tipologica (ad es.: canto sì, strumenti no) quanto piuttosto funzionale: occorre vedere tempi, luoghi e compagnia in cui ha luogo il *samā'*, analizzarne in altre parole di volta in volta l'occasione o contesto e lo scopo. Così se gli strumenti a fiato e a corda sono da considerarsi illeciti in linea di principio, perché – egli argomenta – sono di regola associati a baldorie e riunioni conviviali in cui scorrono vino e sconcezze a iosa, quegli stessi strumenti diventano però leciti nel *samā'* dei pellegrini che si preparano al pellegrinaggio rituale alla Mecca, o in quello di guerra ad incitazione delle virtù guerriere. Pure il dilettersi coi canti e le musiche della schiava concubina nell'intimità delle proprie stanze è cosa lecita, ma – al-Ġazālī precisa subito – non lo sarebbe più se si invitassero amici ad assistervi. Del pari riprovevole è considerato il *samā'* dei canti funebri perché, egli osserva acutamente:

La tristezza da essi indotti per ciò che ci è sfuggito per sempre è cosa biasimevole e anzi in fondo empia, in quanto configura una sorta di astio nei confronti di un decreto di Dio Altissimo e di rimpianto per qualcosa che non può avere rimedio¹²

La musica sembra comunque produrre secondo al-Ġazālī un effetto speciale cui ogni creatura umana, volente o nolente, soggiace. Quest'effetto si esprime sotto forma della

accensione in chi ascolta di un 'desiderio' indeterminato e indeterminabile, tanto più straordinario quanto più colui che lo percepisce non conosce ciò che desidera... Egli sente sorgere dentro di sé uno stato, come se il cuore chiedesse qualcosa senza sapere che cosa..."¹³

Sublime psicologia della musica! È questo ciò che accadrebbe alla gran massa degli uomini solo superficialmente o per nulla toccati dal messaggio divino, perché anche in un simile uomo la "musica" smuove sempre qualcosa, accenna ad arcane melodie spirituali e

¹² al-Ġazālī 1999: 50.

¹³ Ivi: 68.

allora il suo cuore comincia a reclamare qualcosa che l'uomo stesso non conosce, per cui questi si sente confuso, smarrito, disturbato...¹⁴

Dopo aver menzionato il caso di certi compagni del Profeta che scoppiavano in lacrime, venivano meno o addirittura in qualche caso sarebbero morti al solo “ascolto” del Corano, al-Ġazālī conclude che generalmente parlando, “l'uomo di cuore non può fare a meno di raggiungere l'estasi (*wağd*) mentre ascolta il Corano”.

E qui, come si vede, ci riallacciamo alla questione posta all'inizio: la “musica” (*samā'*) non è affatto neutrale, essa è capace secondo al-Ġazālī di sommuovere il cuore, di toccare le sue fibre più riposte, e di mettere l'uomo in comunicazione con il “Segreto dei Segreti”. Va da sé quindi – conclude il nostro Autore di nuovo con piglio da giurista – che la sua fruizione disordinata, capace di eccitare specie nei giovani lussuria o “pensieri disdicevoli” è da ritenersi proibita (*ḥarām*); se essa avviene a mero scopo ricreativo o di trastullo è quantomeno riprovevole (*makrūh*), ma, attenzione, non vietata; è invece permessa (*ḥalāl*) a colui che trae innocente piacere dalla “percezione di suoni armoniosi”; mentre essa è non solo lecita ma addirittura desiderabile “per colui che si lascia guidare dall'amore di Dio Altissimo” e nel quale il canto e la musica non scatenano lussuria e bassi desideri bensì – conclude al-Ġazālī – “suscitano le più belle qualità”.

3. Nella seconda parte di questo lavoro vorremmo leggere e commentare alcuni passi di Sa'dī di Shiraz,¹⁵ grandissimo poeta persiano del 200. Sa'dī da giovane studiò proprio in quella Nizāmiyya di Baghdad, una università religiosa, in cui lo stesso al-Ġazālī aveva insegnato un secolo prima. Abbiamo visto come al-Ġazālī denunci l'atteggiamento di certi colleghi giurisperiti alquanto severi, pregiudizialmente contrari a pressoché ogni

¹⁴ Ivi: 69.

¹⁵ Su questo autore mi limito a rimandare alla voce relativa nelle principali opere di consultazione come Bausani 1968; Arberry 1958; Rypka 1968 (precedente ed. tedesca del 1959); Yarshater et al. 2008-; Losensky 2012.

forma di musica. Sappiamo che Sa'dī fu molto vicino alla sensibilità del sufismo o mistica islamica, pur caratterizzandosi come poeta tutt'altro che staccato dal mondo. Ora, occorre precisare che l'atteggiamento di alcuni sufi nei riguardi della musica non doveva divergere molto da quello di quei dottori della legge alquanto bacchettoni, a loro volta bacchettati come s'è visto da al-Ġazālī. Lo si evince da varia letteratura, trattatistica e poetica, e io mi limito a qualche esempio tratto da due famose opere di Sa'dī, il *Būstān* o Verziere¹⁶ e il *Golestān* o Giardino,¹⁷ due capolavori rispettivamente della poesia didattica e della prosa persiana classica. Inizio da un brano del *Būstān*, in cui troviamo un personaggio che viene presentato come un "saggio asceta" sufi che si produce proprio alla lettera nel ruolo del "guasta-feste". Il tutto prende spunto da un aneddoto di questo poema didattico in cui si narra di un principe di Ganjé (nell'attuale Azerbaijan) che aveva dato scandalo con il suo comportamento corrotto e incline alle baldorie a base di vino e menestrelli. Alcuni pii musulmani si lamentano sdegnati con questo saggio asceta che però, inopinatamente, prende a invocare sul principe corrotto la celeste benedizione, scandalizzando i presenti che protestano vivamente. Al che il saggio asceta si difende dicendo loro di avere invocato da Dio la grazia del pentimento su quel principe corrotto. A quel punto la voce si sparge e

qualcuno andò a riferire tutto tale e quale a quel principe. / Per la commozione questi versò lacrime dagli occhi come da nuvole / E pianse senza tregua [...] / Quindi mandò qualcuno a quel saggio asceta con questo messaggio: "Aiutami! / Datti la pena di venire da me affinché la testa io pieghi [nel pentimento] / E la testa d'ignoranza e ingiustizia io tagli".¹⁸

Il principe dunque, sorpreso dalla benevolenza dell'asceta, si pente e lo invita a corte. Questi accoglie subito la richiesta del

¹⁶ Una traduzione integrale in italiano è Sa'dī di Shiraz 2018.

¹⁷ Sa'dī 1965.

¹⁸ Sa'dī di Shiraz 2018: 147-148 (ed. Yūsufi, vv. 2157-2161).

principe pentito, si mette in marcia e giunto al palazzo entra nella sala del banchetto:

... egli vide apprestate vivande dolci e uva e vino e candelabri /
Dieci città dell'abbondanza e dentro gente guasta e corrotta. /
Uno pareva giunto al limite, un altro mezzo ubriaco / Un altro
ancora diceva poesie stringendo in mano una coppa. / Da una
parte il menestrello cantava a tutta voce / Dall'altra si sentiva la
voce del coppiere: "Orsù bevete!" / I compagni di banchetto ebbri
di vino rosso rubino [...] Tamburi e liuto suonavano in armonia
/ E la corda bassa aveva innalzato un triste lamento.

La reazione del saggio asceta di fronte allo spettacolo di "squallore e corruzione" è immediata. Il brano infatti così prosegue:

A quel punto [il saggio asceta] diede ordine di fare tutto a pezzi
/ [...] Fracassarono i liuti e spezzarono le lire / E i cantanti
rimasero con le loro arie sospese. [...] E calici e coppe gettarono
a terra e frantumarono. / Il vino color del tulipano dalle fiasche
rovesciate / Scorse come il sangue da una anatra sgozzata [...] /
Inoltre chiunque prendesse in mano un'arpa / Si prendeva le
botte dai servi come fosse un tamburo. / E se un corrotto ancora
portava sul dorso un liuto / gli assestavano un manrovescio
sull'orecchio.¹⁹

Ma in un altro passo del *Būstān*, Sa'dī lascia trasparire chiaramente cosa pensava di certo furore moralista riguardo la musica che allignava quantomeno in alcuni ambienti sufi:

Ho sentito dire che al banchetto di certi ebbri turcomanni / un
novizio [sufi] prese a distruggere liuti e tamburi dei menestrelli.
/ Lo fermarono tirandogli i capelli come a [corde di] liuto / i
servi, e lo colpirono sul viso come fosse un tamburo. / La notte
quel novizio non dormiva per le mazzate e i colpi subiti / il giorno
seguito il suo maestro volle così redarguirlo: / "Se non vuoi il
viso ammaccato come tamburo / o fratello mio caro, abbassa la
testa come fa il liuto."²⁰

¹⁹ Ivi: 148-149 (ed. Yūsofi, vv. 2163-79).

²⁰ Ivi: 198 (ed. Yūsofi, vv. 2977-2980).

Sa‘dī si sofferma pure su un tema che abbiamo visto ampiamente trattato da al-Ġazālī, quello degli effetti prodotti dall’ascolto della musica o del canto. Ecco cosa ci dice nel brano che segue, in cui egli sembra rivolgersi a un giovane per ammaestrarlo sulle virtù e i benefici del *samā‘*. Il brano è tratto dal capitolo III del *Bustān* dedicato a “Amore, ebbrezza e passione”, in particolare del mistico amante dal cuore reso folle per l’Amato (Dio), il che permette al poeta di stabilire una ulteriore suggestiva connessione:

Non il [canto del] menestrello, ma il passo di una bestia da soma sarà per te una musica sublime (*samā‘*), se possiedi amore e passione

La mosca non batte le ali presso qualcuno dal cuore folle senza che costui come mosca non porti le mani sulla testa!

La nota alta lo sconvolto d’Amore non distingue dalla bassa si lamenta il poveretto solo al sentire una voce di uccello [...]

Quando gli sconvolti d’Amore adorano il vino con il suono della Ruota celeste si inebriano!

Nell’alta Sfera essi rotolano come una ruota e come ruota piangono tristi sopra se stessi [...]

Non stare a criticare il folle derviscio inebriato [d’Amore] ché [in esso] è affondato e per questo agita e mani e piedi [nella danza del *samā‘*]

Non ti dirò, o fratello, che cos’è il *samā‘* finché io non sappia chi è che ascolta il *samā‘*

Se l’uccello del *samā‘* vola dalla Torre del Significato persino gli angeli del cielo restano indietro nella sua corsa!²¹

Sa‘dī ci dice con immagini indimenticabili che l’innamorato (il mistico) si lascia trasportare da ogni musica della creazione, non solo dalla segreta “armonia delle sfere” (motivo di greche ascendenze) ma persino dal suono del batter d’ali delle mosche, qualcosa che lo induce a muoversi eccitato in una danza che qui rievoca in modo trasparente la pratica del *samā‘*.

E si osservi anche come Sa‘dī nel penultimo verso dichiara implicitamente la sua concezione iniziatica del *samā‘* che - egli suggerisce - non può essere illustrato a chiunque, ma solo a chi è

²¹ Ivi: 134 (ed. Yūsufī, vv. 1918-1927).

in grado di “ascoltare”, ovvero chi è predisposto all’amore di Dio. Insomma il mistico innamorato del divino Amato non può che trarre benefici dal *samā'*; ma Sa'dī precisa subito dopo che non è così per chi ha degradato l’amore, per chi insomma è vittima della lascivia e delle più basse tentazioni:

Se invece è uomo da giochi, svaghi e vani trastulli
si rafforzerà dentro il cervello di lui il demonio
Se colui che compie il *samā'* è un adoratore di lascivia
al suo dolce suono si leverà addormentato, non inebriato²²

Più avanti Sa'dī riprende un altro tema ġazaliano, quello del *samā'* cosmico: l'intero mondo dalle sfere celesti fino agli animali più umili canta le lodi di Dio, ma non tutti evidentemente sanno udire questo inno di lode universale:

Sconvolta viene la rosa al passare del vento dell'alba [...]
Il mondo è pieno di *samā'*, di ebbrezza e passione
ma che cosa può un cieco vedere dentro lo specchio?
Non vedi tu il cammello, alle dolci arabe melodie
come la gioia lo induca finanche a danzare?
E se a un cammello entrano in testa gioia e passione
se non entrano nella testa di un uomo, costui è un asino!²³

Dove si sarà notato che qui Sa'dī cita il topos del cammello che danza al solo ascolto di “arabe melodie”, che già abbiamo visto più sopra accennato in al-Ġazālī.

Vorrei terminare questo breve excursus con un brano tratto dall'altro capolavoro di Sa'dī, il summenzionato *Golestān*, un testo in cui egli spesso rievoca ricordi e aneddoti riferiti alle sue trentennali peregrinazioni da un capo all'altro del mondo musulmano. Nel brano è protagonista un derviscio che all'improvviso caccia un urlo va in estasi e si allontana dall'accampamento:

Ricordo – così racconta Sa'dī – che una volta, dopo avere camminato tutta la notte, ci addormentammo all'alba vicino a un

²² Ibidem (ed. Yūsofī, vv. 1928-1929).

²³ Ivi: 134-35 (ed. Yūsofī, vv. 1930-1933).

boschetto. Un derviscio che viaggiava con noi lanciò un grido e s'allontanò nel deserto rinunciando al riposo. Quando fu giorno gli domandai: "Cosa t'è successo?". Mi rispose: "Vedevo gli usignuoli che cominciavano a cinguettare sugli alberi, vedevo le Pernici sui monti, le rane nell'acqua e gli animali nel bosco. Ho pensato allora che non era giusto che tutti fossero intenti a lodare il Signore e che io solo dormissi senza pensare a Lui".²⁴

Va qui ricordato che il Corano (XXIV, 41, ma v. anche XVII, 44) ha un passo famoso sul tema del creato che loda incessantemente Iddio:

Non vedi come a Dio inneggiano gli esseri tutti che sono in cielo e sulla terra e gli uccelli che stendon l'ali?
Ognuno conosce la sua preghiera, conosce il suo inno di lode, e Dio sa quel che fanno.

Seguono alcuni versi che terminano con questa dichiarazione del derviscio: "È indegno della umana condizione / che gli uccelli lodino Dio e io resti silente!"

E Sa' dī chiosa l'aneddoto con splendidi versi sul significato del *samā'*, ribadendo che lo può comprendere solo il cuore che sappia davvero ascoltare, versi che volentieri citiamo a mo' di chiusura:

Tutto ciò che vedi palpita per lodare Dio
il cuore che ascolta ne comprende il significato
L'usignuolo sulla sua rosa canta le lodi di Dio
anche ogni spina ha una lingua per lodare Dio ²⁵

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²⁴ Sa' dī 1991: 119-120.

²⁵ Ivi: 121.

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*Music and Identity:
African Musical Culture in Southwestern
Pakistan*

Sabir Badalkhan
(University of Naples “L’Orientale”)

Abstract

This chapter examines the Black communities of Balochistan and Sindh in southwestern Pakistan and their rich musical traditions, with particular attention to the influence of African music on the coastal Makran fishing population. The study draws primarily on my personal experience as a native of Balochistan and on fieldwork conducted in Balochistan and Sindh over several years, notably in 1991 and 1993. In addition, relevant written and audiovisual sources have also been consulted where available. The discussion centers on two major song-dance genres – *ambā* and *laywā* – and explores the significance of the footed drums, a distinctive cultural marker of the Black communities of Makran and Sindh. This study demonstrates that, despite the deep assimilation of these communities into Baloch identity and culture, they have preserved vital elements of their African musical heritage, maintaining a profound attachment to the music, song, and dance traditions of their forefathers.

Keywords

Black Baloch, Shīdī/Sheedi, Black music, *ambā*, *laywā*, *shayparja*, *kumrī*, *mugulmānī*

*Introduction*¹

I was first introduced to Black Baloch music and dances in 1991 when I carried out an ethnomusicological study tour to Makran (locally pronounced Makkurān) in Pakistani Balochistan and Karachi with the American-born British musicologist Mr. Andersen Bakewell where we made recordings from the traditional music on the coast and in Karachi.² Bakewell already had a vast knowledge of African and Arab music, so he explained to me that some Black Baloch music was clearly African and not native Balochi. This increased my curiosity and I made several study tours to the Makran coast and Karachi during the following years in which I assisted and recorded a number of these dances and music performances, interviewing musicians, dancers, singers, as well as common people with some knowledge on the subject.

Based primarily on the results of my 1991 and 1993 fieldworks and numerous interviews with fishermen, musicians and

¹ Part of the material used here has already appeared in Badalkhan 2008.

I am deeply indebted to many friends in Karachi whose help was vital in meeting and interviewing Black Baloch and Afro-Sindhi community members and filming/recording a number of their festivals and performances. Among these was the late Nisar Ahmad Baloch of Golimar, a dedicated social worker who was barbarously murdered by some unidentified gunman in Karachi in November 2009. It was largely believed that some land grabbers were behind his murder as he mobilized opposition against the allotment of the only public park (Gutter Bāghīcha, aka Trans-Liyari Park) in Golimar to some land-grabbing politicians and builders. He was the spearhead of the *Gutter Bāghīcha Buchāo Tehreek* ("Save Gutter Garden movement") and a member of *Shihri* (Citizens' Team), two NGOs that were trying for about two decades to save "this lung of the city". He was shot dead while he was leaving his home in Golimar (Cowanjee 2009). Among other friends in Karachi, Sangat Wahid Baloch, a living encyclopedia on the Baloch population of Karachi, has always been there to provide me with any help and information. Sincere thanks are also due to him.

Prof. Dr. Ahmed Yaqoub AlMaazmi of the UAE University, Al Ain, has provided me with several published papers to which I would not have had access otherwise. He has also gone through an earlier draft of this paper and given valuable feedback. Very sincere thanks are due to him.

² See the CD, "Music of Makran: Traditional Fusion from Coastal Balochistan" (Bakewell 2000), based on the recordings of this trip and Frishkopf 2006 and Sakata 2001 for reviews on the CD.

common people in Karachi and southern Balochistan in Pakistan, this chapter describes in depth the Black Baloch community on the Makran coast, showing how music-based ritual ceremonies are a flourishing tradition in Balochistan containing artistic elements from their African past. The chapter focuses mainly on two song-dance genres that represent the Black Baloch community and have demonstrable ties to an African heritage, namely *ambā* and *laywā*. Lastly, the chapter discusses the *mugulmānī*, a footed drum that could be described as the hallmark of the musical tradition of the Black Baloch of southern Balochistan and Sindh. The chapter aims to demonstrate that although the Baloch people of African descent have lived in Balochistan and Sindh for centuries, merged with Baloch cultural identity, and no longer have an active memory of their African roots, they have maintained their African musical heritage and the love for the music and dancing traditions of their forefathers. Unfortunately, some of the ceremonies and traditions described in this chapter are becoming a thing of the past because modern working tools, such as the introduction of machinery in fishing and working on boats, have significantly changed old ways of collective work, and, as such, many of the younger generation are unaware of their past musical heritage.

1. The Black Baloch

A large percentage of the population of southern Balochistan and the Baloch of Karachi have clear African features. They are believed to be African by descent or of mixed Black Baloch heritage. Some of them have more marked African features while others are usually dark-skinned. Skin colour and physical features apart, they are all fully integrated into the Baloch national fabric and have become Baloch in every sense of the word. Neither they nor the rest of the Baloch population consider them outsiders or different from the rest of the Baloch. Feroz Ahmed (1989: 30) writes that “[b]ecause of their cultural integration in a society which is legally,

ideologically and, to a large extent, practically non-racialist, the people of African descent do not like to be reminded that they are racially different” from the rest of the Baloch.³

However, it should also be noted that although the Black Baloch are fully Balochized and play active roles in Baloch politics, establishing Baloch cultural and literary bodies, contesting elections and serving as National and Provincial Assembly members in Baloch majority areas as well as leading Baloch nationalist parties, Baloch students’ organizations and serving in high positions in government offices all over Pakistan, when it comes to mixed marriages, they still find it hard to be accepted by fair-skinned Baloch women. For example, a Baloch woman of fair skin is hardly married to a Baloch man of African origin, while in some isolated cases, one may find a Baloch man of fair skin married to a Black Baloch woman (Edlefsen et al 1960: 127). Even in the former case, children born to such couples are not taken in marriage by the family of their fathers or by other Baloch of fair skin. They are considered *pačārmāt* (children “born to a mother of lowly origin”, Dashti 2024, s.v.)⁴ and, as such, not equals. The

³ However, a columnist of the *Balochistan Times* does not agree with such statements and argues that there is still much discrimination against the Black Baloch people on the basis of their skin colour and physical traits (*Balochistan Times*, Opinion page, June 13, 2020. <https://balochistantimes.com/racism-in-baloch-society/>. (Last visited 22 March 2022). Another Baloch writer of mixed African and Baloch blood writes, “The bitter reality is that our Black brothers and sisters and those with darker skin or mixed racial heritage face prejudice and mistreatment within our community, leading a significant number of the Baloch to live in denial and secrecy about their Black heritage” (Sammi Baloch 2020).

Noon Meem Danish, a famous Black Baloch poet and writer of the Urdu language, now settled in the United States, writes of his experiences after shifting from Lyari in Karachi to the United States of America in the following: “My concept of beauty underwent a change [in the USA]. For the first time, I really understood that black can be beautiful too”. He explains that “the Shidis living in Sindh and the black living in Balochistan are not one and the same, just as all whites are not German. They are culturally different” (Asif Farrukhi, 2007 “A Poet in New York”, The daily *Dawn’s* Literary Magazine: Books and Authors, December 9, 2007.

⁴ Daštī (1917, s.v.) translates *pačārmāt* as “the one whose mother is from a lower social status; a low-born (*kam zāt, kam nasl*)” (English translation is added here; see also Panāh Balōč 2022, s.v. *pačārmāt*).

Italian anthropologist, Ugo Fabietti, who carried out fieldwork in the District Kech (formerly Turbat) during the 1980s and 1990s, writes that problems emerged when such couples had children and the young men from their fathers' families refused to marry the children born from such unions because they considered them socially inferior (Fabietti 2011: 65; see also Gazdar 2007: 30 for similar observations). However, with education and white-collar jobs, things are changing but still not when it comes to mixed marriages.

The Baloch population of African descent is mainly settled in southern Balochistan (both in Iran and Pakistan) and in Karachi where they came from Balochistan to find manual labour in the 19th and 20th centuries. They are also found in the interior of Makran, Kharan, Kalat, Lasbela and elsewhere in Balochistan. Local informants in Karachi have told me that the Black Baloch population of Karachi makes up around 50 percent of an estimated one million or more Balochi speakers of Karachi.⁵ In some parts of the city, such as Lyari, where the largest Baloch population of the city is to be found, they are believed to make up about 60 to 70 percent of the total Baloch population. Their number is estimated at about 50 percent in Trans-Lyari and around 30 to 50 percent in the peripheral areas of the city.⁶ They may be around 20 percent of Pakistani Makran's population and a similar number in the coastal belt of Iranian Makran.⁷

Karachi's Black Baloch population is mostly concentrated in the areas of Lyari, Baldia Town, Kharadar, Saidabad,

⁵ It is to be remembered that it also depends on whom one calls a person of African origin and whom not.

⁶ These are only rough estimates provided by my Baloch informants in Karachi during various discussions. As they are ethnically Baloch and speak Balochi, no distinction is made between them and other Baloch in official records.

⁷ According to Pakistan's 2023 census report, the total population of Pakistani Makran was 1,875,872 (see <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2023/Balochistan.pdf>). No recent reports are available to me for Iranian Makran, but according to the 2015 report, the total population was 745,244 (Tighsazzadeha and Asl 2023).

Muhajirabad, Kiamari and Mawach.⁸ Lyari's Sheedi Village Road, Arabi Masjid, Baghdadi⁹ and Bambasa (Mumbasa) Road showcase its large Black Baloch population. Yaqub Qambarani, a Sindhi Shīdī writer and social activist (see below), says that Kharadar was the first home of Karachi Shīdīs. "The spirits (*rūhēn*) of our ancestors are buried here, and because of that, we are in love with Kharadar", he says.

The first slave market in Karachi was held at Lyari's Baghdadi area and the present-day Kajhur bazar (dates market) of Lea Market.¹⁰ Local tradition is that slaves were brought from Africa via Muscat, mostly through Makran, and then sold in Karachi. Baloch elders recount that slaves were available in large numbers for sale and sometimes even two or more persons bought one slave as if they were domestic animals. One person would buy half or even one-fourth of a slave, another would buy the other half or one-fourth of the slave, and so on. The slave would then work for all his/her masters based on the shares they had.¹¹ Local people say that the slave market of Karachi was flourishing even long after the British ban on the slave trade. The League of Nations abolished slavery throughout the world in 1926, and the Khan of Kalat issued a proclamation on November 4 the same year, "abolishing private property in male and female

⁸ A large population of Sindhi and Gujarati Shīdīs also reside in these areas.

⁹ Local Baloch elders from Karachi maintain that the original name of Baghdadi was *Baggdārī* (a Balochi compound word meaning "station of camel caravans"). They say that this was the place where camel caravans coming from interior Balochistan were stationed. Later, the non-Baloch government officials miswrote the name as Baghdadi, and it has remained as such (oral interview with local Baloch elders in February 2024; Suhail Baloch, "Names and History of the Territories of Lyari [Balochi dar] History of Lyari Karachi. Retrieved 20 June 2024 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6p4DCY8vhJk>).

¹⁰ Lea marketplace was built in 1927 and named after the British engineer Mesham Lea, who supervised the work. It functioned as the major trading hub of the city until the creation of Pakistan. The earlier Balochi name of Lea Market was Kaordap (lit. "riverside").

¹¹ The 1920s British records report of a case where a person from Makran bought one-half of a leg of a slave woman for 25 rupees. A year later he bought a whole leg for 50 rupees with which he was entitled to have the fourth child of the woman but her husband died after only one child. The owners forced the woman to remarry immediately so that she could beget more children (cited in Swidler 2014: 206).

slaves throughout his State” (Hameed Baloch 2008: 128; see also Swidler 2014: 211).¹² Slavery in western Balochistan, then merged with Iran, was abolished three years later.

When and how these Black Baloch came or were brought to Balochistan is hard to know, but it appears that they were brought in many waves across the centuries. Many may have been living in Makran even before the advent of Islam¹³ as some Arab tribes were settled in Makran in pre-Islamic times who worked as active dealers of the slave trade (Wink 1999, I: 29-30; Lewis 1990: 158). Wink writes that King Ardashir (180-242 CE), founder of the Sassanian Empire in Iran, “transplanted large numbers of the Azdī tribe of Oman to Fars and to the Kirman-Makran coast. These were Arab seafaring merchants ... and they dominated a Persian maritime trade diaspora which extended into western India” (Wink 1999, I: 48; Badalkhan 2002: 241, n. 30; Ali 2011: 15). Afzal Kirmani, a 12th-century historian from Kirman, also gives an important account of the trade from the port city of Tes/Tiz in Makran, stating that the “inhabitants of Hind, Sind, Abyssinia, Zanzibar, Egypt and the country of the Arabs from ‘Oman and Bahrein trade there. Every kind of musk, ambergris, indigo and logwood, and aromatic roots of Hind and slaves of Hind and Abyssinia and Zanzibar, and also fine velvets, shawls, sashes, and the like rare products have their market at this post” (quoted in S.M.K. Baluch 1958: 181-82; Sultana 1991: 67; Sajjadi 1990: 56).

¹² In an earlier publication, Swidler gives the date of the abolition of slavery in Balochistan in 1932 (Swidler 1992: 568, n. 24), while Ahmed (1989: 28) gives it 1914. However, it seems more likely that slavery was abolished in Balochistan in 1926; see, e.g., Document LON/BPC/ESC/57 - Abolition of the Slavery in Kalat (Baluchistan), dated 1927; retrieved at <https://archives.ungeneva.org/abolition-of-the-slavery-in-kalat-baluchistan>. It should be noted that the State of Kalat (Balochistan) did not make a part of British India or was a direct British colony, so the British laws did not apply to Kalat, which comprised most of the present Balochistan province of Pakistan.

¹³ The Indian linguist S. K. Chatterji holds that the Negroid people of prehistoric India were its first inhabitants who appeared “to have come from Africa through Arabia and the coast-lands of Irān and Baluchistān” (Chatterji 2017⁹: 148; cf. also Chandler 2004: 83; Edlefsen, Shah and Farooq 1960: 124). If that may be the case, many of the Black population of Makran may be the offshoots of those early migrations.

Over time these people have lost any memories of the countries of their forefathers except for their great love for music, singing and dancing, which has survived to this day because of its constant use in their daily life.¹⁴ However, because of the low profile attached to dancing and singing among the Baloch as Muslims, and as tribal/agrarian people where certain professional activities are reserved only for certain social classes, the musical tradition of the Black Baloch may not be as vibrant and strong as that of their African brothers in other parts of the world, but it is still remarkably African in every aspect. Assisting any of their performances, one is immediately struck by the African rhythm of their music and dances. In the following pages, we will discuss some of the remarkable characteristics of the music and dancing traditions of the Black Baloch with some passing remarks on those of the Afro-Sindhis, called Shīdī.¹⁵

¹⁴ The love of the Black Baloch for music and dance is best expressed in the following popular Balochi saying that *har jāga ki ruhle tawār bikant, siāhay pōst purr bīt*, “whenever there is the sound of drums, the body (lit. skin) of the Black becomes full” (and he cannot control himself from dancing).

¹⁵ In Balochistan the term Shīdī is used for the people of African origin of extremely dark, swarthy complexion. Sayad Hāshmi (2000, s.v.) describes Shīdī as a black person, a Zangī (a person originally from Zanzibar but in Balochistan, it indicates any person of supposed African origin), and Adamec (1988:283) writes that the Baloch Shīdīs are descendants of Swahili-speaking Negro slaves. Although the Black Baloch population considers the term Shīdī somewhat derogatory and as an attempt by outsiders to draw a line between them and the rest of the Baloch population, in some of their *laywā* songs they still sing certain phrases and refrains which show that in the past they probably did not mind being called Shīdī. For example, in one *laywā* song, the leader sings *laywā, laywā*, and the dancers/chorus respond with the refrain, *Shīdīay laywā* (i.e., Shīdī’s *laywā*). In another song, the leader simply sings *buro buro* (Balochi words meaning “go, continue”) and the dancers respond with *shīdī jambo* (*jambo* is a Swahili greeting or salutation similar to the English “hello”; see Madan 1903, s.v.). Using the nomenclature shīdī in *laywā* songs probably shows that in the past it was normal for them to be called *Shīdī* but since there is a negative connotation attached to this term, as well as a message of “being other and outsider”, they now take it as an offensive appellation.

As to the origin of the term shīdī, Lodhi traces it to the Arabic word *saydī* (“captive, prisoner of war”) (Lodhi 2008; Badalkhan 2005a; de Silva Jayasuriya 2008b: 23). Ahmed (2011), on the other hand, traces it to the Arabic root *swd*, “black”.

2. *Singing and Dancing ambā and laywā*

Musical traditions and instruments are almost the same all over Balochistan with the exception that some song genres and musical modes may slightly differ from one region to the other (see Badalkhan 2000 for more details). Listening to such music and singing, one is immediately reminded that one is listening to Balochi music or attending in a Balochi dance performance from a particular region of Balochistan. On the other hand, the Baloch population of coastal Makran and Sindh have two specific song genres that are not found in the rest of Balochistan. These are the *ambā* (sea shanties) and *laywā* songs and dances. The former is used for fishermen's songs and dances of the same name, performed exclusively on the coast, while the latter is a dance of entertainment and festivity and is performed exclusively by the Baloch population of African descent on the coast and in Karachi. Since the Black Baloch population of Karachi originally came from Makran, they are often called Makrānī (Makkurānī) by the non-Baloch population of Pakistan. In fact, “for many outsiders the word *makrani* became synonymous with the people of African origin” (Ahmed 1989: 27; see also Edlefsen, Shah and Farooq 1960; Albinia 2008: 64; Siddiqi et al 2015). However, now this trend is changing as the people from other communities are coming to realise that not all of the Makran population is of African origin.

2.1 *Ambā*

2.1.1 *Ambā as work songs*

Ambā (sea shanties) are work songs of Baloch fishermen on the Makran coast. The local tradition is that Baloch *daryāward* (fishermen and seafarers) have sung and danced *ambā* since time immemorial. However, no local term for these songs has survived. In modern times, they categorise their sea shanties as *ambā*, a term whose origin remains a mystery. There is a Swahili term *wimbo*, which means a “song in general, and more specifically, a song of

12 syllables in the line” (Knappert 1982: 23, 30). There are other related Swahili words, such as *imba*, “to sing”, *imbiana*, “sing together, in chorus”, and so on (Rechenbach 1967, s.v.). However, it is hard to say whether the term for Baloch fishermen’s shanties comes from the Swahili word *imba/wimbo* or not.

Amba is also the term used by South Indian fishermen for “boat songs”. They sing *amba* while catching fish in the sea or rivers. Perumal speculates that the South Indian term *amba* might be derived from the word *ambi*, which means a boat both in Tamil and Kannada.¹⁶ As in coastal Makran, South Indian *amba* songs are also sung by fishermen while pushing their boats into the sea or pulling them out of the sea for repair or other purposes (Perumal 1987: 556). These songs are described as happy rhythms that help fishermen focus their energy while they are engaged in doing tough jobs such as hauling a net or pulling a boat out of the water (Kannadasan 2021; see also Hugill 1969 and 1979 for more on sea shanties).

Like the south Indian fishermen, Baloch fishermen also sing *ambā* songs while doing tedious work such as pulling or spreading nets while fishing or pulling/pushing boats into the sea or out of the sea at the start or end of the fishing/seafaring seasons, or for repair. These songs were also sung on board when sails were used for trade and transport. It needed a harmonious workforce to fold or spread the sails or to do other heavy work on board. So, one person holding a drum would take his seat at the front of the boat, beating the drum, and the team leader (shantyman) would lead *ambā* singing to provide synchronisation to the movements of the working body.¹⁷ The only person who would not take part in *ambā*

¹⁶ Another hypothesis is that the virgin sea goddess in South India and Sri Lanka is called Ambal and that the term *amba* for fisherfolk songs may have come from the goddess Ambal (Sadish n.d.: 2).

¹⁷ Pearl fishing boats from the Arab countries employed one or two professional or semi-professional singers, called *nahhām*. Their function was to sing on board to coordinate work as well as to provide entertainment to the divers who would become bored and fatigued from their heavy work (Ulaby 2012: 51; Olsen 2002: 87). These *nahhāms* were apparently different from the Baloch *ambā* singers since these latter were not professional singers and who also made part of the working force on the ground as well as on board of a boat.

singing would be the *nāhudā* (shipmaster), who did not take part in manual work on board or ashore, and as such, he did not join in the singing.

2.1.2 *Ambā as festive songs*

When *saparī būjīgs* (ocean-going sailing vessels)¹⁸ returned from their long journeys, sometimes after three months, other times after six months,¹⁹ and sometimes even after a whole year or more when they traded with different countries without returning to their hometowns, their sails would be seen from a long distance so people of the town would gather at the shore to receive them. The crew would anchor their ship in open waters, as there were no docks anywhere in coastal Makran. They would sit on small boats, called *battēl*,²⁰ and begin to row towards the shore. From the shore, other fishermen and relatives of the crew members would sit on *battēls* and sail towards them to greet and accompany the returning sailors amidst great celebrations. Those from the shore and those coming from their ship would start singing *ambā* with the beat of drums, rowing to meet each other. At one point, still in the sea, they would meet, and after the exchange of greetings from a distance, they would return to the shore amidst drumming, singing and celebrating. On the shore, the townsfolk, including men, women and children, would gather to greet the crew. Drums were beaten and men of all ages joined in singing and dancing until the crew and those who had gone to greet them reached the shore and joined them in the dancing and singing.²¹ When

¹⁸ Largest of the *saparī būjīgs* were called *gālī* and *gurāb*.

¹⁹ Sometimes it was because of the unfavourable winds, other times it was when they traded with or transported goods from one port/country to another.

²⁰ *Battēl* in Balochistan is a small fishing boat generally used for fishing in shallow waters (cf. Arabian Gulf *batīl*, a fast ship with two masts used for long travelling and pearl fishing; Hurriez 2013: 154).

²¹ *Ambā* festive dances, performed out of the working context, are similar to other Balochi collective dances with the only difference in name. In some societies, there was a tabu against singing shanties ashore (see Hugill 1979: 1). It might be possible that *ambā* is also not performed out of the working context but

everyone was exhausted, the seamen would then go to their homes.²²

Goods were unloaded by *hammāls* (porters), sometimes professionals, other times volunteers, and brought to the shore on *badans*.²³ In the afternoon, or the following morning, depending upon the time of the arrival of the ship, the crew members would return to the town centre and, in the local tea shops, would recount the adventures and experiences of their journey to the curious townsfolk, gathered in large numbers to enjoy the tales of the returned seamen. The crew would put on their gala dress, such as wide trousers made out of 4 to 10 metres of cloth, a loose shirt of fine *Mašādī bōsukī* (muslin), and a *mašādī*²⁴ turban tied around the head on a special cap. One end of the turban would hang down while the other would be erected one hand high (*ca.* 40 to 45 centimetres) above the head. While dancing, the hanging part would be tied around the loins to hold up the shirt and make the dancing more flexible. Shirts and the hem of the trousers would be embroidered with golden threads as if they were bridegrooms. Celebrations would continue for several days as the whole town gathered to honour their return.²⁵

our informants in Ormara and Pasni in 1991 and 1993 told us that they danced *ambā* also on festive occasions.

²² Sailors on merchant ships from Kuwait, Oman and other Gulf states also celebrated their arrivals at the harbours by organizing festivals called *samra* (Ulaby 2012: 58).

²³ *Badan* is a small coasting vessel with no deck, usually used to transport goods from and to a ship anchored in the open sea. It is also used for fishing in shallow waters. *Badan* is also the name of an Arab boat that once fished and traded all along the Omani coast (Severin 1982: 22; Ochs 1999: 161; Miles 2020: 380).

²⁴ *Mašādī* is the name of a costly turban. According to the locals, it was originally brought from the city of Mashhad in Iran.

²⁵ All this information is based on my interviews in Ormara, Pasni and Gwadar during the years, but more specifically the one in Ormara in 1993 when Azim Ghulam Muhammad of Shahrak was the Chief Officer of the Local Government there. He invited aged fishermen, *nāhudās*, former seafarers, *ambā* and *laywā* performers to his residence, where I interviewed them. Very sincere thanks are due to him.

2.1.3 *Ambā songs and dances to mark the fishing season*

One of the main occasions for *ambā* performance in coastal Makran was the start of the fishing and sailing season, which followed a summer break caused by the rough seas during the monsoon winds.²⁶ From early May until the end of July, for a period of 90 days, Baloch seamen (*daryāward*) kept their boats out of the water. According to their calculations, this period starts when the *paor* (Pleiades or Seven Sisters) “goes under the earth” (*zimīnnay čērā rawant*), and the sea becomes dangerously turbulent. They pushed their *būjāgs* (large boats) into the sea in early August when the planet *Zāl* (Saturn, *zuḥal* in Arabic, Persian and Urdu) emerges from the earth and is visible in the sky. For boats of smaller size, they waited until the first of September when *Suhail* (the Canopus star) came out of the earth and became visible. With the appearance of *Suhail*, the sea becomes calm and safe for boats of all sizes. This is when the fishermen say that the sea is *wāhir*, calm, and safe for fishing and sailing.

In July, seamen began preparing their boats for launching. The tenth day after the disappearance of *Suhail* (the Canopus star) – which falls on the 22nd of July – Makran seamen pushed their large boats into the sea amid a popular festival called *Naoroz*²⁷ by the coastal population (Suhail 2017a: 91ff.; Suhail 2017b: 90ff.).

For the *Naoroz* festival, young unmarried girls put lentils in baskets in late July and filled them with muddy sand collected from the shoreline. These baskets were then left in the shade and watered for about two weeks to allow them to grow fully green.

On the day of *Naoroz*, girls took these baskets with lentils that had then grown fully green. They took *čāngāl* (a sweet dish made

²⁶ In Oman, the *laywā* performers are also invited to celebrate the inauguration of a new sea vessel (Murer 2020: 230, n. 84; Murer 2022: 14), which in Makran would be performed by a team of *ambā* singers and dancers. It appears that the performance of *laywā* in Oman and *ambā* in Makran on such occasions is almost the same, with only differences in nomenclature.

²⁷ The term *naoroz* is given in Suhail. He comes from Gwadar. He is a retired teacher by profession but descends from a generation of seamen. I did not enquire about this term during my previous visits to the coast and have no personal knowledge of it.

from dates, clarified butter, and millet or rice flour), along with garlands of *ārag*²⁸ and unshelled peanuts, prepared beforehand for the festival. Girls aged seven to ten,²⁹ carrying baskets of green lentils on their heads, led the procession, followed by young boys wearing garlands of *ārag* and peanuts around their necks. They were then followed by a procession of townspeople, including *nāhudās*, *jānšūs*,³⁰ men, women, and children, along with drummers beating their drums and participants singing, dancing, and cheering. During these festivities, boys and girls sang verses like *janikkān naorōz nakīstag, bačikkān čāngāl nawārtag* (“girls have not organized the *naoroz* feast, and boys have not eaten *čāngāl*”) as they approached the sea to make offerings (Suhail 2017a: 91ff.; Suhail 2017b: 90ff.). The procession would go through the town toward the seashore, where the girls offered the green lentil plants to the sea as a symbolic act of devotion and gratitude.³¹ Afterwards,

²⁸ *Ārags* are boiled and sun-dried dates. Dates from some types of date palms are collected when they turn from green to yellow and are not yet ripe. They are boiled and dried in the Sun. This way, they can be stored for a long period of time.

²⁹ Girls of marriageable age did not participate in these public gatherings and festivities as the Baloch believed that a grown-up daughter’s place was in her parents’ house and not in public. Newly married women, on the other hand, attended such festivities as female segregation was not practiced in traditional Baloch society until the second half of the 20th century. With the arrival of non-Baloch government functionaries and armed forces, women’s seclusion started, initially practiced by the upper-class Baloch families and then followed by the middle class, while the working-class women did not practice it as they could not afford such luxuries, as well as it was considered against *balōčāt*, “the Baloch code of conduct” to hide face from other fellow Baloch men. Even in present times, most families in the countryside do not observe female segregation, which they consider against *balōčāt*. Families not observing female segregation often claim proudly that they have maintained their Baloch way of life, *may kīrrā balūčī int, may janēn maojar nayant* (“we have maintained our Baloch way of life, our women are not segregated”), and it is considered a point of honour not to have abandoned Balochi cultural values and tradition.

³⁰ *Nāhudā* is the shipmaster and *jānšūs* are the crew members of a vessel whose number ranges from 4 to 22, depending upon the size of a vessel (for more on this, see Badalkhan 2002).

³¹ None of the people present could tell me about the symbolic significance of sprouted lentils, garland-making, and the offering of the sprouted lentils to the sea, but we find similar traditions in several other parts of the world as well.

čāngāl would be distributed among the participants, and men would dance and sing *ambā* songs accompanied by drummers and oboe/conch players until everyone would be exhausted.³² By midday, the celebrations would come to an end.

In the afternoon, the Hindu community³³ of the town held its collective ritual. Community elders gathered to make monetary contributions to purchase sugar, oil, rice, and other ingredients for ceremonial food. They cooked sweet rice (prepared with *gur*, raw sugar) and decorated coconuts with flower garlands. These coconuts were then carried in procession to the sea and offered as ritual offerings to the sea. Young boys then jumped into the

For example, the ritual of sprouted seeds is a major component of the Zoroastrian Nowruz festival, celebrated at the commencement of the Iranian New Year (in 2010, the United Nations General Assembly declared March 21st as the International Nowruz Day). Two weeks before the beginning of the festivities, women sow seeds inside a plate and water them constantly so that they germinate fully by the day of Nowruz. The sprouted seeds, called *sabzeh*, is one of the seven *S's* (names of items beginning with the letter *sīm* in Persian) components of the Nowruz festival. On the completion of the festivities, the green seeds are thrown into the running water. To them, sprouting green seeds symbolise renewal, rebirth and the beginning of a new life, while throwing away seeds into the running water symbolises getting rid of past year's problems (see Batmanglij 2008 for more on the Nowruz celebrations).

Similar traditions are found in many other parts of the world as well. Italian anthropologist D'Onofrio writes that from the cult of the vegetation god Osiris in ancient Egypt to the summer solstice celebrations in Sardinia and Castelbuono in Palermo, Italy, from Provence in France to the Maronite feast of Eid el Burbara in Lebanon and the ceremonies of the Piramalai Kallar in Tamil Nadu, India, the symbol of the sprouted seeds, whether it be of wheat, barley or lentils, plays a central role in many rituals and festivals (D'Onofrio 2018; see also D'Onofrio 2020 for more on this tradition in a global context).

³² I was repeatedly told in Ormara in 1993 that until girls offered green lentils (*sabzitagēn māš*), boys ate *čāngāl*, and men celebrated the occasion with *ambā* singing and dancing at the beginning of the fishing/navigation season, no boat would be pushed into the sea. However, no such ceremonies were being held at a mass level in 1993, though children celebrated it in their own way, I was told in Ormara by my fisherfolk informants.

³³ The Hindus of Balochistan were originally from India, who had opened businesses in different towns and villages in Balochistan. Many were living there for generations and considered Balochistan as their homeland and called themselves Baloch. Alas, almost all of them migrated to India following the Indian partition in 1947, followed by communal violence in many parts of Pakistan except for the Baloch majority areas.

water to retrieve them, turning the ritual into a playful competition. A designated person from the Hindu community then took a plate of cooked rice, offered it to the sea, filled the plate with seawater, and returned to the town without looking back at the sea – a gesture they believed would secure divine protection for their homes and businesses. The seawater was then sprinkled in Hindu homes and shops, followed by prayers from both Hindus and Muslims for a prosperous fishing and trading year and for the safe return of departing fishermen and sailors. The cooked rice was then distributed among the participants. Hindu shopkeepers then distributed (offered *hayrāt*) sugar among the people, a substance that probably symbolized prosperity (by its multitude of grains), purity (by its whiteness), and peace and serenity (by its sweetness).

Suhail records that after the offerings of green lentils and the distribution of food, young boys collectively bathed in the sea and playfully pulled bystanders into the water, a practice that carried both a festive and ritual significance. Elderly men and local notables, if present, were often carried by young boys and thrown into the water or drenched with buckets of seawater, acts that were tolerated with laughter and cheer as part of the community celebration.

The following day marked the practical beginning of the fishing and seafaring season. Hundreds of men gathered on the shore to launch one vessel after another into the sea, accompanied by drumming, singing, and cheering in a vibrant atmosphere of collective work, which not only symbolized unity and cooperation but also reflected the necessities of maritime life when machines were not yet introduced to replace human strength. Thus, the *Naoroz* festival at the beginning of August signified both the reopening of the maritime season as well as a deeply rooted ritual complex that expressed the coastal community's enduring connection with the sea, the planets, and the cyclical rhythms of renewal and livelihood.

Makran seamen worked for about 275 days at sea each year. During the summer months – from 2nd May to the 1st of August – when the Indian Ocean turns dangerously rough, seamen withdraw their vessels from the water to protect them. This break

was also used for necessary maintenance, such as oiling, painting, and repairs. On such occasions, fleets of boats were pulled ashore in succession, accompanied by the rhythmic beat of drums and the singing of *ambā*. The spirit of mutual help was so strong that if some boats returned late, people would wait for their arrival to help bring them out before retiring to their homes. I was often told by the fishermen in Ormara in 1993 that they knew exactly which boat had arrived and which one was missing.

2.1.4 *Texts of ambā songs*

In a working context, *ambā* songs always begin with the chant of (*h*)*aylambay*, which is a call to the working force, alerting them to get ready. With this call, the working force, or the dancing team, takes its position and replies in the same manner. Then the leader (shantyman) starts singing the first line and the respondents reply with the refrain or the second line and the movements of the working force or the dancing team. The team leader, *jamādār* (leader of the working team) in the working context and *sarōgān* (head, leader) in the festive dance, changes songs and phrases and the working force responds accordingly. For example, in the working context, the leader begins by singing *kolīlā*, *kolīlā*,³⁴ and the team answers with only *kolīlā* and pushes/pulls jointly (Suhail 2017a: 208). In another song, the leader simply sings (*h*)*aylambay(s)* and the working team responds only with the monosyllabic word *ays*³⁵ and moves jointly (ibid.: 209). In this case, too, the leader may change the words each time while the team responds only with the same word. In some other *ambā* songs, both the leader and the respondents may change their

³⁴ This is not a Balochi word, and I have no idea of its provenience.

³⁵ Both (*h*)*aylambay* and *ays* are not Balochi words. Ochanda describes *halambe/harambee* as an utterance used to charge the spirit of cooperative action in lifting, pushing or pulling something heavy. He describes it as a Bantu/Swahili word meaning “Let us all pull together” (Ochanda 2013: 59; cf. Badalkhan 2008: 285, n. 9). It also used to be the cry of porters in Kenyan coastal towns when lifting heavy loads and doing collective work (Ochanda 2013: 59). Baloch sailors may have learned these words and phrases during their frequent visits to the North African coastal towns, working along with the local fishermen.

wordings each time and go on singing as long as the work continues. For example, see the following:

Leader: *sarī umbō, sarī umbō*, (Meaning not clear)

Choir: *Mēdānī battēl kumbay sarā biā* (Battēl boat of Mēd³⁶ come to the Kumb).

L.: *Piṣṣī kān, O gurbag*, (Go away, O cat, the tomcat),

Ch.: *Māhīgā mabar tinnay sarā* (Don't take away the fish from the frying pan).

L.: *Aylay yallā, yā malēsē* (Not Balochi words),³⁷

Ch.: *kukkūray pād gōkay sagindān* (Hen's legs and cow's stomach).

L.: *Aylay jūs* (Not Balochi words),

Ch.: *Mālī jūs* (Not Balochi words).

....

L.: *Kīyyā šutag Zangbārā* (Kīyyā has gone to Zanzibar)

Ch.: *Kīyyāy nānagēnān*. (Kīyyā's ?)³⁸

.... (Suhail 2017a: 211-13).

Some modern poets have also composed songs they call *ambā*, which modern singers sing with modern musical instruments, but these are not sung in the working context (see Suhail 2017a; Jahāndīdeh 2018 and Fazal Khāliq 2021 for some of these songs).

2.1.5 Traces of African languages in *ambā* songs

Besides other aspects of the *ambā* songs and dances, there is yet another interesting thing to mention here, that several *ambā*

³⁶ Mēd is the term used for Baloch professional fishermen and sailors. They inhabit all along the Makran coast stretched from Minab in Iran on the west to Karachi in Pakistan on the east. Mēd are Baloch by ethnicity and Sunni by faith. No one other than Sunni Baloch professional fishermen, who have inherited the profession from their forefathers, would be called a Mēd (for a detailed discussion on the Mēd, see Badalkhan 2006).

³⁷ Jahāndīdeh (2018: 15-17) gives an *ambā* song with a similar refrain collected from the Iranian Makran.

³⁸ The word *nānagēnān* is not known to me. There is the Balochi word *nālagēn* for coconut and this could be the plural of *nālagēn* misprinted in the book but I am not sure.

songs contain Swahili words and phrases.³⁹ On asking well-known local singers about how these songs had reached the Makran coast, I was told that until the late 20th century, a lot of trade and transport of goods was carried out on sailboats (*āčārī*)⁴⁰ with the East African countries. When they (Baloch sailors) reached the African coast, they were greeted by Africans with singing and dancing accompanied by different types of drums. They were also joined by the local people in doing the heavy work of loading and unloading goods. All such works were carried out with the accompaniment of drumming and singing, so the Baloch sailors also learnt some of their songs during these collective works and dances.⁴¹ When they came back to Makran, they sang them during their collective works related to fishing and the sea as well as on festive occasions, transmitting them to their community. However, there might be another explanation for the arrival of these songs in Makran as well: for centuries, Makran has been a corridor for different types of trade including that of slaves⁴² and these songs may have reached Balochistan along with the slaves and remained there as long as they continued singing them during their collective work and

³⁹ It seems that some Swahili words and phrases have survived in songs and rituals among the Black population of the region. During (1989: 47), for example, observed that certain formula fragments in exorcism songs in Southern Iran were in African languages, and Christensen (2002: 679) writes that the *lewa* singers in Oman use a poorly understood mix language of Swahili and Arabic. Sultana (1991: 248) also reports of a *gwālī-ay māt* (medium of evil spirits) in Gwadar, who related himself to Habsha (Ethiopia) and who spoke some “African dialogue”. Barbera (2021: 6, 9) records that when a *gwālī* (person possessed by “wind” evil spirit) enters in a state of trance, her/his *gwāl* speaks through him/her in different languages, such as Balochi, Urdu, Arabic, Swahili and other African languages.

⁴⁰ *Āčār* is the Balochi word for sail, and *āčārī* is a generic name for deep-sea sailing vessels.

⁴¹ Basu writes that “in the Indian Ocean maritime world music provided a mode of communication for people working together on ships, or in ports loading and unloading boats. Seamen and labourers in ports came from a range of different places and cultural backgrounds and often did not understand each other’s languages. But they made music together and ... sing, drum and dance, on dhows and in ports” (Basu 2008b: 163).

⁴² For more on this see Badalkhan 2002 and 2008.

festivities. Now, as the joint manual work is not needed anymore, these songs are losing ground at a surprising speed. It is almost impossible to find a single person above 50 who does not know some *ambā* songs, while it is equally hard to find someone below 30 who knows anything about these songs. To my great surprise, many youths on the coast that I met in 2023, did not even know what an *ambā* was, although they remembered that the fishermen always sang songs when they worked collectively, especially when the work was related to pulling or pushing boats out of or into the sea or moving heavy trunks of trees used for boat building or house construction.⁴³

I made the first recordings of *ambā* songs in Ormara in 1991 when I visited the coast with Mr. Anderson Bakewell.⁴⁴ I then returned to the coast in 1993 and collected more samples and data on *ambā* performances and information related to the seafaring activities there. Here I present some samples that I recorded in 1991.⁴⁵ The 1991 performance was made by a group of seventeen men of different ages – the youngest member was in his 20s while the oldest was in his 70s. They told me that the dress they put on for special performances is usually a loose shirt “similar to the Arabic *kandora*”. However, in our case, they were in their normal Balochi dress. The performance was accompanied by two big double-headed drums (one *rahmānī* and one *kiāsar*)⁴⁶, and one *mugulmānī* footed drum. Two *ṭimbuk*

⁴³ Many people on the coast told me that when they carried heavy trunks of trees or did any other heavy work, that required a collective force, they sang *ambā* with the accompaniment of drums. “These heavy trunks would then look so light as if we were carrying bales of cotton”, they often said. Sometimes, a person would sit or stand on the trunk and dance to the rhythm of the drum(s) while others carried the trunk shouting and singing *ambā* songs. In this way, they carried heavy trunks sometimes from very long distances.

⁴⁴ See the introduction above.

⁴⁵ See Fazal Khāliq (2021) and Jahāndīdeh (2018) for more samples of *ambā* songs and discussions on the genre.

⁴⁶ Drums with the same names are also played by the Baloch in the Sultanate of Oman (see Sebiane 2014; Sebiane 2020; Mürer 2020; Mürer 2023; Murer 2023).

(small drums) and one *gurr* (shell instrument) were also played in the accompaniment.⁴⁷

We observed that in several *ambā* songs there were words and phrases which were not Balochi or any of the languages known to me, such as Urdu, Hindi or Persian. The meanings of these words and phrases were not known to the local people and the performers either. Mr. Bakewell suggested to me that some of the songs could be in Swahili which might have survived among the Black Baloch population of coastal Makran. This increased my curiosity, and I decided to get it confirmed. When I came back to Italy, I transcribed some of these songs and gave them to Prof. Adriano Rossi who then passed them to Prof. Elena Bertoncini (1939-2018), then the professor of Swahili at the Oriental University of Naples. A few days later she brought back the texts with comments and translations. Here I reproduce them with the proposed Swahili text given opposite to the versions recorded in Makran. The text in Swahili was prepared in 1991 by the lecturer of Swahili at our university.

Texts sung by Baloch fishermen	The Swahili version⁴⁸
Leader: <i>nalīyāyāy makēnṛo nalīyāyā</i> Chorus: <i>kipēpēn mawā.</i>	Nalialia e Makendo nalialia Kipepeoni mawā (mawa = humu)
Leader: <i>karīmā mūsā karīmā</i> Chorus: <i>karīmā yāngo (yāmo?) karīmā.</i>	Karima Musa Karima Karima yangu (= wangu) Karima
Leader: <i>mawāay makēnṛo mawāay</i> Chorus: <i>mawā kāzīay hoyāēn.</i>	Mwanao e Makendo mwanao Mwana ni kazi we huoni

⁴⁷ It is a pity that we did not have a video camera to record and preserve the spirit of the traditional *ambā* and *laywā* performances during our 1991 Makran tour. All of those famous *ambā* singers, dancers and drummers, whom we had recorded in Pasni and Ormara in 1991 are now dead, leaving behind no one to carry on the tradition.

⁴⁸ AlMaazmi says that this is Zanzibari Swahili which indicates that this song originated from the coastal Muslim Swahili community (his comments on an earlier draft of this paper).

Leader: *kānīay waṭṭēngā*

Kwa nini (w)e watenga

Chorus: *haywala jumbay*⁴⁹

Hewala jumbe

Translation:

Leader: I cry, poor me, Makendo⁵⁰

Chorus: Here is where the wind blows

Leader: Great prophet Musa, great one,

Chorus: My prophet, great one

Leader: I am Makendo, your son

Chorus: Son is work, why can't you see that

Leader: Why did/do you separate (work and kinship)?

Chorus: Thank you, leader, I accept.

2.1.6 *Musical instruments and the performing style of an ambā dance*

In the working context, *ambā* songs may or may not be accompanied by drums, but there are also *ambā* performing teams (called *ambāi*), with their drummers and dancing bands who are invited on festive occasions. The group leader, as in other collective dances and singing, is called *sarōgān* (“leader”), and the chorus is called *jawābī* (respondents/choir), which is also the working body in the context of joint work (Badalkhan 2008: 286; Jahāndīdeh 2018).

Outside the working context, *ambā* is performed as a group dance joined by dozens of people, and in that case, dance becomes more

⁴⁹ Some fishermen recited this last couplet inverting the position of the lines but as they did not understand the meanings of these verses, it is quite likely that they were subject to alterations. In some cases, the leader sang *wala jumbay*, and the chorus responded *haywala jumbay*.

Bilkhair gives a similar version of this song sung in the Arab Emirates as a *liwa* song. It goes as *Jombi Haywa liwa Jombi / Bana Jombi nalia ya simba jawa*, and says that this is a song through which the workers transmitted and received news to and from their homeland in Africa. She writes that workers used this song as a secret code to forward messages. She gives Jombi as a personal name writing that the “friend persists in calling Jombi to go so that they can both perform the liwa dance” (Bilkhair 2021: 134).

⁵⁰ Makenḡo is not a Baloch personal name or a Balochi word.

important than the sung words. The dancers form a circle singing, dancing and moving anticlockwise while the musicians take their place in the centre of the circle. The musical instruments involved in an *ambā* performance are the same as those used for a *laywā* performance – the only exception is that in *ambā* performance the wind instrument is a *gurr* (conch shell)⁵¹ while in *laywā* it is a *surnā* (oboe). The drummers stand side by side in the centre hanging their drums from their shoulders and play them with sticks, or the right side with a stick and left side with an open hand.⁵² The *mugulmānī* player takes his position in the centre of the performers. After warming the skin of the *mugulmānī* at a burning fire (see plate 5) to tighten and tune the skin, he stands next to it and plays it, sometimes with open hands and other times with one or two sticks, called *lat̤* (“stick”). The leader of the team takes two sticks and stands in front of the dancers guiding them like a music director.⁵³ In the beginning, the rhythm is slow and the dancers move following the beat of the drums, but as the rhythm grows faster and faster, and songs with fewer syllables, the performance gets faster and faster, reaching a point when the dancers dance in a whirling speed. At this point, the circle breaks up. Some dance in couples, others singly, revolving around the drummers. Some sit down on the ground, squatting and hopping like frogs, some dance on their own in a freestyle hop on one foot, shouting, yelling and hopping (this kind of excitement can also be witnessed in other Balochi collective dances, such as *laywā*, *dučāpī* and *suhbat* (for these see Badalkhan 2000a: 777). When everyone is exhausted, the session comes to an

⁵¹ I was told by some shipmasters in Gwadar that sometimes they also used a buffalo, cow or bull horn which has a deep, strong sound (oral interview with fishermen in Gwadar, 17 February 2025).

⁵² The drummers of the *ambā* performance that we recorded in Ormara in 1991 sat on the ground because of the lack of space. Since music playing was banned by the local mullahs, they were afraid of performing in the open. We recorded them inside a small boundary wall. They sat side by side placing their drums on their bent legs, turned the strips of drums around their upward bent knees and played (see plates 1 and 2). However, that was an unusual setting.

⁵³ Sometimes, a senior member of the group, and not the *sarogān*, takes the sticks and guides the dancers while the *sarogān* remains in the lead of the dancers singing and dancing with them.

end and after a few minutes' break for refreshment, another session is started. Each session lasts about 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the number of dancers and the occasion for which it is organized. The whole performance continues for several hours. Unlike the *laywā* songs and dances, where the performers are almost exclusively the Black Baloch, the *ambā* songs, when sung in the working context, are sung by fishermen coming from different sections of the society. When performed for entertainment purposes, it is mostly performed by Baloch with strong African features.

2.1.7 *Ambā as a dying tradition*

As a final note, it should be noted that modern working tools have changed old ways of collective work. As a result, some of the collective-work songs that accompanied such activities, have become a thing of the past or are disappearing rapidly as they find no place in the changing working conditions. For example, tractors or wrenches are used to push boats into the sea or pull them out, and no joint human force is employed anymore. As such, the fishermen no longer sing *ambā* and the younger generation is missing the opportunity to assist people singing such songs to raise the morale of the collective workforce.

2.2 *Laywā*

While *ambā* is a collective work song, sometimes also performed as a group dance outside the working context, *laywā*⁵⁴ is exclusively a festive dance and song performed to celebrate a special occasion or event. Unlike *ambā*, which is performed by fishermen coming from different tribal/social backgrounds, *laywā* is the dance *par excellence* of the Black Baloch people and none other than them perform this dance. It is considered the hallmark

⁵⁴ The term *laywā* is transcribed differently in different sources, such as *leywa*, *līwa*, *laiwa*, *lewa*, *lēwā*, *leīwa*. etc. While making mention of it in other sources, I have written the word as given in those sources. As for Balochi, I have tried here to transcribe the word as pronounced by the local people.

of the Black community, a link with their past and a manifestation of their love for music, singing and dancing.

Laywā is also one of the most vibrant African cultural traditions found among the African diaspora in the Arab Emirates, Sultanate of Oman, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, southern Iran, southwestern Pakistan, India, the Maldives and elsewhere in the region.⁵⁵ It is performed with similar musical instruments in all these countries with only minor differences from place to place. Al-Khan describe the word *laiwa* as of Swahili origin possibly meaning a “dance-circle”, holding that the name of the dance comes from the choreographies that assumed a circular form (Al-Khan 1989: 3-6). Al-Harthy (2012: 125, n. 26), on the other hand, holds that the word *lewa* means getting “high” in kiSwahili, and Sebiane (2020: 116, n. 3), on the authority of Shawqi, states that “[l]e terme *leiwah* dérive d’une expression swahilie, *ku-lewa*, signifiant « se saouler », dont la première syllabe a été supprimée”.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Olsen (1967: 30) writes that *leiwah* is the most widespread of the African dances in the Gulf where they gather in the evenings several times a week to perform *leiwah*. Alpers also mentions the prevalence of *lewa* among the people of Sohar, Zanzibar, Dubai, and Bahrain (Alpers 1997). De Silva Jayasuriya mentions of a dance performance in the Maldives, called *Baburu Lava* (“African Song”) which was introduced into the Maldives by seafarers and settlers from Africa. She opines that *Baburu Lava* and the *laywā* under discussion here are related to each other (De Silva Jayasuriya 2008a: 435-36; see also Ellis 2005: 95). However, one of the major differences between the *laywā* performed by the Black Baloch and that in the Arab countries, Iran and India is that to the Baloch it is purely a festive dance while in the latter countries, besides being a festive dance, it is also performed to treat persons supposedly possessed by evil spirits (see Olsen 1967: 30-31; Alpers 1997: 71, 75; Murer 2020; Mürer 2021: 255; Christensen 2002: 679; Sebiane 2007; Ulaby 2012: 56; Sebiane 2014; Sebiane 2020; Mirzai 2002: 10; Sā’edi 1994: 107-8; Riyāhī 1977: 19-20). Although During (1997: 41) writes that in Iranian Makran *laywā* dance is also present in *gwāti-damāl* spirit possession rites but I have not heard of it in the Pakistani side.

⁵⁶ For more on the meaning of *laywā*, see Bilkhair 2021: 129; Alpers 1997: 70. Bilkhair Khalifa describes *laywa* as a musical dance originally from Kenya which is sung in Swahili and performed by Africans all year round (Khalifa 2006: 229; see Christensen 2002, Mürer 2024 for the description of *lewa/leywa* as performed in Oman).

The Black community of Pakistan is known universally for its great love for music, singing and dancing.⁵⁷ For them, every occasion is a good occasion to organize dancing and singing parties. While walking around the streets of Lyari in Karachi during the weekends till the 1980s, one would frequently encounter Black Baloch youth dancing *laywā* to the rhythm of particular drums. These dances were organized on engagements, weddings, the birth of a son, and on the occasion of religious festivals, such as on the days following the two Eids, and so on. When a group starts dancing, Black males of all ages would rush from all sides to join as they consider it their community dance. This still continues but less frequently than in the past (see below).

Bilkhair describes *līwa* as originally being “an art of manhood or masculinity, brought by Africans to the Gulf for the purposes of ceremonial ritual as well as to ease work. In the pre-oil era, *līwa*’s function shifted from being a ceremonial initiation that prepared warriors for war to an entertainment music” (Bilkhair 2021: 126). She maintains that *līwa* was originally brought by African seafarers employed on merchant ships owned by Arabs. In the earlier days in the Gulf, *līwa* was joined by both men and women from all sectors of society as dancers or instrument players (*ibidem*; Adra 2002: 710). Hassan observes that in some cases, men and women, accompanied by an ensemble of instruments called ‘*iddat al-lewa*’ (‘tools of *lewa*’) which includes a large shawm and some drums, still sing and dance *lewa* in Iraq, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the Emirates (Hassan 2000: 403-404).

2.2.1 *Musical instruments used for laywā and the structure of the dance*

The instruments employed in a *laywā* performance in Pakistan are almost the same as those used in an *ambā* performance outside the

⁵⁷ People of the region with African roots are generally known for their great love for music, singing and dancing (cf. Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2002; Mirzai 2002; Bilkhair 2021: 129; Basu, Schwerin, Minda 2008; see also Rudvin in this volume). Ahmed writes that “[t]he propensity of Black people toward dancing and playing music is viewed as an indication of the continuity of African culture” with which they have earned the stereotype of *shīdī bādšāh* (Shīdī kings), or “happy-go-lucky” (Ahmed 1989: 29).

working context. These are: one *mugulmānī*, two big double-headed drums, generally called *ṛuhl*, but specifically, the bigger one is called *rahmānī* and the smaller one is called *kiāsar*; two small *ṭimbuk* (double-headed drums), one or two *sumā* (oboe), and one or two *tāl* (lit. plate but here, steel plates) played with sticks.⁵⁸ In the case of the unavailability of steel plates, some cooking pots of steel will also do the job.⁵⁹ As in an *ambā* dance performance (see above), the skin of the *mugulmānī* is warmed at a burning fire to tighten the skin and raise the pitch before the beginning of the performance and also at the intervals when it is felt that the skin has become loose. Once the *mugulmānī* is ready, drummers take their positions standing close to each other in the middle. The *mugulmānī* player stands next to them while the *tāl* player places his instrument on a tripod⁶⁰ and takes his position close to them. In the beginning, the *sumā* player plays some high-pitched notes to announce the start of the dance. He is followed by the drummers. The dancers form a circle around the drummers and begin moving slowly from right to left guided by the drumbeats and the sound of the *sumā*.

The players of *rahmānī* and *kiāsar* drums often move along with the dancers inciting them constantly and guiding them with their dance movements. The players of *ṭimbuks*, on the other hand, may stand in one place or follow the *ṛuhlīs*. At the height of the dance, when the dancers go back and forth quickly, drummers follow them going back and forth, inciting them by drumming loudly and fast. The next step would be that the dancers break up the circle and dance individually with much excitement, often circling the drummers and the *mugulmānī* as if they were dancing only for them. In the beginning, they sing along with dancing but

⁵⁸ In the Gulf countries, dancers-singers surround five musicians: four percussionists who play drums such as *msondo/mshindo*, *kasir* and *rahmani*, an idiophone named *tanak*, and an oboe called *zamr* (Sebiane 2017: 3; Bilkhair 2021: 129-30).

⁵⁹ In modern times, many troupes have replaced their *tāks* with modern instruments bought in the market that produce a similar sound to *tāl*.

⁶⁰ In the past they used to sit on the ground and place their steel plates in front of them.

when they break the circle, they simply dance, shout, yell and make sounds like wild animals, etc. Some form couples and compete in shaking shoulders, arms, and wiggling buttocks, others dance individually by doing the same. The session comes to an end when everyone is exhausted. Each session lasts for about 20 minutes or half an hour while a full *laywā* performance may last several hours, a whole evening or much of the night. There is no fixed number of participants for a *laywā* dance performance. They may be 20 or 30 or above a hundred.

Although the main musical instrument of a *laywā* dance is the *mugulmānī* without which it is unthinkable to organize one, *surnā* also plays an important role in formal *laywā* dances. Occasional street *laywā* dances, on the other hand, can be organized with even simple drums. It is the *surnāī* who leads the dancers and changes the tempo of the dance every now and then until it leads them to a fast, whirling stage. At the height of the performance, sometimes he plays one line of a song on his *surnā* and the next line is sung by the dancers. Sometimes, he only plays the part of a poetic line, and the dancers complete the rest – this stage is the most animated and playful stage of the dance when the *surnāī* and the dancers communicate with each other in the language of music (cf. Bilkhair 2021: 129 for similar observations from the Arabian Gulf).

Some professional *laywā* dancers paint their faces and bodies with different colours (especially white strips on their arms and bodies imitating wild animals), wear headgear of bird feathers on their heads, skirts of straw bushes, adorn themselves with cowrie shells chains around their forearms, legs and ankles, and often mimic wild animals – sometimes they even tie a fake tail of straw to look like monkeys.⁶¹ They do so especially in official cultural programmes, TV shows, stage performances, and wedding ceremonies. They pretend to behave *jangalī* (“wild”, like primitive

⁶¹ Similar practices have been recorded among the Afro-Indian Sidis in Gujarat, Karnataka and elsewhere (see Alpers 1997: 75; De Silva Jayasuriya 2008a: 431; Kassebaum and Claus 2000: 877; see also Murer 2023 for some video links of *laywā* performances in Karachi where the dancers perform *laywā* dressed this way).

Africans).⁶² Such professional dancers do not take part in circle dances where tens of participants take part. They dance individually, in couples, or in small groups. Since *laywā* is also performed in a freestyle way where dancers begin dancing independently on their own, some of the professional and master *laywā* dancers present themselves as African *jangalī*.

2.2.2 Formal and informal way of *laywā* performance

In modern times *laywā* is performed both formally and informally. Formally, it is performed as described above. Informally, it is organized where the *mugulmānī* player, drummers and *sumāī* are invited or they come on their own with some friends to enjoy a *laywā* dance just for fun and entertainment. They gather at a public place – in a courtyard⁶³ in the case of a wedding ceremony or on a personal invitation – and start playing music and dancing. Young and old from the community begin dancing individually without forming any circle or following any particular rules. They start shaking their shoulders and buttocks in a violent way until they are exhausted and then stop to rest for a while before coming back to the floor. When one group of dancers stops, another group enters and begins shaking their shoulders, bodies and buttocks until they are exhausted, and this continues for as long as the music goes on. In most such cases, male dancers in couples face each other and compete in shaking their shoulders and buttocks. Sometimes, one person dances and others clap, and then another one replaces him, and this goes on for about half an hour or so until the music is stopped and the session comes to an end. It is one of the most common ways nowadays, and also the most playful style. Musicians stand still and play while dancers dance frantically in front of them.

⁶² During writes that “Lewā is sometimes described as the 'African jungle dance'” (During 1997: 39).

⁶³ Lyari’s Baloch population mostly live in very small houses with no courtyards so they erect tents in nearby streets closing it for traffic and hold their ceremonies there.

However, there has been much criticism regarding the shaking of buttocks in the *laywā* dance, and Baloch people of other backgrounds often criticise them for dancing, what they call, “vulgarly”. Light-skinned Baloch people consider it shameful for a Baloch of any background to dance with shaking buttocks. The Black Baloch, on their part, maintain that it is a part of the *laywā* dance and that no restrictions should be placed on the movements of *laywā* dancers. A famous Baloch nationalist and revolutionary poet, Ghulam Rasul Mulla alias G. R. Mulla, who died in August 1914 at the age of 75, once wrote in one of his popular poems that *čō šumā Kādūay yalēn baččay / parčā laywāay sarā naččay* (“belonging to the valorous stock of Kādū⁶⁴ / why do you [Black Baloch] shake your bodies in the *laywā* dance?”). While singing this popular song, famous Baloch singer, Nur Muhammad Nural, often adds that *pa Balōčā srēnā ča jahl surēnag ayb int* (“it is shameful for Baloch to shake his body parts down the waist”).

2.2.3 African heritage of *laywā*

Laywā is basically an African dance “brought to the Gulf from the Eastern Coast of Africa to Oman and subsequently elsewhere in the Gulf” (Ulaby 2012: 56). However, it is interesting to note that in some Gulf states it is mainly performed by the Black Baloch people. Ethnomusicologist Maho Sebaine writes that in the Al-Satwa quarter of Dubai tourists and visitors are frequently entertained with *Laiwa* performances by local musical and dance troupes having a clearly African appearance, but they identify themselves as Baloch (al-Balushi). They also carry the surname of al-Balushi, the local Arabic pronunciation of the ethnonym Baloch. They

⁶⁴ Kādū Makkurānī (Kadir Bakhsh Rind Baloch, 1811 – 1887 or 1878) was an anti-British revolutionary who operated in Gujarat in India. He was born in Chabhar in western Makran and migrated to Gujarat in India. He was a kind of local Robin Hood who, besides fighting the British colonial forces, robbed the rich and distributed the spoils among the poor. He has become a famous folk hero of Indian Gujarat and a film in Gujarati was made about his life in 1960. Besides, he is also celebrated in several Gujarati folk songs.

speak Balochi, Hindi/Urdu and Arabic (Sebiane 2007: 122). He speculates that the ancestors of these performers may have originally come from the Swahili coast who were first taken to Makran and from there they subsequently migrated or were brought to the Arab coast at different times. Finding the Baloch identity more prestigious than the African one, he speculates, they may have opted for the former (*ibidem*; cf. also Hopper 2015: 212; Hopper 2018: 139; Mürer 2023: 131-32).

As for the first introduction of *laywā* dances in Makran and Sindh, it is hard to speculate whether it arrived in the region as an independent body brought along by local sailors who were frequent visitors to East African coasts or if it was introduced by the Africans brought here as slaves, traders and labourers.⁶⁵ I am of the opinion that the *laywā* dance was most probably introduced by the enslaved Africans who were transported and sold in this region at different periods of time. *Ambā* songs and dances, on the other hand, may have been brought by Baloch sailors and seafarers who were frequent visitors to the East African coasts until the mid-20th century when modern shipping facilities replaced their activities which they carried out with traditional sailing boats. During these cross-continent voyages, sometimes they would spend lengthy periods of time on the African coast assisting and participating in local singing and dancing activities. My informants on the Makran coast maintained that they had learnt these songs and dances in Africa and then introduced them to their fellow Baloch fishermen in Makran.

As to the language of the *laywā* songs, these are presently sung in local Balochi dialects, although a few words and phrases are of dubious provenance. Further research may reveal whether they are

⁶⁵ Similar questions have been posed by several scholars writing on the presence of African musical culture in the Arabian Gulf countries. Hopper, for example, finds it hard to conclude whether *Laiwa* performance in the Arabian Gulf is an indirect result of trade contacts or it was brought by enslaved Africans now settled in the *Batinah* region of Oman. He considers it highly questionable that music travelled alone, suggesting that it migrated along with forced migrants from Africa (Hopper 2015: 214). However, he concludes that it was by the way of Oman that *Laiwa* spread around the Gulf (*ibidem*).

in some African language or not. Local people recount that in the past *laywā* dancers sang songs with many African words and phrases, but most of these are lost now.

2.2.4 *Laywā as a popular dance in Pakistan*

Laywā has lately become a popular dance in urban Pakistan as well, especially in government and semi-government cultural programmes. To the non-Baloch population of the country, it is known as the *mākrānī* or *balochī* dance. Non-Baloch Pakistani dancers and artists dance *laywā* on recorded Balochi music in national cultural shows as well as in official cultural events. The *laywā* they dance is not the *laywā* as performed by the Black Baloch, but a hybrid of *damāl* and *laywā* (cf. Murer 2023: 70). Being a playful and joyous dance, non-Baloch artists and dancers always perform it enthusiastically and joyfully, although in their own way. At larger cultural events, Black Baloch dancers are invited where they present *laywā* as a *mākkurānī* (i.e., Black Balochi) popular dance.

3. Footed drums: *Mugulmānī/mugarmān, shayparja, and kumrī*

3.1 *Mugulmānī/mugarmān*

One of the main musical instruments and cultural symbols of the Black population of Sindh and Balochistan is the footed drum, called *mugarmān* by the Sindhi Shīdīs and *mugulmānī* by the Black Baloch. In Pakistan, it is found only among the people of African descent and nowhere else. It is a big drum of cylindrical shape with four legs.⁶⁶ It is carved out of a single trunk and hollowed inside. Its lower end is open, and the upper

⁶⁶ In some cases, it may have three legs, but the majority have four legs. Thus, the alternate name for *mugulmānī* in some coastal towns of Makran is *čārpādagī* (“of four legs”), never *saypādagī* (“of three legs”).

end is covered with cow, ox, buffalo or camel hide.⁶⁷ It is about three and a half to four feet high while its width varies depending upon the purpose for which it is used. The player places it in front of him and plays it standing. It is played either with hands or sticks. It is usually played by one person but at the height of a performance, two persons may play it with their full strength, either jointly or they may replace each other intermittently. It is a secular instrument when played for *ambā* and *laywā* performances but considered highly sacred when played in Sufi ritual dances, such as *damāl*, *shayparja*⁶⁸ and other rituals at Sufi shrines in Sindh and Balochistan (see Rudvin's chapter in this volume). These latter are organized on the *Urs* (death anniversary) of patron saints as well as on any occasion by families to ward off evil spirits (*badrūh*, *jinn*) from their homes or businesses, ward off evil eyes from their families, crops, businesses, social positions as well as after the fulfillment of a vow (*kaol*),⁶⁹ on the birth of a son, success in a competitive exam of a son/daughter, on a marriage ceremony of a son, or the occasion of the circumcision of a baby boy,⁷⁰ and so on.

⁶⁷ Buffalo hide is the preferred one because it is thick and gives a deeper and low-pitched sound. In the case of the unavailability of a buffalo hide, skins of cow, ox and camel are also used (see also Albinia 2008: 69).

Zubair Mukhtar, a Baloch poet from the coastal town of Pasni, told me via WhatsApp on June 10, 2024, that once he had accompanied a *laywā* dance troupe to Islamabad for a national festival at the Lok Virsa (Institute of Folk Heritage). During the performance, the skin of their *mugulmāni* had torn. He says he had rushed to the nearby city of Rawalpindi, bought a buffalo hide, and the performers then fixed their drum.

⁶⁸ Performers of both *Mālid* and *Shayparja* are Baloch with strong African features but no one uses terms such as Black Baloch for them as they are considered Baloch in every sense of the word. Sometimes they even claim that they are the indigenous people of Makran while the people with fairer skin, straight hair, and sharp noses are migrants from the Middle East and northwestern Iran (cf. also *BDCS, Makran*, 1907: 105).

⁶⁹ *Kaol* is when one vows that if such and such a wish is fulfilled, she or he will sacrifice such and such an animal and/or organize a session of mystical dance performance, such as *mālid* or *shayparja* performance, etc.

⁷⁰ In modern times, baby boys are circumcised by doctors in hospitals, so no major festivities are held anymore. In the past, when baby boys were circumcised

Shayparja performances are also organized on the occasion of both the Eids – generally on the day following each Eid (cf. Badalkhan 2000: 779).

3.2 *Shayparja*

The footed drums used for *shayparja* Sufi rituals are taller and slenderer than the normal *mugulmānīs* used for *ambā* and *laywā* performances. The performers of *shayparja* are called *shayparjāī* (“*shayparja* performers”).⁷¹ Hughes-Buller writes the following about a *shayparja* performance he observed in Makran during the late 19th century. He describes that the

by village Luris (ironsmiths, goldsmiths, musicians, singers, artists and craftsmen of the Baloch; for more on the Luris see Badalkhan 2005b), it was one of the great occasions to celebrate in the life of a family. The circumcision marked the passage from childhood to adulthood when the boy became a full member of the family, the tribe in tribal areas and the society at large. He would be liable to take revenge (or become a victim of revenge) and was allowed to carry arms and take part in tribal wars. In some Baloch tribes, the boy did not wear trousers until he was circumcised as putting on trousers meant adulthood with all its responsibilities and obligations towards the society. It was for such reasons that circumcisions took place at the age of 6 to 7. In non-tribal areas, such as Makran, it could take place anytime from the 40th day after birth until the 7th year of age. (It should be added that, unlike some Muslim societies, female circumcision was never practiced in Balochistan.)

⁷¹ *Shayparja* performers are followers of the Sufi Saint Shaikh Farid Shakarganj, also called Ganji Shakar (1173/1175-1264/1265 A.D.) whose shrine is near Lahore in the Punjab (Badalkhan 2000a: 779-80; Sakata 2000: 755; Nizami 1955; Talib 1973). The compiler of Makran *Gazetteer* observed that the rites of *Shayparja* were “confined to persons of slave extraction” (*BDGS. Makran*, 1907: 114). He connects this ceremony with “the fetish worship of Africa” (*ibidem*). Although I believe that the performance style may resemble African fetish worship but the Makrani performers relate it to their patron saint, Shaikh Farid Shakarganj, and thus the corrupted name of *shayparja* (Shaikh Farid-jān – Balochi suffix *jān* added to show endearment). Until the recent past, *shayparja* performances were regularly held on Monday and Friday nights (cf. *ibidem*) but now only on special occasions, or when a family organizes such an event and invites one of the *shayparja* teams to perform at their place. *Shayparja* performances are also organized on official days and local cultural events presenting it as a part of Makran’s popular culture.

drum fixed on a tripod and covered with a red cloth, which is called *Mughulmāni*, ... is placed in the centre of a circle and men and women together join in the performance of a dance round it while it is beaten by a man with both hands accompanied by four other men beating the ordinary native two-sided drum. The sound of the drum is accompanied by songs which are taken up by the circle of men and women who gradually work themselves into a frenzy of excitement and whirl round and round. The performances last throughout the night with intervals of rest (*BDGS, Makran 1907: 114*).

It appears from the description above that very little has changed in the performance of *shayparja* since then, except for the name of the footed drum which is no longer called *mughulmāni* but *shayparja*, and that men and women do not dance together anymore. Nowadays, women of all social classes sit at a distance from men, unless it is a close family gathering, and watch the performance from behind. They do not join men in dancing, or at least I have not heard of any such case.

3.3 *Kumrī*

Drums similar to *shayparja* are also played at Sufi shrines for mystic dance rituals and as an accompaniment to prayer songs, such as *zīkr* (rhythmic remembrance of the name of Allah and His attributes) and *manqabat* (praise songs to the Prophet and his companions), etc. In most of these cases, these footed drums are no longer called *mughulmāni* or *shayparja*, but *kumrī*, a term not found in earlier records.⁷² I was told that at the *ziārat* (shrine) of Nēk Nūr Mahmad, a local Sufi saint in the Ormara area, ritual performances are organized on almost all Thursday nights (nights between Thursdays and Fridays) and the main instrument played

⁷² *Kumrī* is the name of the bird *Streptopelia turtur* (my thanks are due to Shakur Shohaz for this information, via Balochi *Gālpōli dīwān* WhatsApp group, 14/10/24). I have not seen this bird but my friends from Balochistan say that it is famous for its sweet singing voice. The word *qumrī* is also found in Arabic and Persian, where it is used for turtledove and ringdove. It might be possible that because of the sweet singing voice of the bird, the footed drums at holy shrines are called as such.

there is the *kumrī*. It is slenderer and taller than the normal *mugulmānī*.⁷³ Like other footed drums, it is also played with one stick and one open hand or with two sticks or with both hands. The annual festival of this saint is held on the 15th of Sha'bān (*barāṭay šāp* of the Baloch), the eighth month of the Islamic lunar calendar.⁷⁴ People from distant towns and villages come to participate in the ritual and make offerings (*hayrāt*). The *kumrī* of the shrine is considered one of the most sacred objects in the shrine and is rarely taken away from there.⁷⁵ It is only taken out of the shrine in a procession during the performances and then taken back as soon as the ritual dancing is finished. During these rituals, the drum is treated as an animated object with spirits living inside (cf. Basu 2008c: 241). During the intervals between one session and another, burning incense is put under the drum to feed these benevolent spirits.

3.4 Footed drums considered male

All footed drums are considered male and are not shown uncovered to women.⁷⁶ The sides are always covered with a colourful cloth or a cloth of bright colours. Among the colours for the skirt, red or green are preferred, but I have also seen *mugulmānīs* and other footed drums covered with cloths of

⁷³ I have not yet seen a *kumrī* drum in person but from the descriptions provided to me by local informants, these appear to be four feet tall and somewhat slimmer than the standard *mugulmānīs*. In height and width, they seem to be similar to *shayparjās*. In this case, too, these instruments are exclusively used by the Black population of Makran.

⁷⁴ This information was provided to me by Zubair Mukhtar from Pasni through WhatsApp on 12 June 2024.

⁷⁵ In modern times, the *kumrī* footed drum at the shrine in Ormara is also rented to *laywā* musical groups who take it to nearby towns for *laywā* dances. They bring it back to the shrine as soon as they finish their dancing sessions (information provided by Zubair Mukhtar via WhatsApp). I was also told of one or two other *kumrī* drums kept in two Sufi shrines in Pasni but I failed to find any traces of them.

⁷⁶ Basu also observed during an 'urs of a saint in Karachi that the *mugarmān* was treated as one of the most sacred objects of the cult and that women were prohibited to touch it (Basu 2000: 260; see also Eyssalenne 2023: 115).

different colours sewn together. Satin (*rēšām*) and velvet (*makhmal*) are the preferred ones but in the absence of these, any cloth of strong colour is used.

3.5 *First introduction of mugulmānī in Balochistan*

The players and makers of these drums do not have any idea about when they were first introduced to Balochistan, and when and by whom these were first brought. Some aged people, who were known for their vast knowledge of the local history and traditions, told me that the instrument was first introduced in Makran by the African slaves brought by Mir Hammal-e Jiand, a legendary hero of the sixteenth century.⁷⁷ Since then, this drum has become a cultural symbol of the Baloch population of African descent. Some *ambā* and *laywā* performers in Ormara told me in 1993 that the instrument was originally brought by African slaves from Mombasa,⁷⁸ but they did not have any idea when it was first introduced to Balochistan.

3.6 *Origin of the name mugulmānī*

As to the origin of the name *mugulmānī*, Prof. Abdulaziz Lodhi once told me that the name comes from Bantu/Swahili, where the word *magulu* means “leg/foot”, and *mane* means “four”.⁷⁹ Ahmed Almaazmi, commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter, said that “the phrase ‘four legs’ in Swahili is *miguu minne*. -*Miguu*- is the plural of -*mguu* (leg/foot) in Bantu languages with *mi-* marking plural for body parts. *Minne*, derived from *nne* (four), aligns with

⁷⁷ For Hammal-e Jiand see Badalkhan 2000b; Gul Khān Nasir 1969; Hamid Balōč 2009: 211 ff.; Hamid Balōč 2023, vol. 1, chap. 7; Faqir Šād 2016.

⁷⁸ Albinia considers the *mugarmān* drum to be a relative of the *ngoma* drum originally from Zimbabwe (Albinia 2008: 70). Basu, citing Janzen (1992), describes *ngoma* as a complex term from the Bantu language family with a wide range of related meanings, such as drum, song, performance, healing association, spirit possession and ritual” (Basu 2008c: 233, n. 4).

⁷⁹ Oral discussion with Prof. Lodhi, Uppsala, October 2003. Google Translate gives the Swahili word *mguu* for “leg” and *minne* for “four” (see also Lodhi 2008: 6, n. 20; Eyssallene 2023: 115; Murer 2020: 225, n. 81).

miguu through the *mi-* prefix. Together, "miguu minne" means "four legs".⁸⁰ Thus, *magulumane*, *miguu minne* would mean a drum with "four legs". Interestingly, the drum is sometimes called *čārpādagi* ("of four legs") by some in coastal Makran.

3.7 *Mugulmānī/mugarmān as a cultural symbol of Afro-Pakistanis*

The Blacks of Sindh and southern Balochistan consider *mugulmānī/mugarmān* their most important cultural heritage and symbol. The Baloch in Karachi very often say that at every festival of Lyari's Black population, whether it be a wedding, the marriage engagement of a son, the celebration of the birth of a son, or a secular festival, such as the celebration of the victory of a football team, success of a candidate in local or national elections, etc., one will always find Blacks celebrating it with drumming and dancing and *mugulmānī* would be one of the necessary components on all such occasions (cf. Ahmed 1989). I was often told that the people of African descent identify themselves with this drum, and when they hear its sound, they forget about everything and rush from all sides to join the dancing. They consider it a liberating tool that takes them away from their day-to-day miseries and sufferings. Yaqoob Qambarani, a Shīdī writer, social activist, and the President of Pakistan Shīdī ittehād (Pakistan's Shīdī Alliance), originally from Sindh but now settled in the Baghdadi area of Karachi, once said during an interview that "*mugarmān* frees us from all social and cultural bonds and the miseries of our routine life. We never need an invitation to join a dancing session where *mugarmān* is being played. Every performance is open to us all as a community. When we start dancing to its beat, we forget about our surroundings and do not care who is watching us and who is not, and whether the feast belongs to us, some of our acquaintances or to complete strangers, we all run to join the dance as a single body".⁸¹

⁸⁰ He has added this while going through an earlier draft of this paper.

⁸¹ The interview in Urdu was retrieved on 13 March 2022 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UujrrVeZp2U&t=788s>. The English translation is mine. All references to Yaqoob Qambarani and Ghulam Akbar Shidi in this paper are taken from the same interview.

Abdul Aziz Shidi, a grandson of Muhammad Siddiq Musafir, says that the Shīdīs in Sindh identify themselves with Musafir, whom they venerate as a saint.⁸² He says Musafir used to tell his fellow Shīdīs that *mugarmān* is as vital to them as a rifle to a soldier. He called it the trademark of the Shīdī community. He called upon his fellow Shīdīs to embrace African culture and not be ashamed of their African roots. Musafir maintained that every nation “has its own 'spiritual instrument' which 'they use for worship and also for the entertainment of their souls'. ... For Sheedis there is the mugarman” (Albinia 2008: 77). He recalled that “Old Sheedis would listen to the beat of the drum and weep, remembering the lands they had been snatched from. When the drum was played and the dancing began, the ‘old language’ would come back to them. Musafir urged Sheedi parents to play the mugarman to their children, to teach them the old language, and to pass on the African culture they had inherited. Sheedis should not feel ‘shame and disgrace’ when playing the mugarman. Their ‘ancestral instrument’ was a ‘weapon’ for building Sheedi solidarity - one of the principal things, he felt, that Sheedis had lost since the time of freedom” (*ibidem*).

Abdul Aziz finds himself in total agreement with his grandfather and adds that *mugarman* “is the identity of the Shīdī community, and the symbol of our mutual love. It is the instrument of unity and fraternity of our community. Whenever we listen to the sound of this drum, which is easily heard within a range of five to six kilometers during the night-time in the

⁸² Muhammad Siddiq Musafir was born in 1879 in Tando Bago, District Badin in Sindh. He was the son of a former slave brought from Zanzibar to Tando Bago. Musafir’s father was later freed by his master for his good conduct. Musafir was a writer, teacher and a social worker. Shīdīs in Sindh consider him their educator and liberator without whom they would still be working the fields of their masters. He was “the architect of Sheedi identity, the man whom all Sheedis credit with ‘bringing our people up’” (Albinia 2008: 70). Musafir was also a prolific writer. Albinia writes that he ghost-wrote several books for a rich businessman, and twenty-five books under his own name. These include books on Islam, translations of Urdu and Persian novels into Sindhi, a biography, and several others (*ibid.*: 76).

countryside, our community abandons all its engagements and rushes to join the dancing”.⁸³

3.8 Permissibility of footed drums in Islam

Shīdīs claim that although Islam prohibits the use of musical instruments for entertainment purposes, it allows the playing of *mugarmān*. Ghulam Akbar claims that the Prophet Muhammad himself permitted the playing of *mugarmān*. He says Hazrat Qambar⁸⁴ and Fida⁸⁵ used to play *mugarmān* to entertain the Prophet, and for this reason the *mugarmān* has blessing powers. Similarly, Yaqoob Qambarani claims that playing *mugarmān* is permissible in Islam also because only its upper side is covered with animal skin and that the drums covered only from one side are permissible in Islam. He says the *mugarmān* was invented by Hazrat Qambar to entertain Imam Hussain, grandson of the Holy Prophet. “When the Prophet heard its sound, he sanctioned its playing. From that day on, this instrument has enjoyed a spiritual place in our community”, he told the interviewer. A similar statement is also attributed to Muhammad Musafir where he claims that the playing of and dancing to the rhythm of *mugarmān* was religiously permissible in Islam as the Prophet Muhammad

⁸³ For the interview of Abdul Aziz, see the documentary “Kings without Thrones: Sheedi Badshah”, by Alice Peter, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVV3oRG16RA> (last visited 20/12/2024. The video is with English subtitles).

⁸⁴ *Hazrat* is an honorific title added to the names of persons to show respect and veneration. In India and Pakistan, it is often added before the names of prophets, saints, holy men but also to prominent personalities and dignitaries.

Qambar was the name of Imam Ali’s faithful slave, who later freed him. He was in charge of Imam Ali’s horses and camels and was the standard bearer of a wing of his army in the Battle of Siffin. Qambar was beheaded at an old age on the orders of Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi because he refused to denounce Imam Ali (Rizvi 1972/1988: 44-46).

⁸⁵ I was unable to find any reference to the Fida mentioned above.

himself “used to take his favourite wife Ayesha to listen to the mugarman being played”⁸⁶ (Albinia 2008: 77).

3.9 *Sound of mugulmānī/mugarmān appeasing to jinns and spirits*

The Black Baloch and Afro-Sindhīs believe that the sound of this drum is also appeasing to *jinn* and other evil spirits. These spirits enjoy the sound of this drum, and when they listen to it to their heart’s content, they go away and leave the humans in peace. They argue that when evil spirits are not content, they attack and possess humans and make them sick. As such, to appease them, it is necessary to organise drumming sessions at shrines at different intervals to make them content. They say that the sound of this drum has spirituality in it which is not found in the sound of other drums. The *sifat* (praise songs to Allah) sung with the accompaniment of this drum have a special effect on the listeners, says Yaqoob Qambarani.

3.10 *Melody types performed on mugulmānī/mugarmān*

As to the melody modes of this drum, Yaqoob Qambarani explains that three different *tāls*⁸⁷ (rhythm) are played on *mugarmān* drums. The first one is called *kīlō wayrō*⁸⁸ which is then divided into three classical *tāls*. He says it needs a lot of experience and training to play this melody properly. Not all Shīdī players can play this rhythm. The *zīkr* performed on this *tāl* is called *mawāī*. The

⁸⁶ AlMaazmi brought my attention to a ḥadīth attributed to Aisha, wife of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), which says that “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) was sitting, and we heard noise and the sound of children. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) stood up, and it turned out to be an Abyssinian woman dancing while the children surrounded her. He said, ‘O Aisha, come and watch’. So, I came and placed my cheek on the shoulder of the Messenger of Allah, and I kept watching her between his shoulder and head”. <https://dorar.net/hadith/sharh/83391> (English translation of the original Arabic ḥadīth is by AlMaazmi).

⁸⁷ In Indian classical music, *tāl* is any rhythmic beat or strike that measures musical time.

⁸⁸ R and T with dots under are retroflex sounding like Urdu ر̣ and ٹ̣.

mawāī is mostly in the form of question and answer. Several *manqabats* (songs praising and glorifying the Holy Prophet and his Companions) are also sung in this *mawāī* (see above note 71).

Qambarani explains that the second type is called *las* which is a simple rhythm. This one is also called *maidānī* (from *maidān*, ‘plain’?). Because of its simplicity, this tune is played in *tarabī*⁸⁹ (light, cheerful) mode in which there is much *čančalpan* (coquetry, playfulness, entertainment). This rhythm begins with the *zīkr* (prayers invoking the names of Allah) followed by songs of happiness and merriment. When this rhythm reaches its climax, all participants enter into a state of excitement and dance ecstatically.

3.11 *Mugulmānī/mugarmān as a link among the African diaspora*

The Shidīs connect themselves and their traditional musical instrument *mugarmān* with the African diaspora in the rest of the world. Yaqoob Qambarani (see above n. 71), for example, says that the *mugarmān*, being popular among peoples of African descent worldwide, is called differently in different countries and places. Among the most common names, he says, are *musēnro*,⁹⁰ *saylānī*, *winār/wīnāl*, and *ṛārā*. *Musēnro*, he explains, is a Swahili word which means ‘the caller’ (*pukārnay wālā* in Urdu). The term *saylānī*⁹¹ (lit. “traveller, vagabond”), according to him, means being “always on the move” and *winār/wīnāl* is “to keep all in a

⁸⁹ *Taarab* is a major African music style played for entertainment at weddings and festive occasions all along the Swahili coast in East Africa. It contains “features of a typical ‘Indian Ocean’ music, combining influences from Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, India and the West with mainland African and local Swahili musical practices” (Fargion 2014: 3; Gunderson 2002: 488).

⁹⁰ Footed drums are called *mesondo/musundu* in the Arabian Gulf and Oman (Al-Khan 1989: 13-14; Christensen 2002: 678).

⁹¹ *Selani* is the name of a musical instrument used by the Indian Sidis during the *urs-sharif* of Bava Gor. Among the musical instruments used for dance, Gupta mentions one called *selani* which is “a fiddle-like instrument with a dried gourd having a stiff catgut string and a bunch of peacock feathers mounted on one end and shells as charms to ward off [f] evil. It is played with a stick held with a coconut shell in which loose pebbles rattle. The latter is wrapped up in silken cloth and is also known as *jhuñjhuna* or *mai misra* after their goddess and can be played as a solo instrument” (quoted in Alpers 1997: 74).

bond” (*pāband karnay wālā*, i.e., “to keep united”) as it unites all the Africans in a single body. He holds that the *mugarmān* is called *brambo* in Brazil, which is the same in form and rhythm as “our *mugarmān*”. The Africans in the Caribbean, he claims, call it *bāṭā* which they play in their festivals.

3.12 *Musical instruments played along with mugulmānī*

The *mugulmānī* of the Black Baloch people is played with the accompaniment of four drums: two *ruhl* (double-headed big drums) and two *ṭimbuk* (double-headed small drums). The biggest drum is called *rahmānī* and the smaller one is called *kiāsar/kaisar*. The two small ones are called *ṭimbuk*. While the former names are limited to the Black Baloch population on the Makran coast and Karachi, the latter is a name used for all small double-headed barrel drums used as an accompaniment to big drums and found all over Balochistan. When the *maydānī* rhythm is played, says Yaqoob Qambarani, the accompanying drums should be three. Among these, one is called *rahmānī* and the other two are called *kaisar*. Another musical instrument played in the accompaniment of *mugarmān* is *surnā* (oboe), which, according to Qambarani, is made of *sīṭ* (conch shell).

Qambarani says that Sindhi Shīdīs also employ four drums in the accompaniment (*sangat*) of *mugarmān*. These drums are called *mosīnda* and *jālāṭa*. There must always be four of them, he explains.

3.13 *Making mugulmānī drums*

To make a *mugulmānī*, the first step is to select the trunk of a tree, preferably that of mango (*amb*), teak (*śāg*) or rosewood (*śīšum*). If these woods are unavailable, other local trees are selected but the first choice in Pakistan goes for teak and mango. The log is first cut and trimmed to the desired size and then hollowed from inside. Four legs are carved out of the same log to make the drum stand while playing. The upper side is then covered with an animal hide whose sides are stretched tight and fixed on pegs inserted on

the upper sides of the drum. Since the drum has no cords to tighten the skin and raise the pitch, the skin is heated next to a burning fire before each performance and during intervals with which the skin tightens and produces a sharp and strong sound. The drum is considered highly sacred, so the incense *kundrikk* (Arabic *lubān*, *boswellia sacra*, frankincense, olibanum) is kept burning during the process of its making and the smoke is directed toward the instrument to keep it fumigating. It is believed that the smoke of the incense appeases the spirits of the drum. It usually takes from one to two months to make a single *mugulmānī*. When ready, it is wrapped with a cover of satin or velvet to hide its body from unwanted eyes, especially from the sight of women.

4. *Mullahs' opposition to music and singing*

The traditional Baloch society was known for its religious laxity and liberal attitude towards religious matters. However, all of this changed with General Zia ul-Haque's coming into power in Pakistan in 1977 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Following Zia's Islamization plans, Quranic schools began mushrooming all over Balochistan, strict Sharia laws⁹² were imposed and the mullahs emerged as a new social class with a considerable role in society. Previously, the role of a mullah in Baloch society was limited to leading prayers, performing funeral ceremonies, formalizing marriage contracts, and, in some cases, giving Quranic lessons to children. In return, they were given some monetary and material support from the community. With Zia ul-Haque's plans for Islamization, in which he was fully supported by the Arab countries, the United States, and the West, the mullahs were put in the driver's seat of the society. In the past, the word of a mullah, except for religious matters, had little or no importance in Baloch society, now his verdict on social issues is

⁹² The Sharia laws are religious laws that lay down rules for Muslims to follow. These can be described into five major categories: obligatory, recommended, permitted, discouraged, and forbidden. To some Muslim schools of thought, music is among the prohibited actions that a Muslim should avoid at any cost.

considered the last word.⁹³ They soon became powerful enough to impose their brand of Islam on the people. Among other things, they also tried to impose a total ban on music and singing. Even though they were not successful in wiping out music from the society, they have reduced it to a great extent. Many musicians and singers have abandoned their musical pursuits and joined the mullahs in their mission of Islamising the society. Musicians and singers have been facing serious challenges from the indoctrinated religious people, and I have even been told of cases where musical instruments were broken by mullahs, and musicians and singers were physically beaten. This has had serious implications on the singing and dancing of *ambā* and *laywā* in southern Balochistan and Karachi as well.

Mazār/Mazū, a famous *ambā* and *laywā* performer in Ormara, told me in 1993 that during the earlier days singing and dancing were like food and shelter for the coastal Makran's (Black Baloch) population. He lamented that now mullahs prohibit people from singing and dancing, and as such, his children had asked him not to dance in public as they felt ashamed of it. "I have told them that I will keep dancing as long as I am alive, and once dead, take my body to the graveyard amid dancing and drum beating", he then confided to me. He added after a short pause: "I have made it clear to my children that just as nobody can ask me to quit fasting in the month of Ramadan or stop praying to God, in the same manner, no one can ask me to quit dancing. Dancing is like a prayer for me". He also lamented that when they organized *ambā* and *laywā* dancing parties, put on their ceremonial dress and went to the town centre, local mullahs would send children to shout at them, "Satan is walking," and made people laugh at them.

⁹³ Contrary to the position of a mullah in traditional Baloch society, that of a sayyid, supposedly a direct descendant of the Holy Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima, was highly respected in Baloch society. His word always had a high weight in tribal disputes, family affairs and in other societal issues. While a mullah was always derided by the common folk, a sayyid was always respected and feared for his inborn spiritual powers. A sayyid was never harmed or killed in tribal disputes, and when he intervened in a tribal fight, the fight would be stopped in his respect.

Sometimes they even threw fresh animal dung at them, he told me (cf. also Fazal Khāliq 2021: 2 for the prohibition of mullahs on dancing and singing on the coast).

Until the late 1970s, Black Baloch men and women danced together without any problem as there was no concept of female segregation among them. These men and women would come from the same neighbourhood and related to each other, there would be mutual respect and consideration for each other's womenfolk. No one considered it shameful if women joined their men in dancing. There is a custom, called *tambū bandag*, "erecting the tent." This is when a huge tent is erected for the guests in a wedding ceremony or for some other community affair or festival. Young and old people of the community take part in erecting the tent. In the past, once the tent was erected, a *laywā* dance was organized in which men and women danced together to the rhythm of *ruhl* and *surmā* (drums and oboe). The men stood in one row and the women in the other facing each other with the drummers and oboe player in the middle. With the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the 1980s, women dancing with men was completely banned. In the past, every quarter of Lyari had its *laywā* drummers and dancers while now only Baghdadi and Sheedi Village Road are said to have active *laywā* teams. I was also told in Karachi in 2024 that the *laywā* dance sessions have decreased by about 60 to 70 percent in comparison to the pre-1980s era.

Conclusion

This chapter introduces the Black Baloch population of southern Balochistan and Karachi and their vibrant musical tradition. It has especially concentrated on the famous *ambā* and *laywā* songs and dances performed by the Black Baloch in coastal Makran and Karachi. The chapter has also discussed in some detail the single-headed footed drum *mugulmānī* (also called *shayparjā* and *kumrī* in some coastal regions of Balochistan where it is used for sacred rituals and religious ceremonies). It has also been pointed out that the musical tradition of the Black population of southwestern

Pakistan is part of a broader regional and cross-border Black music and identity. As such, this music plays an important role in linking the people of African descent in southwestern Pakistan and southeastern Iran with the rest of the African diaspora in the region. The chapter has also raised questions about whether this musical tradition arrived with the African people brought to this part of the Persian Gulf in different phases of history, or whether it was brought by Baloch seafarers who frequently visited African and Arab coasts for trade and transportation of goods with their locally made sailboats.

Furthermore, it has been discussed that *ambā*, being a collective work song and dance, is in danger of being forgotten since the working conditions and tools have changed in the modern technological era and collective work is no longer needed while fishing and working on the sea. *Laywā*, being a festive and joyful dance, is still very popular and flourishing among the Black population in coastal Makran and Sindh. Although it has gone through some changes among the Baloch from being a festive-cum-ritual dance to simply a festive dance, its survival is presently not at risk because of its widespread popularity among the Afro-Pakistani population and lately because of its inclusion in the broader nationwide cultural events.

It can be added that there is an urgent necessity for an in-depth study of the Afro-Pakistanis and their musical tradition. Pakistan's Black music badly needs recognition, acceptance, appreciation and patronage. So far, it has not received the attention it deserves. It has always been treated as the music of the outcasts, an object of fun and often of mockery. This mindset must change, and Black music should be treated on par with the music of other nationalities in Pakistan for its vibrant cultural role and the centuries-old history of a long journey connecting different cultures, countries and continents.

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Plate 1: Ambā performance in Ormara, 1991. In the front row are the *rahmānī* (middle) and *kiāsar* drums, and behind is the *mugulmānī*. (Photo by the author)



Plate 2: Drummers of the Pasni *laywā* team, recorded in 1991. *Gurr* (conch) is not used in *laywā* dance performances, but Qayyum wanted to demonstrate how it is played in an *ambā* performance. I learned in 2023 that all these drummers have died over the past years. (photo by the author).



Plate 3: *Shayparja* drummers from Kashkalat, Turbat, taking a rest after a session. Recorded in Shahi Tump, Turbat, 1997 (photo by the author). Dr. Taj Baloch thankfully organized this performance so that we could study and record them. The standing drum in the middle is the *shayparja* footed drum, formerly called *mugulmānī* (discussed above).



Plate 4: Warming by the fire skin of the *mugulmānī* drum before playing (photo by the author, Ormara, 1993)



Plate 5: Seamen narrating stories about their experiences in Africa and elsewhere in the region (photo by the author, Gwadar, 1993).



Plate 6: Seamen narrating their navigation experiences in distant lands (photo by the author, Ormada, 1993)

Il suono del silenzio in alchimia

Il sukūn e l'anima razionale

Paola Carusi

(Università degli studi di Roma “La Sapienza”)

Abstract

Nel suo cosmo dominato da quattro nature incorporee, l'alchimia islamica si occupa della questione del suono; e tra i quattro suoni legati alle nature, il quarto suono è il *sukūn*, il silenzio. Legato all'oscurità, lontana da Dio se Dio è luce, e prossimo alla terra fredda e secca silente al centro del cosmo, nel gioco degli opposti tanto caro all'alchimia il *sukūn* si rivela strumento dell'anima razionale che ne ha bisogno nella generazione del linguaggio articolato (*nuṭq*) che la distingue.

Keywords

sukūn, alchimia islamica, suono, silenzio nella musica, filosofia islamica

Il testo a cui è dedicato questo lavoro è un passo che si trova nel *Miftāḥ al-ḥikma* (*La chiave della sapienza*), opera di un sedicente allievo di Apollonio di Tiana; opera in tre *maqālāt* di cui sto preparando l'edizione critica. La tradizione islamica, e con essa la lettura di nostri contemporanei, è ben consapevole del fatto che il contenuto di questa opera, espresso in lingua araba da un musulmano, è di origine preislamica: non a caso uno dei titoli con cui l'opera è presente nella tradizione testuale è *Miftāḥ al-ḥikma fī uṣūl al-falsafa* (*La chiave della sapienza che contiene le origini della filosofia*);¹ più incerta,

¹ MS. Meshhed, Āstān-e qods-e rezawī, 6372a, *Miftāḥ al-ḥikma al-muḥtawī 'alā uṣūl al-falsafa*.

e qui si tratta delle opinioni di studiosi a noi contemporanei, è la sua collocazione tra le opere di alchimia: dove M. Ullmann,² e anche F. Sezgin,³ pur citando i suoi contenuti ‘ermetici’, non esitano a collocarla tra le opere di alchimia, nel 1950 H. Ritter,⁴ nel suo esame dei mss. Ayasofya 2466 e Üniversite A 4145, la dichiarava ‘ermetica’ togliendola esplicitamente dal gruppo delle opere alchemiche e riconducendola a una connotazione filosofica, anche se particolare. A mio parere, certamente Ritter da un certo punto di vista aveva ragione: le teorie che questa opera espone testimoniano l’esistenza di una ben determinata filosofia della natura che sembra andare al di là dei confini dell’alchimia; il *Miftāh* non è dunque solo un’opera importante per la comprensione della filosofia alchemica islamica, ma in esso è presente anche qualcosa di più ampio e più antico.

La filosofia della natura che il *Miftāh* accetta e fa propria, è, come recita il titolo, una filosofia ‘di fondamenti’, che l’autore sviluppa descrivendo la creazione e l’ordinamento del cosmo.

Due sono i capisaldi su cui poggia e può esistere l’intera struttura del cosmo:

– l’esistenza di nature incorporee - calda-secca, fredda secca, calda umida, fredda umida - che si collocano al centro di qualsiasi riflessione sul cosmo e sulle creature che lo abitano. Questa teoria, come è noto, è di origine antica: quando i musulmani la ricevono, di nature hanno già trattato, solo per citare due nomi, autori illustri come, in filosofia, Aristotele e, in medicina, Ippocrate e Galeno; nel passaggio all’Islam, e nell’acquisizione da parte dell’alchimia, ciò che è nuovo non sono dunque le nature ma l’uso che di esse si compie.

– secondo caposaldo è l’organizzarsi del cosmo per opposti; opposti che compaiono fin dal primo realizzarsi della creazione, con interposizione di termini medi.

Generate all’inizio dalla parola di Dio, sono le due nature opposte calore e freddezza, destinate a diventare calda e secca e fredda e secca, cui fanno seguito per successiva interposizione di

² Ullmann 1972: 175.

³ Sezgin 1971: vol. 4, 77-91, ivi *Miftāh al-hikma*, 90-91.

⁴ Ritter 1950.

opposti tre nature: la natura umida equilibrata, intermedia tra la calda e fredda iniziali, e le nature calda umida e fredda umida, intermedie tra calda e secca e equilibrata e fredda e secca e equilibrata. A partire da queste cinque nature,⁵ tutte le creature del cosmo vengono alla luce: prima i quattro elementi, fuoco aria acqua e terra, poi, a partire dal basso, i tre corpi composti, minerali piante e animali.

Tutto ciò che compare nel mondo è riconducibile:

– alla composizione in nature: i minerali freddi e secchi, le piante fredde e umide, gli animali caldi e umidi; anche se il testo recita che, all'interno di ogni gruppo, ogni componente deve essere valutato in relazione agli altri;⁶

– alla regola degli opposti: in ogni essere creato, sia esso inorganico o organico, non vivente o vivente, sono presenti, nel suo 'esteriore' e nel suo 'interiore' due composizioni in nature opposte,

⁵ Nella formazione degli elementi e degli esseri del mondo sublunare, a partire dalle cinque nature sono formati, uno dopo l'altro, i quattro elementi, e la quinta natura, umida, perfettamente equilibrata e centrale nel mondo superiore, scompare. Ciò da un lato può far pensare alla medicina, per la quale, in natura, il temperamento perfettamente equilibrato non esiste, o anche all'alchimia e alla sua costante ricerca della natura perfetta; dall'altro evoca, forse con più immediatezza, il racconto che nel *Miftāḥ* è fatto sul peccato di Adamo, e sulla sua caduta sulla terra, dovuta a uno squilibrio nelle nature. Posto da Dio nel giardino dell'Eden e dotato di una natura equilibrata, Adamo mangia il frutto proibito dell'albero, creato 'del pesante della sostanza della terra'; e appesantito dal cibo assunto, non è più sorretto dal giardino e cade sulla terra. *Miftāḥ*, P. Carusi ed. in corso, *maqāla* 3: «Quando [Aštā'il, Iblis] seppe che il Creatore altissimo aveva creato da una sostanza, la cui posizione, per nobiltà, era inferiore a quella della sua, una creatura, e l'aveva posta al di sopra di lui, e l'aveva esaltata, lo invidiò per questo, e si servì del serpente, tentandolo perché disobbedisse al suo Creatore; finché [Adamo] giunse a questo, mangiando dall'albero da cui il suo Creatore gli aveva proibito di mangiare. Quell'albero era stato creato dal pesante della sostanza della terra; e quando il suo (di Adamo) sottile si mescolò con il denso che era dalla parte della pesantezza, il luogo che sosteneva ciò che era leggero non lo sostenne [più]; allora Dio altissimo lo fece discendere sulla terra e da lui ebbe origine la discendenza detta dei figli di Adamo».

⁶ Ad esempio: le piante sono fredde e umide, ma di esse alcune sono meno fredde (più calde) di altre...

o forse meglio complementari: a un esteriore caldo e secco, ad esempio, corrisponde un interiore freddo e umido, e viceversa.⁷

A proposito degli opposti, si noti: alle due prime nature opposte, che sono luce (la parola di Dio) e tenebra (il suo opposto), sono associate tutte le qualità opposte del cosmo: calore e freddezza, movimento e quiete, leggerezza e pesantezza, rarefazione (o sottigliezza) e densità etc.; calore movimento leggerezza rarefazione etc. dalla parte della luce e di Dio, e i loro opposti dall'altra parte. Si noti tuttavia, e si tratta di una cosa importante: le qualità per così dire 'non lodevoli' non sono condannate, ma necessarie perché senza di esse non sarebbero comprensibili i loro opposti. Esempi, scrive l'autore: se non ci fosse la densità non si comprenderebbe la rarefazione, se non ci fosse la pesantezza non si comprenderebbe la leggerezza, e anche: se non ci fosse la tristezza non si comprenderebbe la gioia, se non ci fosse il male non si comprenderebbe il bene, e così via.

Veniamo ora al suono, che nel *Miftāḥ* è trattato nella terza *maqāla*.

1. Il discorso ha inizio con l'enunciazione di quali siano i suoni

Diciamo che vi sono tre tipi di suoni:

- il suono del nominativo (*ṣawt bi'l-'arf*), che è il suono del calore e della secchezza;
- il suono dell'accusativo (*ṣawt bi'l-naṣb*), che è il suono del calore e dell'umidità;
- il suono del caso obliquo (*ṣawt bi'l-ḥafd*), che è il suono della freddezza e dell'umidità.

⁷ Ciò che è qui espresso nel *Miftāḥ* sembra essere una sorta di prima stesura, o stesura semplificata, di quanto si trova nel *corpus* attribuito a Ġābir ibn Ḥayyān; secondo il quale ciò che varia, in una trasmutazione, o trasformazione chimica, sono le due nature del corpo, opposte e complementari, interiore ed esteriore, rimanendo la composizione totale sempre la stessa. In ogni corpo le nature sono sempre nel rapporto 1:3:5.8, e alla composizione totale è attribuito il numero 17, somma di questi quattro numeri, o n17. Cf. S.N. Haq 1994; Carusi 1995.

Quarto [tipo di suono] è il *sukūn*, che è il silenzio; un quarto tipo che è dalla parte della freddezza e della secchezza.⁸

Ecco qui comparire insieme le nature e gli opposti. Le nature, come ci si aspettava, sono quattro, ma di esse la quarta, il silenzio (il *sukūn*), deve essere considerata a parte, perché in un certo senso 'si oppone' o meglio, come si è detto, 'è complementare' alle prime tre. La natura di questo quarto suono, scrive l'autore, è fredda e secca; le qualità associate sono dunque la tenebra, l'immobilità, la pesantezza; e il suo elemento è la terra. Si potrebbe pensare che ciò conduca a una rappresentazione negativa del silenzio, ma così non è: per la regola della complementarità, se non ci fosse il silenzio non si comprenderebbe che cos'è il suono; fredda, secca, immobile e silente al centro del cosmo, la terra, anch'essa fredda e secca come il silenzio, svela la sua forza di centro che attrae, si rivela come la tenebra della creazione, il silenzio che si accompagna e definisce la prima parola di Dio.

2 - Al centro della sua esposizione, al tempo stesso al di là della questione delle nature, l'autore mette ancora più in evidenza la questione degli opposti.

Il silenzio è sempre necessariamente connesso alla pesantezza ed il suono articolato è sempre necessariamente connesso alla leggerezza. Il movimento esteriore e muto è il movimento delle sostanze delle mani, delle gambe, della testa e di altre cose esteriori nell'uomo, che sono visibili, e con questo movimento avviene anche l'azione. Il movimento interiore è il movimento

⁸ Questa ripartizione dei suoni non è casuale. La natura calda e secca (fuoco), natura dei massimi movimento e leggerezza, è associata al nominativo, caso che individua chi compie l'azione (il *fā'il*), e la natura dell'accusativo, natura di chi subisce l'azione (*al-maf'ūl*), è associata alla natura calda e umida (aria), che si trova a un gradino inferiore. Al discendere dei livelli corrisponde un progressivo diminuire del movimento, fino alla totale immobilità del *sukūn*. Una situazione molto simile a questa si trova, in medicina, nella relazione tra umori e nature: bile (calda e secca), sangue (caldo e umido), flegma (freddo e umido) e atrabile, o bile nera (fredda e secca); da cui risulta, nell'opinione del medico, che i suoni possano agire sugli umori del corpo e correggerne gli eventuali squilibri.

delle membra dell'interno della creatura, e del torace,⁹ da cui si produce un suono che la lingua e le labbra modulano finché diviene perfetto e intellegibile, ed è detto 'linguaggio'. Con questo movimento si produce il discorso, e 'esposizione' è l'espressione del linguaggio.

Abbiamo detto che ogni sottile è dotato di suono e ogni denso è muto: dal suono non si forma un discorso se non si aggiunge ad esso un silenzio che lo interrompe, e ciò avviene solo con il mescolamento del sottile e del denso, dei quali uno porta la natura del calore e dell'umidità e [la natura] del calore e della secchezza e l'altro porta la freddezza e l'umidità e la freddezza e la secchezza. Questo mescolamento si verifica come abbiamo menzionato, a meno che una delle sue sostanze non sia più abbondante dell'altra: se prevalesse infatti il sottile, il denso sarebbe celato, ed il suono non cesserebbe mai, non interrompendolo il silenzio; se invece predominasse il denso, il sottile sarebbe celato, ed il silenzio non cesserebbe mai, non interrompendolo il suono.

Non si produce assolutamente ciò che abbiamo citato se non per ciò che abbiamo citato, cioè per un mescolamento equilibrato in cui ognuno dei due agisce sull'altro nella misura in cui l'altro agisce su di lui. Quando l'anima [razionale] vuole [che vi sia] il suono articolato, muove il sottile di quella sostanza, ed esso si manifesta esteriormente sul denso; quando [l'anima] vuole [che vi sia] il silenzio, arresta il movimento del sottile di quella sostanza, il denso si manifesta esteriormente sul sottile, ed il suono si interrompe.

In questo testo è presente il centro, o il cuore, della trattazione che il *Miftāḥ* fa del suono. Nel grande gioco delle nature, delle qualità e degli opposti, suono è movimento, leggerezza, rarefazione, e silenzio è quiete, pesantezza, densità;¹⁰ ma i suoni non sono tutti uguali. I suoni emessi da esseri inanimati, o da esseri animati e non

⁹ Organi della fonazione e diaframma.

¹⁰ Una lettura importante del rapporto suono / silenzio contemplato nel gioco degli opposti si ritrova in alcuni versi di Mawlānā Ḡalāl al-Dīn Rūmī; se la vita è suono e la morte è silenzio, e nella vita di questo mondo il flauto di canna piange per la lontananza dall'Amato, nella morte, che è la vita vera, il flauto tace perché l'Amato è raggiunto. Rumi 1980, 92: «Morite, morite, uscite da questa nube, / usciti che ne sarete, Luna lucente sarete! / Tacete, tacete, il silenzio è sussurro di morte; / tutta la vita è in questo: siate un flauto silente» (F. II, 58).

dotati di ragione, non si fanno discorso articolato (*nutq*); solo nell'uomo, animale razionale, il sapiente alternarsi di suoni e di silenzio, di movimento e di quiete, produce parole o musica, il fluire di un discorso intellegibile. Il ruolo cruciale giocato dal silenzio è qui espresso al suo livello più alto. Sia esso pausa tra parole o tra suoni, il *sukūn* è l'opposto denso e oscuro necessario a produrre l'armonia del discorso che dall'interno dell'uomo l'anima razionale produce.

Viene qui in luce il ruolo fondamentale esercitato, in ogni luogo e in ogni tempo, e al di là dei confini dell'alchimia e di singole scienze, da un silenzio che è pausa: nella retorica, nella recitazione, nella musica; un silenzio che è centrale, inoltre, nella rilevazione del suono del corpo umano, cioè il ritmo del cuore, la pulsazione (altri due opposti, sistole e diastole), che fa dire a Ibn Sīnā¹¹ che per il medico conoscere la musica è di grande aiuto; e tra medicina e musica il ritmo del tamburo (si

¹¹ Ibn Sīnā 1999, vol. I, 170-171: «Si deve sapere che, nel polso, vi è una natura musicale. Come l'arte della musica si realizza in modo perfetto componendosi il suono, sia nella relazione che vi è tra suono acuto e grave, che nelle variazioni periodiche del ritmo con cui si succedono gli intervalli (lett. i tempi) che si infiltrano tra le sue battute, così è lo stato del polso: la relazione dei suoi intervalli nella velocità e nel ripetersi è ritmata e la relazione dei suoi stati nella forza e nella debolezza e nell'estensione [degli intervalli] è una relazione come quella che si ha nella composizione [musicale]; e come i tempi del ritmo e gli intervalli del suono possono essere concordanti o discordanti, come pure le irregolarità possono essere ordinate o non ordinate; [così] anche le relazioni degli stati del polso nella forza e nella debolezza, e nell'estensione [degli intervalli] possono essere concordanti e non concordanti, anzi irregolari, ciò che esce dal genere del polso ordinato. Galeno ritiene che la quantità percettibile delle relazioni del ritmo (*wazn*) si generi secondo una di queste relazioni musicali citate: il rapporto del *kull* (il doppio, l'ottava) + la quinta, che è il rapporto del triplo (la doppia ottava), poiché è il doppio composto con quello che aggiunge 1/2, che è quello che è detto il rapporto di quinta; il rapporto che è il *kull*; il rapporto che è detto di quinta, che aggiunge 1/2; il rapporto che è di quarta, che aggiunge 1/3; e il rapporto che aggiunge 1/4 (terza maggiore); quelli che seguono non sono percettibili. Io ritengo importante che si colgano questi rapporti con la palpazione, ed è più semplice per chi è abituato, tramite la tecnica, ai gradi del ritmo e all'armonizzazione del suono, e poi (inoltre) ha la capacità di conoscere la musica e può misurare i dati tecnici con i dati scientifici. Quando volge la sua riflessione al polso, quest'uomo può comprendere queste proporzioni con la palpazione». Cf. al-Faruqi 1981.

veda in particolare il *daff*) che nelle sedute dei mistici consapevolmente ricerca il ritmo del cuore. La relazione tra silenzio e mondo fisico anche oggi viene in primo piano: in musica, nel noto 4' 33" di John Cage, brano in cui la partitura recita *Tacet* dall'inizio alla fine, la durata in secondi, 273, è lo stesso numero che in fisica indica la temperatura dello zero assoluto, - 273 °C; come a mettere insieme il silenzio assoluto e l'immobilità assoluta della natura, indissolubilmente legati ed entrambi irraggiungibili.¹²

3. *La lingua araba, sacra, e la sua connessione al cosmo.*

Questi quattro tipi [di suono] che sono posati su (appoggiati a) 28 segni grafici (grafemi) si compongono in una composizione che è come quella dei 28 astri (stelle) che sono le mansioni lunari, che indicano le dodici costellazioni (segni zodiacali), e si generano dal mescolamento delle quattro nature con ciò che è in eccesso delle sostanze dei sette pianeti che regolano (governano) il microcosmo.

¹² In un passo molto noto del suo *Silenzio*, John Cage racconta l'esperienza da lui compiuta in una camera anecoica; resa una camera priva di ogni tipo di suono, il suo silenzio non è assoluto, perché in esso rimane il ritmo della vita. La natura, che è viva, - Cage osserva - produce suoni senza interruzione e il silenzio è ciò che permette di accogliere questi suoni. Cage 2019, 41: «[...] per quanto ci possiamo sforzare di creare un silenzio non ci riusciremo mai. In certe circostanze tecniche potrebbe essere auspicabile ottenere una situazione la più silenziosa possibile, ossia quell'ambiente chiamato camera anecoica, sei pareti di materiale insonorizzante allestito in modo da ottenere una camera priva di eco. Parecchi anni fa a Harvard sono stato in uno spazio del genere e ho sentito due suoni, uno acuto e uno grave, e quando li ho descritti al tecnico incaricato questi mi ha spiegato che quello acuto era il mio sistema nervoso in funzione, quello grave era la circolazione del sangue. Sino alla fine dei miei giorni ci saranno suoni, e seguiranno anche dopo la morte. Non c'è nulla da temere riguardo il futuro della musica». Cage 2013, 17-18: «Ho iniziato a essere molto interessato al frastuono tanto tempo fa grazie a Oscar Fishinger che faceva film astratti. Ha fatto una osservazione che mi ha colpito: "Ogni cosa ha uno spirito e quello spirito può essere liberato trasformando qualsiasi cosa sia in vibrazione". Da lì ho cominciato a battere cose, colpirle, strofinarle, lavorare con le percussioni ed essere interessato al frastuono. Non mi sognerei mai di mettere i doppi vetri perché amo tanto i rumori. Il traffico non si ferma mai, notte e giorno. Di tanto in tanto un clacson, una sirena, frenate stridule, estremamente interessanti e sempre imprevedibili...».

Quando i segni grafici si mescolano con i [tre] suoni vocalici e il *sukūn* che ad essi si appoggia, si diversificano in modo che quello di essi che cambia dà informazione su quello di essi che rimane identico, e quello di essi che rimane identico dà informazione su quello di essi che cambia; e da ciò si forma un discorso in cui l'alternarsi del suono con il silenzio lo mostra il mutarsi del segno grafico e dei suoni vocalici. Nelle due sostanze dalle quali è formato il composto parlante, quel discorso si trova in potenza; ma il congiungimento menzionato lo fa uscire dalla potenza all'atto, per la causa che abbiamo detto.

Queste riflessioni sulla connessione tra suono emesso nella lingua araba e cosmo fisico concludono finalmente il discorso sul suono. Prima di passare ad altre considerazioni, l'autore si sente in dovere di celebrare la lingua che è per lui la più perfetta in cui il linguaggio razionale può esprimersi: la lingua araba, lingua non solo sacra, ma anche parte della tessitura fisica del cosmo: le sue 28 lettere - egli scrive - corrispondono, sulla terra, alle 28 mansioni lunari, configurazioni di stelle che scandiscono il tempo nel cielo; in altri testi, in alchimia, Ġābir ibn Ḥayyān parlerà di legame tra lettere e nature: lettere calde, fredde, umide e secche, composizione interiore ed esteriore dei corpi, e non sarà un discorso molto lontano da questo.

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Notes on Avicenna's Mūsīqī-yi Ḥikmat-i 'Alā'ī and its Manuscript Tradition

Ivana Panzeca
(University of Palermo – Fscire)

Abstract

This paper outlines the manuscript tradition that preserves the Music section of the only Peripatetic *summa* written by Avicenna in Persian, *Dāniš-nāma-yi 'Alā'ī*. In Avicenna's *Biography*, Ġūzġānī reports that his master wrote it at the request of the prince he served, 'Alā' al-Dawla. Avicenna himself, in the introduction to the work, specifies that al-Dawla asked him for a *compendium* in Persian of the fundamental principles of the sciences. The work is a treatise concerning seven disciplines in four groups: Logic, Metaphysics, Natural Sciences, and Mathematics (Geometry, Astronomy, Arithmetic, Music). The master, making use of previous works written in Arabic, completed the first three sections rearranging the traditional order to Logic, Metaphysics, and Physics, placing the inferior sciences after Metaphysics. Mathematics was lost during Avicenna's life and Ġūzġānī, after the death of his mentor, completed the work by adding that part and inserting, in addition to Astronomy and Music, also Arithmetic and Geometry. For the missing sections of Geometry, Astronomy and Music, Ġūzġānī translated into Persian the passages extracted from previous works by Avicenna and that he himself had added to *al-Nağāṭ*; as regards Arithmetic, he instead reconstructed the corresponding part of *Šifā'*. Music was essentially expounded in these *summae* and only incidentally in other minor works.

Keywords

Avicenna, music, manuscript, *Dāniš-nāma-yi 'Alā'ī*, Persian

Islamic writings on music are often theoretical treatises concerned with the analysis of pitch and duration, the constituent elements of melody. They

are conceived less as descriptive accounts of contemporary practice than as systematizations of possible structures, utilizing, in the case of pitch, mathematical formulations derived from the Greek legacy. Among the most impressive examples of such writings are the relevant chapters in Avicenna's *Ketāb al-naǧāt*, *Dāneš-nāma-ye 'alā'ī*, and *Ketāb al-Seǧā'*, where music is considered as one of the mathematical sciences (the medieval *quadrivium*)¹.

1. Overture

This paper outlines the manuscript tradition that preserves the Music section of the only Peripatetic *summa* written by Avicenna in Persian (Pārsī-darī², known as *Dāniš-nāma-yi 'Alā'ī* (*Dāneš-nāma-ye 'Alā'ī*, henceforth *DN*)³. In Avicenna's *Biography*, his faithful disciple Abū 'Ubayd al-Ġuzǧānī reports that his master wrote 'Alā'ī at the request of the prince he served, the Kākūyid amīr 'Alā' al-Dawla Abū Ġa'far Muḥammad ibn Rustam Dušmanziyār. The work was compiled during his stay in Isfahan between 1021 and his death (1037), Mahdawī and Gutas agree in placing it in the first years of this period, around 418H/1027⁵. It was probably composed after *al-Naǧāt*, given the similarity between the two works and the extemporaneous need to make some topics accessible to 'Alā' al-Dawla. Avicenna himself, in the introduction to the work, specifies that 'Alā' al-Dawla asked him for a

¹ Wright 1987.

² Afnan 1964: 60-85.; Lazard 1971: 361-391; Id. 1975: IV, 595-632; Mo'in 1367Hš/1988: II, 529-571; Massé 1384H/2005: IV, 35-41.

³ Ibn Sīnā 1309H/1891 (Logic, Metaphysics, and Natural science); Id., 1315Hš/1926 (critical edition based on four mss, comprising two parts—Logic (*Mantiq*) and Metaphysics ('*ilm-i barīn*)); Id. 1353Hš/1974a; Id. 1353Hš/1974b; Id. 1353Hš/1974c; an edition of the Mathematics section had been announced, but never published (M. Minuwī, *Riyāḍiyyāt. Dānišnāma-yi 'Alā'ī*. Tehran: Anǧuman-i tār-i Millī). See Ibn Sīnā 1371Hš/1992, 17-29 (*Music section of Dāniš-nāma*, Music of Iḥwān al-Šafā's treatises, *Kunz al-taḥ*), and Id. 1394Hš/2015 (*Mūsīqī* pp. 241-269, based on the manuscripts preserved in London, see below). Cf. Achena 1987; Beidokhti 2021-2022, 69-89 (in Farsi). Regarding the translations, see Ibn Sīnā 1955-1958 and 1986; Id. 1971; Id. 1973; Id. 1973bis. For general information on the work, see Dabashi 1993.

⁴ Gohlman 1974: 68-69.

⁵ Gutas 2014: 118-119 and 424-425; Mahdawī 1333Hš/1954: 101.

compendium in Persian of the fundamental principles of the five sciences, Logic, Physics, Astronomy, Music, and Metaphysics⁶. The master, making use of previous works written in Arabic⁷, managed to complete three sections, rearranging the traditional order to Logic, Metaphysics, and Physics, an order which would also be reprised in *The Easterners*, placing the inferior sciences (‘ilm-hā-yi zīrīn) after Metaphysics, where instead *Kitāb al-Šifā'* culminates with the science of Divine Things (*Ilāhiyyāt*).

The different arrangement in the *DN* is not fortuitous. This book was written in order to acquaint an uninitiated mind with the notion of science, and with the division of the sciences into speculative and practical disciplines and the subjects and objects of each. For this purpose, there was need of an introductory prologue which could only be placed straight after the section on logic and at the head of the section on metaphysics⁸.

The work is a treatise on seven sciences grouped into four sections: Logic, Metaphysics, Natural Sciences, and Mathematics (Geometry, Astronomy, Arithmetic, Music). Mathematics was lost during Avicenna's life, and as he was not in the habit of producing copies of his works, his faithful disciple Ğūzġānī, after the death of his mentor, completed the work by adding the part of Mathematics and inserting, in addition to Astronomy and Music, also Arithmetic and Geometry. For the missing sections of Geometry, Astronomy and Music, Ğūzġānī translated into Persian the parts extracted from previous works by Avicenna that he himself had added to *al-Naġāt*⁹; as regards Arithmetic he instead reconstructed the relevant section of *Šifā'*¹⁰:

⁶ Ibn Sīnā 1353Hš/1974: 1-2.

⁷ Janssens 1986: 163-177; Id. 1998, 109-122.

⁸ Achena 1987.

⁹ Ibn Sīnā 1364Hš/1985. Cf. Hefny 1931; Dhanani 2007: 604-605.

¹⁰ Ibn Sīnā 1376H/1956; D'Erlanger 1935: 103-245. Cf. Bertolacci 2017-2018: 284: "the most ancient extant manuscript of the work presently known, namely ms. London, British Museum, Or. 11190 (485H/1092-1093), contains only Mathematics and, within Mathematics, only three of its four sections (Astronomy, Arithmetic, Music)". For a list of manuscripts containing the Mathematics section of *Šifā'*, see <https://www.avicennaproject.eu/#/downloads/mss> (accessed 1 May 2024).

I had in my possession books by him [Avicenna] which were composed on the Mathematical sciences and were appropriate for it [the *Najāt*]. One of them was (i) *kitābuhu fī uṣūl al-handasa muḥtaṣaran min kitāb Awqlīdis* [his book on the *Principles of Geometry*, as an abridgment of the book by Euclid] [...]; another was (ii) *kitābuhu fī l-arṣād al-kullīyya wa-maʿrifat tarkīb al-aflāk, ka-l-muḥtaṣar min al-Majisṭī* [his book *On Comprehensive Observations and Cognizance of the Structure of the Celestial Spheres*, as an abridgment of the *Almagest*]; and another was (iii) *kitābuhu l-muḥtaṣar fī ʿilm al-mūsīqā* [his book *Abridgment of the Science of Music*]. I thought I would add these treatises to this book [the *Najāt*] in order for his writings to end in accordance with what he indicated in its introduction. But since I could not find on Arithmetic anything by him similar to these treatises, I thought I would abridge (iv) his book on *Arithmetic* (*Aritmāṭiqī*) into a [smaller] treatise [...] and add it to [the *Najāt*]¹¹.

The book's title may have been given by Ğūzġānī or other disciples. The Longer Bibliography reports *Kitāb Dāniṣ-nāma-yi al-ʿAlāʾī bi-l-fārisīyya*¹², but in other sources the work appears under different titles: *Kitāb Dāniṣ-nāma*, *Kitāb ʿAlāʾī*, *Ḥikmat ʿAlāʾī*, *Risāla ʿAlāʾī*, *ʿAlāʾīyya*, and *Dāniṣ-māya*. Bahmanyār (d. 458H/1066) translated the Persian title precisely as *al-Ḥikma al-ʿAlāʾīyya* (*Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*)¹³.

Sometimes the work is found catalogued under a generic *DN*, which in reality does not preserve Avicenna's writing, but other treatises, such as *Dāniṣ-nāma-yi Ğahān*, on physics by Ḥusaynī Iṣfahānī (fl. 15th c.), or *Dāniṣ-nāma-yi Šāhī*, a collection of samples of old problems pertaining to various topics in philosophy, compiled by Muḥammad Amīn ibn Muḥammad Šarīf al-

¹¹ Gutas 2014: 463; Gohlman 1974: 44-45; Ibn Sīnā 1364Hs/1985: 399; Maḥdawī 1333Hs/1954: 234-235; Ragep, Ragep 2004: 3-4.

¹² See Gohlman 1974: 147 and the synopsis in Gutas 2014: 401.

¹³ Bahmanyār 1375Hs/1996. Cf. al-Rahim 2009: 12: "Bahmanyār's philosophical summa is *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* (or *Taḥṣīlāt*); it was written in Arabic in Iṣfahān sometime between 415/1024 and 428/1037 and is dedicated to his maternal uncle Bahrām ibn Khūrshīd. The work is structured according to Avicenna's *Dāniṣnāma-yi ʿAlāʾī* with sections on logic, metaphysics, and physics (in that order), and it appears to have been translated, possibly by Bahmanyār himself, into Persian" (al-Ḥwānsārī 1411H/1991: II, 153; Āqā Buzurg Ṭīhrānī 1403-1406H/1983-1986: III, 395).

Astarābādī (d. 1627) for Sulṭān Muḥammad Quṭb Šāh of Golconda (1612-1626)¹⁴.

In addition to the incorrectly catalogued works, there are also spurious *DN* that are preserved under Avicenna's name, mainly in Turkey. They contain a text on Logic, sometimes with the title *al-Risāla al-'Alā'iyya* or *Tabṣīra*, which Maḥdawī attributes to a logician who was a disciple of Lawkarī's, 'Umar Ibn Sahlān Sāwī (d. after 537H/1143). Sāwī was an interesting figure of the twelfth century, famous for having defended Avicenna against the attacks by Šahrastānī and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī and who earned his living by copying *Šifā'* and selling copies of it for one hundred dinars each, probably in Nishapur¹⁵.

2. *The partitions*

Despite his major interest in mathematical sciences¹⁶, Avicenna dedicated few works to the topic. He did so especially during his stay in Gorgan (c. 1012-1013) and in Isfahan (after 1014), when he wrote *Šifā'*, *Naḡāt*, and *DN*. Music was essentially expounded in these *summae* and only incidentally in other minor works¹⁷.

In the subsection relating to Music, Gutas inserts an independently circulated Arabic treatise (*Risāla fī l-Mūsīqā*)¹⁸

¹⁴ See Ā. Buzurg Ṭihirānī 1403-1406H/1983-1986: vols. VII, 58-59, VIII, 46-47.

¹⁵ See Ergin 1937: 16; Anawati 1950: 28-29; Maḥdawī 1333Hš/1954: 274-275; Munzawī 1970: II.2, 1494; Dirāyatī 1391Hš/2012: VI, 849.

¹⁶ Ardeshir 2008: 43-61; Rashed 1984: 29-39; al-Daffa, Stroyls 1984: 60-118; Djebbar 1999: 51-70.

¹⁷ Wright 1987: "Thus the *Resāla fī l-nafs* contains a passage on the perception of sound (*ZDMG*, 1875, pp. 355-56); the first chapter of the *Resāla fī makārej al-ḥorūf* concerns itself with the physics of sound production; and the *Qānūn fī l-ṭebb* discusses the pulse by analogy with musical proportion conceived, interestingly, not only in terms of rhythm but also of intervallic relationships (ed. Cairo, 1294/1877, I, pp. 125-26; see also the parallel passage in *Ragšenāsī*, ed. M. Meškāt, Tehran, 1370/1951, pp. 31-36). There is, further, a brief definition of the scope of the science ('*elm*) of music in *Pī bayān aqsām al-'olūm al-ḥekmiya wa' l-'aqlīya* (BM. MS. Add. 7528, fol. 44v)". Cf. Farmer 1937: 245-257; Id. 1965; Cruz Hernández 1981: 27-36. For an overview, see Shiloah 1979: 137-143.

¹⁸ Gutas 2014: 468-479; Al-Bayhaqī 1935: 189; al-Mūsawī 1353-1354H/1934-1935, treatise no. 7.

which coincides with the part that Ġūzġānī added to *Naġāt*. Moreover, he mentions the Music part of *Šifā'* and a pseudoepigraphic treatise entitled *Al-Madħal ilā šinā'at al-mūsīqā*. The Longer Bibliography does not cite the music section of *Naġāt and Šifā'*, but only *al-Madħal*; the compiler may have read the scribal note of the Hyderabad manuscript which preserves *Risāla fī l-Mūsīqā (imlā' al-Šayḥ al-Ra'īs 'alā sabīl al-madħal)*, but it is an unlikely hypothesis, considering his reliability and the note in which he specifies that *al-Madħal* is not the Music section of *Naġāt*. On the other hand, the work would hardly refer to the corresponding part of the *Kitāb al-Šifā'*, which is an extensive section on music and not an introduction. It is difficult to establish whether *al-Madħal* is a separate treatise on the topic, but it is highly plausible¹⁹.

The most in-depth exposition on Mathematics is clearly found in *Šifā'* and succinctly in the *Naġāt* and *DN*. The three *summae* therefore represent three instrumental partitions of the same symphony. The times of the works are marked according to the traditional classification of the Aristotelian-Alexandrian sciences and Mathematics incorporates the four sections corresponding to the disciplines of the *quadrivium*: Geometry (Euclid's *Elements*), Astronomy (Ptolemy's *Almagest*), Arithmetic (Nicomachus's *Introduction*), and Music, (Ptolemy's *Harmonics*).

We are thus presented here not with the results of empirical observation, but with a sophisticated adaptation and development of material derived from the Greek theorists. In the less technical areas there are, predictably, Aristotelian echoes, and Avicenna himself refers to Euclid and to the more important figure, in musical theory, of Ptolemy²⁰.

Avicenna's analysis of music, starting from Ptolemy and the subsequent elaborations by al-Kindī and al-Fārābī, develops in a mostly identical way in the three works, starting precisely from the definitions that concern the discipline as a science that concerns

¹⁹ See Gutas 2014: 468-469.

²⁰ Wright 1987.

notes and the times that separate them. The art of music is essentially made up of two parts: the first is composition (*ta'lif*), which has notes as its object and analyzes their state of consonance and dissonance; the second is rhythm, which studies the times that separate notes and the beats that follow one another, and examines their harmonious or disharmonious state. These two parts have the aim of investigating compositional procedures and creating melodies.

3. *Persian suite*²¹

This section reports the indications of some complete *codices* containing the four sections of *DN*, which have been inspected up to this stage of the research. The survey exclusively took into consideration the manuscripts that preserve the Mathematics section and, among these, those also containing Music. Furthermore, information relating to some *codices* has been integrated. Other manuscripts, which appear complete in the literature, still remain to be acquired²².



MS ۱۴۱۴

Tehran, Milli Library²³

Probably XVIII c., *nasta'liq*, ff. 380, *Mūsīqī* ff. 358-380.

According to the sources and existing bibliographical references, this copy would appear to have been copied from its exemplar dated 27 Rağab 728H/15 June 1328. On page 229 there is a collation note indicating that the manuscript was revised and

²¹ The lists of manuscripts preserving *DN* can be found in: Anawati 1950: 25; Mahdawī 1333Hš/1954: 113; Munzawī 1970: II.1, 664-665; Dirāyatī 1391Hš/2012: XIV, 288-290.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 289, reports an apparently complete manuscript, Tehran, Anğūman-i Ațār-i Milli 89 (probably XIV c., pp. 319, Logic (1-66), Metaphysics (69-185), Physics (185-252), Mathematics (253-307), but in the absence of a detailed inspection, it is not possible to establish whether they actually contain the Music section. Another probably complete *codex* is preserved in Lahore, see Naushahi, 2012: 6, no. APh I 1, ff. 332.

²³ Dirāyatī 1391Hš/2012: XIV, 288-289; Various Authors 1976-2020: III, 470-471. The editors of the new edition (Ibn Sīnā, 1394Hš/2015: 229-230) refer to two manuscripts preserved at the Mağlis Library which they consider the oldest, ms 2093 (1033H) and ms 2094 (1053H), not containing Mathematics.

corrected up to the end of Natural Sciences. The place of geometric shapes and diagrams in the Mathematics section is left vacant.

Incipit


خواجه رئیس ابوعلی الحسین بن عبدالله بن سینا رحمة الله علیه میگوید که صناعت موسیقی دوجز و است یکی تألیف است و ضوع آن نغمتهاست و اندر حال اتفاق ایشان و ... ناتفقای ایشان نگاه کنند

 MS 123

Tehran, Mağlis Library²⁴

Undated, *nash*, ff. 265, *Mūsīqī* pp. 499-526.

It is a valuable undated manuscript, but with two ownership statements (Abū al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī Naqī; Nādir Qāḡār 1295H) and a seal placed on the first page and dated 1095H. The first page also features a precious artistic decoration in lapis lazuli blue in a floral shape which shows the titles of the works in the collection in each petal. Title and chapters are in cupreous green, and the pages are bound in gold with notes; some have been restored in the binding.

 MS 1025

Tehran, Malik Library²⁵

XVII c., *nash*, ff. 253, *Mūsīqī* pp. 479-505.

The codex contains a blue and gold illuminated headpiece; the space for geometric figures is left blank, and the final part of the Music section is missing.

 MS Or. 2361²⁶

London, British Library, Oriental Manuscripts²⁷

1073-5H/1662-5, *nash* and *nasta‘līq*, ff. 269, *Mūsīqī* ff. 157r-164r.

²⁴ Dirāyatī 1391Hs/2012: XIV, p. 290; Munzawī 1970: 665; Various Authors 1345Hs/1965: II, 1078-1079.

²⁵ Dirāyatī 1391Hs/2012: XIV, 289.

²⁶ A collection of fourteen treatises on music theory in Arabic and Persian, British Library: Oriental Manuscripts, Or. 2361, in *Qatar Digital Library* https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100035587376.0x000001 (accessed 1 May 2024).

²⁷ Rieu 1894: suppl. 558-561; Id. 1895: suppl. 114-116.

Copied by Sayyid Abū Muḥammad ibn Sayyid Faṭḥ Muḥammad Samānī (Arabic texts); Muḥammad Amīn al-Akbarābādī (Persian texts) in Šāhghānābād (Delhi), Ambala, Lahore, Kashmir.

It is an invaluable *codex compositus* from the Mughal era, containing 14 musical texts in Arabic and Persian, whose fascinating journey has been chronicled in detail by Jenny Norton-Wright²⁸. Dīyānat Ḥān was a senior intellectual and provincial administrator of Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), born in Qandahar and raised in India, according to a note reported by his nephew Mirzā Muḥammad ibn Rustam Mu'tamad Ḥān on f. 2r of the manuscript. A great enthusiast of the musicological heritage of his times, he commissioned several scientific treatises, including copies of works on contemporary Indian instrumentation and performance. The compilation of this valuable manuscript began in Delhi in 1073H/1662, shortly before Aurangzeb's expedition to Kashmir²⁹, with two treatises in Persian on the permissibility of music and singing, copied by a native-speaking scribe, Muḥammad Amīn al-Akbarābādī.

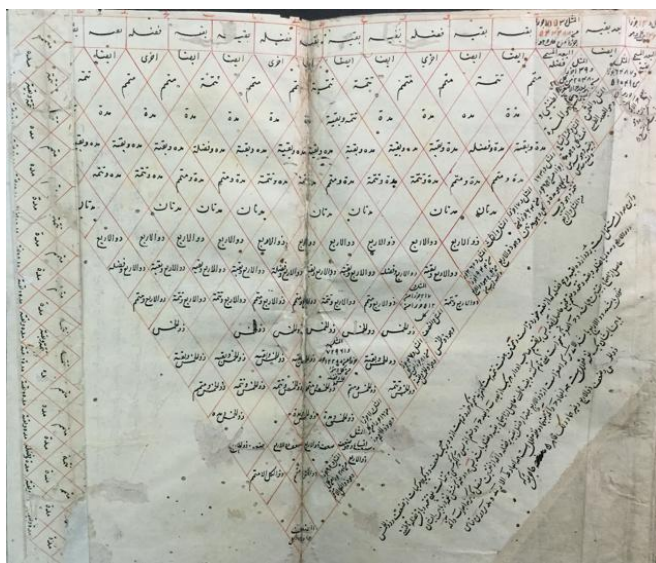
Between 1662 and 1663, seven Arabic texts were copied by Sayyid Abū Muḥammad ibn Sayyid Faṭḥ Muḥammad Samānī, probably in Punjab: al-Kindī, *Risāla fī ḥubr ta'rif al-alḥān*; Faṭḥallāh Širwānī (d. 1453 c.), *Risāla fī 'ilm al-mūsīqī*; Ibn Zayla (d. 1048), *Kitāb al-kāfī fī l-mūsīqī*; al-Fārābī, *Min Kitāb al-madḥal fī l-mūsīqī*; al-Urmawī, *al-Risāla al-mismā bi-l-adwār fī l-mūsīqī*; Anonymous, *Risāla šarḥ Mubārak Šāh bar adwār*.

Mūsīqī-yi hikmat-i 'Alā'ī, extracts on the music of DN, was completed at Anbala (Ambala), halfway to Lahore. Dīyānat personally worked on checking the *codex* and took care of the correction of works in Arabic, probably indicating greater literacy in Arabic rather than in Persian, the language spoken at court. In addition to checking the copy, he may also have been the author of the numerous and precious diagrams present in the *mağmū'a*; “seven years earlier he himself added the diagrams to a manuscript written for him in Hyderabad (Deccan), a copy of al-

²⁸ See Norton-Wright 2020.

²⁹ Bernier 1916: 350-428; Sāqī Must'ad Ḥān 1947.

Birjandi's (d. 1525-6) *Treatise on the Construction and Use of Some Observational Devices (al-Risālah fī ṣan'at ba'd al-ālāt al-raṣādiyyah wa-al-'amal bihā*, British Library IO Islamic 4419)"³⁰.



British Library, Or. 2361 (162v-163r)

Aurangzeb left Kashmir in 1663 and on 23 Rabi' I 1075/14 October 1664 in Delhi more treatises were added to the collection, including two in Persian, al-Buḥārī's *Kaṣf al-awṭār* and *Risāla kanz al-ṭuḥaf dar mūsīqī*, “a fourteenth-century Persian treatise of uncertain authorship on music theory and practice, which includes an illustrated section on the form, manufacture and tuning of nine traditional wind- and string-instruments including the lute, *qānūn*”³¹.

The long copying process can be reconstructed through the detailed colophons present, but the *codex* presents enigmas linked to the random and inconsistent order of the works, dictated neither by date of composition or copying, nor by language or topic. Originally the *mağmū'a* was probably differently bound and

³⁰ Norton-Wright 2020.

³¹ *Ibid.*

appeared decidedly more sober, as it was linked to academic and study purposes. The Kashmir-style illuminated miniature and the blue leather binding with gilt decoration were added later³². They were probably connected to the various transfers of ownership in the 19th century, documented in f. 2r which culminated in its purchase from Seyyed 'Alī, of Hyderabad in 1881³³.



British Library, Or. 2361 (157r)

³² *Qatar Digital Library* https://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100035587376.0x000001 (accessed 1 May 2024): Black ink, with rubricated headings and overlinings, key words and diagrams in red. Some use of green ink (f. 133v-135r) [...] Pages are bordered in blue with text areas framed in blue, gold and red, added later (see f. 252v). The margins of ff. 2v-3r are illuminated with gold floral designs, and the headings of each treatise except the second (f. 15r), eighth (f. 165r) and twelfth (f. 238v) are illuminated in a later Kashmiri style with gold, blue, red, green and white. The heading of the ninth treatise (f. 236v) is illuminated in gold only [...] some notes and corrections throughout; especially to the third and fifth treatises. Many of the colophons are written outside of the present trimmed page dimensions, and retained on folded tail edge tabs [...] Defaced square ownership seal (f. 2r), Ownership seals (ff. 2r, 18r, 33r and 247r, the last defaced).

³³ *Ibid.*: Mirzā Muḥammad ibn Rustam Mu'tamad Ḥān (grandson of Diyānat Ḥān)'s seal dated 1120/1708-09 and his ownership inscriptions (ff. 2r, 18r, 33r and 247r, the latter defaced); defaced and illegible square black seal (f. 1r); Ḡulām Muḥammad Ḥān Ṣāhib Alḥān's purchase inscription for 300 rupiah, dated 25 Raġab 1225/26 August 1810 (f. 1r); another purchase note for 261 rupees, dated 1238/1822-3 (f. 1r); purchase note for this volume, describing it as "in 15,000 bayt s, the eighteenth volume [?], [enclosed] in a white wax-cloth [?]" for 261 rupees, dated 1238/1822-3 (f. 1r); acquisition note dated 15 Rabī' I 1240/7 November 1824 (f. 1r); acquisition note dated 29 Raġab 1241/9 March 1826 (f. 1r); purchased from Seyyed 'Alī, of Hyderabad, 28 May 1881. Cf. Norton-Wright 2020.

With such a wealth of internal information, Or. 2361's significance goes well beyond its musical subject-matter, providing a snapshot of the sometimes highly mobile context of manuscript production at the time. The pages of this volume trace the interconnecting lives of the emperor Aurangzeb, his intellectual courtier Dīyānat Khān, and the latter's two scribes over a few years, against a moving backdrop of cities, mountains, plains, and royal encampments. A scholarly life was evidently not a sedentary one for Dīyānat Khān³⁴.



MS Add. 16830

London, British Library, Oriental Manuscripts³⁵

XVII/XVIII c., completed in Lahore (1127H/1715), *nasta'liq*, ff. 283.

A *codex* belonging to the collection of Major William Yule (1764-1839) containing exclusively *DN* (ff. 283), includes the section dedicated to Mathematics (Logic f. 3r; Metaphysics f. 67v; Physics f. 175v; Geometry f. 207v; Astronomy f. 233v; Arithmetic f. 260v; Music f. 273v). On the first page there appears a note by a previous owner of the *codex*, Muḥammad Naṣīr al-Dīn, who had purchased the first part of the work and had commissioned a copy of the remaining section in Lahore in 1127H. Indeed, the manuscript shows two different hands.



MS Add. 16659/13-14³⁶

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Rieu 1881: II, 433-434.

³⁶ Compendium of philosophical and scientific texts by and about Avicenna (ابن سینا), British Library: Oriental Manuscripts, Add ms 16659, in *Qatar Digital Library* https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100000001517.0x000093 (accessed 1 May 2024): black ink, with rubricated headings and overlinings in red; each text in the manuscript has a headpiece illuminated in gold, red and blue; beginning with f. 4, all pages are framed in yellow, black and red. Abū Ṭālib al-Ḥusaynī's inscription recording his purchase of the manuscript at Muršid'ābād while returning from Kolkata to Lucknow in Rabī' II 1208/November-December 1793 (f. 4r); Major Yule's inscription appended below that of Abū Ṭālib al-Ḥusaynī from whom he records that he won the manuscript at Lucknow in September 1803 (f. 4r); Major Yule's *ex libris* with date September 1805 (recto of first front flyleaf f. i-r). Some *marginalia* by multiple hands.

London, British Library, Oriental Manuscripts³⁷
1182H/1768-9, *nash* (different hands).

The *codex* belongs to the British Library collection Yule (number 23). It is a multiple-volume of 53 short treatises on various philosophical and scientific topics by Avicenna and of commentaries on and translations of his works. It was probably copied from its exemplar completed in Akbarābād (Agra) on 18 Šafar 1091/10 March 1680, as reported by an erased colophon (f. 552, lines 21-26).

The manuscript was purchased by Abū Ṭālib al-Ḥusaynī a Mušidābād in Rabī' II 1208/November-December 1793, and later bought by Major Yule in Lucknow in 1803 (f. 4r). The thirteenth text of the *codex* preserves the sections of Logic (ff. 258v-271r), Metaphysics (ff. 271v-295v) and Physics (ff. 295v-310r) of Avicenna's *Hikmat-i 'Alā'ī* (ff. 258v-310r). The following text (Add. 16659/14) contains *Risāla dar 'ilm-i Riyādiyyāt* by Ğūzġānī (ff. 310v-342v), as a mathematical complement to Avicenna's previous work: *Risāla dar Handasa* (Treatise on the Elements of Geometry, ff. 310v-320v), *Risāla dar 'ilm-i Rašd wahiyāt samān* (Treatise on the Science of Observation and Organization of the Heavens, ff. 320v-332v), *Risāla dar Aritmāṭiqī* (Treatise on Arithmetic, ff. 332v-338r), and *Risāla dar Mūsīqī* (Treatise on Music, ff. 338r-342v).

4. Remarks

Regarding the manuscript tradition of DN, two codices are worth mentioning: i) MS 1135 (1041H/1631, ff. 143, copied by Muḥammad ibn Šayḥ Ğalāl al-Qanawġī al-Qurayšī al-Šidīqī), preserved at the Raza Library in Rampur (India)³⁸, which provides an unusual type of quadrangular copy, namely *Manṭiq – Ṭabī'īyyāt – Ilāhiyyāt – Riyādiyyāt*. The Mathematics section unfortunately ends with Astronomy. The order of this manuscript may not be an accident of transmission: it represents an otherwise unattested copy format

³⁷ Cureton, Rieu 1846-1871: 447-451; Rieu 1879: II, 438-439.

³⁸ Šiddīqī 1375Hš/1996: 313.

that reflects the classic subdivision used by Avicenna in his other *summae*; ii) MS Mağlis 32, a collection of four treatises dating from the 16th c., preserves the first three sections of *DN* in the following order: Logic, Natural Philosophy and Metaphysics. Even the order of this precious *codex* may not be a chance one; probably belonging to the Daštakī family, it recalls a valuable manuscript of *Šifā'*, Rampur 3476³⁹.

Furthermore, some details relating to two bibliographical sources should be highlighted:

a) Brockelmann, in *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*⁴⁰ reports the following as *codices* containing the Mathematics section: Gotha Pers. 114; Rieu II, 4/433; Suppl. 162; Ind. Off. Éthé 2218; Teh, I, 78; Mashh. I, 34,⁹⁸. The first *codex* mentioned, preserved at the Gotha Library of the University of Erfurt, bears the title *Nazahat nāma-yi 'Alā'*⁴¹ and actually contains another treatise on Natural Sciences; the second, third and fourth *codices* listed above correspond respectively to British Add. 16830, British Or. 2361 and India Office 2218 (containing only Logic, Metaphysics and Physics); the last two Iranian manuscripts remain to be verified.

b) Mahdawī, in his *Bibliographie d'Ibn Sina*⁴², later taken up by Ergin and Guta⁴³, on p. 113 among the *DN* manuscripts considered

³⁹ See <https://www.avicennaproject.eu/#/manuscripts/intro> (accessed 1 May 2024): “ms Rampur, Rampur Raza Library, 3476 ξ (ḥikma 112) (R), for example, was copied in 718H/1318-9, collated and corrected almost a century and a half later (854H/1441), owned shortly afterwards by three consecutive members of the Daštakī family in Shiraz (Šadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Daštakī Širāzī, d. 903H/1498); his son Ġiyāt al-Dīn Maṣṣūr Daštakī Širāzī, d. 948H/1542; and this latter’s son Šadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Tānī, d. 962H/1555), until the times of Ḥāğğī Muḥammad, owner of the manuscript in 1100H/1689, and of this latter’s son and daughter Mīrzā (or Mīr) Ḥān Muḥammad Hādī Ḥusaynī (owner in 1105H/1694) and Faṭīma, to whom their father bequeathed the manuscript in 1100H/1689. A possible further owner, Faṭḥ Allāh al-Širāzī, d. 997H/1589, a student and/or relative of Ġiyāt al-Dīn Maṣṣūr Daštakī Širāzī and member of the court of the Mughal ruler Akbar (reg. 1556-1605AD), presumably first brought the manuscript to India, where at some point it was lodged in the Mughal royal library and later transferred to Rampur”; Bertolacci, Dadkhah 2022.

⁴⁰ Brockelmann 1937: suppl. I, 853-854.

⁴¹ Pertsch 1859: 30-36.

⁴² Mahdawī 1333Hš/1954: 113.

⁴³ Ergin 1956: 28; Gutas 2014: 424-425.

complete also lists includes a Millī *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* 1322 (XVII c.), which today belongs to the collection of the Maḡlis Library⁴⁴ and contains only the first three sections of the work, excluding Mathematics.

Conclusions

The witnesses that preserve *DN* mostly report the original canonical Avicennian division into three sections, Logic, Metaphysics, and Physics; secondly, the tradition preserves the work in its entirety, including Mathematics (e.g. MS London, British, Add. 16659); finally, some manuscripts preserve partial copies containing Logic and Physics, or only a portion of the work, Logic or Physics. To date, there is no attested copy that preserves a selective copy containing Logic and Metaphysics or only the latter⁴⁵. As regards the Mathematics part, you can also find specific sections (e.g. Kolkata, Asiatic Society of Bengal, MS 565, 1228H/1813, *Risāla dar Handasa*)⁴⁶ or the entire Music excluding the rest of the work (e.g. MS London, British, Or. 2361).

In a chronological perspective, the manuscripts relating to Music and forming part of this census date back to the 17th/ 18th century with a large gap relative to previous centuries, a remarkable trait which is also found in the activity of copying of the other Avicennian *summae*. Another notable aspect concerns the diffusion of the work, which increased during the Safavid Renaissance, an element that demonstrates a renewed interest among scholars of the time in Avicenna's entire production, both in Arabic and Persian. It is also evident in the significant number of translations of Avicennian or pseudo-Avicennian works during that period.

This contribution, far from aspiring to be exhaustive and complete, has only partially presented the manuscript tradition

⁴⁴ Dirāyatī 1391Hs/2012: XIV, 289.

⁴⁵ The issue relating to the manuscript tradition of the entire *DN* will be discussed in a forthcoming article.

⁴⁶ IVANOW 1926: 394.

relating to the Music section of Avicenna's *DN*. Some codices remain to be acquired and examined.

At the current state of the art, a critical and complete study of *DN* still remains a *desideratum*, particularly with regard to Mathematics.

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Strategies of devotional performance in the Sufi premakathās

Annalisa Bocchetti
(Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”)

Abstract

As metrical compositions crafted by Sufi poets who drew from the Indo-Persian tradition, the Sufi *premakathās* were shaped by the religious and aesthetic tastes of early modern North Indian society. These tales were recited and sung before different types of audiences, on both formal and informal occasions, from Muslim courts to marketplaces, creating moments of widespread devotion as well as courtly entertainment.

In light of their style and content rooted both in Indian and Persian sources, this article considers these poems as performative texts created by poets who were also practitioners actively engaged in the construction of social spaces of performance. Through these texts, we are introduced to a world of minstrels, dancers and different classes of musicians who reflect the musical trends of the early modern society wherein these tales originated. Among the most striking features of these poems is their detailed description of musical patterns and instruments. This includes the recreation of sets of *rāgas* and *rāginīs* alongside technical notions as components used for enriching the description of musical shows in the storyline.

This article focuses on one poem of the tradition, the *Citrāvalī* by Usmān (1613 AD), examining how musical culture is presented in such mystical tales, shedding light on the close relationship between poetry and religious emotion present in Sufi literary practices that were deeply rooted in regional music traditions.

Keywords

Sufism, North India, Awadhī, performance, poetry.

Introduction

The Sufi *premakathās* are allegorical tales in the Awadhī language that flourished in North India under the Sultanate and further developed during the Mughal dynasty. These literary works offer valuable insights into the cultural, literary and religious history of India, standing as a unique example of the multi-faceted Indo-Islamic literary production. Spanning approximately five centuries, the earliest Sufi story ever composed in Awadhī of which we have knowledge is the *Candāyan*, a Sufi version of a popular folk tale of two lovers, Lorik and Cāndā, composed by Maulana Dā'ūd in 1379 AD at the Tughluq court of Dalmau, thus setting the stage for a new Sufi poetic genre (Behl 2016: 59). As early as the fourteenth century, the Turkish courts provided a platform for this Sufi vernacular culture to develop, as they allowed the creation of an environment in which Sufi poets could present and perform their works through circuits of aristocratic patronage (Digby 2004: 339-343; Behl 2016: 5, 47-48). Although these tales were composed by Muslim authors who were most likely familiar with Persian, the language and imagery of their poetry reflect the traditions and aesthetics of the Indian region (Behl 2016: 1-3). By composing Sufi poetry in a local North Indian idiom, the Sufi poets were able to conceive works that transcended cultural, literary, and linguistic boundaries. Even though the language was native to North India, many of these compositions were originally written in Perso-Arabic scripts and later transcribed into Devanāgarī or Kaithī scripts. This explains in part how languages circulated freely across script traditions before ideological divisions of the late colonial and postcolonial periods (King 2010; Hakala 2016).

There is no doubt that the Sufis played an important role in vernacularizing Islam in South Asia for many centuries, and the production of Sufi poetry in regional languages was crucial to this process (Anjum 2017: 192). The emergence of Sufi narratives in Awadhī marks both the beginning of an Indo-Islamic literary tradition and the reimagining of Islamic culture within the Indian landscape. This event not only impacted the way Islamic values

were perceived and interpreted in the region, but it also led to the formation of new cultural identities. Moreover, by voicing their religious message through aesthetic compositions in a spoken idiom, Sufi poets made their teachings local and comprehensible to the indigenous communities through familiar symbols and vocabularies. In doing so, they may be considered the forefathers of the literarization of Awadhī, fostering new literate communities (Behl 2016: 6).

These compositions are referred to as *premakathās* (“love tales”) because their authors drew primarily on the Sufi ideal of divine love, expressed through metaphors and language associated with human love and desire. Most of these tales narrate the journey undertaken by a prince, often in the guise of a yogi, in search of a faraway princess who represents the reflection of divine beauty. To reunite with his divine beloved, the hero must face several trials and go through various obstacles across real and imaginary regions of the Indian landscape. These adventures along the hero’s way reflect the various stations (*maqāmat*) on the Sufi spiritual path of self-transformation. In the end, the prince succeeds in uniting with the princess, symbolizing the union of the human soul with the divine, which echoes the core principle of the existential unity (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) (Behl 2016: 45, 234, 304). In this way, these narratives blend the conventions of both Persian and Indian traditions, resulting in an original expression of Sufi devotional poetry’s sensual aesthetics. This is the reason, among the many possible modes of interpretation that these fictions allow, one may view them for their spiritual pragmatism, which may have served as symbolic spiritual manuals, especially for Sufi novices who needed to understand the different levels of the Sufi path represented through symbolic references in the narrative *premkathās*. Nevertheless, the *premkathā*’s Sufi goal does not conflict with other secular and more entertaining objectives. The composition of their tales allowed the authors to display their knowledge, gain prestige, and engage in literary and religious competition with other groups in the wider Indian literary panorama. Additionally, the form of the *premkathā* required the poets to pay careful attention to the aesthetic and musical

qualities of the poem, making it an enjoyable experience for their multicultural audience.

As these tales were shared and re-told across the private and public spaces of Islamate India, they were adapted and modified to suit the changing contexts and audiences, thus allowing different interpretations. Due to their complexity and versatility, they could be recited in court to entertain the royal public or sung in a Sufi shrine to teach other believers. These narratives passed on in local markets and private homes, giving audiences an intimate and communal experience of the message.

With their style and content rooted in Indian and Persian storytelling traditions, this article analyzes the poems in the context of their function as performative texts created by mystical poets who were also involved in the creation of social spaces for performance and musical entertainment. The metric structure of these poems helped Sufi performers keep the rhythm when reciting them aloud, sometimes with musical accompaniment that added a layer of complexity to the performance. As a result, the poems maintain a quatrain-couplet scheme (*caupāi-dohā*), which helped the poets with the recitation and memorization of the verses.

These poetic performances were attended by various members of the Indian society, including rulers, Sufi shaykhs, and common people. The Sufi poets used their skills to create an amusing atmosphere, while also expressing deep philosophical ideas. Being highly influenced by the Persian lyrical format of the *maṣnavī*, these poets adapt the typical praising formulas to Allāh (*ḥamd*), the Prophet (*na't*), and the four caliphs to the local context and textual form of the Indic ode (Behl 2016: 34-39; Orsini 2017: 6). These prologues play a significant role in the theological context of the Sufi *premakathās*, providing the Sufi ideological framework to the narrative and stating the spiritual intentions of the poets. Although this literature was largely inspired by the Persian mystical tradition of the *maṣnavī*, the Sufi poets have succeeded in developing it as new form of aesthetic devotional expression in vernacular language.

Significantly, the merchant and poet Banārasī Dās (1586-1641 AD), who was active during Akbar's reign, recorded in his poetic

autobiography *Ardhakathānaka* (“Half Tale”) the custom of reading and reciting these poetic tales in private gatherings. As part of the oral-performative culture of early modern India, the author shows how informal networks of learners and scholars contribute to the circulation of Sufi poetry in more intimate settings. He recalls reciting verses from Quṭbān’s *Mṛgavati* (1503 AD) and Mañjhan’s *Madhumālatī* (1545 AD) during some evening receptions held at his house, creating moments of musical and poetic pleasure.¹

The poems themselves reveal the familiarity of Sufi poets with poetic metrics and musical knowledge. Apart from their mystical significance, these Sufi poems are original compositions with performative and meta-performative elements, which include extensive descriptions of musical patterns and styles, detailed lists of instruments, and *rāgas* and *rāginis* or musical modes. This study focuses on one poem of the genre, the *Citrāvālī* by Usmān of Ghazipur (1613 AD) composed during the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (1605–1627 AD), to examine the interplay of music and poetry in a Sufi literary context of seventeenth century Awadh. In his poem, Usmān transposes the living tradition of storytelling, adding technical notions of music and descriptions of various popular performance practices. By situating his poem within the vibrant performance culture of his time, Usmān brings to life an animated world of minstrels, bards, dancers, and musicians from diverse castes, reflecting the musical trends of his age. In addition to that, this article explores how music serves as a vehicle for articulating spiritual emotion in the *Citrāvālī*, highlighting its dual role as both a devotional practice and a source of communal entertainment.

¹ “[Banārasī Dās] used to spend [the whole day] sitting at home and would not go to the market. He used to read [aloud] two poems: *Madhumālatī* and *Mīragāvati*. He recited them in the evening when [groups of] ten-twenty men gathered [there]]. He would sing and talk [about these poems] and [his audience] would stand up, blessing him continuously” (*taba ghara maiṃ baiṭhe rahaiṃ jāhiṃ na hāṭa bajāra/ Madhumālatī Mīragāvati pothī doi udāra/ te vāṃcahiṃ rajanī samai āvahiṃ nara dasa bisa/ gāvahiṃ aru bātaiṃ karahiṃ nita uḷhi dehiṃ asīsa*) (*Ardhakathānaka*: 335-336).

1. *Soundscape of early modern North India*

There are relatively few biographical details about Usmān that can be gained from his own literary work. In the prologue of his poem, he describes his family—his father Shaikh Hussein, along with his five brothers, who appear to have been residents of Ghazipur. The poet’s reference to two Sufi saints also indicates a Chishtī affiliation. He praises Shāh Nizām ud-din Chishtī of Narnaul and Bābā Hāzī, whom he describes as his spiritual guide (*pīr*), evoking images of Sufi love through elements common to Hindu devotion (*Citrāvalī*: 22, 27).

Usmān dedicates a part of his prologue to the description of his hometown, Ghazipur. In his description, the town appears as a place where storytelling and musical shows occur regularly. Groups of *bhāṭṭs* (bards) and *kalavānts* (musicians) practice music, prosody, and provide amusement for the city’s residents (*Citrāvalī*: 25).² Thus, he illustrates two broad categories of performers who relied much on the kings’ patronage and were often employed at the court in the Mughal India. Both groups played a prominent role in early modern India’s oral and musical world. Referring to their expertise and activity, Usmān employs technical terms from the Sanskrit tradition, such as *saṅgīta* [music] and *piṅgala* [prosody], alongside the term *guṇa* to describe their musical and poetic tradition. In addition to its meaning as “quality” or “virtue”, the term *guṇa* also had a specific application in the courtly setting of Usmān’s time, where it was used to refer to refined musical taste and performance. This is reflected in the poet’s description of the town’s musicians as “full of talent” (*guṇa pūre*). The literary historian Francesca Orsini points out the polysemous term *guṇa* found in the imagery and terminology of early modern vernacular sources. As she suggests,

² “...musicians are full of every talent/ the skilful *Bhāṭṭs* and *Kalavānts* expound prosody and music./All they do is recite poems and music; everyone you see is a king in his own house./ All over the place dancing and jumping, everybody walks with trotting steps” (...*guṇījana saba guṇa pūre/ Bhāṭa Kalāvata vasaiṃ sujānā jinha piṅgala saṅgīta bakhānā/ guṇa carcā binu āna na kājā jo dekho apāne ghara rājā/ jaham taham nāca kūda puni hoī ṭhumukata bāṭa calaiṃ saba koī*).

at the time, poets often associated the concept of *guṇa* with the generic idea of “talent”, alongside the specific meaning of “aesthetic and musical connoisseurship” (Orsini 2015: 348). Usmān’s use of *guṇa* in describing musicians (*gunījana*) as “full of talent” of his hometown’s choral society further illustrates how the term was used to refer to musical talent (*Citrāvalī* 25).

Following the prologues, the story of *Citrāvalī* unfolds, named after the protagonist of the Sufi poem. Indeed, Usmān narrates the romance between Princess Citrāvalī and Prince Sujān first bloomed after they saw each other’s self-portraits. In line with this element, Princess Citrāvalī impersonates an artist woman (*citrinī*) who paints self-portraits. It is the vision of her portrait in her picture gallery that first arouses the prince’s desire to unite with her, feeling the separation from his beloved that leads him to start his long quest for the princess. The romantic notion of separation and longing for reunion (*viraha* in Awadhī, *hiḥr* in Persian) is identified in *Citrāvalī*’s story as a metaphor for the soul’s journey towards divine union. In fact, in Chishtī philosophy, the human soul’s desire to unite with God is a primary soteriological path (Behl 2016: 105; De Bruijn 2012: 104; Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 2).

Aside from the painting symbolism that is central to the poem, Usmān has enriched it with references and descriptions that relate to other forms of art, especially music and storytelling. When the poet refers to a performer from Bījānagar visiting the court of King Citrasen, he employs both the term *kathaka* (“storyteller”) and the general term *gunī* (“skilled”), which, in this context, alludes to the performer as a musical savant (*Citrāvalī*: 479). The poet, thus, combines both storytelling and music expertise in the performer’s figure, since he can recite stories, intonate *rāgas*, and play the *vīṇā*. In the poem, the king of Rūpanagar, the father of Princess *Citrāvalī*, requests the storyteller from Bījānagar to display his talent, as is shown in the following lines:

1. *Manahuṃ bīna rasanā teṃ kahā ānana gunī dekhi saba rahā*
2. *rājai kahā kahā tumha jānā āpana guna saba karahu bakhānā*

1. “It was as though he spoke with a *vīṇā* for a tongue, everyone kept looking at the skilled [performer].
2. [At one point], the king asked him: - “What [kind] of knowledge do you possess? Reveal [to us] all your talent.”
(*Citrāvalī* 479).

In the poem, the *gunī* is often contraposed to the *mūrkhā* (literally “ignorant”), referring to someone who lacks musical sensibility. The *Citrāvalī*, together with other literary sources of the time, demonstrates how the understanding of the term *guna* and its correlated concepts have evolved over time, acquiring more nuanced connotations of performance and music taste.³

Through the description of Princess Citrāvalī’s birth anniversary, Usmān engages his audience with a detailed account of a musical event, through which we learn about musical instruments, rhythms (*tālas*), and modes (*rāgas*), as well as their capability to evoke specific emotions (*bhavas*) in listeners. In this connection, Usmān brings into his poem the aesthetic concept of *rāga*, which modulates the musical experience of the audience. In Indian music theory, the *rāga* expresses a melodic framework based on a combination of notes in a particular order, which elicits certain emotions (*rasa*) in the audience—from joy and sorrow to calm and excitement. Additionally, *rāgas* are usually associated with particular times of day or seasons, landscapes, iconographies, and deities (both male and female). The *rāgas* are musical components important to both the Northern (Hindustani) and Southern (Carnatic) branches of Indian classical music. As such, the concept of *rāga* represents a significant aspect of traditional Indian music and has a profound effect on the representation of South Asia’s rich musical heritage (Ruckert and Widdess 2000; Kassebaum 2000).

In Sanskrit, the word *rāga* is derived from the verbal root *rañj*, meaning “to color”, specifically “to color red”, and by extension “to

³ Busch (2010), for instance, translates as “ocean of talent” the title *guna-samudra* given to Lal Khan, a musician at the Mughal court under Shah Jahan (r. 1628-58), in the *Padshāhnamah* (“The book of emperors”) (p. 285), pointing out to his inexhaustible musical expertise.

please or delight”. Accordingly, in Indian music aesthetics, *rāgas* and *rasas* are correlated, since each melody evokes a distinct aesthetic response. As each *rāga* corresponds to a certain set of notes and rhythms, this results in a distinctive soundscape. As early as the eleventh century, Sanskrit literature was highly influential in the development of Indian musical culture. Brugière (1994) explains how various contributions relied on Bharata’s *Nāṭya Śāstra*’s aesthetic principles to develop a system of *rāgas* that govern the structure and form of their musical compositions. Drawing from the *rasa* theory of Bharata, the *rāga* should provide the listener with an emotional context, and this emotion is expressed through the *rasa*.⁴ These ideas were developed and refined in the court’s literary circles, becoming an integral part of Mughal culture already in the sixteenth century (Schofield 2015). Those who were able to appreciate the subtle nuances of each *rasa* in the poetic text or musical composition they were experiencing were commonly identified as *rasikas* (“those who savour the *rasa*”). Schofield (2015) argues that the Mughal patrons would be able to appreciate the complex forms of Indic poetry and music due to their familiarity with Persian aesthetics. Indeed, the Persianate aesthetic theory as well placed the audience at the center of the aesthetic experience, putting emphasis on the audience’s emotional and intellectual response to the artwork. In Islamicate and Persianate India, this finds connection in *samā’* (“audition”), a Sufi musical ritual, often accompanied by singing and dancing, which is believed to help adepts reach spiritual ecstasy and foster spiritual growth, making it an invaluable part of Sufi practice (Lawrence 1983: 72)

The thirteenth century saw the classification of *rāgas* into female, male, and neuter categories in an attempt to facilitate systematization and differentiation (Brugière 1994). In his poem, Usmān too distinguishes between [male] *rāgas* and [female] *rāginīs*. Then, drawing upon Sanskrit theoretical works and

⁴ In the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (“Treatise on Theatre”), we learn about eight *rasas*: the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), the comic (*hāsyā*), the tragic (*karuṇā*), the furious (*raudra*), the heroic (*vīra*), the terrific (*bhayānaka*), the gruesome (*bhībatsā*) and the marvellous (*adbhuta*). Later, a ninth *rasa*, the pacific (*sānta*) was added to the repertoire.

Hindustani musical tradition, the poet organizes them in two specific music sets. In particular, the poet classifies groups of six *rāgas* belonging to the *Hanumān-mat* and the *Parvatī-mat*.⁵ In that period, the *Hanumān-mat* was starting to circulate across various sources and contexts; in this relation, iconographic representations and texts record its widespread diffusion in North India. For instance, Dāmodar Mīśra, a musician who found royal patronage at the courts of Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān, has given special attention to the Hanumān system in his Sanskrit treatise *Sanḡita-darpaṇa* (“Mirror of Music”) composed during the seventeenth century (Miner 2015: 389-390). To further distinguish these musical sets, Usmān assigns each set a specific range of notes, melodies, and rhythms characteristic of that particular *mat*. In the following stanza, the poet introduces the repertoires performed at the princess’ birthday, which are based on the Hanumān and Parvatī systems:

1. *Gāi gunīna ṣuni rāga sunāe vartamāna jasa kalī maham āe*
2. *Bhāiro Kausika Meghamalārā Hiṇḍōla Dīpaka ujīyārā*
3. *Sīrīrāga rāganha kara sāmī ṣuni tinha kī rāginī sunāi*
4. *eha mata rāga sabai kou jānā tātem maiṃ nahim kīnha bakhānā*
5. *Hanumaṃta-mata jo rāga bakhānā je sanḡita parhā te jānā*
6. *Bhāiro Pañcam Meghamalārā Naṭa Gaurā Mālavā sudhārā*
7. *Pārvatī-mata jo kou gāvā chao rāga ehi bhāṃti sunāvā*
8. *Sīrīrāga Bhāiro kahā au ṣuni kahā Basanta*
9. *Pañcama Meghamalārā ṣuni Naṭa-Nārāyana anta*

1. “Then the artists sang the *rāgas* following the contemporary style.
2. Bhāirav, Kauśik, Megha Malhār, Hiṇḍōl and the luminous Dīpak.
3. Like the *rāgas* of the [group] of Śrī Rāga, then they sang its *rāginīs*.
4. Everyone knows this school, for this reason, I will not describe it.

⁵ It is likely that the poet was referring to *Someśvar-mat*, which is also known as *Śiva-mat*. The *Sanḡitadarpaṇa* (c. 1625 AD) of Dāmodara Mīśra recognizes four main *mats* (“schools”), namely *Hanumān-mat*, *Kallī Nāth-mat*, *Bharat-mat*, and *Someśvar-mat*.

5. The rāgas of the Hanumān school performed [at the birthday] are made known as recited:
6. Bhairav, Pañcam, Megh Malhār, Naṭ, Gaurā and [they] completed [the cycle] with Mālavā.
7. Those who sang the [group of rāgas] of the Pārvatī school, they performed six rāgas in [following] way:
8. they recited [first] Śrī Rāga and Bhairav, and subsequently Vasant,
9. then, Pañcam and Megh Malhār, ending with Naṭ- Nārāyaṇ.”
(*Citrāvalī* 74)

Then, Usmān enriches the celebration by adding to the musical repertoire the *rāginīs*:

1. *Sirīrāga kī rāginī ahīṇ kahauṃ banāi jo Girījai kahīm*
2. *Gaurī Madhumādhavī Kedārī Tarivana au Mālavī Bihārī*
3. *Bhairō kī rāginī Bhairōī Pārvatī āpane mata joī*
4. *Rava Baṅgālī au Gūjarī puni gāe bahu lai guna karī*
5. *Desī Devagirī Ghaurāṭī puni Basanta kaha jo tia bāṭī*
6. *puni Ṭoḍī Hiṅḍōlahi gāī Bhorahiṅ gāī Lalita sohāī*
7. *Pañcama kahaṃ Vibhāsa Bhūpālī Baṛahīsī Karnāṭī Mālī*
8. *Pañcama kī puni rāginī Pañcama ke saṅga gāī*
9. *Megha rāga kī rāginī aba sunu kahauṃ banāi*

1. “I will describe how the *rāginīs* of [the group of] Śrī Rāga are composed according to the Pārvatī school:
2. Gaurī, Madhumādhavī, Kedārī, Tarivan, Mālavī and Bihārī.
3. The *rāginī* of Bhairav, Bhairavī, as [recited] by the Pārvatī school.
4. Then they sang Rava, Baṅgālī, and Gūjarī with many skills.
5. Desī, Devagirī, Ghaurāṭī followed by Vasant performed in three parts.
6. They carried on singing Ṭoḍī with Hiṅḍōlī, Bhairavī, and the lovely Lalit.
7. Pañcam, Vibhās and Bhūpālī were performed, [with] Vaṛhīsī, Karnāṭī and Mālī.
8. Then, they sang Pañcam along with its *rāginīs*.
9. Now listen to how the *rāginīs* of Megh *rāga* are composed.”
(*Citrāvalī* 75)

1. *Gandhārī Sorāṭha Mallārī Sāderī puni Harisigārī*
2. *taba chaṭṭhe Kausikī sohāī bibidhi bhānti kai guniyana gāī*

3. *ṣuni Naṭa kī rāginī bakhānī Naṭikā Kāmodī Kalyānī*
4. *Naṭa Hammīra Ahīrī gāī Sāraṅgī ṣuni gāī sunāī*
5. *lini grāma gāini sura barnā uḍau khāḍau sarala saṃṣurna*
6. *Kharaja Rāṣaba Gandhāra sohāvā cauṭheṃ sura Madhyama ṣuni gāvā*
7. *Pañcama Dhaivata aura Niṣādhā soī gunī sato sura sādḥā*
8. *asa kachu sabhā siṃgāra bhā au ṣuni rāga bakhāna*
9. *Hāhā Hūhū suni caṣe surapati dekhi lajāna*

1. “Gandharī, Sorath, Malhārī, Sadarī, and Harsingārī.
2. Then, at the sixth [place], the musicians sang the pleasant Kauśikī in various styles.
3. Next, they performed the rāginīs of Naṭ, [which are] Naṭikā, Kamodī, and Kalyānī.
4. They sang Naṭ, Hammīr, Ahīrī, and then, they recited Sāraṅgī.
5. [They] sang [them] in three groups, [three] class of scales: pentatonic, hexatonic, and complete heptatonic.
6. They intonated Ṣadaj, Raṣabh, the lovely Gāndhār, and the fourth note Madhyam,
7. [With] Pañcam, Dhaivat, and Niṣādh the musicians completed the seven notes.
8. The assembly was adorned in such a manner, and the rāgas were performed in such a way,
9. that, by listening to them, the [*gandharvas*] Hāhā and Hūhū were overwhelmed and Indra [was left] in humble amazement.”⁶

(*Citrāvālī* 76)

As the scholar Allyn Miner (2015) has explained in her essay on the *Mṛgavati* (1503 AD), a Sufi poem of the same tradition, what is striking about these texts is their extensive references to old and new local music forms and genres. By reading these texts, we understand the large musical influences on them. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Indian classical musical aesthetic sources would have circulated in courts and private Sufi circles as well (Miner 2015: 400-406). Within the context of Sufi poetry, the presentation of musical sets of *rāgas* and *rāginīs* alongside their symbolism is indicative of the aesthetic and spiritual character of these compositions, reflecting how musical ideas

⁶ Celestial beings usually dwelling in the water or in the heavens; they are the male counterpart of the *apsarās* [nymphs].

resonate deeply with the Sufi vernacular mystics. At one level, these conventional musical chapters in the *premakathās* are the artistic and aesthetic expression of the Sufi poets, providing their audiences with moments of aesthetic pleasure. At the other level, they show the combination of aesthetic and religious practices, shaping the idea of music and poetry as forms of devotion and spiritual experience. This discourse evokes specific musical rituals performed in some Sufi orders, such as the *mahfil-e-samā'*, previously mentioned, which is traditionally held at the *dargāhs* where adepts evoke God's many names (*zikr*) (Ernst and Lawrence 2002: 5, 27). These musical collective sessions are especially relevant to the Chishti doctrine, since it has become part of the layout of prayers. It is likely that this ceremony was initially only a recommendation to Sufi devotees, who performed it occasionally, and it eventually became part of the Chishtī commandments (Lawrence 1983: 72).

2. Music and Sufi poetry: experiencing the divine's multiple sounds

In the episode of Princess Citrāvalī's birthday celebration, Usmān recreates a musical scene in the story plot portraying a royal orchestra ensemble playing for the princess' eleventh birthday. Through this plot device, the poet evokes Indian classical and folk sounds performed in North Indian courts, royal households, and more popular settings. Usmān mentions various types of instruments—string, percussion, and wind—, played by expert musicians for an audience with musical taste (*Citrāvalī: 72-73*). Each sound produced by the instruments causes magical and delightful effects on the listeners and the surrounding space, except on those who are deprived of musical taste (*mūrkhā*).

The passage below illustrates the opening of the musical assembly by King Citrasen, father of Citrāvalī, which is attended by a varied audience:

1. *Bāhara Citrasena maniyārā sabhā jori kai racā akhārā*
2. *kanaka pāṭa para baiṭhyo rājā surapati dekhi sabhā mana lājā*
3. *guna nidhāna dacchīna ke gunī tinha pragatī vidyā jata sunī*
4. *gāvahi gīta bajāvahi bājā parathira bāva bheda uparājā*

5. *suramandila taḥaṃ aṣuruba dīsā eka sarāsana paṃca batīsā*
6. *sahasa bāna chūṭahim eka bārā mūrakha chaṛi jāna pai bhārā*
7. *bāja pakhāuja āuja saṅga mana hulasai jasa uḥai taraṅgā*
8. *murachi pare sura nara sabai binu ataṅka bhāi mīca*
9. *manahum jivāe lai sakala mukha amirita puni sīca*

1. Citrasen gathered the assembly outside and arranged an arena with bright gemstones.
2. As the king sat on the golden throne, the assembly looked at him in amazement. He looked like the king of gods.
3. To the south, musicians, treasures of virtues, exhibiting their talent, to be listened to.
4. They sang songs and played musical instruments creating [musical] vibrations in the motionless wind.
5. The *swarmanḍal* was a unique sight: a single rod [of strings] could play from five to thirty-two [notes].⁷
6. Thousands of notes were released all at once: [even] fools quit filled [with music] in their souls.
7. The *pakhāwaj* and the *āwaj* resounded together, as the tune rose, the hearts rejoiced.⁸
8. Everyone, men and deities [alike] fainted away, unfazed by death.
9. And all [of them] were restored to life as if their mouths were watered with the elixir.⁹

(*Citrāvalī*: 72)

As part of his description of the sounds made by the instruments, the poet uses a fascinating image. The Avadhi term *bheda*, meaning difference or modification, is here intended as a perturbation, vibration, or a change in the wind's motion (line 4). Thus, Usmān uses the term *bheda* to illustrate the physical, audible effects of wind

⁷ The *swarmanḍal* is a kind of dulcimer with a varied number of strings. The name means "circle of notes", referring to its ability to produce several notes ("Svaramanḍal", in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Music of India*, vol. 3, 2011, p. 1041).

⁸ In Hindustani music, it is a popular traditional drum. It has two heads and is barrel-shaped. A few theories exist regarding the origin of the term *pakhāwaj*. According to some, it is derived from the *āwaj*, a hemispherical drum played with sticks widely used during Mughal times. It is also believed that the name comes from the Sanskrit words *pakha* or *paksha*, meaning side or wing. The two heads of the drum may be seen as the two wings of the instrument ("Pakhāwaj", In *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Music of India*. Oxford University Press, vol. 3, 2011, pp. 782-83).

being affected by the vibrations from musical instruments which produce different sounds. The music that resonates through the wind has magical effects on the entire audience, encompassing all kinds of creatures, including “fools”, who are those lacking musical sense as discussed previously. In this respect, the poet uses wordplay to make a metaphor for music's power. Indeed, there is a pun on the word *bāna*, which can mean both musical note and arrow (line 6). In this way, Usmān describes the musician touching his instrument's strings, which release notes like thousands of arrows shooting their way into the hearts of all who hear it, suggesting that music has the power to transform anyone.⁹

The poet continues to illustrate various instruments coming together in the scene to form a tapestry of sound. Each instrument is described according to the effect its sound produces on the listener, through aesthetic associations, wordplays, and technical notions. In doing so, the poet is able to create a vivid and rich auditory experience that has the power to transport the reader to the very place where the music is being played:

1. *Mahuara sura janu mada mahuvārā chukaṭī māha karai matavārā*
2. *caṅga ataṅka sunata nara jhūle bansī dhuni suni ahi-kula bhūle*
3. *puni budhi harana kamāica sājī ḍola Sumerū bīna jaba bājī*
4. *gahi pināka jānahum sura gahā jata kata jagata bejha hoi raha*
5. *huḍuka bāja jalajantu bajāvā ko na jantu vai sabada bhulāvā*
6. *ḍapha bajāi munivara citaharā ko na jāi tehi ghare parā*
7. *bājai jhāmjha majīrā tūrā rājahiṃ bhāva soī sura pūrā*
8. *tanta vitanta ausikhara dhuni anta pare puni tāra*
9. *pāmcau sabada jo jagata maham hoi raha jhanakāra*

1. “The sound of the *mahuvār* was like an inebriating *mahuā*: a single sip will intoxicate you.
2. The men swung as they listened to the sound of the *caṅga*, [while] the melody of the *bansī* made them forget [all their] worries.
3. Then, [they] arranged musical bows to defeat the mind; Mount Sumeru shook when the *vīṇā* resounded.

⁹ In this connection, an alternative reading of this second part of the line could also be as “those ignorant [of music] were struck by notes [similar to arrows] in their soul”.

4. They wielded the *pināk* as if they were seizing arrows. Everyone in the world was paralyzed [by its sound].
5. The aquatic creatures echoed at the sound of the *huḍuk*, no one could forget [it].
6. The moment the *daf* was played, it captivated even the finest of sages. Would anyone not be surrounded [by its sound]?
7. As the *jhāñjh*, the *manjīrā*, and the *turahī* were played, the king was thoroughly pleased with the music.¹⁰
8. Toward the end, both the strung and unstrung [instruments] reached their peak and once again took over the rhythm.
9. The five ‘sounds’ reverberated throughout the world”.¹¹

(*Citrāvālī* 73)

Usmān compares the sound of the *mahuwār*, the flute used by snake-charmers in North India, to the *mahuā* flower from which a special type of liquor is derived. This comparison shows once again the poet’s imagination and ability to play with words in comparing the intoxicating effect of hearing the flute’s sound to drinking the juice of the flower. A range of other wind instruments are mentioned in the stanza, such as the *caṅga*, a Persian traditional instrument resembling a harp, and the *bansī*, also spelt *bansurī*, the typical Indian flute made of bamboo, which is traditionally associated with the god Kṛṣṇa.¹²

Conclusion

Although the lists of *rāgas* and musical sets may have been only vague representations of much more complex musical compositions, the way Sufi poets evoke music theory and performance in their vernacular narratives is noteworthy. Moreover, references to specific instruments, styles, and *rāgas* help us understand how music and its ideas were formulated in different performative contexts and texts.

¹⁰ Names for more types of lutes, harps, and zithers used in South Asia.

¹¹ It is a reference to the “five great sounds” (*pāñca maha-śabda*), generally referring to the royal concession made to a feudatory of playing and enjoying five musical instruments. It also denotes five official titles (starting with the word *maha*) bestowed by the kings to local chiefs (Shastri 1995: 105).

¹² The representation of Kṛṣṇa playing the *bansurī* under the fig-tree is a popular motif in Hindu iconography.

Usmān's description of the royal concert reveals how premodern Indian Sufi poets enriched their poetic compositions with these musical passages, representing elaborate sections devoted to the exposition of music and the knowledge of it.

In the *Citrāvalī*, the heroine's birthday celebration frames the narrative for the musical performance, capturing the spirit and elegance of the North Indian courtly environment. As the poet weaves musical forms and patterns into his melodious tale, he creates intense moments of performance that audiences in Mughal India would have been able to appreciate. In these portions of his narrative, Usmān illustrates how he has brought music components and themes previously evoked in the genre to a new level of creativity. In addition, we learn about music and performance traditions preserved from the early modern past, alongside practical notions, instruments, and melodies that are rarely or no longer performed.

The description of Ghazipur in the *Citrāvalī* as a site of performance where people engage in storytelling, dance, and music provides us with both an ideal and concrete performative context, reflecting the cultural milieu that resonates deeply with Usmān's artistic and spiritual vision. Thus, the author bears witness to the oral and musical traditions performed throughout North India, where Sufi *premakathās* like his *Citrāvalī* were sung and shared across courtly and more popular settings of performance, just like those described in his own poem.

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*Apologia for Music in the Ḥadīṭ-s: the Kitāb
al-Samā' of Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāhir al-Qaysarānī
(d. 506/1113)*

Rosanna Budelli
(Foundation for Religious Sciences)

Abstract

Islamic tradition attributes numerous sayings (*ḥadīṭ-s*) regarding music and singing to the Prophet Muḥammad, who is described as occasionally attending musical performances. Nevertheless, in this type of literature, condemnation and censure do prevail over approval and praise of these arts. This apparent contradiction seems to be resolved by al-Qaysarānī in his *Kitāb al-Samā'* ('The Book of Audition'), in which the author punctiliously demonstrates the unreliability of *ḥadīṭ-s* denouncing music. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the method that al-Qaysarānī uses to distinguish the true from false *ḥadīṭ* and the arguments he proposes to justify his work.

Keywords

ḥadīṭ, Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāhir al-Qaysarānī, *samā'*, singing-girls (*qiyān*)

1. Introduction

The Kitāb al-Samā' (lit. 'Book of the Audition')¹ or *Fī Ğawāz al-samā'* ('On the Lawfulness of Audition')² is a short treatise in

¹ The edition used for this contribution is that of Cairo 1997. Quotations from this book are indicated with (KS).

² This variant in the title is found in the Istanbul manuscript: Köprülü Kütüphanesi, 391, see Brockelmann 2017: *Suppl. I*, 622. A copy of this manuscript is available online (see bibliography).

which the author, Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāhir al-Qaysarānī, defends the legitimacy of music and singing based on Prophetic traditions unanimously considered as authentic. The aim here is to refute those who claim that Islam prohibits these arts by resorting to counterfeit or questionable *ḥadīth*-s transmitted by hypocritical people.

The term *samāʿ* encompasses a rather broad meaning, ranging from simple ‘listening’ to all meetings, sittings and events where music is performed, where songs are sung, and poems recited. In Sufi circles, the *samāʿ* is a ceremony that combines music with the practice of *dīkr*, i.e. the incessant mentioning of God’s name accompanied by special breathing and movement/dance techniques, the aim being to achieve a state of ecstasy and spiritual communion with the divine.

Al-Qaysarānī disregards this second aspect of *samāʿ* to focus on the defence of music *per se* and the legitimacy of relaxation and enjoyment enshrined in the principal sources.

2. *The debate on the permissibility of music before al-Qaysarānī*

The literature devoted to music in the early days of Islam is vast and is already attested in the *Fihrist* (‘Index’) of Ibn al-Nadīm’s library (d. 385/995), which lists 143 titles, including translations from Greek and new works. Only 11 of these works have come down to us (Shiloah 1995: 19-22). Equally wide-ranging were the early debates on the permissibility of music and singing animated by supporters on both sides.³ Generally speaking, we might say that the classes of jurists, traditionalists and the strictest censors of morality clashed with the Sufi movements, philosophers and men of letters.

The master al-Šāfiʿī (d. 204/820), head of the juridic school of the same name, devotes a chapter of his *Kitāb al-Umm* (lit. ‘The Book of the Mother’, i.e. ‘The Book of the Source’ of law) to the question of the legal testimony of persons addicted to games

³ For a rather comprehensive overview of these positions, see Farmer 1973; Robson 1936: 1-13.

(*ṣahādat ahl al-la'ib*), (Šāfi'ī 2007: 8, 179-180). In his opinion, certain games expressly named in the *ḥadīṭ*-s would be abhorred (*yukrahu*) by God and his Prophet, such as *nard* (backgammon).⁴ Albeit to a lesser extent, other games should also be censored such as chess (*šitranğ*) and any forms of amusement and entertainment (*malāhī*). All these things “do not befit the people of religion (*ahl al-dīn*) nor belong to the dignity (*murū'a*) of men”.⁵

In another chapter of this book, dedicated to poetry, the author distinguishes between good, edifying verses and bad, mendacious verses, denying legal testimony to the author of the latter (Šāfi'ī, 2007: vol. 8, 178). Both subjects, plays and poetry, are related to music: the verb *la'iba* ('to play') is one of the ways of indicating the act of 'playing' (instruments/games) along with *'azafa* (from which *mi'zafa*, pl. *ma'āzif*, 'musical instrument');⁶ poetry, on the other hand, is associated with singing both through its use of rhyme and metrics and the musical accompaniment that often went with it (one might cite the great work on Arab poetry and poets under the significant title *Kitāb al-Ağānī*, 'The Book of Songs', by Abū al-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī, d. 356/967).

Other juridic schools also consider music to be 'reprehensible' (*makrūh*) or 'forbidden' (*ḥarām*)⁷ and whoever exceeds in devoting himself to this art is equated with the 'prodigal' (*saḥīh*), unable to

⁴ Šāfi'ī does not directly mention the *ḥadīṭ*-s, but the reference here is to the chapter of the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, entitled *Man la'iba bi-al-nard fa-qad 'aṣā Allāh wa-rasūla-hu* ("He who plays with *nard* disobeys God and His prophet"), contained in the *Kitāb al-Adab* (Book of Conduct).

⁵ Šāfi'ī, 2007: VIII, 179.

⁶ In the Arabic writings of the early centuries, there was no single term for music: the Greek-derived term *mūsīqī* or *mūsīqā* (now widespread) was mainly used by philosophers and by scholars who were familiar with Greek culture, see the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā al-kabīr* (The Great Book of Music) by al-Farābī (d. 339/951), the *Risālat al-madḥal ilā al-mūsīqā* (Epistle of Introduction to Music) by al-Kīndī (d. 256/873) and in the *Risālat al-qiyān* (The Epistle of the Singing-girls), cited below. In Qaysarānī's book, *samā'* means 'audition' / 'hearing', while for 'playing' the author uses the verb *l-'b* ('to play'). The verb *daraba* (lit. 'to beat') was and is used especially for percussion instruments.

⁷ We recall that, according to Islamic Law, there are five types of legal acts (*al-aḥkām al-ḥamsa*): obligatory (*farḍ* or *wāğīb*), recommended (*mandūb* or *mustaḥabb*), indifferent/permissible (*mubāḥ*), reprehensible (*makrūh*), and forbidden (*ḥarām*), the opposite of the last is *ḥalāl* (lawful), see Schacht 1964: 121.

exercise some of his legal rights. ‘Audition’, in general, is compared to all that is false and futile (*bāṭil*) and listening to women singing outside the family context is to be strongly condemned.

All these positions are summarised and criticised by al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) in his theological summa, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-dīn* (‘The Revitalisation of Religious Sciences’), and more precisely in the section entitled *Kitāb al-Samā’ wa al-wağd* (‘The Book of Listening and Ecstasy’).⁸

For this celebrated theologian and mystic, music is, on the contrary, a means of spiritual elevation and therefore an essential component of Sufi ritual and meditation. One cannot prohibit music any more than one can prevent a nightingale from singing, argues al-Ġazālī: “If it is permissible to hear a sound whatever it may be, moreover meaningless, why should it not be permissible to hear a voice conveying a maxim or good teachings?” (Ġazālī, 2013: IV, 422-423).

Furthermore, listening to beautiful and harmonious sounds may arouse sublime states in human beings, thanks to the correspondence between certain sounds and the spiritual element that is within them. However, not everyone has the right predisposition to enjoy this condition.

The sound, after reaching the ear, is perceived by a hidden sense in the heart, and those who lack it inevitably miss out on the pleasure that accompanies that sound.⁹

For their part, the philosophers al-Kindī (d. 256/873),¹⁰ al-Fārābī (d. 339/950),¹¹ the Brethren of Purity (Iḥwān al-Ṣafā, IX-X secolo)¹² and Avicenna (d. 427/1037)¹³ disregard or minimise the juridic

⁸ Ġazālī, 2013: IV, 412-413.

⁹ Ġazālī, 2013: IV, 447.

¹⁰ According to sources, al-Kindī wrote as many as 15 works devoted to music; the addition of the fifth string to the Arabic lute is also attributed to him, see Fadlou, 1995: 35.

¹¹ He is the author of the *Kitāb al-mūsīqā al-kabīr*, which, in the edition of Cairo 1977 (see bibliography), consists of 1210 pages.

¹² See the fifth volume of the *Epistles*, dedicated to Music (Wright, 2010).

¹³ Avicenna discusses music in his *Danišnāmā* (Book of Knowledge) along with other sciences, see Morewedge, 1973.

debate to focus on the physical and natural aspect of music. They draw from Greek sources, such as Aristotle and Plato, and discuss musical theories and instrumental technique. Al-Kindī and the Brethern of Purity believe, as does Pythagoras, that music possesses a cosmic dimension and is in tune with the sound generated by the celestial spheres and the movement of the planets. The different melodies, thanks to their virtual therapeutic effects,¹⁴ can also exert their influence on the human soul and all living beings.

In the pre-Islamic Arab world, musical or poetic inspiration was believed to be the work of *ǧinn* and demons, who took possession of the souls of their performers as well as those of the listeners. Poets as well as musicians were equated with madmen, in Arabic *maǧānīn*, pl. of *maǧnūn* (= possessed by the *ǧinn*), and it is in order to distance itself from these inferior spirits that the Qur'an dismisses accusations against Muḥammad of being a poet (*šā'ir*), a madman (*maǧnūn*) or a magician (*sāḥir*).¹⁵ Accused of being liars and followers of demons, poets are denounced above all in Sura XXVI, vv. 221-226.¹⁶

A similar approach to that of al-Qaysarānī, i. e. the attempt to justify the permissibility of singing and music through the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna, had been adopted some two centuries earlier by the Andalusian Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940) who had dedicated several chapters of his *al-Iqd al-farīd* ('The Precious Collar') to the subject. The work is devoted to everything 'a man of the world and culture' should know, but focuses, in particular, on poetry, its different styles and metrics.

The author feels compelled to defend this art and others related to it, by citing the *ḥadīṭ*-s and anecdotes about the first generations of Muslims who trifled with innocent forms of entertainment.¹⁷

¹⁴ See: Nofal, 2017: 41-54; Wright, 2010: 76-77.

¹⁵ See Qur. LXV, 51; XXI, 5; XXXVIII, 4-5; XXXVII, 36; XV, 6.

¹⁶ Regarding the relationship of the Qur'an to poetry and, in specific, to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, in which poets and seers were associated with prophecy, see Neuwirth - Wilder (2019).

¹⁷ See Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 2013: IV, 87, 89, 106, 148-158.

Some of the traditions quoted by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih are found in al-Qaysarānī’s *Kitāb al-samā’*.

3. *The author of the Kitāb al-samā’*

His full name is Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Aḥmad al-Šaybānī al-Maqdīsī al-Qaysarānī. The final epithets of his name (*nisba*) inform us of his birthplace, Jerusalem (al-Maqdīsī or al-Muqaddasī is ‘the Jerusalemite’) and the Anatolian origin of his family (al-Qaysarānī = from Qaysariyya or Caesarea). The aforementioned appellations are sometimes joined by al-Zāhirī from the name of the juridic school to which he belonged, characterised by a strict adherence to the extrinsic meaning (*zāhir*) of the expressions in the Qur’an and the *ḥadīth*s.¹⁸

Known primarily as a scholar of the traditions of the Prophet (*muhaddith*) and a historian, al-Qaysarānī was born in 507/1057 and began learning the science of *ḥadīth*s at a very early age, according to the historian Ibn Ḥallikān.¹⁹ As was customary at that time, he travelled extensively to hear the best-known masters and learn new *ḥadīth*s from them.

He lived for a long time in the city of Hamadān (in western Iran), where he wrote most of his works and where he copied the collections of Buḥārī, Muslim and Abū Dawūd several times on commission. He is credited with placing the *Sunan* of Ibn Māḡa among the six collections that are considered canonical whilst clearly dividing the aforementioned works into books and chapters by topic.²⁰ Another biographer, al-Dahabī, informs us of al-Qaysarānī’s adherence to the antinomistic current of the *malāmatī* Sufis, which would explain the criticism levelled at the author for his permissive attitude.²¹ He died in Baghdad in 1113, returning from the last of his many pilgrimages to Mecca.

¹⁸ For a general overview of this school, see Osman, 2014.

¹⁹ Ibn Ḥallikān, 2013: III, 5-6. See also Dahabī, 2012: IV, 27-29.

²⁰ On the discussions about the reliability of Ibn Māḡa, see Brown, 2011; Melchert, 1997, 105.

²¹ Dahabī, 1985, XIX, 364.

Al-Qaysarānī wrote historical-biographical works, such as *al-Mu'talif wa-al-muhtalif fī al-ansāb* ('Homonyms and differences in genealogies'), known in Latin as *Homonyma inter nomina relativa*;²² on inauthentic Prophetic traditions, such as the *Kitāb al-mawḍū'āt* (The Book of Counterfeit ḥadīṭ-s), and on Sufism, *Ṣafwat al-taṣawwuf* (The Excellence of Sufism).²³

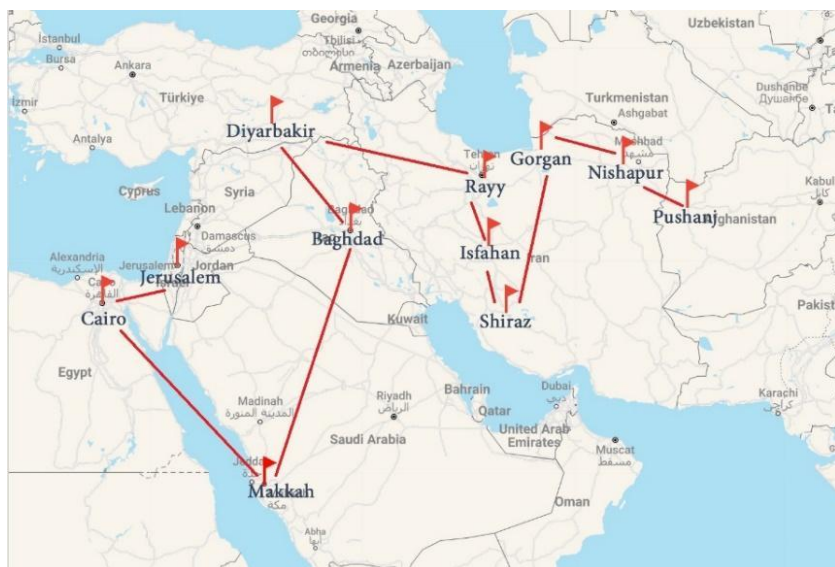
4. Qaysarānī muḥaddiṭ

To prove the validity of his theses, al-Qaysarānī applies in the *Kitāb al-Samā'* all his experience in the field of ḥadīṭ-s and plays the dual figure of the *muḥaddiṭ* in the sense of 'scholar' and 'transmitter' of ḥadīṭ-s. On the one hand, he expresses his own judgment regarding the authenticity or critical points of each tradition and, on the other, in order to reinforce the authority of a ḥadīṭ, he provides new chains of witnesses that have handed down a specific saying up to his day. That is to say, Qaysarānī stands as the last link in long chains of transmission (*isnād*) ranging from the people closest to the Prophet to the most recent master from whom he himself learned that tradition.

The *Kitāb al-Samā'* also informs us of every single city where the author learnt the ḥadīṭ he mentions, effectively tracing a topography of knowledge through the schools he attended. Following his 'cultural' pilgrimage, we learn, therefore, that he studied in the cities of Mecca, Egypt (Miṣr), Baghdad, Nishapur, Shiraz, Diyarbekir (in Arabic: Ṭuḡrāmid), Isfahan, Ray, Gorgan (an Iranian town located on the Caspian Sea) and Bushang or Pushang (near Herat). We do not know the chronological order of his journeys, but from the following map we can get an idea of his movements.

²² Qaysarānī: 1865.

²³ The complete bibliography is in Dahabī, 2012: 364.



With the exception of Egypt, which is the westernmost country he visited, the author travelled as far north as Diyarbekir and as far east as Iran and Afghanistan. All this attests to the flourishing *ḥadīṭ*-s study and transmission activity in the eastern provinces of the caliphate in the late 11th and early 12th century (5th-6th century Hegira).²⁴

Al-Dahabī also informs us, in the words of al-Qaysarānī himself, that he travelled on foot carrying books on his shoulders and “living day by day” (*kuntu a’išu ‘alā mā ya’tī*).²⁵ The freedom of movement in these areas was probably helped by the political and territorial unity guaranteed by the Seljuks, who effectively dominated the heart of the Abbasid caliphate (Iraq) and all of Iran, to the point of even threatening the Ghaznavid territories in Afghanistan.

²⁴ It should be noted that the authors of the six canonical collections are almost all from the East: Muslim is from Nishapur, Buḥārī from Uzbekistan, Abū Dawūd al-Siġistānī from Sistan (Iran), but from an Arab family, Ibn Māġa from Qazwin (Iran), Tirmidī from Termez (south Uzbekistan), Nasā’ī from Nasā (Khorasan).

²⁵ Dahabī: XIX, 363.

5. The Kitāb al-Samā'

The work is divided into two parts: in the first, al-Qaysarānī clarifies what prompted him to compose this book and lists the *ḥadīṭ*-s favourable to music and singing, thus proving their authenticity; in the second, he analyses the sayings cited by denigrators of these arts and systematically demonstrates their artificiality.

At the beginning of the treatise, the author exalts the role of the Prophetic mission entrusted to Muḥammad and the importance of his example and behaviour at the normative level:

He - peace be upon him - spread the [divine] message and fulfilled the [primordial] covenant (*amāna*);²⁶ He provided advice and enacted the Law for his community: he ordered and forbade according to what was ordained to him. No one after [the Prophet] and after the well-guided caliphs - to whom [Muḥammad] called for obedience and whose conduct (*sunnatu-hum*) he commanded to conform - has the right to forbid what God Most High and His envoy have made lawful. [Prohibition] can only take place based on clear evidence of a decisive Qur'anic verse (*āya muḥkama*) or a tradition received in authentic form (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or based on consensus expressed by the community (*iğmā'*), (KS, 30).

In the last sentence, al-Qaysarānī lists the only sources that have the authority to prohibit something: namely the Qur'an, the *sunna* of the Prophet and the consensus (*iğmā'*) of the community. These are the three pillars of Islamic Law, in accordance with the Zāhirī school, which does not consider *qiyās* ('analogy'), this being permitted by most of other schools.²⁷ Consensus basically consists of agreement between all juridical schools, and it is preferable to accepting a saying that is not sufficiently corroborated by reliable testimonies or attributed to a Companion rather than the Prophet.

²⁶ This refers to the pact between man and God which is spoken of especially in Qur. XXXIII, 72.

²⁷ See Goldziher, 1971: 32-34, 145-146; Osman, 2014: 19-20.

Consensus (*iğmā'*) – al-Qaysarānī affirms - is superior to the single saying (*al-ḥabar al-munfarid*) of a Companion and the *ḥadīṭ* must always be understood in its explicit meaning (*'alā zāhiri-hi*). If the text implies different meanings, the most likely (*ašbah*) [meaning] and most appropriate to the explicit sense applies. When, on the other hand, there are *ḥadīṭ*-s that are equivalent in meaning, the worthiest is the most authentic in terms of the chain of guarantors (*isnād*), while the broken chain is worthless (*laysa al-munqaṭi' bi-šay'*), (KS, 31).

For al-Qaysarānī, the authority of a *ḥadīṭ* depends on the integrity of the chain of transmission, but also on the uniqueness of the source, namely Muḥammad, whose authority derives directly from God. Establishing what the Prophet actually said means restoring his centrality and his authentic message against all falsification and alteration. The author urges scepticism when confronted by those providing uncertain, even invented traditions, or those who interpret the Qur'an according to their personal ambitions and inclinations.

As for conclusions (*istidlāl*) from counterfeit (*mawḍū'āt*) or 'strange' (*ğarā'ib*) *ḥadīṭ* received from individual chains of transmission (*afrād*) or reported by lying or untrustworthy persons (*mağruḥūn*), who do not provide sufficient evidence or who interpret the Qur'an based on their personal intentions and opinions, we must be on our guard, we must not rely on what they say and we must not follow their path. Otherwise, if this were permissible, no word could be considered more trustworthy than another (KS, 30).

6. The Prophet Muḥammad and entertainment

The first *ḥadīṭ* quoted in the *Kitāb al-Samā'* describes the Prophet as enjoying an entertaining show and the singing of girls on feast days. Al-Qaysarānī reports several variants of these *ḥadīṭ*-s found in the canonical collections of Muslim (d. 875)²⁸ and Buḥārī (d. 870).²⁹

²⁸ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Ṣalāt al-'iḍāyn*, 4.

²⁹ Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-'iḍāyn*, 2, 3.

Below we compare two variants of two *ḥadīṭ*s mentioned by the author.

Variant 1	Variant 2
<p>[First <i>ḥadīṭ</i>]. Abū Bakr entered [Muḥammad's house], during the festival of Minā and there were two young slave girls (<i>ḡāriyatān</i>) with [ʿĀ'īša], who sang with two tambourines (<i>bi-duffayn</i>), while the envoy of God – peace be upon him – was lying covered by his cloaks. [Abū Bakr] rebuked [the girls], but the envoy of God uncovered his face and said: - Leave them alone, Abū Bakr, these are festive days!</p> <p>[Second <i>ḥadīṭ</i>]. ʿĀ'īša said: - I saw the envoy of God cover me (<i>yasturunī</i>) with his cloak while I watched the Abyssinians playing in the mosque, until I grew tired of it. [Among the singers] the youngest slave, eager to have fun, (<i>ḥarīṣat 'alā al-lahw</i>) was highly appreciated (KS, 38).</p>	<p>[First <i>ḥadīṭ</i>]. ʿĀ'īša said: [Abū Bakr] came to the house of the envoy of God – peace be upon him - when two young slave girls were near me singing [for the victory] of Bu'āt. [The Prophet] was lying on the mattress and his back was turned. Abū Bakr, may God be pleased with him, came in and rebuked me, saying: - Satan's flute in the house of God's messenger - peace be upon him? God's envoy approached him and replied: - Never mind, Abū Bakr, these are feast days! When [Abū Bakr] turned his attention away, I beckoned [to the girls] and they went out.</p> <p>[Second <i>ḥadīṭ</i>]. [ʿĀ'īša] said: "It was a feast day and the Black people (<i>Sūdān</i>) played with shields and swords. I asked God's envoy [to look] or he asked me if I wanted to look, I answered yes, and he made me stand behind him, my cheek on his (<i>ḥaddī 'alā ḥaddī-hī</i>). [God's envoy] said: - Continue, O Banū Arfida, until I grew weary (<i>ḥattā idā malaltu</i>)! Then he asked me: - Are you satisfied? I answered: - Yes. And he said: - So go back home." (KS, 38-39).</p>

A comparison of the texts reveals differences in detail that, in some cases, may be significant in terms of the messages they convey and the contribution they make to knowledge of the structuring of the *ḥadīth*. The circumstances in which the episodes take place are the feasts of Minā (*ayyām al-tašrīq*), i.e. the three days following the feast of sacrifices (variant 1), or that of the battle of Bu ‘āt, a place not far from Medina (variant 2). In the second case, the reference is to the end of the conflict that broke out in 617 between the Arab tribes of the Banū Aws and the Ḥazrağ. The event, which Muḥammad calls ‘our feast’, will lay the foundation for the two covenants of ‘Aqaba, with the Prophet’s subsequent migration to Medina (*hiğra*).³⁰

As far as the protagonists are concerned, the Prophet is presented, in these versions, either lying down and covered or with his back turned and thus almost hidden from the sight of Abū Bakr, who would probably not have dared criticise the singers in Muḥammad’s house if he had noticed the presence of the Prophet immediately. The subsequent unveiling restores the hierarchy between the two and between their pronouncements on music.³¹

‘Ā’iṣa, for her part, either attends the Ethiopians’ performance in the mosque covered by the Prophet’s cloak (variant 1), or stands behind the Prophet, but in an almost intimate stance with her cheek against his before the audience (variant 2).

The slave girls in these anecdotes are described as young or very young (variant 1). In yet another version, it is specified that

³⁰ See: Watt - McDonald, 1988: VI, 120-124. The battle between these tribes and the victory celebrations had pre-Islamic origins as highlighted by ‘Asqalānī, 2023: II, 141.

³¹ The reference to Muḥammad being covered is absent in another version of the episode quoted by Qaysarānī that reads: ‘Ā’iṣa said: “Abū Bakr entered while two female slaves (*ğāriyatān*) of the Anṣār were with me, who sang in the manner of their people on the occasion [of the feast] of Bu ‘āt, but they were not [professional] singers. [Abū Bakr] resented: - Satan’s flute (*mizmār*) in the Prophet’s house – peace be upon him? It was a feast day and God’s envoy replied: - Every people have its feast and this is our feast!” Is this to be considered the primitive version to which the detail about Muḥammad covered was later added? (*SK*, 37)

they are not professional singers (KS, p. 37),³² perhaps to highlight the lack of ill-will on their part and avoid comparing them to the category of courtesans (*qiyān*) taught singing and music to delight their masters (see the *ḥadīṭ*-s cited below).

Another interesting detail is represented by the musical instruments played by the girls: the *duff* or *daff*, a simple tambourine without rattles, in the first case, and in the second case, the *mizmār*, a kind of wooden pipe or flute, the latter associated by Abū Bakr with the devil (*ṣayṭān*). Both instruments seem to have been well received by the Prophet, who intervenes in defence of the singers and the celebration.

As far as the chain of transmission is concerned, al-Qaysarānī adds his *isnād* to those of Muslim and Buḥārī. There are eight generations of guarantors, starting from his most recent source up to 'Ā'īša.³³ The addition of the new transmission chain is probably due to the fact that the *ḥadīṭ*-s corroborated by multiple sources are called *mutawātir* and are considered the most reliable of all.

In another series of *ḥadīṭ*-s, al-Qaysarānī reports, based on evidence also dating back to 'Ā'īša, Muḥammad's appreciation of singing during wedding feasts:

One of the Anṣār married a girl from the family of 'Ā'īša and [the Prophet's wife] led her to Qubā'.³⁴ The envoy of God asked 'Ā'īša: - Did you accompany your bride? - Yes, she answered. - And did you send any of the Anṣār singers with her, since they love singing? 'Ā'īša answered no, and God's envoy ordered: - Go to [Qubā'], O Zaynab! [Zaynab] was a woman who sang in Medina (KS, 39-40).

³² See also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Ṣalāt al-'iḍayn*, 16.

³³ Its *isnād* consists of: 1) Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṣāfi' ī al Makkī (d. 472/1079); 2) Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn Firās (d. 403/1012); 3) Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Faḍl al-Raybalī (d. 322/933); 4) Abū 'Ubayd Allāh Sa'īd Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Maḥzūmī (d. 249/863); 5) Sufyān Ibn 'Uyayna (d. 198/814); 6) Hišām Ibn 'Urwa (d. 146/763); 7) 'Urwa Abū Hišām (d. 94 / 713); 8) 'Ā'īša (d. 58/678).

³⁴ Suburban area of Medina.

In the last variant of this saying, the Prophet even mentions the beginning of a poem or tune:

The envoy of God said: - The Anṣār are a people who cultivate love poetry (*ghazal*), why don't you send someone who recites: - *We have come to you, we have come to you, we greet you and you greet us* (KS, 40).³⁵

When speaking of singing and melody in Islam, one cannot help but think of Qur'anic recitation and the modulation of the voice by proficient readers (*qurrā*). Al-Qaysarānī reports some *ḥadīth* in which God is credited with appreciating a beautiful voice reciting His word:

God does not [love] to hear anything as He loves to hear the Prophet – peace be upon him - singing (*yataḡannā*) the Qur'an melodiously (KS, 40).³⁶

and

The Messenger of God – peace be upon him – said: - God listens with greater interest to the man who reads the Qur'an in a beautiful voice than the master does to the singing of his courtesan (*qayna*).” (KS, 40).

The author of the *Kitāb al-Samā'* highlights how both *ḥadīth* are to be considered authentic, according to the criteria established by scholars of the traditions, but the second is not cited in the collections of Muslim and Buḥārī, while it is included in the *Sunan* of Ibn Māḡah.³⁷ The content is subject to discussion (*iḥtiḡāḡ*) since a comparison is made between something licit (the recitation of the Qur'an) and something considered illicit by some traditionists (possession and listening to the singing of a courtesan). In

³⁵ Ibn 'Abd Rabbih reports the same episode adding other verses, see 2013: vol. 5, 91.

³⁶ In Arabic: “*Mā aḡina Allāh li-ṣay' mā aḡina li-l-nabī – ṣalla Allāhu 'alay-him wa-sallam – yataḡannā bi-l-Qur'ān*”, Buḥārī, *Ṣaḡīḡ, Tawḡīd*, 32, 52; *Faḡā' il al-Qur'ān*, 19; Muslim, *Ṣaḡīḡ, Musāfirīn*, 232-234. The verb *aḡina* can be translated either as 'to listen' or as 'to allow', 'to authorise'.

³⁷ Ibn Māḡa, *Sunan, Iqāmat*, 176.

disagreeing with this opinion, al-Qaysarānī argues that this *ḥadīṭ* confirms the lawfulness of listening to singing in general (including secular singing) and he will return to reiterating his thesis in the second part of the book, where he quotes extensively from fraudulent sayings associating the prohibition of music with the singing of courtesans.

7. The Qur'an and entertainment

There is no explicit prohibition of music and singing in the Qur'an, but those who condemn these arts use certain verses that deal with the topic indirectly as a pretext for confirming their opinion. The words around which criticism revolves are *lahw* ('fun', 'ephemeral thing') and *laġw* ('futility'). The former term recurs several times in the Qur'an, usually paired with *la'ib* ('game', in the sense of 'ephemeral play', referring to earthly life).³⁸ The following passages are those most frequently cited in this debate.

But there is the sort of person who purchases distracting tales [*lahw al-ḥadīṭ*], intending, without any knowledge, to lead others from God's way, and to hold it up to ridicule. (Qur. XXXI, 6)³⁹

Yet they spread out towards trade or entertainment [*lahw*] whenever they observe it and leave you [Prophet] standing there. Say, 'God's gift is better than any entertainment or trade: God is the best provider. (Qur. LXII, 11)

With regard to the first verse, some exegetes describe the circumstances that supposedly inspired the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), namely the presence of a man, a certain al-Naḍr Ibn al-Ḥārīt, who sold books in Mecca with stories of the ancient Persians. When someone narrated to him the Prophet's edifying speeches, he mocked that person by claiming that the stories of

³⁸ See Qur. VI, 32; XLVII, 36; III, 62; see also VI, 70; VII, 51.

³⁹ The Qur'anic quotations are taken from the translation by Abdel Haleem, 2004.

his own heroes were better.⁴⁰ The second verse, on the other hand, alludes to a precise episode: one day, while the Prophet was preaching in the mosque during the Friday assembly, the faithful were distracted by noises from outside due to the arrival of a caravan with goods to sell. Most of those present went out and very few stayed to listen to Muḥammad.⁴¹

Exegetes agree in identifying the expression *lahw al-ḥadīṭ* (lit. ‘funny’ or ‘futile stories’) of the first verse with ‘singing’ (*ḡinā*) and ‘listening’ (*istimā*) in the sense of false and deceptive talk, as those of poets and singers, that leads the faithful towards disobedience to God and unbelief. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), in particular, interprets the sentence ‘who purchases distracting tales’ with the payment by some Arabs of courtesan-singers (*qiyān*) and reports some *ḥadīṭ* opposing the buying and selling of these slaves (Ṭabarī, 2001: XX, 126).

Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), an Andalusian exegete and jurist, lists, for his part, the different interpretations by his predecessors and likens the melody of songs to Satan’s deceptive voice aimed at seducing people, as in the words addressed by God to Iblīs: “Seduce whom you will with your voice” (Qur. XVII, 64).⁴² In contrast to these severe judgments, al-Qaysarānī provides a rather original interpretation of the second qur’anic verse by relating the permissibility of trade to that of entertainment.

God has linked entertainment to commerce and the judgement on the [first] term of the relationship (*al-ma’ṭūf*) is the same as the one expressed regarding whatever is related to it (*al-ma’ṭūf ‘alay-hi*). Since there is agreement that trade is permissible - and this judgement is certainly part of what Islamic Law approved of what

⁴⁰ Qurṭubī, 2014: VII, 36. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, speaks of ‘books’ (*kutub*) containing those tales told at nightly vigils (*samar*) or ancient stories that the contemporaries of the Prophet considered similar to those in the Qur’an; see Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 2013: V, 91.

⁴¹ Ṭabarī justifies the behaviour of the early Muslims in the second verse by mentioning a famine that struck the city of Medina, resulting in price increases. An oil merchant, by the name of Diḥya al-Kalbī, announced the sale of his product outside the mosque and the participants in prayer rushed to him to buy the precious commodity, Ṭabarī, 2001: XXII, 644.

⁴² Qurṭubī, 2001: XVI, 456.

came from the Age of Ignorance (Ġāhiliyya) – and it is unlikely that the Prophet had forbidden [the trade] since it took place at the door of the mosque on Fridays, and since God blamed those who left His envoy and went out to watch and listen [to what was going on outside] without issuing a single verse forbidding [entertainment] nor inspiring a saying of the Prophet becoming normative (*sunna*), we infer that the judgement on commerce and entertainment is the same (KS, 72)

The author also harshly criticises Qur'anic commentators who establish an immediate connection between *lahw* and singing without sufficient evidence or quote unreliable *ḥadīṭ* to corroborate their exegesis. (KS, p. 76).

The term *laġw* ('futile thing') recurs in three verses (Qur. XXIII, 1-3; XXV, 72; XXVIII, 55) and the interpretation given assimilates it to *lahw*. In particular, the following verse is cited:

[The servants of the Lord of Mercy are] those who do not give false testimony, and who, when they see some frivolity, pass by with dignity (Qur. XXV, 72).

Here again, exegetes contrast lightness and superficiality with the seriousness and gravity that should characterise the believer and shield him from temptation. The expression *lā yašhadūna al-zūr* ('do not give false testimony') is understood as 'do not testify to polytheism (*širk*)' or 'disbelief (*kufṛ*)'. The meaning of the word *zūr* is explained as the act of 'embellishing a thing', 'describing it in words other than its true quality' and thus 'lying', 'deceiving'. Hence, the link with poetry and music, which charm and deceive at the same time.⁴³

Those in favour of music, however, quote the first verse of Sura XXXV, although the apparent meaning of the phrase is rather distant and vague.

Praise be to God, Creator of the heavens and earth, who made angels messengers with two, three, four [pairs of] wings. He adds

⁴³ Ṭabarī, 2001: XIX, 314.

to creation as He will: God has power over everything (Qur. XXXV, 1)

The sentence “He adds to the creation as He will (*yazūdu fī al-ḥalqī mā yašā‘u*)” is explained by exegetes in the sense of ‘beautiful things’ being added to creation, including the sciences (*‘ulūm*) and the arts (*ṣanā‘i*) or a ‘beautiful voice’ (*ṣawt ḥasan*).⁴⁴ This opinion is corroborated by some sayings in which the Prophet shows that he appreciates the voice of a Qur’anic reciter. In this regard, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih reports that upon hearing a beautiful Qur’anic recitation, Muḥammad is said to have exclaimed: “The flutes of the family of David have been brought [to me].”⁴⁵ Al-Ġazālī confirms these words by another tradition that considers all prophets to be endowed with a beautiful voice: “Allah has sent no Prophet except one with a beautiful voice” (Ġazālī, 2013: IV, 422).

8. *The ḥadīth opposing music*

The number of *ḥadīth* opposed to music is superior to that in favour, and al-Qaysarānī lists the first ones, systematically criticising the reliability of each of them, according to criteria established by Muslim experts since the early centuries of Islam.

This is formal criticism that bases the authenticity of a *ḥadīth* on the integrity of the chain of the various generations that transmitted it and on the reliability of the individual transmitters. It is enough for just one of these persons to be ‘weak’ (*ḍa‘īf*), in the sense of ‘unreliable’, to bring the whole chain into question. The method adopted by al-Qaysarānī in judging this type of *ḥadīth* is divided into three parts: quotation of the *ḥadīth*, judgements issued by canonical sources, personal comment.

Example:

⁴⁴ Qurṭubī lists the different interpretations but is inclined to limit ‘the additions’ to the angels themselves or their wings, as is evident from the Qur’anic text, see Qurṭubī, 2014: XIV, 320.

⁴⁵ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 2013: V, 87. The Andalusian author goes on to talk about the beneficial effects of music on the body (‘it purifies the blood’) and the soul (‘it relaxes the heart’), see Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, 2013: V, 87-88.

Nāfi' reports: - Ibn 'Umar heard the [sound of] the pipe (*mizmār*) and put his fingers in his ears, moving away from that street. Then he said to me: - O Nāfi', do you hear nothing? - No, I answered. Then he took his fingers from his ears and said: - I was with the Prophet who, having heard something similar, did the same thing (KS, p. 59).

This tradition is classified as *munkar* ('denounced', i.e. it contradicts other *ḥadīṭ* considered authentic and has an unreliable link in the chain of transmission)⁴⁶ by two canonical sources: Abū Dawūd (d. 275/889) and Buḥārī, while it is defined *ḍa'īf* ('weak', i.e. with a discontinuity in the *isnād*)⁴⁷ by Aḥmad al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915). Qaysarānī relates in detail the judgements made in the main collections, but also criticises the way of deducing prohibition or universal norms from generic and contingent gestures: "If the Prophet had wanted to forbid *mizmār*, he would have done so explicitly; it is not enough to say: 'he heard this and reacted this way.'" (KS, p. 59).

A negative assessment also regards a *ḥadīṭ* frequently mentioned by music denigrators, but which is absent in authentic sources.

The angels will not testify to your enjoyment (*lahw*) except as adversaries and enemies (KS, p. 74).

Al-Qaysarānī deploys, on this occasion, all his knowledge of the biographies and genealogies of the transmitters (*'ilm al-riḡāl*, lit. 'the science of men'). He states that one of the authorities on which this saying hinges is 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-Ġaffār al-Faqīmī accused by the earliest generations (*salaf*) of fabricating (*yaḍa'u*) the texts of the tradition especially on moral issues (*fī al-faḍā'il wa-al-matālib*, lit. 'on virtues and faults'), (KS, 74).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ This is the definition given by Ibn Ḥaḡar al-'Asqalānī quoted in Hasan, 1996: 36-37.

⁴⁷ A *ḥadīṭ* is classified as *ḍa'īf* (weak) as due either to discontinuity in the chain of narrators or due to some criticism of a narrator, see Hasan, 1996: 48-49.

⁴⁸ Ibn 'Adī al-Ġurġānī (d. 365/976) had also included him in his collection of uncertain and spurious *ḥadīṭ* entitled *al-Kāmil fī ḍu'afā' al-riḡāl* ("The Exhaustive about Weak Transmitters") highlighting his unreliability, see Ġurġānī, 1997: VI, 252.

Most Prophetic sayings opposed to music and singing associate these arts with the apocalyptic signs that will accompany the end of time and the spread of immoral customs of all kinds within the Islamic world.

The people particularly targeted are the *qiyān* or *qaynāt* (pl. of *qayna*).⁴⁹ The term is often translated simply as ‘singer’, but these are generally female slaves who were trained from a very young age in the art of entertainment. In addition to singing, they could dance, compose music and verses and were good calligraphers too. Already present in pre-Islamic times, they usually belonged to the wealthiest members of society of whom they were the legal concubines.⁵⁰ The name *qiyān* sometimes indicated free women who devoted themselves to the same occupation (Hamid, 2017: 190-206). According to Charles Pellat, there were also the *qiyān* linked to the lower classes, wine merchants and tavern owners, as the verses of some poets attest,⁵¹ hence social disapproval towards them and their association with prostitution.

We reproduce below some *ḥadīth*-s of the second part with the final judgements extracted from al-Qaysarānī’s discussion.

For He Who holds my soul in His hand, the world will not pass away until abjection (*al-ḥasf*) and defamation (*qadf*) spread. They asked him: - O envoy of God, when will these things happen? - When you see women riding on saddles, when courtesans (*qaynāt*) multiply and falsehood is witnessed.

[Al-Qaysarānī’s judgement]: ‘Denounced’ (*munkar*) *ḥadīth* (KS, 81).

Some people from my community will spend [their lives] eating, drinking, and enjoying themselves; they will pass the time with monkeys and pigs, and they will be struck with abjection and defamation because of their trading of courtesans, their love of wine, musical instruments (*ma‘āzif*), and silk clothes. But the wind will sweep away the living in my community, just as it did with [the people] of ‘Ād.

⁴⁹ Bar Hebraeus (d. 685/1286) links the etymology of the term *qayna* to Cain. Cain’s daughters (*qiyān*) are said to have invented musical instruments and to have been singers, cited in Farmer, 1919: 7.

⁵⁰ On the social position of these figures, see Nielson (2021).

⁵¹ Pellat, 1956: 855b.

[Judgement]: 'Abandoned' (*matrūk*) *ḥadīṭ* (i.e., a transmitter of the chain is known as a liar or inaccurate in reporting the sayings),⁵² (KS, 81).

'Alī said: - The Prophet has forbidden the sale, purchase or trade of female singers (*muḡanniyyāt*) and female prefics (*nawwāḥāt*), just as he has forbidden [exploiting] their earnings.

[Judgement]: 'Denounced' or 'abandoned' *ḥadīṭ*, (KS, 82).

Whoever hears [the singing of] a courtesan, lead will pour into his ears.

[Judgement]: 'Weak' (*da'īf*) or 'heavily denounced' (*munkar ḡiddan*) *ḥadīṭ*. (KS, 84).

Looking at a singer is forbidden (*ḥarām*), her singing is forbidden and her price is forbidden.

[Judgement]: 'Abandoned' *ḥadīṭ*, (KS, 84-85).

Do not pray for him who dies while in possession of a singing slave (*qayna*).

[Judgement]: 'Abandoned'. (KS, 87).

By God, people will undergo a metamorphosis (*yumsahūna*), if they indulge in wine and play musical instruments, turning into monkeys and pigs.

[Judgement]: 'Interrupted' (*mawqūf*) *ḥadīṭ* (i. e. its chain of transmission breaks before the Prophet);⁵³ moreover, one of the transmitters, Ibn al-Ġundī, is unknown (*maḡhūl*). (KS, 87).

On the other hand, the juxtaposition of singing with the presence of the devil is evoked in the following *ḥadīṭ*:

It is not lawful to sell courtesans, nor to buy them, nor to entertain with them. Then the Prophet added: - For He in Whose hands is my soul, if a man raises his voice singing, the devil will leap on his shoulder until he falls silent.

[Judgement]: 'Denounced' (KS, 87).

⁵² For more in-depth on this definition, see Kamali, 2005: 39.

⁵³ About the difference between *mawqūfe marfū'*; see Hasan, 1996: 19-20.

In many of these sayings, Muḥammad also harshly condemns the use of musical instruments, putting them on a par with wine and idols of the pre-Islamic era (Ġāhiliya), as in the following example:

The Prophet said: - My Lord has sent me to eliminate flutes and [all] musical instruments, the idols worshipped in the Ġāhiliyya and wine. I swear by my Lord that no Muslim (‘*abd*’) in the world will drink [wine].

[Judgement]: ‘Abandoned’ (KS, 83).

Contrary to more restrictive views that consider only those instruments explicitly mentioned in the tradition (such as the tambourine) and only on certain occasions (wedding celebrations) as licit,⁵⁴ al-Qaysarānī argues that what is not expressly forbidden is fundamentally permissible (*kāna aṣlu-hu al-ibāḥa*) and indeed “he who prohibits what is lawful is like he who makes lawful what is forbidden” (KS, p. 63). Finally, he mentions the favourable positions regarding the use of musical instruments expressed by the school of Medina, which he considers particularly authoritative, and by the Zāhirī juridical school (KS, 63).

9. Who is against music?

According to al-Qaysarānī, the aforementioned sayings also demonstrate the hypocrisy of the men who fabricate them. But who are those people who use the traditions of the Prophet as a pretext for condemning music? In al-Qaysarānī’s opinion, they are ignorant people who do not know the science of the *ḥadīth*s and yet are so convinced of their opinions that they blindly oppose those who speak the truth:

With these sayings and examples, one wants to challenge those who refuse to listen to the song because of their ignorance of the tools of *ḥadīth* knowledge and science. Each of them, when he reads a saying written in a book, considers it appropriate to make a doctrine (*madḥab*) of it and opposes those who disagree with him.

⁵⁴ For a review of authors opposing music, see Mussa, 2024: 9-22.

This is a serious mistake, indeed gross ignorance (*ḡahl ḡasīm*), (KS, 89).

The image of Muḥammad derived from the sayings quoted in the second part of the book, is that of an inflexible and uncompromising man. On the contrary, the Prophet, as al-Qaysarānī observes, preached a more serene approach to life instead of severity and difficulty.

The Prophet, his companions, the followers of the next generation and the [first] leaders (*imām*) of the Muslims ordered a light touch and advocated against difficulty and severity. They themselves liked joking and playing, not like the Qur'anic readers (*qurrā'*) of our time - may God not increase them! - who authorise what God Most High has forbidden and strictly forbid what God has made lawful. We do not see any reader devoted to asceticism (*mutaqaššif-an*) whose motto (*šī'ār*) is not backbiting (*ḡība*) and whose cloak (*dilār*) is not represented by gossip (*waqī'a*) among the people (KS, p. 89).

In the passage just quoted, the polemic emerges against certain religious men of his contemporaries, in particular the class of Qur'anic readers, who followed a strict ascetic life and wanted to impose it on the rest of the faithful. Al-Qaysarānī returns to the subject later, criticising these rigid codes of conduct, which, in his opinion, derived from foreign forms of asceticism (*nask 'aḡamī*) (KS, 95).⁵⁵ In contrast, Muhammad would have said:

You were sent as facilitators (*muyassirūn*), you were not sent to place obstacles (KS, p. 90).

God Himself is the Facilitator (*musahhīl*) *par excellence* (KS, 90).

One more element confirming al-Qaysarānī's thesis is the behaviour of the most prominent members of the first generations of Muslims, as well as their immediate successors and 'well-led'

⁵⁵ The same passage mentions the presence of people in Muḥammad's own circle who insisted that the Prophet be stricter in his prohibitions and sometimes succeeded in convincing him, see KS, 95. On the ascetic movement of the early centuries of Islam, see Melchert, 2020.

(*rašīdūn*) caliphs. As the testimonies of the time reveal, there was no prohibition against music and singing in early Islamic communities, and indeed the Prophet's companions show that they loved and appreciated music, beauty and women (*KS*, pp. 91-93).

Furthermore, he reports the well-known episode of 'Umar Ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb, who, during a pilgrimage to Mecca, allowed a singer of secular songs (*ġinā' al-a'rāb* = the songs of the Arabs) to cheer up the pilgrims with his voice while they were in a state of ritual holiness (*iḥrām*). 'Umar also used to say: "Singing is the provision (*zād*) of the traveller." (*KS*, pp. 42-43).

Al-Qaysarānī also provides similar evidence about the masters of Islamic juridic schools, who are usually deemed to be hostile to music. The jurist Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/975) is portrayed here while, being publicly questioned about the *samā'*, he replies that he is not aware of any particular provisions and states that "the wise do not refuse or abstain from listening to music; only the ignorant person (*ġāhil*) or an Iraqi ascetic (*nāsik*) with a hardened soul (*ġalīz al-ṭab'*)" prohibits it (*KS*, 46).⁵⁶

In the last anecdote narrating the first generations of Muslims, the author relates an event that took place in the year 370 of the Hegira (980-81 A.D.) in Baghdad at the home of the teacher Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-'Azīz Ibn al-Ḥārīt al-Tamīmī. The man had invited the heads of the different juridic schools as well as the leading theologians, preachers and ascetics living in Iraq at the time. A proficient Qur'anic reciter was called in for the occasion, and, at the end of the performance, he was invited by those present to continue with his recitation of secular poems.

Al-Qaysarānī considers this episode to be a symbolic form of 'unanimous consent expressed in the same session' (*al-iġmā' al-mun'aqid*). These figures represented, at that precise moment in history, the highest authority in matters of law (*ahl al-'aqd wa-al-ḥall* = lit. 'those who bind and loosen'), (*KS*, 47-48).

⁵⁶ Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, 2013: vol. 5, 92. Even the strict traditionalist Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), author of, among other things, a book on asceticism (*Kitāb al-zuhd*), is said, according to an anecdote told by his son, to have appreciated music at home while criticizing it in public (*KS*, 47).

To conclude this brief description of the book of the al-Qaysarānī we might mention a passage by the famous writer al-Ġāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), known for his originality and wit, who dedicated an epistle to the slave-singers (*Risālat al-qiyān*). His work is a pretext for extolling the art of singing and poetry and, in keeping with al-Qaysarānī, the author denies the presence of any veto in the Qur'an and the Sunna on the subject.

In his opinion, it is difficult to give a satisfactory explanation of music that ultimately coincides with the very essence of the soul (Ġāḥiẓ, 1964: II, 160-161).

We see no evil in singing, for it is basically poetry dressed up with melody. If [poetry] is truthful, it is good, if it is untruthful, it is bad. The Prophet – peace be upon him - said: - Some poems contain wisdom. And 'Umar Ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb added: - Poetry is but [a form of] language and is as good or bad as language is... If we say that language is not a forbidden thing, the addition of metre or rhyme cannot lead to its prohibition for any reason. The same applies to the addition of melody, which cannot produce anything forbidden. The metre of the poem is on the same level as the metre of the song, while the chapter of rhythm (*al-'arūḍ*) belongs to music (*mūsīqā*) and the latter, in turn, to the definition of souls (*ḥadd al-nufūs*): it is impossible for human language to give a satisfactory definition of [music], one can learn it with the mind just as one learns metre and rhyme. There is no reason to forbid it, nor is there any basis for it in the Book of the Most High God or in the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him.

Conclusions

With this book, al-Qaysarānī intends to unequivocally demonstrate the permissibility of music and singing in *ḥadīṭ* and, thus, in Islamic law, whilst countering those who wish to impose an overly restrictive view of Islam. The *Kitāb al-Samā'* responds, in a way, to the needs of a 12th c. Muslim to devote himself peacefully to listening to, or performing, music without incurring religious and social reproach.

His extensive experience in the field of Prophetic traditions and, in particular, his knowledge of the so-called *'ilm al-riğāl* ('science of men'), i. e. the genealogies and biographies of the transmitters, enables the author to competently judge the reliability of the sayings, in accordance with the traditional method of investigation based on the integrity and reliability of the chain of transmission.

Establishing what the Prophet actually said, or providing the correct interpretation of the Qur'an regarding music and singing, is a way for al-Qaysarānī to give a more truthful image of Islam. In his view, the Islamic community as a whole should play a greater role in settling disputes of opinion through *iğmā'*, the consensus or agreement between different juridic schools convened to discuss individual issues.

Finally, in the authentic *ḥadīth* reported in the *Kitāb al-samā'*, the Prophet Muḥammad himself reassumes his most spontaneous human dimension and, contrary to the way the most intransigent Muslims and strict ascetics depicted him, he is described as enjoying moments of leisure or indulging in simple entertainment on feast days.

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Songs and Music in Medieval Persian Poetry (11th-13th century)

Nahid Norozi

(Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna)

Abstract

In medieval Persian poems (*maṭnavī*), beginning with Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nām* ('Book of Kings') (11th c.), bacchic-musical moments we see the presence of minstrels and singers. These are described with extensive use of related musical terminology (names of instruments, related melodies, etc.). The typical occasion is the frequent banquets (*bazm*) at courts where music and singing are heard while perhaps tasting good wine: moments of leisure in the Persian poems alternate with episodes of battles (*razm*). In particular, we will dwell on the minstrel par excellence, the legendary Bārbad, his stories and his music and songs, sometimes used – a particularly intriguing aspect - also as a means of transmission or exchange of messages. The poets from whom we will draw exemplification are Ferdowsi (10th-11th cent.) and Nezāmi Ganġavi (12th-13th cent.), who tell us about the minstrel Bārbad in the context of the famous story of the aristocratic lovers King Hōsrow and Princess Širin. In this article we will also focus on some names of Persian musical modes and melodies that partly coincide with the names of certain musical modes of the *Maqām* system prevalent in the Islamic areas.

Keywords

Bārbad, Persian melodies, *maqām*, Nezāmi Ganġavi, Ferdowsi

Introduction

In this chapter we will examine the works of Persian poets of the classical period, authors of epic and fictional poems composed

between the 11th and 13th centuries but set in the pre-Islamic period. Rather than speaking specifically and technically about the science of music, we will examine a number of aspects related to musical practice.¹ In general, it is clear from these works that music in Persian courts was a frequent and valued practice that took place on a variety of occasions and circumstances, such as banquets, festivals (mainly associated with the cycles of the seasons), religious ceremonies and rituals, and marriage or coronation-related festivals. Music was also used on hunting occasions,² to celebrate victories or to prepare the army for war, or even during an attack on the battlefield with the obvious intention of instilling fear or awe in the enemy³, etc.⁴

¹ For an in-depth study of music in pre-Islamic Persia we refer to Lawergren 2016, from which we extract an interesting review of Greek authors who comment on music practice in the Achaemenid age (550-331 BC):

Herodotus (5th century B.C.E.) remarked on Achaemenid priests who did not perform their rites to *aulos* music (*Histories* 1.132). In the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon (ca. 430-after 356 B.C.E.), who had visited Persia in 401 B.C.E., told of the great number of singing women at the Achaemenid court (4.6.11; 5.1.1; 5.5.2; 5.5.39). Athenaios of Naucratis (3rd century C.E.?) mentioned a court singer who sang a warning to the king of the Medes of the acquisitive plans of Cyrus II (ca. 600-530 B.C.E. He also related that the Macedonian general Parmenio captured the 329 singing girls of the court of Darius III (ca. 380-mid-330 B.C.E.; *Deipnosophistai* 13.608) and that a royal officer at Babylon had 150 singing girls at his table (12.530). Because Greek writers are fairly unanimous, they should probably be trusted in their account of the many singing women. The tradition of women musicians entertaining men continued in the Islamic period with the singing slave woman [...].

For a comprehensive study of music in Iran we refer to Nettl 2012.

² Musical scenes are discernible, for example, in the bas-reliefs of Tāq-e Bostān near Kermānšāh, particularly in the hunting scene section in which players and their instruments appear. See Farmer 1938: 397-412, especially: 397 and 402.

³ “In the martial use of sound, the Persian armies were in the vanguard, and they terrorized the Greek armies with the rolling of drums and the clashing of trumpets.” See De Zorzi 2019: 33 (my transl.).

⁴ It is important to keep in mind that the modes of circulation or occasions of music practice and transmission in medieval Islamic Persia are diverse. Moḥammad-Taqī Dāneš-Pažuh (1970: 25-26) lists the following areas of use: 1. Folk music, involving a multitude of peoples and ethnic groups who practiced it at festivals, funerals, and other occasions mostly of a collective and ceremonial

In these poems we often find the names of musical instruments mentioned, and also the names of traditional musical modes and sometimes of specific tunes melodies and songs. Above all, however, we observe the massive presence of minstrels, and it is this aspect on which we would like to dwell here. In Persian there are several names for this category of performers: predominantly we find: *rāmeš-gar* (read: ‘one who produces joy’), with the same meaning also in the Arabic equivalent *moṭreb*, both words conveying the idea of the joy the musician produces; *ḥonyā-gar* (lit.: ‘one who produces lyrical songs’), *navā-gar* (lit.: ‘one who produces music/melody’), or *gusān/gōsān/kusān*⁵ (‘minstrel, storyteller’) or the Arabic equivalent *moğanni* (‘singer of lyrical verse’) who could at the same time also be the player. Another interesting detail is that among these minstrels there are also quite a few women, of whom we find traces, for example, in the history of the Sasanian king Bahrām V (reg. 420-438).⁶ The latter, also

nature; 2. Music performed within aristocratic courts and houses; 3. Qur’ān psalmodying (*tartīl*) and the call to prayer (*adān*) are further musical occasions in which ritual was central; 4. Sacred religious performances on the occasion of the commemoration of martyrs, for example, often accompanied by songs of praise and other kinds of artistic manifestations; 5. Scientific literature related to music, in which the authors were not necessarily composers, musicians or practitioners (see also Farhat 1998: 563); indeed, even mathematicians or philosophers dealt with music as a subject across or tangential to their disciplines 6. Finally, the Sufi mystics’ musical hearings, known as *samā’*, which took place in *ḥāneqāh* (convents of Sufi brotherhoods) and meeting places where singing was accompanied by instruments and sometimes ritual dances (cf. the musical practices of the Mowlaviyyé brotherhood (Turkish: *mevlivîyye*, Arabic: *mawlawiyya*). The same author also recalls the music used by wandering dervishes as well as *ğavānmards*, the latter frequenters of traditional gyms (*zurḥān*, lett. ‘house of effort/strength’) where musical moments were also not lacking.

⁵ According to the anonymous author of the *Muğmal al-tawārīḥ wa al-qīṣaṣ*, *kusān* is the synonym for *ḥonyā-gar* in the Pahlavi language, i.e. Middle Persian. (See Anonymous 1339: 69). On the ancient figure (of the Parthian age) of the Iranian minstrel *gusān/gōsān* see Boyce 1957.

⁶ The book relating to the “Kingdom of Bahrām” of the *Šāh-nām* of Ferdowsi, is the only book in which we find the depiction of women devoted to music, as evidenced, for example, by the story of the three sisters Farānak, Māhāfarid and Šanbalid, a harpist, a singer and a dancer, respectively (see *ŠN*, vol. VI: 476-484, vv. 773-888); or the story of Ārezu, a poetess, player, and singer (*ŠN*, vol. VI: 484-

known as Bahrām-e gur ('Bahrām of the onager,' i.e. an Asian wild ass, which he loved to hunt), is famous as a lover of music (as well as of women and hunting). There is a widely known traditional story that he ordered the Indian king Šangol to send him 2000 minstrels⁷:

be nazdik-e Šangol ferestād kas / čonin goft k-ey šāh-e faryād-ras
az ān luriyān bar-gozin do hezār / nar o made bar zaḥm-e barbaṭ
savār⁸

[Bahrām] sent someone to Šangol / Thus saying, "O king, o rescuer
From among those Luris choose two thousand / males or females practicing the (read. riding with the] plectrum on the lute.⁹

From these passages Bahrām V appears to have been a true great lover of music and during his reign musicians would have enjoyed special attention.¹⁰ In general, music during the Sasanian dynasty was held in the highest regard by the court and witnessed a period

500, vv. 889-1127), women whose musical knowledge had attracted the attention of King Bahrām and thus they gained access to the Sassanid king's gynoeceum. On the role of women in Persian music from antiquity to the present, see Maleki's monograph (2001).

⁷ According to one manuscript of ŠN, the number of minstrels would have reached 10,000. See note 6 to verse 2560 in ŠN, vol. VI: 612.

⁸ ŠN, vol. VI: 612, vv. 2559-2560, 2562-2563.

⁹ All translations in this article are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰ In the same episode of Indian minstrels recruited by Barhrām-e Gur, we also read in Anonymous 1339: 69 where the number of Luris is given as 12,000. The Luris of Iran are the current inhabitants of the western province of the same name in Luristān. However, it is possible that the term *luri* is a variant of *luli* (the points of articulation of the phonemes "r" and "l" are indeed very close) of which we find abundant traces in Neopersian letters, particularly in Ḥāfeẓ Širāzi, a term with the meaning oscillating, perhaps not coincidentally, between 'gypsy' and 'minstrel' (for a detailed discussion on this, see Badalkhan 2005). In Dehḥodā 2006, the lemma *luri* is actually considered synonymous with *luli* and *kuli/kowli*. Also Dāneš-pāzūh 1970: 24, citing the historical work *Sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa al-anbiyā'* by Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, confirms the massive presence of *gusāns* (Arabized in the formal plural *ḡawāsina* from the singular *ḡusān*) and *kowli* (from *kābuli*, but in the text of Iṣfahānī in its form of the Arabic plural *akā'īl*), from India.

of growth, to the point that there is even mention of the existence of a kind of Ministry of Music.¹¹

Despite the fact that minstrels occupy a prominent place in Persian literature, they are mostly unnamed, with the exception of a few legendary musicians of great fame. By way of example, we mention Bārbad (of whom we shall see more in the present work) and his rival Sargeš/Sarkeš, as well as Nekisā¹², Rāmtin¹³ and Bāmšād¹⁴. But we should also mention a woman harpist, Āzāde-ye Čangi¹⁵, whose stories are also narrated by various historical sources and whose existence in pre-Islamic Persia, though sometimes shrouded in legend, we are practically certain of.

One of them, often mentioned in the poems and also well known throughout the Islamic areas¹⁶, is Bārbad¹⁷ or Fahlbad in

¹¹ See Homā'i 1996: 25

¹² The two minstrels Sargeš (see Anonymous 1939: 81 where the name is mentioned in one of its variants and the origin is also specified: Sarkis-e rumi) and Nekisā were apparently two Greek-Byzantines in the service of the Sasanian king Ḥosrow Parviz; see Taqizāde's commentary (p. 16) on Eqbal Aštīyāni's article 1984: 7-13.

¹³ *Rāmtin* is likely a variant of *Rāmin*, the name also of the protagonist of Gorgāni's novel, *Vis o Rāmin*, in which Prince Rāmin (of whose name we find in Gorgāni's work another variant namely *Rāmnin* which compared to *Rāmtin* in the Persian spelling differs only in one diacritical point) emerges as a musician and even as the inventor of the harp or a type of harp. Here are the relevant verses:

There is no proud ruler like him / no one like him in joy composer of melodies.

See how well he created the harp / whoever could create better [than he]?

Proof that he created the harp with skill is this / that the name of the instrument in his honor is "Rāmnin's harp" (Gorgāni 2002, ch. 124, vv. 86-88).

On the figure of the protagonist Rāmin as a skilled musician, see Norozi 2022: 231.

¹⁴ I.e. another minstrel in the court of Ḥosrow II, about whom little is known. See Dehḥodā 2006, s.v. *Bāmšād*.

¹⁵ I.e. the famous harpist beloved by King Bahrām-e gur of whom we find mention in the *Šāh-nām*, (*ŠN*, Vol IV: 373-379, vv. 166-233) and whose story will be reworked later by Neẓāmi, Amir Ḥosrow of Delhi and other poets who produce other Bahrameides.

¹⁶ For a list of texts, Arabic and Persian, in which Bārbad is mentioned, see Reḏāzādeh Šafaq 1924: 66-71.

¹⁷ Regarding the dubious pronunciation and uncertain meaning of the name *Bārbad* there are several theories (see Reḏāzādeh Šafaq 1924: 63-66). In Dehḥodā 2006 and Sayyid 'Abd ar-Rašid 2007, s.v. *Bārbad*, we find indicated the meaning of 'Lord of the court'.

Arabic, a name that actually has many variations.¹⁸ A musician in the court of the Sassanid king Ḥosrow II or Ḥosrow Parviz, (reg. 590-628), I will devote the following passages to examining his work. The name Bārbad, a native in all probability of Ġahrom (a locality not very far from Šīraz)¹⁹ appears in the story of King Ḥosrow Parviz, included in the poem *Šāh-nām* (henceforth abbreviated to *ŠN*) i.e., the *Book of Kings* by the famous epic poet Ferdowsi²⁰ who lived at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. It is a colossal epic work of more than 50,000 couplets, recounting the exploits of pre-Islamic Persian kings including precisely the story of Ḥosrow II whose reign is viewed as a veritable golden age of Persian music. The *Book of Kings*, a central work in the Persian literary canon, became an inexhaustible source for later authors of both epic and fictional works. For example, the love affair between King Ḥosrow and the Armenian princess Šīrin, which is included in Ferdowsi's *ŠN*, is taken up by many later authors, among whom we mention only the famous Neẓāmi Ganġavi of the 12th-13th centuries. In all these poems, whose titles include precisely the names of the lovers Ḥosrow and Šīrin²¹, our minstrel Bārbad is featured.

¹⁸ There are multiple variants in Arabic sources of this name, indeed it is actually a nickname: Fahl(a)bad/d, Bahl(a)bad/d, Fahl(a)wad/d, Fahr(a)bad/d, Bahr(a)bad/d, or Bārbad/d.

¹⁹ For example, *Loġatnāme-ye Dehḡodā*, *Borhān-e Qāte'* and *Rašīdi s.v. Bārbad*, indicate Ġahrom as Bārbad's hometown. Ferdowsi also mentions the city of Ġahrom; he does not point to it specifically as Bārbad's hometown but rather informs us, in the episode of Ḥosrow's death, that upon hearing the sad news, Bārbad rushes from Ġahrom to Tisfun (Ctesiphon) (see *ŠN*, vol. VIII: 355, v. 399). Finally, there are other sources that indicate Bārbad's origin now from the city Marv (e.g. in Ta'ālībī 1989: 441) sometimes from that of Neišābur (cf. Ređāzādeh 1924: 63).

²⁰ There is, of course, an endless specialized bibliography on Ferdowsi and his work; here we limit ourselves to pointing out the Italian translation in loose endecasyllables by Pizzi 1886-88 and the chapters devoted to him in some well-known literary histories and encyclopedias, where further references can be found: Bausani 1960: 588-618; Arberry 1994: 42-52; Rypka 1968: 154-62; Khaeġhi-Motlagh 1999.

²¹ The title of the romance poem that is part of a famous "Quintet" (*ḡams*) by Neẓāmi Ganġavi (12th-13th cent.) which tells the story, already found in

Let us start with Ferdowsi, who introduces us to Bārbad as “the minstrel king” (*šāh-e rāmeš-garān*),²² but first let us give a brief summary of the story of Ferdowsian Bārbad.²³

One day Sargeš, a first-rate musician and composer in King Ḥosrow's court, learns of Bārbad's prowess and fame and, alarmed, plans to make himself known to the king. Sargeš does not want to lose his role as the first court musician, so he tries in every way to prevent Bārbad from entering King Ḥosrow's palace. Bārbad subsequently manages by a trick to enter the royal garden; thus, dressed in green and with a lute, or rather a *barbito*, also green, he camouflages himself among the branches of a cypress tree from which, thus concealed, he begins to sing while playing his instrument; the latter is perhaps not by chance called *barbaṭ*, a name that evidently immediately evokes Bārbad's name. But on the name of the instrument, as well as on Bārbad's name, there are some hypotheses that we must gloss over here.²⁴ Instead, let us look at the verses related to the episode of Bārbad in Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*:

bar-ān sarv šod barbaṭ andar kenār / zamān-i hami bud tā šahriyār,
az ivān biy-āmad be-d-ān ḡašn-gāh / biy-ārāst pāliz-gar ḡa-ye šāh
biy-āmad paričehre-ye mey-gosār / yeki ḡām bar kaf bar-e šahriyār

Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nām* (Book of Kings) (10th-11th cent.), of the celebrated pair of lovers, namely Ḥosrow, legendary ruler of the Sassanid dynasty, and the beautiful Širin, an Armenian princess. For an early account of the author see: Bausani 1960: 640-97; Rypka 1968: 210-3; Arberry 1994: 122-9; Bürgel 2006: 25-9, 63, 149-224; and for imitations of *Ḥosrow and Širin* see Zolfagari 2015: 276-320.

²² *ŠN*, vol. VIII: 287, v. 3703.

²³ In the *ŠN*, Bārbad is alive until Ḥosrow's death, while in the “History of Ta‘ālibī” 1989: 447, he is poisoned by the rival Sargeš/Sargis/Sarkaš/Sarges. On this legendary character see Tafāḡdoli 1988.

²⁴ Regarding the literal meaning of the name of this instrument ‘duck breast’ has also been suggested because of a vague resemblance to its soundboard. In fact, the word *barbaṭ* is composed of *bar* ‘chest’ and *baṭ* (Arabized form of the Persian *bat*, meaning ‘duck’). Another hypothesis held by several scholars sees the origin of the word from the name of the minstrel Bārbad, since he himself is believed to be the maker of the instrument in question. However, there is also the hypothesis of a possible derivation of the word from the Greek *barbitos*. See Farmer 1938: 405-406; Šafi‘i Kadkani 1991: 577-581; Dehḡodā 2006, s.v. *Barbaṭ*.

ğahān-dār be-stod ze kudak nabid / bolur az mey-e sorḡ šod nā-
padid
be-d-ān-gah ke ḥoršid bar-gašt zard / hami bud tā gašt šab lāžvard
zanande be-d-ān sarv bar-dāšt rud / hamān sāḥte pahlavāni sorud
yeki nağz dastān be-zad bar deraḡt / k-az ān ḥire šod mard-e bidār
baḡt
sorud-i be āvāz-e ḥowš bar-kašid / ke aknun to ḥwāni-š «dād-
āfarid»²⁵

[Bārbad] went up to that cypress tree with the lute (barbaṡ) in his
arms / stayed there a little while until the Prince [Ḥosrow],
From the lodge came to that festive place / and the gardener
prepared the king's seat.
There came [then] a fairy-faced cupbearer / holding a cup and
offering it to the [Ḥosrow] king
The king of the world took wine from the maiden / the crystal [of
the cup] disappeared because of the red wine²⁶
When the sun turned yellow [at sunset, the king] / stayed there
until the sky became dark blue for the night
[Bārbad], the player (zanandé), then on that cypress tree took the
lute (rud) ²⁷ / on which he composed his “Heroic Song”
(Palhavāni sorud)
He played an exquisite melody on that tree / such that the man
of auspicious destiny (=the king) was astonished.
[Bārbad] sang the song with a beautiful melody / which is now
called “Dād-āfarid”

Here *Dād-āfarid* literally means something like “created by the Just One” i.e., by God, in short, a “divine” song. In this passage from Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*, we thus find the name of the first song sung by Bārbad.

King Ḥosrow at this point wants to know where that extraordinary music came from, but to no avail. Discouraged, King Ḥosrow asks for another cup, and Bārbad resumes playing his second aria called, this time, *Peykār-e gord*, i.e. “The fight of the valiant”:

²⁵ *ŠN*, Vol. VIII: 284-285, vv. 3664-3671.

²⁶ That is, once filled with red wine, due to the transparency of the crystal, the cup could no longer be seen. Note the color play between red (*sorḡ*) and, in the next verse, yellow (*zard*) and blue (*lāžvard* = lapislazuli).

²⁷ *Rud*, another name for the lute, is indeed a polysemic word, also alluding to ‘music’.

zanande degargun biy-ārāst rud / bar-āvard nāgāh digar sorud,
ke “Peykār-e gord”-aš hami ħwāndand / čonin nām az āvāz-e u
rāndand²⁸

[Bārbad] the player tuned the lute to another mode / And
suddenly resumed with another song
Which they called “The fight of the valiant” (Peykār-e gord) / This
name they gave for that [particular] song of his

And here we learn the name of another song that is evidently
meant to evoke the king's prowess and to capture his attention
with verses of praise. Again, the king tries to find out where such
beautiful music comes from, but again to no avail. Next is the turn
of a third song with its own specific name:

bar-āmad degar-bāre bāng-e sorud / hamān sāhte digar āvāz-e rud
hami “Sabz dar sabz” ħwāni konun / bar-in gune sāzand mardān
fosun²⁹

Another time the voice of a song was raised / the same [musician]
composed another lute aria
Which is now called “Green upon green” / In this way true artists³⁰
create enchantment.

Struck by the beautiful musciand impatient with the unsolved
mystery, King Ḥosrow drains another goblet of wine and says:

čonin goft k-in gar ferešte bodi / ze mošk o ze ‘anbar serešte bodi
va-gar div budi nagofti sorud / hamān sāhte karde āvāz-e rud
be-ġu’id dar bāġ tā in koġā-st / hame bāġ o golšan čap o dast-e
rāst
dahān o bar-aš por ze gowhar konam / bar-in rud-sāzān-š meh-tar
konam³¹

Thus said [Ḥosrow], “If this is an angel / it is made of fragrant
musk and amber.

²⁸ *ŠN*, Vol. VIII: 285, vv. 3678-3679.

²⁹ *ŠN*, Vol. VIII: 285-286, vv. 3685-3686.

³⁰ The original says *mardān* (‘men’), which here takes on the special sense of
“great (or real) men” just like the artists depicted in the poem.

³¹ *ŠN*, Vol. VIII: 286, vv. 3689-3692.

And if a demon were he would not sing a song; / the same one
 who played on the lute,
 Look for him in the garden, see where he is / [search] for
 everywhere in the garden and in the rose garden, right and left
 [I want] to fill his mouth and chest with pearls / I want to raise
 him above other musicians”

Hearing these words of admiration and praise, Bārbad makes up his mind to come down from the tree and introduce himself to King Ḥosrow, telling his story. The king soon offers him the position of the first court minstrel, and Bārbad thus becomes his favorite musician.

Ferdowsi also tells us about Bārbad's death, devoting ample space to a rather dramatic episode. It should be mentioned here that in his famous history *Ġurar al-ahbār*, the historian Ta‘ālibī (350-429/961-1038, a contemporary of Ferdowsi)³² speaks of Bārbad's death occurring by poisoning at the hands of his jealous rival Sargeš.³³ Ferdowsi, however, proposes a different version; he informs us that since Bārbad was strongly attached to King Ḥosrow, when the latter was killed, he decided to end his career as a poet. In fact, after weeping over the king's coffin and singing a moving funeral elegy, Bārbad cuts off his four fingers and sets all his instruments on fire, so that he may never again play for anyone else.³⁴ Later, the above-mentioned poet Nezāmi also chooses the same end of Bārbad as proposed by Ferdowsi, but relates it, very fleetingly, in only one verse³⁵. It is noted, however, that Nezāmi does not take up the Ferdowsian episode of the tree on which Bārbad was hiding. Nezāmi foretells Bārbad's presence already at the outset of his poem *Ḥosrow and Širin* (henceforth *ḤŠ*), inserting him in a dream in which King Ḥosrow sees his own ancestors prophesying to him his future reign over Persia. Other events and characters, among which an exalted minstrel named Bārbad, are also mentioned:

navā-sāz-i dahand-at Bārbad nām / ke bar yād-aš govārad zahr dar
 ġām³⁶

³² See Ta‘ālibī 1989: 441-443.

³³ *Iw*: 447.

³⁴ *ŠN*, Vol. VIII: 355-358.

³⁵ *ḤŠ*: 421.

³⁶ *ḤŠ*: 48.

They will give you a minstrel named Bārbad / whose [only]
remembrance/mention makes the poison sweet in the cup

In a subsequent chapter Neẓāmi, wanting to introduce us to Bārbad's extraordinary skill, attributes to him the invention of as many as one hundred musical modes (*ṣad dastān*). During a symposium the musician chooses “thirty melodic airs (*si lahn*)” for Ḥosrow:

ze ṣad dastān ke u rā bud dar sāz / gozide kard si lahn-e hoš-āvāz³⁷

Among a hundred musical modes he had in his instrument /
Bārbad chose thirty sweet-sounding melodies

Citing one by one the relevant titles, one might assume that Neẓāmi's interest with respect to Ferdowsi is in this context more technical and that he is perhaps aiming to show off his knowledge of music by quoting the tunes created by Bārbad.

It may be interesting to take a look at the titles of these thirty melodic airs:

1. *Ganġ-e Bādāvārd* (‘Treasure Carried by the Wind’)³⁸; 2. *Ganġ-e gāv* (‘Treasure of the Ox’)³⁹; 3. *Ganġ-e suht* (‘Burnt Treasure’)⁴⁰; 4.

³⁷ HŠ. 190.

³⁸ *Borhān-e Qāte’* is the name of the second of Ḥosrow Parviz's eight treasures. Ta’ālibī 1989: 444-445 says in this connection that the son of the Roman emperor, an enemy of Maurice (Ḥosrow's father-in-law), fearing that Alexandria would fall into the hands of Ḥosrow who had surrounded it, wanted to save the royal treasure by sending it by ship to an island. But a strong wind was blowing, which pushed the treasure very near to the camp of Ḥosrow, who happily transferred it to his own treasury.

³⁹ Ta’ālibī (1989: 444-445) tells us that one day a farmer plowing the land with his two oxen finds a jar containing treasure from the Alexandrian period, so he alerts Ḥosrow who, discovering a hundred other similar jars, leaves one to the farmer and the rest he appropriates into his own royal treasure.

⁴⁰ We read in *al-Ġamāhir fī ma’rifat al-ġawāhir* (‘The Compendium on the Knowledge of Precious Stones’) by al-Bīrūnī cited by Dehḥodā 2006, s.v. *Ganġ-e suht*, that there was a very rich treasure in Persia containing coins, various jewels, perfumes and oils, which was struck by lightning and caught fire. The fire lasted for four months and its smoke killed animals up to forty parasangs. Once the fire was put out, a red ruby was found under the ashes.

Šādorvān-e morvārid ('Pearl Pavilion')⁴¹; 5. *Taht-e tāqdīsī* ('Dome Throne')⁴²; 6. *Nāqusi* ('Of the Bell/Bell/Campanary')⁴³; 7. *Owraṅgi* ('Of the royal throne'); 8. *Hoqqe-ye Kāvus* ('The casket/The trick of Kāvus')⁴⁴; 9. *Māh bar kuhān* ('The moon above the mountains'); 10. *Mošk-dān* ('The speck of moss'); 11. *Ārāyeš-e ḥoršid* ('The ornaments of the sun'); 12. *Nimruz* ('The noontime')⁴⁵; 13. *Sabz dar sabz* ('Green

⁴¹ It is said of this melody that one day Bārbad had played it in Ḥosrow's pavilion, whereupon the latter gave his minstrel a tray full of pearls. See Dehḥodā 2006.

⁴² Ta'ālibī 1989: 443-444 describes this throne as one of the wonders in King Ḥosrow's possession: a throne 180 *arš* long, 130 *arš* wide, and 15 *arš* high (one *arš* corresponding to the length of a forearm). The throne was made of ebony, teak wood, ivory and other fine woods, embellished with gold and silver, and above it was a dome made of gold and lapis lazuli bearing various engravings: the sky, the stars, the constellations, the seven continents, the rulers and the places they frequented such as banquets, battle and hunting grounds. There was also a contraption on this throne that indicated the time of day. The *Taht-e tāqdīs* was then divided into four parts covered with fine carpets enriched with very precious rare stones (for example there were pearls as large as a sparrow's egg), each used for one of the four seasons. There was also a crown for which sixty *man* (180 kg) of gold and other stones were used, but it was supported by a gold chain so that it would not weigh too heavily on the king's head. In short, Ta'ālibī explains the minutiae of this throne of Ḥosrow, to which Bārbad composes a song of praise.

⁴³ In today's repertoire of Persian music, known as *radīf*, this aria has survived as a melodic type (*guš*) within the Navā modal system (*Dastgāh-e navā*), the same being true of aria No. 5, *Taht-e tāqdīs* (see previous note).

⁴⁴ The Arabic word *hoqq* in Persian primarily means 'casket' but a second meaning is 'trick'. In the first case Bārbad evidently sings about the precious casket of the Kayanid king, Kay Kāvus, but in the second case, that is, with the meaning of 'trick/cheat', it is possible (but unlikely) that it refers to King Kāvus' ingenious trick for flying. Ferdowsi in this regard informs us that Kāvus, in order to be able to fly, builds an upright throne (*taht*) with four spears placed on the four sides, on the tips of which he skewers animal flesh. Then Kāvus ties four hungry eagles to the throne; upon seeing the meat fly, in an attempt to eat it, thus the king is able to fly, albeit briefly. Cf. *ŠN*, vol. II, 95-101. This episode, highlighting the greed of Kāvus, tempted and urged on by Iblis, may have been sung by Bārbad as an edifying lesson for his ruler Ḥosrow and as such would have didactic-sapiential purposes, something of which we find abundant exemplification in the Persian letters.

⁴⁵ Nimruz is also a melodic type (*guš*) in the modal system (*dastgāh*) of Šur ('Fervor').

on green')⁴⁶; 14. *Qoft-e rumi* ('Byzantine closure/locking')⁴⁷; 15. *Sarvestān* ('Cypress garden'); 16. *Sarv-e sahi* ('Slender cypress'); 17. *Nušin-bād* ('The exquisite wine'); 18. *Rāmeš-e ġān* ('The joy of the soul'); 19. *Sāz-e Nowruz* ('The melody/sound of Nowruz')⁴⁸; 20. *Moškuy*, var. *Mošġuy* ('Alcove/Pagoda')⁴⁹; 21. *Mehregāni* ('[Of the feast] of Mehregān')⁵⁰; 22. *Morvā-ye nik* ('Good omen'); 23. *Šābdiz* ('Šābdiz')⁵¹; 24. *Šāb-e farroḥ* ('Happy night'); 25. *Farroḥ ruz* ('Happy day'); 26. *Ġoñče-ye kabk-e dari* ('The bud of the royal partridge'); 27. *Nahġirgān* ('Hunting Land'); 28. *Kin-e Siyāvoš* ('Siyāvoš's Revenge')⁵²;

⁴⁶ As we have seen above, Ferdowsi also quotes this song from Bārbad.

⁴⁷ It is possible that this is some musical element or piece of alleged Greco-Byzantine origin (*rumi*). This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that there were at least two musicians of Greek-Byzantine origin in the court of King Ḥosrow II (see footnote 12), so the author implicitly assumes that Bārbad was also proficient in it.

⁴⁸ *Nowruz* (with the Arabic variant *Nairuz*), a major ancient-Iranic festival corresponding to the spring equinox, also gives its name to a subgroup of the Arab *Maqām*, namely the *Rāst* (a not coincidentally Persian word).

⁴⁹ This refers to Širin's alcove, but the word also means 'pavilion' and sometimes 'pagoda' (see Dehġodā 2006, s.v. *Mošku*), and in the latter sense it would emphasize Ḥosrow's adoration of his beloved Širin.

⁵⁰ This is the name of another pre-Islamic Iranian festival corresponding to the autumn equinox, still celebrated today, by which the cult of *Mehr* ('sun'), also known in the Roman Empire in connection with the worship of the god Mithras, is celebrated.

⁵¹ This is the name of Hosrow II's celebrated horse, for whose death Bārbad composed an elegiac song with which to break the sad news to the ruler (see below).

⁵² In Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings* (*ŠN*, vol. II: 202-416) Prince Siyāvoš, heir to the throne of his sovereign father Kay Kāvus but a victim of his stepmother Sudābē's lust, must face the test of fire to prove his innocence regarding the accusation of violence that the overruled woman charges him with. Siyāvoš passes the test by passing through the fire unscathed. Opposed to the war against the Turan, after various vicissitudes, he flees to enemy lands and marries a Turanid princess. Falling victim to suspicion and conspiracy, however, he is eventually killed by Iran's historic enemy, the Turanian king Afrāsiyāb. In Persian literature, Siyāvoš eventually becomes a symbol of innocence, purity, and martyrdom, and is often celebrated or quoted in elegies (*martiy*) and even taken up in the contemporary Persian novel. After his death, Siyāvoš is avenged by his son Kay Ḥosrow and Rostam, the Persian "Hercules." We read about him in Ferdowsi's poem (*ŠN*, vol. II: 380-416), in an episode that takes the same title we find here in the Bārbad tune i.e. *Kin-e Siyāvoš*.

29. *Kin-e Irağ* ('Irağ's Revenge')⁵³; 30 *Bāğ-e Širin* ('Širin's Garden')⁵⁴.

These titles lend themselves to further considerations, e.g., the first five names have to do with objects in King Ḥosrow's possession around which there are legends conveyed by various sources, including the aforementioned "History of al-Ta'ālībī" (see related footnotes). It could perhaps be assumed that the texts of these melodies were eulogistic in nature, i.e., in praise of the king.

But among these thirty titles we also find epic elements with references to the Persian heroes of the national epic. For example, there are titles that contain the names of pre-Islamic Persian kings or princes such as 8. *Hoqqe-ye Kāvus* ('The Casket/Trick of Kāvus'), 28. *Kin-e Siyāvoš* ('The Revenge of Siyāvoš'), 29. *Kin-e Irağ* ('The Revenge of Irağ'), all characters from the Ferdowsian epic. There are also cases of kings or princes who are *exempla* of didactic-sapiential character, such as in the story of Kay Kāvus, or even in the case of the sad story of Siyāvoš and Irağ, with associated elegiac tone texts. Also of elegiac tone would be Song No. 23, composed for the death of Ḥosrow's horse, Šabdiz (see below).

Other titles of these thirty melodies contain hints of natural or bacchic elements, which are well present in the Persian lyric tradition, e.g., 9. *Māh bar kuhān* ('The moon above the mountains'); 10. *Mošk-dān* ('The speck of moss'); 11. *Ārāyeš-e ḥoršīd* ('The ornaments of the sun'); 12. *Nimruz* ('Midday'); 15. *Sarvestān* ('Cypress Garden'); 16. *Sarv-e sahi* ('Slender Cypress'); 17. *Nušin-bād* ('The Exquisite Wine').

⁵³ Here we find the background story of *Kin-e Irağ* lending its title to this tune by Bārbad: Feridun is the legendary king of early Iran who defeats his arch-enemy Ḍaḥḥāk. According to tradition (see *ŠN*, vol. I: 136-157), he bequeaths the world to his three sons (Salm, Tur and Irağ); but to the youngest Irağ he gives the best part i.e. Iran, whereupon the two other brothers out of envy kill him. Thus begins an interminable series of wars, especially between the Turans, descendants of Tur (one of the three brothers) and the Iranians, descendants of the victimized brother, Irağ. The latter will be avenged on the one hand by his father Feridun and on the other by his son Manučehr.

⁵⁴ In this title there is explicit reference to Širin, Ḥosrow's beloved wife. For more information about the list of thirty Bārbad's songs see Neẓāmi, *HŠ*: 191-194.

And finally, there are titles such as: 18. *Rāmeš-e ġān* ('The Joy of the Soul'); 20. *Moškuy* (var. *Mošguy*) ('Alcove/Pagoda') that transparently suggest to us loving intimacy.

But Neẓāmi is neither the only one nor the first to mention the titles of these melodies or songs. For lack of space, we will only include the earlier poet Ferdowsi, who mentioned only about ten titles in his Book of Kings, five of which were later taken up by Neẓāmi.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ In the episode concerning Bārbad on the tree, Ferdowsi mentioned only three Bārbad's melodies, and of these three only one *Sabz dar sabz* ('Green on Green') is found among the thirty melodies mentioned by Neẓāmi. This parsimoniousness is understandable because Ferdowsi basically narrates only one episode that takes place in one evening; in fact, Ferdowsi mentions a total of about ten melodies in the course of his poem, five of which share a commonality with Neẓāmi's list, namely: the aforementioned 1. *Sabz dar sabz*; 2. *Taht-e Ṭāqdis*; 3. *Ganġ-e bādāvar* (var. *Bādāvārd*), the name of Ḥosrow's second treasure; 4. *Ganġ-e suht*; 5. *Šādvārd-e bozorg*, which precisely recalls *Šādorvān-e morvārid* which, according to the *Borhān-e Qāte'*, is the name of one of the eight treasures of the Sassanid king Ḥosrow Parviz. The complete list of tunes cited in the *ŠN* is as follows:

1. *Sorud-e Ḥosrovāni* ('Royal Songs'), derived from the period of the Sasanian Bahrām Gur (Vahrām V, reg. 420-438), in which Persian music was rearranged or classified (*tanẓim*) into seven or eight units, witnessed in the *al-Lahw wa al-Malāhi* of the Persian arabographer Ibn Ḥordādbēh who enumerates these eight melodies (*āhang*): *bondestān* (var. *sendastān*), *bahār*, *ebryn*, *ebryn*, *Mādar-u-asbān* (var. *māh dar bostān*), *šesom/šasm* (var. *Nasīm*), *qob* (var. *gov*), *asbrās* (var. *aspris*). "Seven or eight melodies" are cited because sometimes *ebryn* and *ebryn*, are unified. Cited in Christensen 1936: 479 and Mallāḥ 1990: 500.
2. *Sorud-e Māzandarāni* ('Song of Māzandarān'), from which we learn that in the conquest of Māzandarān, a minstrel from this Caspian region plays the *barbat* at the court of Kay Kāvūs. On *Sorud-e Māzandarāni* see also Boyce 1957: 25.
3. *Sorud-e Pahlavi* ('Parthian/Pahlavi song'), of which see Boyce 1957: 26-27, as well as Tābetzādeh 2003: 121.

In addition to these three songs Mallāḥ 1990: 499-501 adds the following:

4. *Dādāfarid*, the first song that Bārbad sings on the tree in the garden of King Ḥosrow Parviz (see above).
5. *Peḡkār-e gord*, the second song that Bārbad sings on the tree in King Ḥosrow's garden (see above), but Ta'ālibi 1969: 442 mentions another name instead, namely *Partow-e Farḡār*.
6. *Sabz dar sabz*, the third song that Bārbad sings on the tree in King Ḥosrow's garden (see above).
7. *Taht-e Ṭāqdis* which is one of the thirty *lahn/navā* composed by Bārbad (see above).

Finally, it should be added that there was another legend circulating about Bārbad. We learn that, according to the “Chosen History” (*Tāriḥ-e gozid*) of Ḥamdollāh Mostowfi, a 14th-century work (1281-1340), Bārbad composed 360 melodies or songs, that is, practically one for each day of the year.⁵⁶ The 9th-century Arabic author al-Ġāḥiẓ also confirms this for us: “There was not a day for which Bārbad did not create a new poem and rhythm.”⁵⁷

It is worth mentioning that these minstrels, so dear to Ferdowsi, Nezāmi and their imitators, strengthened the hypothesis of the existence of a nonreligious poetry in pre-Islamic Persia in the aftermath of the Arab conquest⁵⁸, at least orally and in close association with the art of music. Moreover, the titles of these melodies which accompanied texts that have not come down to us, could be a clue to the presence of different contents, namely panegyric, epic, didactic-sapiential, lyrical and elegiac, as we have just seen. But this is another topic, which takes us away from our theme.

Minstrel songs as a tool to exchange messages

Another interesting aspect concerning minstrels who appear in the Persian poems mentioned above is that they sometimes use

8. *Šādvard-e bozorg*, according to *Borhān-e Qāṭe'*, s.v. *Šādvard*, is the name of the seventh of the eight treasures of the Sassanid king Ḥosrow Parviz, and at the same time also a melody (*parde-i ast az musiqi*). This name is reminiscent of *Šādorvān morvārid*, the fourth of the thirty melodies (*lahn*) of Bārbad in Nezāmi, probably a variant.
9. *Ganġ-e bādāvar* (var. *Bādāvard*), is the name of the second treasure of Ḥosrow; in Nezāmi it is the first of the thirty tunes of Bārbad, in *Borhān-e Qāṭe'* it is the sixteenth, and it is also explained that it is one of the eight treasures of Ḥosrow (see above).
10. *Ganġ-e suḥt* is the third of the thirty melodies of Bārbad that we found in Nezāmi (see above).

⁵⁶ Mostowfi 2002: 123; see also Christensen 1936: 479.

⁵⁷ See al-Ġāḥiẓ al-Baṣrī, *al-Maḥāsin wa al-aḍḍād*, p. 359, cited by Reḡāzādeh Šāfaq 1924: 69. According to Eqbāl Aštīyāni 1984: 9-10, there are 72 Persian *naġm* ('melodies') of the Sassanid period; the author quotes the relevant names correctly.

⁵⁸ Although in different forms and prosody than in the Islamic era, which Šafi'i Kadkani 1991: 105-112, and 561-575, discusses at length.

song as a means of conveying others' messages, with more or less obvious metaphorical subtexts and allusive words. A famous allusive message is again expressed through Bārbad on the occasion of the death of Šabdiz, King Ḥosrow's beloved horse. The royal squire, fearing that he would incur the king's wrath if he informed him of the death of his horse, asks Bārbad to bring the sad news to the king through a song, which the minstrel will do with delicacy and his usual expertise.⁵⁹

In another famous episode of Neẓāmi's *HŠ*, the lovers talk animatedly with each other shaping a kind of love tussle in five different moments, that is, complaining and accusing each other of unfaithfulness, cruelty and the like. Now, these love dialogues or squabbles between King Ḥosrow and Princess Širin are taken up in the next episode, in King Ḥosrow's camp, where the love tussle is continued in four more places; and here is the interesting aspect: this is done not directly, but mediated through the singing of two minstrels. That is, Širin communicates indirectly with Ḥosrow through the songs of Nekisā⁶⁰, another famous minstrel, and Ḥosrow in turn promptly responds through the songs of Bārbad.⁶¹ Let us look at a few verses in the rhetorically elaborate and highly refined language of Neẓāmi:

ze koṅ-e parde goft ān hātef-e ḡān / k-az in moṭreb yeki rā su-ye
man ḥwān
be-d-in dargah nešān-aš sāz dar čang / ke tā bar suz-e man bar-
dārad āhang

⁵⁹ Ta'ālibī 1989: 446.

⁶⁰ Legend has it that Nekisā invented/created the royal songs (*ḥosrovānihā*), during the reign of Bahrām-e Gur, cf. Christensen 1936: 479. It is unlikely that this is the same Nekisā we find in the court of King Ḥosrow in Neẓāmi's romance poem, as Nekisā would have to have lived for more than 150 years to be in both the courts of King Bahrām V (reg. 420-438) and Ḥosrow II (reg. 590-628). However, the creative freedom of Persian poets often disregards or ignores historical data, fostering curious anachronisms (recall that Neẓāmi himself, in the prologue of the *Eqbāl-nām*, has the seven great philosophers of antiquity meet in the throne room of Alexander the Great: Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Apollonius, Thales, Porphyry, and Hermes". See Neẓāmi 1938: 85-92.

⁶¹ See *HŠ*: 359-379.

be ḥasb-e ḥāl-e man piš āvarad sâz / be-guyad ânče man guyam be-
d-u bâz
Nekisâ râ bar ân dar bord Šâpur / nešând-aš yek do gâm az pišgah
dur
k-az in ḥargâh-e maḥram dide bar-duz / samâ‘-e ḥargahi az vey
dar âmuz
navâ bar tarz-e in ḥargâh mi-zan / rah-i k-u guyad-at ân râh mi-zan
az in su Bârbad čon bolbol-e mast / ze digar su Nekisâ čang dar
dast [...]
Malek del dâde tâ moṭreb če sâzad / kodâmin râh o dastân râ
navâzad [...]
Nekisâ bar ṭariq-i k-ân šanam ḥwâst / foru goft in ġazal dar parde-
ye râst⁶²

From the corner of the tent said [to Šâpur] that inspiring muse
(Širin), / “Call one of the minstrels to come near me.
Accommodate him at this threshold with harp in hand / that he
may raise a melody over my ardor
And, befitting my mood, compose his own music / singing what I
shall tell him.”
Šâpur led Nekisâ to that threshold / seated him one two steps
from the place of honor
He said to him, “Don't even look at this intimate pavilion / the
music (samâ‘) for this pavilion let her inspire you!
Play a melody suitable for this pavilion / and play on the musical
mode she will ask you.”
On one side [stood] Bârbad like an inebriated nightingale / on
the other, Nekisâ with harp in hand [...]
The king [Hosrow] dictated from the heart for the minstrel
[Bârbad] to play / [telling him] in what musical manner and with
what melody to play [...]
Nekisâ as well as that idol (Širin) asked him / sang this ġazal on
the râst mode: [...]

What is the *râst* mode? Here we glimpse another interesting element, namely the fact that with each message mediated through one of Bârbad's or Nekisâ's songs, a precise musical mode is associated with each of them. Today's modal system is called *dastgâh* (the older word is *dastân*), but sometimes also *pard* as

⁶² HŠ: 358-359.

Nezāmi calls it, However, we also find the Arabic word *maqām*, i.e., system of modes on which compositions or improvisations are based.⁶³ This *rāst* mode (literally something like sincere/authentic or righteous/right) also turns out to be one of the 12 musical modes or *maqām* listed by several Arabic and Persian treatise writers including, for example, the famous Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Urmawī (13th cent.).⁶⁴ The other 7 modes that Nezāmi mentions, also traceable to traditional treatises, are: *Heṣāri* ('Of the fortress'), *Nowruz* ('Nowruz') and *Rāhovi* ('Melodic/Robust') performed by the minstrel Nekisā; and ' *Uššāq* ('Lovers'), ' *Erāq* ('Irak'), *Sepāhān* ('Iṣfahān') and *Zir-aṣkan* ('Languid') performed by the minstrel Bārbad.⁶⁵

Nezāmi, through the 8 songs performed by Bārbad and Nekisā, thus brings us the name of 8 modes of traditional Persian music at the height of the 12th-13th centuries.

⁶³ It is worthwhile here to quote the definition of 'modality' in the words of Maurizio Agamennone – also from a comparative perspective between Eastern and European music: "the Modality constitutes a complex system of norms and behaviors concerning the organization of pitches in time, according to specific, locally determined criteria. It constitutes, therefore, a mental and cultural paradigm for the organization of melody in the course of predominantly extemporaneous performative actions within cultures with a predominantly oral tradition [...] The Modality, as a general abstract system, is typical of all music types that do not turn out to be subordinate to the tonal harmony of the European matrix." Agamennone 1991: 148 (my transl.), cited by De Zorzi 2019: 21.

⁶⁴ Lucas 2019: 26.

⁶⁵ It is not easy to determine the precise names and number of Persian modal systems or those of Arabs or Turks because the criteria for their classification in the Middle East vary according to region, historical periods, theorists and treaty types, etc. Although the names of the modal systems of the different peoples of the Muslim areas (particularly Persians, Arabs and Turks) are very similar to each other, nevertheless, by virtue of the differences in the cultural substrate of the different regions, there is not always perfect coincidence. Nowadays, for example, Persian music is attributed 12 *dastgāh* or *maqām*, Turkish music 13, and Arabic music 14. But even these numbers cannot be relied upon with certainty. As for Persian music, modes (*dastgāh*) are often confused with melodic types (*gus̄*), so we find some disagreements among theorists; on this subject see During 2011.

But even before Neẓāmi and al-Urmawī⁶⁶, there is another Persian prose literary text, at the height of the 11th century, in which we find a list of names of musical modes. I refer to the *Qābus-nām* ('Book of Qābus') by Kay Kāvus ebn-e Eskandar, in which we read this passage:

Ĝegar-ḥwāre ma-bāš o hame navāhā-ye ḥosrovāni ma-zan va ma-guy ke šarḥ-e motrebi negāh hami dāram, noḥost bar parde-ye Rāst čiz-i be-guy, pas bar rasm-e har parde-i čun parde-ye Bāda va parde-ye 'Erāq va parde-ye 'Uššāq va parde-ye Zir-afgand va parde-ye Bu Salik va parde-ye Sepāhān va parde-ye Navā va parde-ye Goḏāšta va parde-ye Rāhawi [...]⁶⁷

Don't distress yourself by always playing and singing the Regal Melodies (navāhā-ye ḥosrovāni), and don't say "I abide by the rules of minstrels!" Sing [something] first on the Authentic mode (Rāst), then, according to custom, on all [the other] modes, as for example, on that of Wine (Bāda) [should be Māda]⁶⁸, in the 'Erāqi (Irāq), in that of the Lovers ('Uššāq), in the Languid (Zir-afgand), in that of Bu Salik (Bu Salik), in that of Işfahān (Sepāhān), in the Sound (Nawā), in the Rest (Goḏāšta) and in the Robust (Rāhawi) [...]

This is a very valuable account, given the relative antiquity of the source, in that it informs us of the existence of the so-called "Royal Melodies/Modes" (*navāhā-ye ḥosrovāni*) of pre-Islamic Iranian origin, of which we also find traces in other texts preceding this work by Kay Kāvus ebn-e Eskandar.⁶⁹ The crucial aspect is that the author here seems to clearly distinguish these Iranian "royal melodies" from those in vogue in the more recent Islamic tradition, citing as we have just seen in sequence the names of 10 musical modes.

⁶⁶ Regarding the names of musical modes in vogue in the Islamic Middle Ages, particularly in the "Systematic School" of al-Urmawī, we find many correspondences with the names we have seen in Neẓāmi (see also Lucas 2019: 27).

⁶⁷ Kay Kāvūs ibn Iskandar 1992: 196.

⁶⁸ See *Ibidem*, where we find in footnote 5 the variant *mād* ('female') which seems more correct to us. Cf. Purjavādi 1995: 327, which refers to Manučehri's *Divān* as does also Dehḥodā 2006, s.v. *Māde*.

⁶⁹ See for example in Ferdowsi's *Book of Kings*, which we mentioned in footnote 55.

One final observation: Neẓāmi adopts terms relating to the modal system in use in the Islamic period contemporaneously with him, whereas we know that the story of his poem is set entirely in the pre-Islamic era. This is a conspicuous anachronism, although it should be noted that, significantly, many of the names of these *maqām* and their ramifications are in the Persian language, which may lead us to speculate that the origins of a good part of these melodies are Iranian. But this is another topic that requires more historical and musicological expertise than I possess, and goes beyond the scope of this paper.

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Sindhi Sufis, Sheedis and Saints: Shaping Cultural Identity through Music

Mette Rudvin
(University of Palermo)

Music may be the only key that can unlock their ancestry¹

Abstract

This chapter discusses musical traditions in the south-eastern province of Sindh in Pakistan, focussing on the Sufi and the Sheedi communities. Historically a through road for international commerce and cultural exchange, Sindh has a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Subsequent to the Muslim conquest of Sindh in 711, Sufi travellers and missionaries brought with them a legacy of devotional music and poetry that has left a profound impact on Sindhi cultural identity. The chapter sheds light on the Sufi legacy in Sindh, suggesting also that Sufism promotes moderate Islam and thus fulfils a deradicalizing function. The chapter subsequently focuses on the Sheedi community, descendants of the Arab-African slave-trade. The Sheedis, some of whom are Sufis, are known for their lively singing and dancing traditions, reflecting the strong links to their African ancestry. For the Sheedis, music is also a source of employment that has helped forge a new hybrid cultural identity by allowing them to maintain an ancestral continuity to Africa and at the same time affirming an independent regional Pakistani identity in the face of much discrimination. Music is thus instrumental in 'reinventing' a cultural and ethnic identity. The chapter illustrates how both Sufi and Sheedi musical traditions represent the Sindhi cultural landscape through devotional song, dance and shrine-veneration.

Keywords

Sheedi, Sufi music, cultural identity, migration, re-inventing tradition

¹ Shekhawat 2012: 5, referring to the Sheedi people.

1. *Introduction. The 'gateway to Islam': Sindh at the crossroads of civilizations*

The present chapter describes the lively musical traditions in the south-eastern province of Sindh in present-day Pakistan, beginning with a brief excursus into its eclectic and variegated history. Dominated, ruled, conquered and settled by a string of overlapping civilizations and dynasties of different faiths, practices and languages through the centuries, it has inherited a rich cultural legacy (see e.g. Anjun 2024, Ahmed 1989). Its geographical location – between north-east Africa, the Arabian peninsula and the Indian sub-continent – rendered it easily accessible to both trade and conquest. Subsequent to the Muslim conquest in 711, after which Sindh became commonly known as the 'gateway to Islam', Sufi travellers and missionaries brought with them a rich heritage of devotional music and poetry that has left a profound impact on Sindhi cultural identity². Today, Sufi musical traditions are practised widely in Sindh and saints are venerated at the many shrines scattered throughout the region as sites of devotion as well as entertainment.

The Sheedi community³, some of whom follow Sufi practice⁴, clearly have very different roots compared to the early Sufis in that

² Anjun's enlightening (2024) study discusses religious fluidity between Islam and Hinduism in the early Islamic period and how Sufism fit well into, and reciprocally impacted, the evolution of medieval Islam in Sindh.

³ The origin of the word "Sheedi" is not entirely clear. Ahmed (1989) suggests that it could be a mispronunciation of the Arabic word 'sayedi' - 'master' - but "instead of being an honorific, it actually represents mockery of Black Slaves". Albinia also provides a number of interesting theories about the origin of the term (Albinia 2008: 60).

⁴ Some scholars, such as Shekhawat 2012 and Busdiecker 2018, note that the Siddis and some Sindhi Sheedis are also Sufi. Indeed, the Sheedi patron saint Mangho Pir was a Muslim Sufi saint, and the trance-like dances at the annual festival are also reminiscent of Sufi traditions. Peter-Bhagtaney (2018), in conversation with Ballu Qambrani, has an interesting observation on how Sufism evolved in this community towards more religiously-inspired practices as a result of accusations of impiety: "Since Sheedi community members at large follow a strand reminiscent of the Sufi school of thought in Islam, Sufiana text is also part

they descend from African slaves, merchants and soldiers who arrived from Africa and the Arabian peninsula to modern-day India and Pakistan. Today, Sheedis are found predominantly in southern Sindh, especially in the Lyari district of the southern metropolis Karachi, as well as in the neighbouring province of Balochistan (see Badalkhan in this volume). Prior to and following the Arab conquest *Siddis* (they are known as *Siddis* in India) also settled in many parts of what is today India, and many migrated there after Partition in 1947. Today, this eclectic Indo-African population and their descendants, Péquignot (2020) notes, “have occupied various social positions throughout Indian history, and the ancestral routes of contemporary Siddis can be very distinct. Siddi communities today live in diverse areas, speak different languages and practice various religions.”

For centuries Sheedis have been professional musicians, often performing at weddings where they are paid to dance and sing. Numerous scholars have observed how their music reflects and maintains strong links to their African ancestry, a source of pride and identity for Sheedis today. Sheedi music maintains and affirms its African heritage intrinsically through Swahili words, technical musical features and instruments that likely stem from Africa. The African connection has also captured the imagination of numerous travel writers, musicians, ethnographers and journalists.

For the Sheedis, music - songs and dance - embodies an emotional function as well as an identitarian one. The identitarian function is played out annually at one of the hallmarks of Sheedi

of the selection of music for events. In recent years, however, cultural *sehra* songs have mostly been replaced with spiritual *kalam*; the former are folk songs sung primarily at festivities in Sindh and the latter is the recitation of text or poetry of spiritual nature. For Ballu Qambrani, 51, this evolution has occurred in the light of accusations rendering even self-identifying Muslim members of the community as non-believers. Qambrani, like many others of his community, was forced to relocate to Badin from Karachi, with his wife and children. “After 2010, social attitudes changed for the worse,” he says. “We were driven out of our home in Manghopir by militant groups,” he recalls, “but there was nothing we could do.” *And while displaced geography is not a new phenomenon for the Sheedis, being labelled infidels is. Hence to protect themselves, Sheedi folk musicians decided to reemphasise their religious beliefs through their profession.* “You will hear Ya Ali cries at a Sheedi Mela more than anywhere else,” Qambrani points out.” (emphasis added)

devotional activities, the ‘Mela’ festival at the shrine of the Sufi saint Mangho Pir. Maintaining and affirming their African heritage through the centuries has helped to build a syncretic Sheedi-Sindhi identity enabling them to differentiate themselves from mainstream Sindhi culture, creating and affirming (in the face of much discrimination) a distinct group identity. Much has been written about music as an expression of lament in diasporas across the world, narrating the collective suffering of a people in exile through their respective musical traditions. Where music can cathartically express the grief of exile, representing ancestral memory, it can equally be the source of festivity.

Comprehensively, the chapter aims to show how devotion, spirituality and cultural identity are expressed concomitantly through both Sufi and Sheedi musical traditions in Sindh. Although they have very different historical roots – indeed almost antithetical – they share a similar joyful, vibrant, devotional *telos* that characterizes the cultural landscape of Sindh.

2. From the Indus Valley civilization to modern-day Sufism: Sindh’s thriving cultural and musical landscape

2.1 Religious fluidity and a versatile historical legacy in ancient Sindh

Lapped by the Arabian Sea in the south and bordering India’s Rajasthan and Gujerat provinces in the East, Sindh is equally home to the modern metropolis of Karachi and to the ancient Indus Valley civilization, its magnificent remains housed in the ancient city-ruins of Mohenjodaro⁵. As mentioned, a gateway from the Middle East and the Persian Empire to the Indian sub-continent from ancient times, it was a busy trading post with ports on the Arabian Sea, a stone’s throw from Saudi Arabia and Oman. Just a little further along we find Yemen, Eritrea and Somalia and the strategic Gulf of Aden bearing into the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Given its strategic location, Sindh was home to many

⁵ Ahmed mentions evidence of an early African connection with the Indus Valley civilization discernible through African features in early figurines (Ahmed 1989).

thriving civilizations, primarily along the Indus River and its fertile delta; these civilizations included Indo-Aryan tribes, the Hindu Vedic and Buddhist civilizations, Persian Empires, the powerful Indian Mauryan Empire, the Graeco-Indian Hellenistic reign spanning modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, to a succession of Iranic nomadic people. This vibrant succession of peoples and ethnicities reflects a string of religious identities, from the pre-Islamic period with its Hindu and Buddhist populations to the approaching dominance of Islam.⁶

Pre-Muslim Sindh hosted both Hindus and Buddhists (see Anjun 2024), but Derryl Maclean (1989) notes how scholarship on pre-Islamic Sindh is difficult to assess accurately because “It generally is conceded that a large and important portion of the population of Sind at the time of the Arab conquest was Buddhist. This conclusion has been based primarily on a reading of the various forms of the words *budd* and *sumanīyah* which occur in Muslim sources.” (Maclean 1989: 1) On the Arab conquest he notes the following: “two antagonistic perspectives have emerged ... (1) the early British administrator-historian and Indian nationalist view that both the conquest and conversion took place either solely or primarily by the sword; (2) the Indian Muslim modernist and Pakistani nationalist view that the conquest was largely, and conversion wholly, peaceful.” (Maclean 1989: 22)

The French scholar Michel Boivin also observes that it is difficult to accurately assess the ethno-religious context of pre-Islamic Sindh:

Historical sources show that before the arrival of the Muslims in 711, there was no flourishing Hindu civilisation. A Brahmin named Chach had usurped power from a Buddhist dynasty, and Buddhists demographically dominated the province. As for the conversion of the population to Islam, it occurred over the long

⁶ Academic sources include Boivin 2023, Levesque 2016, Schimmel 1986 and Hussain 2022. The government of Sindh provides a useful summary of its history on their website: <https://www.sindh.gov.pk/history>. A reliable non-academic source by Muhammed Ali Shaikh that provides a summary of Sindhi history is <https://www.dawn.com/news/1673480> published in 2022 in the English-language national newspaper of Pakistan, *Dawn*.

term, through the proselytizing activity of the Ismailis and then the Sufis. Massacres of populations did indeed take place, but they concerned both Hindus and Muslims considered as heretics. Later historical sources do not allow us to know the development of Hindus before the arrival of the British. Hinduism as we know it today was built during the colonial period, through an interaction between the colonial power and the Hindu Sindh elites. However, the British observe that the Hinduism practiced in Sindh contains many specificities (Boivin 2023: 17).

Along with large parts of the Indian subcontinent, Sindh fell under Islamic rule subsequent to the Muslim conquest by Arab military commander Muhammed ibn al-Qāsim al-Thaqafī in the early years of the 8th century. It is easy to see how Sindh has earned its moniker as the ‘gateway to Islam’. Muhammad Huzaifa Nizam writes about the exchange of knowledge and skills between the inhabitants of the Indus Valley⁷:

As Islam spread across South Asia in the early 8th century, the Indus Valley emerged as a region which had plenty to offer to the Muslim world. The conquest of Sindh opened a gateway of knowledge between the expanding Muslim empire and the Indus Valley, resulting in a great exchange of intellectual ideas, knowledge, practices and practitioners.

Sindh saw a succession of various Islamic dynasties, one of the last being the powerful Moghul dynasty that was established in 1591, co-existing with British (unofficial and later official) rule (see footnote 7). Ahmed (1989) observes that the strong connection between Sindh and Africa after the Muslim conquest, also due to the trade between Sindh and the Persian Gulf states, led to a strong African presence there. The penultimate rulers of Sindh, the Kalhoras, were overthrown by the Talpur Baloch, who ruled over Sindh from 1783 to 1843 (Ahmed 1989). In 1843, under the British general Charles Napier, the British invaded and annexed Sindh, becoming the East India Company’s first territorial

⁷ “How the Indus Valley Fed Islam’s Golden Age” in *Dawn*, Jan 15th, 2023.

possession⁸. In August 1947, at the time of independence from Britain and partition from India, Sindh ultimately became an autonomous province in the newly formed Muslim country of Pakistan. It comes as no surprise therefore that Sindhi culture - be it religious, artistic, musical or poetic - reflects the plethora of variegated dominions that through the millennia accompanied the great Indus Valley civilization. Unsurprisingly, modern-day Sindh hosts an assorted ethnic composition. Apart from the Muslim, Hindu and Christian Sindhi populations, we find many 'tribal' peoples representing a broad range of ethnicities and languages. As the renowned scholar of Sufism Annemarie Schimmel observes in her study on the literature of Sindh (Schimmel 1974: 2):

Sindhi literature bears the stamp of the various groups of people who settled in the country during the thousands of years that the valley of the Indus constituted one of the great centres of civilisation. The Jats and the Summas, the Laks and the Pathans, the Baloch and their various tribes, the numerous descendants of Arab families, like the Quraishi, Rizawis, Ansaris, headed by the Sayyids, who claim descent from the Prophet, together with families of Persian and Turkish stock. They all played a role in the development of the local culture and literature.

2.2 Sufism in Sindh: A pluralist legacy as a counterweight to extremist ideology

Sufism spread into the Indian subcontinent largely through Sindh⁹. By the 11th century Sufism had already spread, also into Africa, assimilating with other indigenous religions¹⁰. Some

⁸ See https://historica.fandom.com/wiki/Talpur_dynasty.

⁹ On Sufism in Sindh see Levesque 2016: 212-214 and 214-218 particularly on Sindh regional identity-building where Sufi identity becomes part of the identity-building process.

¹⁰ In Sindh, the Chishti order (founded by Abu Ishaq Shami and promulgated by Moheen al-Din Chisti) laid strong roots and became prevalent in the Indian subcontinent, merging with other Sufi orders, and is still a strong presence today, promoting the *Qawwali* musical tradition. (See <https://sufischool.org/orders/chishti.html>.)

scholars have suggested that because of its more open nature, Sufism facilitated assimilation into the region it inhabited “naturally bringing many local musicians into its fold.”¹¹ Possibly due to an intertwining of the Hindu and Buddhist cultures and the incoming religion of Islam, the Muslim conquest of Sindh brought, in its wake, many Sufi scholars and missionaries and consequently a profusion of saints and saints’ shrines (see Levesque 2016). Interestingly, although Sufism is known as a branch of Islam, it was embraced by some of the Hindu population as a syncretic mix of Hinduism and certain mystical and ascetic aspects of Islam; thus, a community of Hindu Sufis developed, many of whom left for India during and after Partition in 1947.¹²

Some scholars have claimed that the relatively peaceful Hindu-Muslim relations in Sindh during Partition - less tense than in other parts of the Indian sub-continent - could be attributed in part to a tolerant Sufi-influenced culture¹³. Levesque observes that during Partition Sindh was not forcibly divided by the British rulers, as the province of Punjab was, and was thus able to avoid some of the worst bloodshed (see also Anjun 2024). Although Sufism undoubtedly presents a moderate face of Islam, the narrative of peaceful relations in the Sindh area being a result of the impact of Sufism has nonetheless been debated (see Levesque 2016 and Hussain 2022). Hussain provides a counter-reading to the narrative of a tolerant Sindh stemming from its interfaith Sufi past; his interpretation is seen through a class-, caste- and colonial perspective:

That narrative, as it was developed under the influence of colonial policies, continues to shape the progressive politics in Sindh. This mythical flourishing of the progressive narrative is problematic in that it calls upon the past to gloss over the present-day inequalities, such as caste discrimination, that predated the colonial period (Hussain 2022: 2).

¹¹ <https://ragatip.com/what-is-Sufism-why-is-music-so-important-to-the-Sufis/>

¹² See Anjun 2024, Levesque 2016: 217 and especially Boivin 2023.

¹³ See Boivin 2015; Levesque 214-217, 222-224, 227.

Given Sufism's tendency towards openness and the explicit call to peaceful relations between peoples (see Anjun 2024), as well as Sindh's pluralistic history, it is thus unsurprising that Sufism took hold in Sindh. At least until Pakistani and international geo-politics led to a phase of increased radicalization in the 1980's, Sindh was both musically and culturally quite eclectic. Whether we choose to follow the more romantic, nationalistic narrative of an intrinsically tolerant Sufism as being the hallmark of Sindhi identity, or a narrative based more on *realpolitik*, there is no doubt that Sufism has had and continues to have a profound Sindh. Which leads to the question that many scholars have proposed: could Sufism function as a bulwark against radical Islam?

More than other forms of Islam, Sufism has appealed to many people in the West. Advocating for peaceful relations between peoples (Anjun 2024)¹⁴, Sufism arguably embodies a more meditative and egalitarian presentation, suggesting that *all* human beings possess a divine element. For similar reasons, Sufism has not always been welcomed by mainstream Islamic movements partly because it overlaps with hugely popular heterodox traditional expressions, such as shrine worship, thus representing a 'rival' to orthodox Islam. Sufism has also been less intransigent on certain social behavioural codes such as alcohol consumption and the segregation and purdah of women (see Anjun 2024). Scholars such as Anjun have highlighted how Sufism, with its values of harmony and tolerance that "were an integral part of the once-lived culture of Sindh", should be foregrounded (Anjun 2024: 84). An active re-imagining or re-claiming of a past state of being, Anjun argues, could help "minimize extremist viewpoints". With regard to Pakistan, she suggests adopting an active mitigation policy, introducing changes such as "communal values of harmony and tolerance in curricula [that] can help de-radicalize the youth and disengage the communities at large from espousing radical views", being

¹⁴ It also embodies the more private aspect of religion: "Throughout the Islamic world, orthodox Islam has been associated with political authority while Sufism has been associated with the personal, private side of worship" (Sakata 1997: 171).

careful not to re-iterate certain negative traditions practiced by followers of Sufism in Pakistan “that seek to perpetuate oppression and injustice in society” such as “practices and traditions associated with the institution of *sajjadah-nashini* or the hereditary custodianship of Sufi shrines, marking the entire region’s sacred geography.”¹⁵

2.3 “Sufi Music”: *Transcendental functions of music, shrines and dance*

Although some past and contemporary Islamic scholars and imams are hostile to music, music is nevertheless embedded in Islamic culture in subtle ways, such as the call to prayer or the singing/chanting of Quranic verses.¹⁶ It has been argued that the significance of music and dance are tied to their functions rather than solely to their sound or movement: “Therefore, the chanting of the Quran may be musical, but is not perceived as ‘music’. The movements of the Sufi in ecstasy are not dance. ‘Those who call it “dancing” are utterly wrong’ (Hujwiri 1911: 416)” (Sakata, 1997:

¹⁵ “Most hostile displays of opposition against Sufi institutions are led by groups of orthodox Muslims loosely identified as ‘fundamentalists’. More subtle and covert acts of opposition are accomplished by the State through the medium of politics and governmental policies.” (Sakata 1997: 170). Sakata describes how a group of protestors managed to stop one of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan’s performances in 1992, probably by fundamentalists who objected to the secularization of *qawwali*. Another incident relates to a Chisti *qawwal* “who was shot dead in the middle of a *sama*” in 1995, again probably by a fundamentalist deeply offended by the extreme exaltation of Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, regarded by Sufis as “the transmitter of esoteric wisdom passed on to him from the Prophet” (Sakata 1997: 170). Another incident, in Balochistan, involved a rocket launched towards a *Zikri* pilgrim site, because the *Zikri* were not considered to be Muslims (Sakata 1997: 170-171).

¹⁶ Other monotheistic religions also have restrictions on music. In some heterodox interpretations of the Christian tradition, such as the Amish, access to secular music is highly restricted. In early Jewish history there were also restrictions on the use of religious and non-religious music: particular forms of music were incorporated into religious ceremonies with deep spiritual meaning akin to prayer and connection with the divine “The prophets of ancient Israel surrounded themselves with music, using its power to help them enter an ecstatic mindset” (Weisenberg 2019). Some Jewish communities, such as the ancient Yemenite Jewish community, have maintained such connections to ancient musical traditions.

165). Sakata quotes the 13th century saint Abu Hafs Suhrawardi (via the renowned scholar Anne Marie Schimmel 1975): “Music does not give rise, in the heart, to anything which is not already there: so he whose inner self is attached to anything else than God is stirred by music to sensual desire, but the one who is inwardly attached to the love of God is moved, by hearing music, to do His will.” Dancing, very different from ‘worldly’ dancing, is thus seen as a form of movement that somehow overtakes the dancer in spiritual ecstasy; a form of whirling or circling or - for the Mevlevi Sufis of Turkey - ‘turning’; see also the *dhamal* dance in Pakistan (Sakata 1997: 168).

The intensely physical, rhythmic nature of music fosters “elevated states of consciousness” typical of the Sufi tradition with its “looping, rhythmic hypnotism, designed to induce trance-like states where believers can follow internal routes to self-knowledge. ... Music is so vital to this regard that some Sufis consider it to be *wajib* (required practice) rather than just *halal* (permissible)” intended to make the listeners more receptive to understanding the message of the songs (Sakata 1997: 167). Its devotional nature enshrines an entry-way into a transcendental bond with the divine, and the audience may “even rise to move about in a kind of spiritual or ecstatic dance.” (Sakata 1997). God is invoked and worshipped through mass chanting of *Dhikr-e-Qalbi* “invoking God within the beat of the heart”¹⁷. The popular collective ritual dance *dhamāl* performed in a trance-like state of mystical devotion at Sufi shrines by both Muslims and Hindus, in Sindh and in the Punjab, is described by Frembgen (2012b). Thus, for Sufis, poetry, music and dance are a dialogue, one could say a ‘love-language’ between Man and God, a physical embodiment of the individual’s worship of the divine but also of an inner spiritual search.

The traditional practice of chanting among Sufi practitioners and saints (see De Zorzi in this volume) lent itself to the evolution of music as a devotional practice. Keeping in mind the caveat discussed in the Introduction that a generalized term like ‘Sufi music’ is in one sense a misnomer, the music performed by Sufi

¹⁷ <https://ragatip.com/what-is-Sufism-why-is-music-so-important-to-the-Sufis/>

saints and practitioners spread throughout the Indian subcontinent. In the Pakistani Sufi tradition, the veneration of saints had led to the proliferation of shrines hosting poetic, musical and dance performances.¹⁸ The devotional musical practices - repetitive and 'chant'-like - became popularized throughout the Indian subcontinent in large part through the Sufi musician and poet Amir Khusrao (1253-1325) by way of a musical format that came to be known as "qawwali".¹⁹ In modern times, Sufi music from Sindh achieved international stardom through the superb performances of the *qawwali* singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (1948-1997) who stemmed from an old line of Sindhi *qawwali* musicians. Khan performed at innumerable local events but also on international stages alongside celebrity Western musicians such as Peter Gabriel and at several WOMAD festivals (World of Music and Dance).²⁰

3. *The Sheedi people in Sindh*

Where the Symposium wished to shine a light on a country that has received little positive public attention, namely Pakistan, this chapter seeks to shine a light on a small community that settled

¹⁸ On the subject of saints and shrines, Sakata notes that "A typical traditional place of performance is at the shrine of a Muslim saint. Here, sitting on the ground and facing the tomb of the saint, the musicians perform for the saint, his representatives, his devotees and other Sufis. The audience listens intently to the songs, and when one is affected emotionally by its message, he may suddenly raise his arms, stand, or even rise to move about in a kind of spiritual or ecstatic dance." (Sakata 2024)

¹⁹ See Sakata's (1994) excellent, exhaustive account of Qawwali music, in particular the music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. The term qawwali comes from the Arabic 'qaul', to 'speak/say', referring to expressing Sufi poetry through music, having as its foundation love as the relationship between Man and God (Sakata 1997: 167).

²⁰ "Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Womad 1985: the qawwali star invokes rapture" published in 1985 in *The Guardian*. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jul/15/iconic-festival-sets-nusrat-fateh-ali-khan-womad-1985>. Many of his performances are available on YouTube, for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUpG4jCdqe4>.

Despite his international fame and performances worldwide, Nusrat Khan continued to perform at local Sufi shrines (see Sakata 1994 and 2024).

- over several centuries - in lower Sindh²¹ and to a lesser extent in Balochistan, in the Makran area²². Counting roughly 250,000 people²³ – most being Muslims, some Hindus and a few Christians – the Sheedi people have traditionally been overlooked in the broader cultural – and musical – debate²⁴. Like the other peoples in Sindh and in the other provinces of modern-day Pakistan, the Sheedi culture also reflects a succession of military, cultural and religious conquests.

In her excellent portrayal of Sheedi culture acquired through first-hand experience and travels in the area, the English historian Alice Albinia observes that the specific origins of the Sheedi people are not well known, nor has their culture been the object of rigorous study; it should be kept in mind that, sadly, much of the knowledge about the Sheedi population was lost to history before scholarship began to record demographic movement in that area (Albinia 2008: 52ff). Although Sheedi history is little known, their musical traditions are gaining recognition in artistic circles: “While the African roots of the *magarman* dance, now a centrepiece of Pakistan’s dance troupes performing abroad, are widely recognized, little has been written about the history and sociology of the people who have continued this and many other African traditions” (Ahmed 1989: 2).

3.1 *Sheedis: Descendants of Arab-African commerce, military conquest and slave trade*

Being a commercial and cultural gateway between the Middle East, the African continent and the Indian sub-continent, Sindh was strategically placed to profit from the age-old slave trade that

²¹ Some also settled in the Punjab and a few in the northern province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Ahmed 1989). The Sheedis in Sindh are Sindhi speakers.

²² See Badalkhan 2007: 276ff for an excellent account of Afro-Pakistani origins and musical traditions in Balochistan; see also Ahmed 1989.

²³ This estimate varies enormously from tens of thousands to a quarter of a million. Anon. 2020a suggests 150,000.

²⁴ Many scholars have written about the discrimination against the Sheedi population, see e.g. Jackson 2023, Ahmed 1989, Peter-Bhagtaney 2018, Albinia 2008 and Anon. 2020a.

flourished in the Indus Valley civilization trading with Mesopotamia and Africa²⁵. Subsequent to the Islamic conquest, many soldiers and servants of African descent also arrived in Sindh, stayed on and intermarried. Thus, from the 13th to the 18th centuries there was a large presence of slaves, soldiers and commanders of African descent in India (Ahmed 1989). Through the Islamic conquests, the slave trade continued to spread and became an important part of Islamic culture in this area. Distinguishable for their dark skin-colour and African facial and hair features, the Sheedis are descendants of these slaves and of African merchants and soldiers who came to the Indian sub-continent through trade and military expansion; most eventually converted to Islam²⁶. Most likely, Albinia observes, most wealthy families had male and female slaves. Although slavery was banned by the British in 1843, almost exactly a century before India and Pakistan gained independence in 1947, it still persisted (Albinia 2008: 59 and Ahmed 1989). Paradoxically, although the British abolished slavery, Africans were discriminated by the British rulers and “it is possible that one of the effects of a hundred years of British rule was the decline in status of black people in India.”²⁷

²⁵ Jackson cites academics suggesting that trade and migration began already in the first century CE (Jackson 2023: 217).

According to Albinia many Muslim rulers during the Moghul dynasty considered African slaves more loyal than indigenous servants and thus encouraged the slave-trade (Albinia 2008: 57).

²⁶ See Badalkhan 2007: 276ff, Jackson 2023, Ahmed 1989, Albinia 2008, Anon. 2020a, Busdiecker 2018, Hafsa 2012. Shekawat reports that the Indian Siddis “are mainly Sufi Muslims, although some are Hindus and some Roman Catholic Christians. ... They worship Baba Gaur, an Abyssinian saint, whose tomb is on a hill above Ratanpur carnelian mines in Western Rajpipla Gujerat.” (Shekawat 2012: 5).

Many Sheedis claim that they can trace their ancestry directly to a companion of the Prophet Muhammed, namely Hazrat Bilal ibn Rabah, also known as Bilal Habshi, an Ethiopian slave and apparently the first male convert to Islam, who received special honours by the prophet. This claim “has furnished them with an intrinsic pride and has helped build their specific communitarian identity” (Albinia 2008).

²⁷ Albinia 2008: 60; see also Mahmood 2018 reporting that black people were discriminated.

Yet another contradiction follows, in the words of a renowned Sheedi community member by the name of Mussafir:

the time of 'freedom' was not 1947 but 1843 - when the British took over. It was a happy time, for Sheedis were so grateful for their liberty that they worked with enthusiasm, formed vigorous social networks, and even though they had few possessions, were always 'dancing and laughing' (contrary to Richard Burton's characterization of emancipation being 'to them a real evil'). Because of their 'joyous nature', they were called 'Sheedi Badshah' by other Sindhis. Though meaning literally, 'Sheedi is King', for Mussafir it described the Sheedi people's elation in their freedom: "Most of the rich men observed their joyful nature with jealousy, because now they could not force them to work by threatening them with swords or sticks." (Albinia 2008: 77)

3.2 From African slavery to a Sheedi community with an independent ethno-regional identity

Badalkhan (2007: 279ff) shows how Afro-Musical traditions in Balochistan on the neighbouring Makran coast (also descendants of African slaves brought to present-day Pakistan) represent a tangible continuity from an ancestral African heritage to a contemporary regional and cultural identity. It is the same with the Sheedis in Sindh. A journalist's first-hand account published in the English-language national newspaper *Dawn* is worth quoting in full:

The descendants of Africans who have been arriving on the shores of the subcontinent for centuries, the Sheedis rose to lofty positions as generals and leaders during the Mughal Empire, which ruled swathes of South Asia. But their history has been scantily written, making it difficult if not impossible for Sheedis — including even those like Akbar whose ancestors arrived in Pakistan relatively recently — to trace their antecedents. "I came to know in the 1960s that my grandfather belonged to Zanzibar, and we contacted the Tanzania embassy to find our extended family," Akbar told AFP outside his home in Karachi. We don't subscribe to the theories that someone brought us as slaves to this region because Sheedis as a nation have never been slaves," argues

Yaqoob Qanbarani, the chairman of Pakistan Sheedi Ittehad, a community group”- Others say the community's origins can be traced back to the genesis of Islam, claiming a shared lineage with Bilal — one of Prophet Mohammad's closest companions.²⁸

To foster the growth and affirmation of a modern Sheedi identity, some Sheedis feel that it is important to acknowledge a slave past, but to focus on the most prestigious slave, namely Bilal Habshi (see footnote 26). Mindful of their shared African ethnic heritage and a shared cultural-musical heritage, there are many tangible and intangible artefacts²⁹ that affirm Sheedi identity and many of these are centred around music. The *Mela*, the annual music festival that will be described in detail below, is an important identity marker that largely builds on the connection with Africa. The same *Dawn* journalist tells us how, for many Sheedis, this festival represents “the most potent symbol of their shared African past, as they struggle to uncover the trail that led their ancestors to Pakistan.” (Anon. 2018). As Hafsa (2012) also says:

The Mela basically, serves as an evidence of the fact that the Sheedi people in Pakistan have unitedly maintained – that although, a lapse of centuries has occurred since their ancestors first settled or came here, they have admirably and firmly preserved their own distinct and vibrant culture, customs, mores, social values, thus every element that constitutes one’s identity.

3.3 *Being outsiders. Sheedi identity expressed through music: Professional singers and entertainers*

Because of their ancestry and features that differ from most of the peoples inhabiting the Indian subcontinent, Sheedis have been subject to discrimination and marginalization through the centuries, frequently referred to as *jungli* (‘wild’) and *Jahili* (‘ignorant’) (Albinia 2008: 53). Albinia describes how - still today

²⁸ Anon. April 6, 2018 “The crocodile shrine of Mangho Pir and its long-forgotten African past”.

²⁹ See Anjun 2024 on tangible and intangible culture.

- they usually have low-status jobs and fewer professional opportunities than other Sindhis, and many find it difficult to afford education for their children. Although many Sheedis have become famous musicians or athletes (especially footballers and boxers), they have not held typically powerful positions such as politicians, landlords, clerics or military service (Albinia 2008: 53).

One of the most influential proponents of Sheedi identity who strove to overturn a widespread ‘happy-go-lucky musician’ stereotype, Mussafir Muhammed Siddiq is known as an architect of Sheedi identity. He notes how the history of Afro-Americans had a big influence on Mussafir (Albinia 2008: 73ff), and makes a poignant comparison between American slaves and the Sheedi people: “Sheedis in Pakistan, [Mussafir] pointed out, should be grateful: ‘it is a fact that the cruelty and hatred which was suffered by the Sheedi slaves of America, was not endured by Sheedis in Sindh’” (Albinia 2008: 74).

Although, sadly, Sheedi musical traditions may be on the wane,³⁰ it is still a strong identity-marker. Like the Indian Siddis of whom it has been said that “[m]usic may be the only key that can unlock their ancestry” (Shekhawat 2012: 5), music could be seen as a counterweight to discrimination for Pakistani Sheedis who have forged much of their identity on performing music- and entertainment-related tasks: “Sheedis are renowned in Sindh as musicians, wrestlers and dancers; they also make a trade as comics or ‘joke-masters’ at weddings.”³¹ In an interview with Sheedi women performers, Peter-Bhagtaney (2018) poignantly relates how Sheedi women take on employment as singers and dancers at wedding parties to help their families financially. Although this brings a much-needed income to the families, professional singing and dancing has generally been a low-prestige profession

³⁰ It is difficult to know for how much longer the Sheedis will be able to maintain their unique musical traditions. Speaking of the annual Mela, Mahmood observes: “*They no longer know why it is held there, they are simply following in the steps and repeating the words of their ancestors.*” (Mahmood 2018, emphasis added)

³¹ Albinia 2008: 75, see also Jackson 2023, Ahmed 1989, Anon. 2020a, Peter-Bhagtaney 2018.

in the Indian sub-continent, and Sheedi women today feel this stigma keenly.³²

3.4 *The African connection: Music as a repository of identity and loss*

Human mobility in the form of migration is an effective channel for the exchange, propagation and renewal of cultural traditions, and migration recursively mirrors “the movement of people from place to place and country to country. Musical styles have been influenced by migration, with communities telling their migration stories through music”.³³ Such migrations can be found in the blues and gospel music of the slave plantations in the 17th-18th century USA, the Flamenco music of the Gypsies in Andalusian Spain, the Portuguese Fado, Afro-American negro spirituals, jazz, Irish folk songs and the innumerable Jewish diasporas around large parts of the world.³⁴ Music is indeed a

³² Albinia describes a community member who encouraged the Sheedis to seek other professional avenues: “Bazmi felt that this was demeaning – he wanted Sheedis to be known for more than just sport or entertainment – and so he held a meeting at which he urged them not to work as servants in other people’s houses, not to ‘eat without invitation to weddings’ (that is, not to go as hired dancers, or to queue up for the free food), and to educate their children.” (Albinia 2008: 75-76)

³³ Anon. 2002b. See “Laments and Longing”; for an interesting account see Blog, *Europeana Foundation*.

³⁴ Francesco Latoro’s extraordinary analysis and collection of written and audio recordings of music developed in captivity, created clandestinely during WWII in ghettos (especially the Warsaw ghetto), concentration camps and work camps shows how music can serve to preserve the human spirit in times of unimaginable suffering, creating a cultural and musical bond between the horror of the camps and ghettos and what eventually became, for some, a better future. Sometimes it was the children who survived and lived to pass on the music, based only upon oral memory. Latoro’s examples are primarily Jewish, but the “composers were Jews, Christians, Sintis, Romas and other Romani peoples, Basques, Sufis, Quakers, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Communists, disabled people, homosexuals, as well as civilian and military prisoners.” Here are some of the most poignant examples from Latoro (2024): “The music written, created and experienced in the camps passed along sometimes unthinkable channels of transmission. Through their creativity, musicians brought the world into the camp, and today, the music that is left brings the camps to the world. Writing

potent expression for a plethora of human experiences, both tangible experiences such as migration, and more intangible expressions such as suffering, longing, belonging and nostalgic remembering, both lived and imagined; all of these aspects are part of the Sheedi musical experience. The poignancy of loss and nostalgia, expressed through music, is all the more intense in forced migration where access to the home country is definitively discontinued.

Thus, music has many positive functions for human beings: in addition to its aesthetic and cognitive facets (beauty, relaxation, invigoration, motivation), it also has social functions. Describing Andalusian Spain, Peter Manuel (1989) describes how flamenco music can be interpreted as a “cry of pain”³⁵. Peter-Bhagtaney (2018) notes how victims of the slave trade used music as the main link to their ancestry. During the violent displacement of African slaves to other continents and regions of the world (Europe, the Americas, the Arab countries, the Indian subcontinent), slaves brought with them memories of their respective languages, religions and cultures as well as music and dance (see Badalkhan 2007: 277).

For Sheedi there is the mugarman. Old Sheedis would listen to the beat of the drum and weep, remembering the lands they had been snatched from. When the drum was played and the dancing began, the ‘old language’ would come back to them... Sheedis

music soothed the omnivorous instincts of the mind and provided a sense of lightness, compared with the unbearable heaviness and brutality of where these men and women were. It was an individual and a collective survival strategy. ... Why was it so important to write and play music in the camps? Émile Goué, a brilliant French composer and prisoner of war who died a year after the liberation from an illness contracted in a camp in Nienburg/Weser, Lower Saxony, probably provides the best answer: ‘Music wasn’t entertainment or a game, but the very expression of our inner lives. ... And yet, the heinous nature of the camps sometimes turned them from places of captivity to unexpected creativity for some of these men and women who, arguably, used music as a way of rising above the horrific circumstances of their daily lives, which many of them were not to survive. ... An obscure, ancestral energy drove musicians to make music even when they faced the abyss of death.’

³⁵ Peter-Bhagtaney (2018), citing Shihan De Silva Jayasuriya 2008 in Manuel 1989: 48.

should not 'feel shame and disgrace' when playing the mugarman. Their 'ancestral instrument' was a weapon for building Sheedi solidarity. (Busdiecker 2018, quoting from Albinia)

Although it could be argued (as witnessed in this quotation) that the music of the Sheedi people emerged as a lament of the many hardships they endured over the years, a vehicle through which to express grief, melancholy, nostalgia, longing and ultimately belonging, Sheedi music today has an important cathartic function that conveys joy rather than melancholy.

Music and dance have arguably been ways to alleviate suffering. In her many captivating conversations with local Sheedis, Albinia describes their awareness of a slave-based past and modern-day discrimination combined with a desire to focus on the happier and lighter sides of life, through music and dance. In the words of one Sheedi woman: "Leva [dance] is very important to us,' they say. 'It came from Africa. *Humein dukh nahin lagta* – we never feel sorrow – only laughter. Sindhi culture is so sad and gloomy; there are too many problems for women – *karokari* [honour-killing], dowry – but there is nothing like that here. We manage to ignore these things and be happy." (Albinia 2008: 67).

Through music and dance the Sheedi community have found a functional channel to express past and present-day suffering and around which they gradually built a syncretic music form, weaving together the memory of a lost continent (Africa) with the experience of their new homeland (Pakistan). And through music and dance, Sheedis have managed to convert pain to joy: 'Sheedis are born to dance'.

3.5 *Forging a regional, ethnic, linguistic and spiritual identity: The Pakistan-Africa connection in music and language*

Naturally, over time, all cultures change and lose touch with their various origins, but music, art and language are excellent channels through which to re-create – and maintain – a continuity

that transcends individual or collective memory.³⁶ The interweaving of Sheedi African descent embodied in the ancient language (Swahili) and forms of music has led to the creation of a viable Afro-Pakistani regional and ethnic identity. As the same *Dawn* journalist (see fn 28) states:

As the knowledge of their origins has faded, so too have many of their traditions, including the vestiges of Swahili once spoken in parts of Karachi. “Swahili has been an abandoned language for some generations now,” says Ghulam Akbar Sheedi, a 75-year-old community leader. “I remember that my grandmother would extensively use Swahili phrases in our daily conversation,” says 50-year-old Atta Mohammad, who now struggles to remember even a few sayings.³⁷

Brian Jackson’s excellent study on music and citizenship among the Sheedis shows how, through music, Sheedis create continuity with their African heritage and at the same time affirm their Pakistani heritage: “... Afro-Indians and Afro-Pakistanis *use this very thing that sets them apart from the rest to come together in shared*

³⁶ Unsurprisingly, modern Jewish music forms have incorporated a great deal from their surrounding diasporic contexts: “Thus, to a large degree, Jewish Music is a cross-cultural phenomenon, the music of the wanderer. Undoubtedly, certain Jewish ritual musical forms have their sources in antiquity, but the idea of creative adaptation has been a hallmark of Jewish musical life for a very long time; thus, Jewish Music has many faces.” (Denburg) Outside the synagogue, the multitude of dispersed Jewish communities in the diaspora incorporated, adopted and adapted local musical traditions that evolved into various manifestations across the world. In the USA, Ashkenazi Jewish refugees brought with them local musical forms that influenced early 20th Century American musical expressions, such as Jazz. Yiddish, from the East European immigrants, became a part of the early C20th US popular culture, creating a bond with their new homeland. “Yiddish quickly made its way from the Lower East Side to Broadway, Hollywood and into American pop culture” (see <https://schoolofmusic.ucla.edu/resources/lowellmilkenmaje/stories-of-music/di-yiddishe-amerike-yiddish-as-a-reflection-of-the-american-jewish-experience/>). As Lotoro shows, suffering can also spawn creativity: the Nazi regime in WWII banned most innovative art (pictorial and musical), resulting in the banished artists bringing with them innovative art to the new host countries

³⁷ Anon. 2018. See also Badalkhan 2007: 279 for an example of the use of Swahili among the Makrani people in Balochistan.

experiences: their ethnocultural histories. ... experiences of racism and xenophobia, and how such experiences relate to the use of musical traditions to reconstruct concepts of belonging" (Jackson 2023: 216, emphasis added). Albinia reports how forms of dance and musical instruments embody a direct connection with the African past:

'Our ancestors brought the leva with them from Zanzibar'. The leva has been danced in an unbroken cultural tradition since the first slaves landed on these shores in the seventh or eighth century. They call their distinctive, four-footed drum the *maseendo*, or *mugarman*, and it too is a relic of their African inheritance (Albinia 2008: 53)³⁸. ... A North American musicologist found that an African family in the Deccan, India, sang an old folksong identical to one she had recorded in Tanzania. ... In Lyari, Khuda Ganj played me the music of Ali Farka Touré, which has recently become popular with Sheedis there because its rhythms are considered similar to those played by Pakistan's famous Sheedi musicians such as the late Bilwal Belgium (Albinia 2008: 69-70).

She describes how Sheedi musical tradition is revitalized:

The continuity between Sheedi music and dance and the musical culture of their African ancestors is actively cultivated and 'updated': "Abdul, whom we met earlier, learned the various dance forms from his Sheedi master 'Malang Charlie', who picked up the moves during one of his trips to Africa. Abdul says they dance because it's in their genes do so. "Sheedis are born to dance". (Albinia 2008: 67).³⁹

³⁸ See Badalkhan 2007: 279ff for an account of the *lawya* in Balochistan, a dance form that has remained similar to its ancient African form.

³⁹ Péquignot also describes how Indian Siddis are projecting their ancestral African heritage onto the present and creating new links to the present-day. Interestingly, despite all these differences, existing Siddi networks are developing further, regionally and nationally. These 'Afro-global networks', based on the Siddis' common identification with their African roots, are now extending beyond India's borders, as relationships are being forged between Siddis and other people of African descent across the globe. These emerging connections provide Siddis with new ways of considering and renegotiating their social position in Indian and global societies, leading to concepts such as 'Afro-Indians' (Péquignot 2020).

The old African language is still sung at the Mela, the annual festival:

Dancing and chanting in Swahili at a crocodile shrine outside Karachi, hundreds of Pakistani Sheedis swayed barefoot to the rhythm of a language they no longer speak — the celebration offering a rare chance to connect with their African roots. ... The celebration features a dancing procession known as the Dhamal, with men and women in trance-like states – a rare sight in conservative, often gender-segregated Pakistan. “The Dhamal dance... is done with great devotion and much delicacy,” says Atta Mohammad, who spoke with AFP at the festival. “Some of us are captured by holy spirits.” Mehrun Nissa, 65, prepares a sacred drink during the mela *while translating from what she says is a Swahili dialect*. “Nagajio O Nagajio, Yo aa Yo.... means now we are leaving to have a drink from the bowl,” she explains (Mahmood 2018, emphasis added).

This quote from Ahmed reiterates the African-language connections represented at the Mela:

[it] represents a unique blend of African culture and local religious practices. Men and women, young and old, dance to the fierce beats of the African call-drums, known to them as *magarman*, sing songs in Swahili mixed with the local languages, and make a ritual offering of meat to the head crocodile. If the reptile accepts the offering, the year will turn out to be auspicious for the *Sheedis* (Ahmed 1989: 2).

These last quotes focus on the mystic, devotional aspect of Sheedi music, an aspect it shares – albeit in a less sophisticated fashion – with Sufism, as described above. The sacred ritual trance-like dance is also seen to have a healing function, as Badalkhan (2007: 277, 282, 287) observes with the *makrani* community in Balochistan where the dhamālā taking place at the saints’ shrine is said to heal people from spirit possession. Shekawat also speaks of the Indian Siddis using song and dance to heal spirit possession through the Swahili language: “Their songs are sung in a Bantu language in Tanzania during spirit possession rituals undertaken for healing purposes. ... The Swahili lyrics of songs also demonstrate the remains of the African culture” (Shekhawat 2012: 5).

The unique legacy of their African musical tradition passed down through the generations has helped Sheedis forge a distinctive regional and cultural identity and has given them a new position in Pakistani society to offset some of the worst discrimination. The force of memory across the centuries - as the debate around the Homeric tradition attests to - can be both dependable and at the same time fragile. Like many artistic phenomena, especially oral narrative, this might well entail both a faithful rendering of the past as well as a more active (re-) creation of past events. Whatever the case may be, it has provided an important source of continuity on which to build, to 're-invent', a group-identity, thereby deeply enriching the artistic traditions of Sindh.

3.6 *Shrines, music and devotion: The Mangho Pir Mela as a tangible connection to Africa*

One of the most important musical and cultural events for the Sheedi people - an important way to connect with their African past - is the above-mentioned annual festival, or *Mela*, where Sheedis celebrate through song and dance at the sacred shrine of the Sufi saint Mangho Pir⁴⁰. The shrine area hosts a lake with crocodiles and is both popular entertainment as well as a site of devotion⁴¹. Mahmood (2018) confirms that

For many Sheedis [Mangho Pir] is the most potent symbol of their shared African past, as they struggle to uncover the trail that led their ancestors to Pakistan. ... With so many traditions lost to the past, the Sheedi mela, or festival, at the Mangho Pir shrine has assumed rich significance and been the epicentre of the community in Sindh for centuries. ... "It attracts the Sheedi community from all over Pakistan," Qanbarani ... tells AFP. We celebrate Mangho Pir mela more than Eid," he adds (Mahmood 2018).

⁴⁰ Otherwise known as Haji Syed Shaikh Sultan, regarded as the patron saint of the Sheedis (see Shekhawat 2012, Hafsa 2012, Busdiecker 2018, Ahmed 1989, Jackson 2023, Anon. 2020a).

⁴¹ "Legend holds that lice on the Sufi saint's head transformed into the reptiles who now live at the shrine" (Mahmood 2018).

To conclude this account of the Sheedi people's attachment to music as both entertainment and devotion, the following are vivid descriptions of the sacred crocodiles at Mangho Pir, the first from Hafsa (2012) who relates how the crocodiles are regarded as:

the disciples of Sakhi Sultan [Mangho Pir], particularly 'Mor Sahib'; the eldest or the chief of the crocodiles. With the very commencement of the festival, a spell of energy, enthusiasm and cultural celebration is unleashed [sic]. The 'Dhamaal' and dance to the music and beating of the Congo Drums, and the practice of jumping over fire, are a clear homage to their rich African heritage and roots. A central ritual in the Sheedi Mela, is the act of garlanding the 'Mor Sahib', to which many pray to also. 'The festival, which bears religious and cultural significance for the Sheedi community, is organised by members of the community who make offerings of sweets and meat to the sacred crocodile. According to the devotees of the Mor Sahib, people from the Sheedi community must offer the Mor Sahib a goat's head, along with the sweets and meat, to ensure that the sacred crocodile continues to bless them all year round' (Hafsa 2012).

Shekhawat vividly describes the crocodile cult thus:

The crocodiles outside the shrine are considered special disciples of the Sufi Saint Baba Mangopir, and Sidis believe they will not harm the saint's followers. The festival kicks off as young Siddi girls come out with specially prepared offerings for the crocodiles that live near the shrine. The march towards the crocodile pond begins, with elder women singing on the African drumbeat in a language that no one else can understand. Siddis say it is a mixture of a Swahili dialect and a local language. According to the ritual the elders first offer the oldest crocodile meat from a freshly sacrificed goat. The offering is hungrily accepted, which means the coming year will pass in peace (Shekhawat 2012: 6).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to describe how the province of Sindh, because of its geographical location as home to the ancient Indus Valley civilization and the mighty Indus River, represented

an extensive arterial network of trade routes and a meeting of cultures, languages, religions and material goods. In the process, Sindh has absorbed many of the customs and ways of the peoples who settled here. I have focussed specifically on one of the spiritual legacies of this thoroughfare after the Muslim conquest, as it became interlaced with the existing Buddhist and Hindu cultures, namely Sufism. The Sindhis quickly absorbed Sufi spiritual and artistic traditions: poetry, music, dance, song and the veneration of select saints at their much beloved shrines. Reference has also been made to an ongoing debate on whether or not Sindhi identity intrinsically embodies Sufism as its inherent spiritual practice, and as a result has been more tolerant and 'softer' than other strands of Islam in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, performances that used to take place in the private domain are "now increasingly coming into the public sphere through public performances, recordings and television" (Sakata 1997: 172). Sakata wrote this piece in 1997 and indeed, today, we have seen the rise of Coke Studio⁴² in Karachi where Sufi, folk and other traditional music is enthusiastically pursued both in traditional form and in more modern 'fusion' forms.

Secondly, I have focussed on another community of Sindhis who have long been associated with singing and dancing, namely the Sheedis. I have described the stirring history of the Sheedi community, from their African ancestry via the Arab slave trade and conquest, to their current struggle to piece together an ethnic and cultural identity in the face of overwhelming discrimination. Weaving together their African heritage (be it slave, merchant or soldier) and the memories from a centuries-old cultural exile, they are able to affirm a new Afro-Pakistani identity, in part through their unique musical traditions.

⁴² The following music video, a 2022 hit by Eva Baloch and Balochi-speaking folk singer Abdul Wahab Bugti from the Lyari area of Karachi is an example from Coke Studio of a modern revisiting of traditional music. This is typical of Coke Studio's fusion of modern international music with Pakistani folk traditions. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQDAi8tI-cU>. This *Dawn* article gives context to the song and the singer, foregrounding singing and sadness: <https://images.dawn.com/news/1190240>.

Mention has been made of how this nostalgic memory of exile can be cathartically embodied and expressed. Like many other peoples subject to forced displacement, the Sheedi people have translated grief into song, for better or for worse. For worse, because it has left Sheedis with the stigma of being ‘only’ entertainers and performers – traditionally a low-prestige profession in the Indian subcontinent - and has possibly been an obstacle to accessing other professions. For better, because it has given them and continues to give them immense musical joy. It has also given them a conduit through which to channel their spiritual joy and devotion to their patron saints, most notably at the annual Mangho Pir festival where they can freely worship their ‘pir’, their saint.

Through the histories of both Sufi and Sheedi communities, we see that Sindh is a land of music, saints and shrines. This syncretic mix has gifted modern-day Sindh, urban and rural, with a plethora of local shrines containing all the trappings of local saint veneration. The legacy of a joyous musical spiritual expression in rural areas - both Sheedi and Sufi - as well as in the modern metropolitan city of Karachi has led to hybrid forms of popular folk+pop in the famous Coke studio and to the spectacular *qawwali* performances of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

The trance-like performances of Sufi musicians, and the trance-like performances of Sheedi ‘leva’ are similar expressions of the devotional bond between human and divine. They share similar forms of expression – trance-inducing semantic and motoric repetitiveness – and they share similar locations – the local shrines dedicated to preferred saints, or *pirs*. In many ways these two expressions of Sindhi musical culture stem from polar opposite experiences: the Muslim conquerors and masters vs. Sheedi slaves, soldiers or servants. Where the Sufis expressed their spiritual joy of communion with the Divine, the Sheedi experience was the generational trauma of exile from Africa finding cathartic expression in song and dance. Where the Sufis ‘willed into being’, through song, a connection to God, the Sheedi people ‘sang into being’ a connection with their long-lost African roots.

The chapters in this volume address many different aspects of music in the Muslim world and in the Islamic tradition. As noted in the Introduction, the semantic coupling “Islam and Music” represents a difficult needle to thread. Despite injunctions in the Qur’an and in certain hadiths critical of music, and an innate suspicion of music by many orthodox Muslims, there is nevertheless a ubiquitous presence of music in the Islamic world. Some of the chapters in this volume have attempted to untangle this puzzle. Together, the chapters describe the vital artistic, cultural and spiritual role of music in the Muslim world, reflecting the ubiquitous presence of music in the human experience.

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- Indian music, with music videos <https://ragatip.com/what-is-Sufism-why-is-music-so-important-to-the-Sufis/>

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*Afterword: Problematizing the Discussion
on Music and Islam*

Salvatore Morra
(University of Cambridge)

I begin this afterword with an experience I had during my academic fieldwork in Tunisia in 2015. It was the end of May, a concert for the 80th anniversary festival of the foundation of the *Rashīdiyya* Institute of Tunis was about to begin, and I made my way past the entrance into the court of the palace, the former building of the music institute, founded in 1935 and devoted to teaching and promoting Tunisian music. There were young and old, men and women, chatting and greeting. After some opening remarks by the director Hedi Mohuli, the invited ensemble of the town of Sidi Bou Said took to the stage. They were dressed in typical costumes of Sufi orders in Tunisia with white robes. It was the devotional group of *ʿĪsāwiyya* of Sidi Bou Said. All branches of this *ṭarīqa* are unified in looking to Sīdī Ben ʿĪsā’s teachings as a touchstone (Jankowsky, 2021; Jones, 1977), and they also enjoy a reputation for preserving *mālūf*, the country’s Andalusī art-music heritage (Davis, 2004; Guettat, 1980). The performance ended with passages of *dhikr* – repeated formulas of *la ilaha illa allah* (there is no God but Allah) or Allah or *huwa* (he) – with a strong sense of sonic and spiritual intensification. During that same summer, I attended the Ṭahar Gharsa’s *mālūf* club in the capital, said to be the direct lineage transmission from the time of *mālūf* revival in the 1930s. "We are Sufi", Sediri, a choir member of the

club, told me during one of the pauses. Mālūf fans, traditionally, pass the time constructing complex personal philosophies of life, sometimes mystical Sufi, that surprises outsiders who do not expect such elaborate abstraction as a common theme in popular Tunisian culture. Devotional practices described as Sufi are the most part social, deeply grounded in place and time and they situate ritual activity at the centre of an Islamic worldwide that sanctions their devotional practices. As Richard Jankowsky has highlighted several times, it is the music that drives the performance, with its ritual strategy of distinctive temporality and feeling of development within a shared large ecology of Sufi practices (Jankowsky, 2010, 2021).

The religion of Islam, with its obligatory rituals and cultural traditions, generates and contributes to an international Muslim music culture. Musical techniques and aesthetics, particularly those involving the performance of the Arabic language, are in fact preserved and promoted throughout the Islamic world community (*umma*) (Tottoli, 2021). On the one hand, mystical ideas and imagery in singable texts and vernacular forms play a key role in popularizing Islam, making it easily accessible and reinforcing the association between musical performance and religious practices. On the other, recitation is not music, as any number of sources may attest. However, as we have seen in this volume, spiritual recitation and musical performance (both vocal and instrumental) exist side by side.

Giovanni De Zorzi inaugurated this volume with a wide-ranging survey of musical practices across the Islamic world emphasizing how music operated simultaneously as art, science, and spiritual exercise. Baffioni's analysis underscored music's role as a science of proportion embedded in a larger metaphysical framework. Her reading highlights how the Epistle presents music as therapeutic and cosmological, capable of restoring harmony to both the body and the universe. Carlo Saccone developed these issues through his study of *samā'* and *wağd* in al-Ġazālī and the Persian poet Sa'dī, exploring the active role of the listener. The interplay of devotion and entertainment is investigated further by Annalisa Bocchetti in her study of Indo-Persian Premakathās,

showing how these texts and performances blurred the boundary between mystical initiation and courtly entertainment. Complementing this, Nahid Norozi examined the works of Ferdowsī and Nezāmī, where minstrels enlivened Persian courts with tales that were by turns humorous, bacchic, tragic, and devotional. Philosophical treatments are developed in Ivana Panzeca's close reading of Avicenna's *Mūsīqī-yi Hikmat-i 'Alā'ī*. Panzeca demonstrated how his work synthesizes Greek, Arabic, and Persian legacies while extending into the Indian subcontinent. A parallel concern with cosmology emerges in Paola Carusi's chapter on *sukūn* in which she interprets silence not as absence but as a constitutive element of sound and rational speech, aligned with alchemical conceptions of elemental balance. Rosanna Budelli returned to the question of legitimacy, where music is defended through a systematic re-evaluation of ḥadīth. How exegetical debates were not merely abstract but shaped the everyday boundaries of cultural practice, is a theme resonant with both medieval and contemporary discussions of Islamic orthodoxy. A shift from textual to ethnographic perspectives is provided by Sabir Badalkhan's study of Black Baloch musical traditions in southwestern Pakistan. Badalkhan interprets ritual forms such as *ambā* and *laywā* dances and the widespread use of the *mugulmānī* drum as cultural memory, preserving links to African ancestry while providing emotional and social cohesion. Mette Rudvin's chapter on Sindh extends this analysis of music as identity, demonstrating music's adaptability: simultaneously preserving African memory, engaging with Sufi devotionism, and participating in globalised popular culture. The scholars who have contributed to this anthology are writing at a crucial moment in the history of academic work more generally, a moment where educational institutions, especially universities in the Western world, are acknowledging their colonial histories and Eurocentric biases. Biases are instantiated in approaches to research and writings; those scholars, for example, who work in humanities and religious studies may rarely discuss sound with those in Music and social sciences, though this may be starting to change as this volume

promises. Although many of us work in Music departments, we have broadened our perspectives to include faith and belief more generally. As noted by M.H. Ilias (2023), today the study of Islam is currently becoming a central concern for many social science disciplines, which rely heavily on such themes as diaspora, mobility, cultural exclusivity, fundamentalism, and so on. Thus, this innovative, interdisciplinary conference held in Palermo (2022), from which this volume derives, explored the multiple relations of music, sound, and Islam as historically lived and experienced in Muslim cultures.

The importance of thinking of religions not just in terms of the histories of people globally but in terms of humans whom we happen to work with and the sonic interactivity of many forms of life on earth, it was of note here. I urge readers, then, to contemplate the chapters in this anthology from a multiple perspective, considering not just human cultures that vary in languages and ways of living Islam but also other environments and forms of spiritual/sound interactions. We could take direction and inspiration from thinkers who have been at the forefront of cross disciplinary thinking throughout their histories. Thinkers such as Ibn al-‘Arabī (560/1165-638/1240) – one of the greatest Sufis of Islam - understand and articulate the intertwined spiritualities of life forms in many ways. In his *Akhlāq al-Şufiyya* (The Sufi Manners and Customs) for example, ‘sound’ plays a role in these narratives as: “ecstasy, the beautiful voice, the dance are the great power of influence possessed by the samā’ “(Shilola, 1979: 151). While philosophers have long debated whether music relates to the nature of religious actions or their consequences, I suggest that, in these pages, two interrelated factors have usefully framed Islamic debates with respect to sonic expressions. Firstly, this anthology reveals relational issues, examining the relationship between the aural/sonic arts and the religious performance in Muslim societies. The authors considered the sonic cultures of Islam, including Islam and its sound mediation and silence. Secondly, many of the authors also narrate positional issues: such things as who has access to what (knowledge and practices). The research methods adopted here often depend on

positionality, and some chapters deal directly with how Islam shapes and is shaped by the sonic arts engaging with Islamic aural/literary dimensions.

The strength of these two interrelated factors is that it significantly broadens the discussion from religious studies to the sociocultural dimensions by drawing on various disciplines such as literature, history and anthropology. This edited volume *Music in the Islamic World* concentrates on two macro geographies of research: Middle East: Arabs; including Turkish speaking countries; *Central-, South- and South-East Asia*: Persian speaking countries, Pakistan and India. This multi-geographical approach is a particularly important contribution, it projects the fostering of literacy into a wider civilizational framework, recognizing the pluralistic dimensions of Muslim civilizations and their multiple identities. There are many nationalities, ethnicities, cultures among Muslims, but as M.H. Ilias recently pointed out: “the non-Muslim public everywhere perceives them as ‘Muslims’ sans differences” (2023: 3). Further, Ali S. Asani urges for an approach that plays a key role in dismantling “unidimensional discourses about Muslim societies — discourses often steeped in the dehumanizing language of civilizational superiority, nationalism, and patriotism, premised on the notion of the Muslim as the “other”” (Asani, 2018: xvii).

Only two contributors to this book utilise aspects of an ethnographic methodology, the core of (ethno)musicological studies, to analyse the poetics and politics of sacred Muslim practices. Therefore, one of the most important factors concerning the relational and positional issues is the fact that in societies which largely rely on aural transmission of music, the study of religious and literary texts is the only way to analyse, explore and investigate their past musical activities. We therefore need multiple lenses through which to understand multitudes of social and cultural influences of music and Islam, and, as this publication can show, I argue that the history of music in Muslim societies must be researched in combination with literature and Islamic studies. In exploring such historical dimensions of the sound-religion nexus, as it is for the *mālūf*/*‘Īsāwiyya* nexus

mentioned earlier, this book is also multidisciplinary since it employs a broad range of artistic expressions to discuss notions of the sacred, authority, theology, and mysticism. Indeed, this book brings together a unique array of scholars – mainly from Italian institutions - contributing perspectives from musicology, anthropology, literature, philosophy and Islamic studies. Academically, in the 1990s, the emergence of anthropological approaches in France and Britain could have been seen in the context of the generation of colonial knowledge, whereas at the turn of the 21st century, the Italian tradition of Islamic Studies had been deeply influenced by the original interest in theological issues. As a result, in fact, thanks to Professor Adriano Valerio Rossi and the scholar Paolo Scarnecchia, in 2003 *the University of Naples L'Orientale* launched a pioneering undergraduate course of “Music History in the Islamic Contexts”.

The task of the Palermo (2022) conference, twenty years after, from which these essays emerged is to introduce this multidisciplinary consciousness to music practices in the Islamic worlds by showing various ways in which Islam can be read and written in its broad historical, religious, and socio-political milieu of considerable complexity and diverse interpretive grid of analyses. What we have said about fostering collaborations among scholars across the region, focusing on music and Islam would be of little news in the complex debate of contemporary arts and humanities studies, one major thrust of which would be to transform musicological studies to a more encompassing religious/literacy criticism. To my surprise, the works of musicologists are rather scant concerning the methodological issues involved in the research in the Islamic context, and so far they have not been adequately dealt with by the regional or international scholarship. This involves rethinking the role of music in the contemporary and historic Islam, and exploring relationships, entanglements, experiences and interactions between Africa, the Middle East and Asia, through the circulation of music in those ‘religious’ cultural spaces. The question for the musicologists is, then, how consequential ‘religious therapy’ should be - does it merely add a new critical appreciation of music

in the Islamic contexts, or does it clear the way for reorganising musicological careers and valorising innovations in strategies for projects that link music and Islam? My intention is thus to highlight, however schematically, the new eclectic theoretical frameworks of this book seen in the typical career context of the contemporary musicologists. A full analysis in this vein would relate the issues raised in the conference papers – and in this book – to a detailed consideration of the professional culture of musicology itself, which I am calling for.

In addressing the relationship between music and the sacred, scholarship on Islam has interpreted ‘spirituality’ primarily as a dimension of inner and cultural belonging, often without considering music as a social and symbolic practice operating in concrete, material environments. Historical musicology, instead, devoting attention to music in the Arab/Turkish/Persian worlds has predominantly focused on the theory of music, or on symbolic and structural analogies viewed from the perspectives of music criticism, music composition, or philosophical speculations, without full consideration of the sociocultural aspects of the relationship between music performance and the religious frames.

This work also intends to address another important concern, but before approaching it, a major conceptual task is at hand: What do we mean by ‘Islamic Worlds’? While Islam is a religion based on the Qur'an, Muslims nevertheless live in many different worlds in terms of their understanding of what the religion means (see also Ulrike Freitag, 2023: 11). But as Marshall Hodgson has argued, the spread of Islam between the seventh and the eighteenth century moulded these regions into what he called the “Islamicate World” (Hodgson 1974, 57–60), meaning the establishment of Muslim political rule and cultural influence over parts of Asia and Africa, without referring exclusively to Muslims. Here, the investigation of these musical worlds in both cases is at the heart of the present enquiry.

Recently, Jonas Otterbeck launched a book series “Music and Performance in Muslim Contexts”, published in association with the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim

Civilisations and the Aga Khan Music Programme. This series presents innovative scholarship in music, dance, theatre and other performative practices and varieties of expressive culture inspired or shaped by Muslim artistic, cultural, intellectual, religious and social heritage. Alongside this initiative, of note, the aim of the Palermo conference (2022) was to promote the foundation of a unique study group, in which members share a common interest in this interdisciplinary theme, within the International Musicological Society (IMS). This society was founded in 1927 in order to “further musicological research in its broadest sense among all peoples”¹. However, historical studies of music have almost always limited themselves to specific geographically or culturally defined areas, but music is pursued in relation to the music of other areas and cultures, resulting in a global network of cross-cultural relationships largely neglected by conventional music historiography. Since then, IMS has still not connected music researchers of Muslim societies to the world community of musicology. This new study group, “Music in the Indo-Mediterranean Muslim Worlds”, will regularly bring together a group of scholars from the Mediterranean to Southeast Asia, and should promote collaboration in long-term research concerning major topics in music of the Muslim worlds, such as: new approaches and methodologies, ethics in music and Islam, modal music theory – *maqām*, musical instruments in Sufi practices, notations, religious and archival research, styles and repertoires, historiographies, musicological analyses, and so on.

The group aims to open a pioneering and productive forum for academic fields and domains of intellectual reflection that have rarely been done through dialogue, showing the possibilities offered by such an exchange for a greater understanding of both musical/aural experiences and Islam. In particular, it sets out to provide musicology with a ground-breaking, in-depth study of the relationship between music and Islam, while offering the field of religious studies a new ‘Area Studies’ on music that goes beyond

¹ Musicology “Who we are”. Accessed November 8, 2025, at <https://www.musicology.org/about-the-ims/who-we-are/>

the usual concerns with sacred acoustics or ritual practices between spiritual and auditory domains. Networking a new interest in this multidisciplinary domain, the study group will have an impact on scholarship of global history of music, focusing on the global interaction of regional musical cultures, by promoting and supporting scholars and performers investigating music history in a global context.

In conclusion, by complicating the discussion on music and Islam, this volume aims to decentre binary hierarchies such as those between theory/practice, centre/periphery, Global North/South, and Musicology/(Ethno)musicology urging to engage with relations of music and cosmological order, devotional practice leading to ecstasy, contested sites of religious legitimacy, and vehicles for identity and resistance in diasporic and marginal contexts.

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Contributors

BADALKHAN, Sabir (University of Naples “L’Orientale”)
sbadalkhan@unior.it

Prof. Sabir Badalkhan has a Ph.D. in Balochi folklore. He has been teaching languages, literature and cultures of the Indian subcontinent at the Oriental University of Naples, Italy, since 1994. He has also taught as a visiting professor at The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA (2002-2003), and served as Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Balochistan, Quetta (2008-2009). His research interests include oral tradition in Balochistan (both in Pakistan and Iran), itinerant musicians, singers, and storytellers in South and Southwest Asia, and African musical culture in Pakistan and Iran. He has published widely on these topics and presented papers in national and international conferences in many parts of the world. His publications include *Two Essays on Baloch History and Folklore*, Napoli – Roma, 2013; co-edited with G. P. Basello and M. De Chiara, *Iranian Studies in Honour of Adriano V. Rossi*, Series Minor, LXXXVII, in 2 vols, Naples, 2019.

BAFFIONI, Carmela (University of Naples “L’Orientale”)
baffioni@unior.it

Carmela Baffioni is Emerita Professor of History of Islamic Philosophy at the University of Naples L’Orientale. She is now Senior Research Fellow at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, ‘Membro nazionale’ of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, member of the Academia Europaea and the Académie Internationale d’Histoire des Sciences, and a founding member of the Arabic

Studies Section of the Accademia Ambrosiana (Milan, Class of Near Eastern Studies). She is the author of 17 books (including histories of Islamic thought) and has edited 17 volumes. Among her monographs: *Il IV libro dei "Meteorologica" di Aristotele* (Naples 1981), *Atomismo e antiatomismo nel pensiero islamico* (Naples 1982), *Sulle tracce di sofia. Tre "divini" nella Grecia classica* (Naples 1990, on the history of Greek thought in Shahrastānī); a commented translation of Averroes's Middle Commentary on *Poetics* (Milan 1990). The Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' or Brethren of Purity is her main field of research. Her publications on them include: *L'Epistola degli Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' "Sulle opinioni e le religioni"* (Naples 1989); *Frammenti e testimonianze di autori antichi nelle Rasā'il degli Iḥwān al-Ṣafā'* (Rome 1994); *Appunti per un'epistemologia profetica. The Epistle of the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā' "On Causes and Effects"* (Naples 2006). For the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* collection of the Institute of Ismaili Studies she has prepared critical editions with English translations and commentaries of the Logical Epistles 10-14 (2010), the Natural Epistles 15-21 (2013), Epistles 39 and 40 (2017), and Epistle 50 (2019). She is currently working on the annotated edition of Epistles 23 and 25, and the English translation with commentary of the *Risāla al-Jāmi'a*. She has written about 200 articles dealing with the transmission of Greek thought in Islam and the Latin elaborations of the Islamic heritage, the main medieval Islamic philosophers (al-Kindī, al-Farābī, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd), Ismaili thinkers (Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī), and topics in Islamic science (atomism, embryology).

BOCCHETTI, Annalisa (University of Ghent)

annalisa.bocchetti@unior.it

Annalisa Bocchetti earned her Ph.D. degree in South Asian Studies at the University "L'Orientale" of Naples, Italy. She is now an FWO junior post-doctoral fellow at Ghent University, in the Department of Indian Languages and Cultures. Her interests encompass Hindi and Urdu literature, Sufism, and forms of storytelling of the Indian subcontinent. Her current research deals with early modern Sufi vernacular romances and their adaptations in different literary forms and languages of Islamate India.

BUDELLI, Rosanna (FSCIRE)

budelli@fscire.it

Rosanna Budelli obtained her PhD in Near Eastern and Maghreb Studies at the “L’Orientale” University of Naples. She has taught Arabic language and literature on fixed-term contracts at several Italian universities and is currently a member of the Foundation for Religious Sciences; she has been the chief librarian at the Giorgio La Pira Library in Palermo. Among her books: *Il Sigillo di Salomone in tre manoscritti di magia copta in lingua araba* (“The Seal of Solomon in three Arabic Manuscripts of Coptic Magic”), and *Ascese e Visioni: i poemi mistici di Muḥammad al-Ḥalīdī* (“Ascensions and Visions: the poems of the Sufi Muḥammad al-Khālīdī”). Her main interests are: Sufi literature, Medieval Islamic traditions (*ḥadīṭ*) and the anthropology of Muslim countries.

CARUSI, Paola (Università di Roma ‘La Sapienza’)

paola.carusi@fondazione.uniroma1.it

Paola Carusi graduated in Chemistry and in Literature. She has taught as a researcher and professor of the History of Muslim Philosophies and Sciences at the Department of the Italian Institute of Oriental Studies at La Sapienza University of Rome. She presently conducts research on the history of Islamic sciences, particularly alchemy and life sciences. She is the author of several monographs and articles published in Italian and international journals. Her major publications include: *Musulmani all’opera: Scienza, tecnologia e società nell’Islam medievale* (2023); *Lo zafferano e il geco: Le scienze della vita nella società islamica del Medioevo* (2007).

DE ZORZI, Giovanni (Università Cà Foscari Venezia)

dezorzi@univ.it

Giovanni De Zorzi (PhD) is professor of Ethnomusicology at the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice. For about thirty years he has been mainly interested in classical and Sufi music from the Ottoman-Turkish and Central Asian area. He alternates between his activity as a musician (*ney* flute in the Ottoman tradition as a soloist or with the *Ensemble Marâghî*), field research, scientific writing and the artistic direction of various musical programmes, which he has carried out

so far mainly with the MiTO Settembre Musica Festival (Milan and Turin) and with the IISMC (Intercultural Institute of Comparative Music Studies) of the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice. Since 2018 he has been ‘Nominator’ for the ‘Aga Khan Music Awards’. Since 2024 he is co/investigator of the study group dedicated to the art musics (*maqām*) of the Middle Eastern and Central Asian world entitled ‘maqām beyond Nation’. The project won an ERC Horizon Award that become, post Brexit, UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) International.

Among His publications include the monographs: *Musiche di Turchia. Tradizioni e transiti tra oriente e occidente* (2010); *Maqām. Percorsi tra le musiche d’arte in area mediorientale e centroasiatica* (2020); *Introduzione alle musiche del mondo islamico* (2021); *Samā‘. L’ascolto e il concerto spirituale nella tradizione sufi* (2021). He edited *Con I dervisci. Otto incontri sul campo* (2013). He edited and translated Jean During, *Musiche d’Iran. La tradizione in questione* (2005) and *Musica ed Estasi. L’ascolto mistico nella tradizione sufi* (2013). He coedited, with Thomas Dähnhardt, *Journey among Dervishes between Past and Present* (2023). His recordings include: Ensemble Marâghî, *Anwâr. From Samarqand to Constantinople on the Footsteps of Marâghî* (2010); *Sounds from the Saray. The Young Bobowski at the Ottoman Court* (2021) and six CD-books, published by Nota Edizioni, series ‘Intersezioni Musicali’, dedicated to various aspects of Ottoman art music, in which De Zorzi is present both as a musician and as the author of the scientific booklets.

MORRA, Salvatore (University of Cambridge)

sm923@cam.ac.uk

Salvatore Morra is currently a British Academy post-doctoral fellow at the University of Cambridge and a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Trinity Hall. Since 2018, he has been the music curator of ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies in Rome and vice-chair of the ICTMD study group Mediterranean Music Studies. He is also co-chair with Dr. Kawkab Tawfik of the recently founded study group “Music in the Indo-Mediterranean Muslim Worlds” of the International Musicological Society. His research focuses on musicological perspectives of Arabic music, interdisciplinary debates around post-colonial nationalism in

the Maghreb and multiculturalism in the Mediterranean, including popular culture, liturgy, sound and media. Between 2020 and 2024, he lectured at the University of Tuscia in Viterbo, Italy. As a performer (guitar and oud), he has a longstanding interest in maqams, experimental improvisation, and is the co-founder of the Maluf System, a post-revival movement of Tunisian music.

NOROZI, Nahid (University of Bologna)

nahid.norozi2@unibo.it

Nahid Norozi is a researcher of Persian Language and Literature at the University of Bologna. Her scholarly interests mainly concern medieval Persian epics and novels and Arab-Persian mystical treatises. She has published numerous articles and translations of contemporary and medieval Persian authors in various scholarly journals. Her publications include: Najm al-Din Kubrā, *The Hearths of Beauty and the Fragrances of Majesty* (Mimesis, 2011); Sohrāb Sepehri, *Up to the Flower of Nothingness. 99 poems* (Arachne, 2014); Kerman's Khwājū, *Homāy and Homāyun. A novel of love and adventure from medieval Persia* (Mimesis, 2016); and al-Sahljāī, *The Book of Light. Facts and Sayings of Abū Yazīd al-Bīstāmī* (Esther, 2018). She has also written on linguistic aspects in the volume *Arabic-Persian Loans in the Spanish Language* (CEB, 2014). She has published the following monographs: *The Wild Horse of Wrath. Introduction to the Poetry of Aḥmad Shāmlu, a Rebel Poet of the Iranian 20th Century* (CEB, 2017); *Beginnings of the Persian Novel. From Gorgāni's Vis and Rāmin (11th century) to the Tristan cycle* (Bear Editions, 2021); Fakhr al-Din Gorgani, *Ten Letters from Vis to Ramin on Cruelty. The most famous love epistolary of the Persian Middle Ages*, (Carocci, Rome 2022). She also edited two volumes of the Proceedings of the Bolognese Iranist Conferences (CoBIran), including: *As the Arrow of Ārash. Il lungo viaggio della narrazione in Iran: forme e motivi dalle origini all'epoca contemporanea* (Mimesis 2021).

PANZECA, Ivana (University of Palermo, FSCIRE)

ivana.panzeca01@unipa.it

Ivana Panzeca is currently Assistant Professor (RtdA) in History of Medieval Philosophy at the University of Palermo. She spent several periods of research in Paris (École Pratique des Hautes Études,

Université Denis Diderot, INALCO), Tehran (Tarbiat-e Modares; IFRI), and Barcelona, where she received funding from the Catalan government within the Beatriu de Pinòs Programme as a Post-doc researcher at the Instituto Universitario del Próximo Oriente Antiguo de la Universidad de Barcelona (IPOA). In the module on Platonismo y Aristotelismo Medievales, she taught *Filosofía clásica en lengua árabe* for two years and at the same time she obtained the title of Experto Universitario en Lenguas y Culturas de India y Iran at the Universidad de Salamanca.

Subsequently she has been Research Assistant at the Scuola Normale Superiore (Pisa), in the framework of an ERC project “Philosophy on the Border of Civilizations and Intellectual Endeavours: Towards a Critical Edition of the Metaphysics (*Ilāhiyyāt* of *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ*) of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)” (PI prof. Bertolacci), and then a FSCIRE Research Fellow at the La Pira Library and Research Centre for Islamic studies in Palermo, of which she is now the Scientific Director. She is currently teaching History of the Islamic manuscript tradition at the University of Palermo and collaborates with the IMT School in Lucca within the PhiBor Research Unit. Her research focuses on the Avicennian tradition in Arabic and Persian, embracing both the textual transmission of the manuscript heritage and the historical/theoretical analysis of the writings examined.

RUDVIN, Mette (University of Palermo)

mett.rudvin@unipa.it

Mette Rudvin, born and raised in Pakistan, completed her studies in Norway and the UK and holds a PhD in Translation Studies. She taught English, translation and public service interpreting at the University of Bologna from 1996-2019, and is currently Associate Professor at the University of Palermo where she teaches English and related subjects. Prof. Rudvin has taught, lectured on and organized seminars and workshops on a variety of subjects including: Translation; English Language and Literature (English as a lingua franca, Children’s literature, Anglo-Indian literature); Community Interpreting; Migration and Pakistan studies; Oral Narrative and more recently Food Communication. She has published

widely on these issues focussing primarily on Community Interpreting. From 1991 to 2019 she worked as a translator and as a community/ legal interpreter between Italian, English, Norwegian and Urdu. From 2014-2018 she conducted a seminar series at the University of Bologna on Pakistan studies.

SACCONE, Carlo (University of Bologna)

carlo.saccone@unibo.it

A former professor of Persian Literature at the University of Bologna and of Islamic Studies at the University of Padua, he dealt with the relationship between poetry and Sufism in the Persian Middle Ages. He has translated various classics including: Hafez (Libro del Coppiere, Luni 1997, Carocci 2003), 'Attar (Il verbo degli uccelli, SE 1986 and Mondadori 1999), Nezami (Libro della fortuna di Alessandro, Rizzoli 1997 and 2003), Naser-e Khosrow (Libro della luce, in "Studia Patavina" 1990/n. 3), Sana'i (Viaggio nel Regno del Ritorno, Pratiche 1993, Luni 1998), 'Attar (La rosa e l'usignuolo, Carocci 2003), Ahmad Ghazali (Delle occasioni amorose, Carocci 2007), as well as Nasimi di Shirvan (CEB-Centro Essad Bey 2020), Sarmad di Kashan (CEB 2022) and Shamsoddin Bardasiri (CEB 2024). He has produced several monographs: Viaggi e visioni di re, sufi, profeti (Luni Ed. 1999), Il maestro sufi e la bella cristiana (Carocci, 2005), Il re dei belli, il re del mondo (Aracne 2014) for a 'Storia tematica della letteratura persiana'. Islamistic volumes include: I percorsi dell'Islam: dall'esilio di Ismaele alla rivolta dei nostri giorni (EMP 1997 and 2003), Allah il Dio del Terzo Testamento (Medusa, 2006), Iblis, il Satana del Terzo Testamento (CEB 2017), Adamo, l'uomo nel Terzo Testamento (WriteUp Books 2022). He edited the Italian edition of The Book of the Ladder of Muhammad (SE 1993, Mondadori 1999) and the monograph Così il Profeta scalò i cieli (Aseq-IPO 2022). Founder of the Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei, he edited four volumes on Alexander (2008), Angelology (2022), Dante seen from the East (2016) and Adam (2021). He co-directs with Nahid Norozi the online journal of Iranistics Quaderni di Meykhane.



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