

MUSICAL ASPECTS OF IBN SANĀ' AL-MULK'S *DĀR AL-TIRĀZ*

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Dār al-Tirāz, the 12th-century treatise on the art of the Andalusian *muwashshah*, was composed in Cairo by the Egyptian scholar, poet, and government official Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk. Despite the fact that it was written in Egypt and not in Islamic Spain, *Dār al-Tirāz* (lit. "The House of Brocade") remains the single most important work to have survived from the medieval period concerning the musical history of the *muwashshah*.¹ The following essay examines three important passages about music from that work and attempts to provide a more detailed, and more musicologically accurate, analysis of the information contained therein.

I. Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's life, education, and travels

Abū al-Qāsim Hibat Allāh ibn Ja'far ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, commonly referred to in Western sources as Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk and in Arabic sources as al-Qādī al-Sa'īd (c. 1155-1212), was the son of al-Qādī al-Rashīd, Ja'far ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, and was a friend and correspondent of al-Qādī al-Fādīl, 'Abd al-Rahīm al-Bīsanī (1133-99), a close advisor to Salāh al-Dīn [Saladin] and one of the most famous literary and political figures of his day.² Biographical entries about Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk are found in all of the major prosopographical collections from the 13th to 15th centuries: *al-Rawdatayn* (Abū Shāma), *al-Daw' al-Lāmi'* (al-Sakhāwī), *Nahj al-Sulūk* ('Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Abd Allāh), *Wafayāt al-a'yān* (Ibn Khallikān), *Mu'jam al-udabā'* (Yāqūt), *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira* (Ibn Taghrībirdī), *al-Sulūk* (Maqrīzī), and *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt* (al-Safādī).

His education seems to have been rather unremarkable and he appears to have travelled very little during his lifetime: we know of only one trip to Alexandria as a youth to study *hadīth*, and another, much later, to Damascus where he served in a government post for a short time before returning to his native Cairo. The biographical literature contains no evidence that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk was a musician, singer, or composer. This should not be overinterpreted, however, since these talents were often only mentioned if the subject's skills in these areas were extraordinary and/or had come to general public notice for some reason or another.

In *Dār al-Tirāz* Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk mentions that he took a liking to *muwashshahāt* in his youth:

When I was in the vanguard of my youth and the forefront of my years, I fell passionately in love with them and was madly enamored of them; I made their acquaintance by listening to them and became their constant companion by memorising them... (p. 30)³

Indications within the text of *Dār al-Tirāz*, as well as evidence from a variety of other sources, indicate that he heard these *muwashshahāt* performed as songs.⁴ The text also seems to indicate that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's knowledge of music was not that of a scholar of music, for he uses none of the technical musical terminology of his day, but instead speaks of music in layman's terms

As an adult he tells us that he spent years studying and analysing the *muwashshah*. He also complains (or perhaps boasts) in *Dār al-Tirāz*, that he could not find a teacher who could teach him this art, and he therefore had to learn it entirely on his own. Writing of himself in the third-person he says:

...he did not find a Shaykh from whom to acquire this science nor a composer from whom to learn this art... (p. 53)

Here, however, the biographical literature provides a different story. Al-Safadī (quoting Yāqūt al-Hamawī) states that in the gatherings of Shaykh Abū l-Mahāsīn al-Bahnasī the linguist [*al-lughawī*] Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk met a Moroccan [*maghribī*] who:

...worked at the composition of maghribī ["Moroccan/North African"] *muwashshahāt* as well as *zajals* and he introduced [Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk] to their secrets and discussed them with him at such great length that [Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk] was motivated to compose *muwashshahāt* of his own that were even more beautiful than those of the people of the Maghrib.⁵

This passage recurs almost verbatim in the *Qalā'id al-jumān* of Ibn al-Sha'ār quoted in the introduction to Muhammad Zakariyā 'Inānī's edition of *Dār al-Tirāz* and a similar passage appears in a biographical work by Ibn Abī 'Udhayba (d. 1355).⁶

These two differing views, however, are not entirely contradictory if we surmise that the Moroccan whom Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk met in al-Bahnasī's gatherings was what we might today call "a good informant", that is, someone who could recite or sing to him – in other words, teach him – a large repertory of *muwashshahāt* and, more importantly for our purposes here, tell him about the singing of *muwashshahāt* in the Maghrib and al-Andalus, but who was not himself engaged in analysing and classifying that repertory.

I would like to argue then that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk most probably did not have a technical understanding of music, but rather knew music as an amateur

musician or a layman would, and that at several critical points in *Dār al-Tirāz* the information he is passing on to us about music in the Maghrib and al-Andalus is second-hand and is therefore not very precisely transmitted. Fortunately, other medieval sources allow us to clarify some of the more obscure passages in his text.

II. Musical Passages in *Dār al-Tirāz*

There are a number of passages in *Dār al-Tirāz* which are of tangential musical interest, but there are three passages in particular that are of interest in reconstructing the musical history of the *muwashshah*:

- a) A passage treating the metric system of the *muwashshahāt*, which includes two references to the *wghun*, a term which has hitherto most often been translated as “organ”;
- b) A passage about *muwashshahāt* in which the *abyāt* and the *aqfāl* sections (the “changing rhyme” and “common rhyme” sections) are of dramatically different lengths which, he claims, could lead to mistakes in the musical setting (*talhīn*); and finally,
- c) A passage about the inclusion of nonce syllables (“lā lā”) so that the lyrics of a *muwashshah* will fit its melody.

(1) Singing “Lā Lā”

I would like to treat this third passage about nonce syllables first since it presents no real difficulties in interpretation. Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk writes:

Muwashshahāt are in one other respect divided into two groups: those in which the text fits the music and which require no assistance in this [*qismun yastiqillu al-talhīnu bihi wa-lā yaftaqiru ilā mā yu'īnuhu 'alayhi*] and this group includes the majority of *muwashshahāt*; and those [of the second type] in which the text does not fit the music and cannot be sung without being supported by syllables that have no meaning, as a prop for the melody and a crutch for the singer [*qismun lā yahtamiluhu al-talhīn wa-lā yamshī bihi illā bi-'an yata'āka'a 'alā lafzatin lā ma'na lahā tukūn da'āmatan li-l-talhīni wa-'ukkāzan li-l-mughannī*], such as in the following lyrics by Ibn Baqī:

Man tālib // tha'r qatlā zabayāt al-hudūj // fattānāt al-hajj

[Who shall seek // vengeance for those slain by the gazelles in their litters // temptresses of pilgrims?] ⁷

The melody would not be correct [*al-talhīnu lā yastaqīmu*] without saying “lā lā” between the two sections ending in [the letter] *jīm* [i.e. between the words *hudūj* and *fattānāt*] (p. 50).

First of all, we should observe that the syllables “lā lā” mentioned here clearly represent nonce syllables and not, as Emilio García Gómez has glossed them: “No, no!”⁸

Second, we should note that Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk divides *muwashshahāt* into only two categories – those in which the music fits the text and those in which the music does not fit the text. There is no sense here or elsewhere in *Dār al-Tirāz* that there exist *muwashshahāt* which are *not* set to music. (This is not to say that *all muwashshahāt* everywhere were *always* sung, but rather that the *muwashshahāt* treated by Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk all appear to have been set to music.)

We might also infer from Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk’s comment that the technique of adding nonce syllables was probably not common in classical art music, that is, the singing of lyrics drawn from *qasīda* poetry, because it would otherwise not merit special mention in his discussion of *muwashshahāt*.

The single most important insight, however, that should be extracted from this passage is that it is completely clear at this point that Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk assumes that we his readers are familiar with the *music* of his chosen example. His demonstration in fact only works if we the readers can “hear the song in our heads” and confirm in our own minds that indeed, the lyrics of this song would not fit the melody without the addition of the syllables “lā lā”. The fact that Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk expects us to know his examples *as songs* has a variety of implications, some of which are examined below.

It is very fortunate, therefore, that we *can* hear this very example and thus understand Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk’s argument firsthand. This text is sung in modern Syria and a published transcription appears in Fu’ād Rajā’ī’s collection of *muwashshahāt* entitled *Min Kunūzinā* (From Among Our Treasures).⁹

The transcription clearly shows the two syllables “lā lā” precisely where Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk says they should be and there are exactly two of them, though it is far more common in both North Africa and Syria to find sequences such as “lā lā lā lā lā lā”. Furthermore, this musical example is an excellent demonstration of Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk’s argument because the “lā lā” are not merely decorative here – they do not simply fill space in the melody – but rather fulfill the crucial function of bringing the melodic line back down from the high D to the A which is acting as tonal centre. Breaking the melody off at the high point, that is, where the words end, would produce a ridiculous effect. So here we have an example of a *muwashshah* known in the 12th century, containing the two syllables “lā lā” where they were found nine hundred years ago. Are we therefore looking at an example of a melody that has survived from the Middle Ages to the present in oral tradition?

Apparently not...

Syrian sources affirm that this *muwashshah* was composed in the early 1950's by the Syrian composer Bahjat Hassān.¹⁰ Precisely for the reasons I have just listed, however, it seems impossible that this could be merely a coincidence: How could a modern composer have inserted two, and only two, "lā" syllables precisely where Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk cites them, and in such a way that they prove Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's point by being structurally necessary to the melody when most nonce-syllable passages are not? It seems more likely that the composition of this *muwashshah* was somehow motivated by the publication of the Arabic text of *Dār al-Tirāz* by Jawdat al-Rikābī in 1949, that is, just a few years before Syrian sources say that it was composed. Since Bahjat Hassān composed a number of *muwashshahāt* upon request, it is possible that Fu'ād Raja'ī, the principal scholar of the tradition at that time, or some other person as yet unknown, requested that Hassān compose music for this text with the characteristics noted by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk. However, there is also still a possibility that this is indeed an old *muwashshah* that has been erroneously attributed to Hassān, in which case this would be a remarkable find indeed! Only further research will tell.¹¹

(2) Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's mysterious organ

The next passage of musical interest has led to a large number of interpretations. In yet another of Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's binary divisions, he writes that some *muwashshahāt* are composed in the classical Arabic metres and others not. Here is what he writes of the latter group:

The second group is made up of those [*muwashshahāt*] in which there is no trace of the [classical] Arab metres, and this group is the majority, by far the larger, a number so large it cannot be reckoned, and they are so irregular that they cannot be measured precisely. I wanted to establish a metrical system for them which would be an aid [*daftar*] in classifying them and a measure of their *awtād* and *asbāb* [units of prosody similar to English "feet"; lit. "pegs" and "cords"], but that turned out to be a difficult and impossible undertaking because they resist systematisation and escape one's grasp. They have no prosody but that of the music, no metre but that of the beat, no "pegs" [*awtād*] but the pegs [of the instruments], and no "cords" [*asbāb*] but [the instruments'] strings. Only with this [musical] prosodic system can one know a well-formed *muwashshah* from an uneven one, a perfect one from a defective one.¹²

Most of these *muwashshahāt* are built upon the *ta'lif* [composition] of the *urghun* and singing them to something other than the *urghun* is "borrowed/defective" and on anything else is "metaphorical/artificial". [Or: ...but on something equivalent is acceptable]

Wa- 'aktharuha mabniyyun 'alā ta'lif al-urghun wa-l-ghinā' bihā 'alā

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ghayri l-urghun musta'ārun wa-'alā siwāh majāzun. [Or: 'alā sawāh mujāzun] (p. 47)

The final passage plays on two terms of Arabic rhetoric which refer to different types of metaphor, so one can read this passage in their technical sense of types of metaphor or in a non-technical sense. In addition, the final two words could be read with a different vocalisation to mean a contrastive final phrase rather than a semantic couplet where the first and second phrases express the same idea in different words. Fortunately, the interpretation that is proposed here does not rely on solving Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's intricate word-play.

To this passage we should also add another brief reference to the *urghun* in the closing passages of the work:

... your brother [the author] was not born in al-Andalus, nor was he raised in the Maghrib, nor did he live in Seville, nor did he ever disembark in Murcia or pass through Meknes, nor did he ever hear the *urghun*... (p. 53)

Consuelo Lopez-Morillas has published an excellent survey of seven different possibilities for the term *urghun* with an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate: pipe organ, portable lap organ, organistrum ("hurdy-gurdy"), a wind instrument, any string instrument, any instrument, and as a general metaphor for setting words to music.¹³

I agree not only with her list of candidates, but also with her conclusions, to wit, that none of them seem to provide a conclusive answer. I can also add one further piece of evidence that muddies the water a bit further, from the *Vocabulista* of Pedro de Alcalá (1505), compiled in Granada immediately after its fall to Ferdinand and Isabella, where we find the following three entries under *órgano*.¹⁴

| <u>Castilian</u> | <u>Alcalá's transcription</u> | <u>Modern transcription</u> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Órgano instrumento músico</i> | <i>Múcica</i> | mūsīqā |
| <i>Órganos de plomo</i> | <i>Múcica min a raçaç</i> | mūsīqā min al-rasās |
| <i>Órgano qualquiera instrumento</i> | <i>Élet a zāmr</i> | ālat al-zamr |

For Castilian "Organ, a musical instrument", the Arabic is simply "music"

For Castilian "Lead-[pipe] organ", the Arabic is "music from lead [pipes]"

For Castilian "Organ, any type of instrument", the Arabic is "a reed instrument"

It appears that at least for Andalusians of Granada in the late 15th century, the term *órgano* in the sense of "any musical instrument" referred primarily to a *reed* instrument (*zamr*).

Rather than trying to derive the answer to this puzzle from the term *urghun*, however, I would like to try to deduce from the context what we should be looking for. First of all, the term clearly refers to a type of music or a musical instrument that did not exist in Egypt, for Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk has never heard one; second, it is apparently something specific to al-Andalus and to the performance of Andalusian music; and third, it was either the basis, or a common accompaniment for, the singing of *muwashshahāt*.

The question, then, is whether or not other contemporary sources offer us anything that would fit this description. I believe they do. Both Ahmad al-Tifāshī and Ibn Khaldūn give descriptions of an instrument that they considered specifically Andalusian and that they both considered the most beautiful instrument for the accompaniment of singing (though neither of them specify the singing of *muwashshahāt*): *al-būq*. The term *al-būq* has misled a number of scholars since it had two very different meanings, one used primarily in the Mashriq and the other primarily in al-Andalus. *Al-būq* in the Mashriq referred to a long, metal trumpet, and it is this meaning that appears in all Arabic dictionaries. Here, however, is Ahmad al-Tifāshī's description:

But the noblest instrument among [the Andalusians], and that which gives the most perfect pleasure in dancing and singing is *al-būq*. It is one of the things that is distinctive to [*mimma yakhtassu bihi*] the people of al-Andalus. It is shaped like *al-zamar* [oboe, *mizmār*], large as *al-būq* [here: trumpet], and inserted into its head is an [animal] horn [*qarn*], then into the horn is inserted a reed-cane [*qasba*], then into the reed-cane is inserted a small tube [*ja'ba*], and it continues thus in sections until it ends in a wheat straw [*qasba min qasab hinta*] at the very end – that is where it is played and the real art [of the instrument] lies therein. When it is played it produces strange beautiful sounds of the most wondrous and ecstasy-provoking type [*fi ghāyat al-atrāb*]. Among [the Andalusians] it is the most festive of instruments for singing and dancing in their drinking parties [*majlis al-sharāb*].¹⁵

*Wa-'ashrafu ālatin 'indahum wa-'akmaluhā ladhdhatan fī l-raqsī wa-l-ghinā'ī al-būq wa-huwa mimma yakhtassu bihi ahlu l-Andalus. Wa-huwa shaklun li-l-zamar 'azīmun ka-l-būq, yadkhalu [or: yudkhalu] fī ra'sihi qarnun thumma yadkhalu fī al-qarni qasbatun, thumma yadkhalu fī l-qasbati ja'batun saghīratun wa-lā tazālu tatadarriju kadhālika ilā 'an yantahī ilā qasbatin min qasabi l-hintati takūnu 'ākhīru l-jamī', yakūnu al-zamaru fīhi, wa-l-sanā'atu kulluhā fīhā. Wa-yakhrāju 'inda l-'amali aswātun gharībatun 'azīmatun ghāyati l-atrābi wa-l-'ajābi. Wa-hādihā 'indahum min a'zami ihtifāli 'alāti al-ghinā'ī wa-l-raqsī fī majlisi l-sharāb.*¹⁶

As this passage from al-Tifāshī demonstrates, the Andalusian *būq* was nothing like a trumpet; it was a reed instrument, it produced an unusual sound that

was not easily comparable to other instruments, and it was the pride of al-Andalus. Ibn Khaldūn offers us a similar description in which he calls the Andalusian *būq* “among the best of the reed instruments of this era” [*min ahsan ālāt al-zamr li-hādihā l-‘ahā*] and says that its sound is delightful [*maldhūdh*].¹⁷

The use of the *būq* as accompaniment for singing is also attested in a brief but illuminating description of a wedding in the streets of medieval Cordoba in the *Jadhwat al-muqtabis* of Ibn Humaydī (1029-95) who transmits the following statement:

I found myself at a wedding in the streets of Cordoba and al-Nakūrī, the woodwind-player [*al-zāmīr*] was seated in the middle of the crowd wearing a brocade cap on his head and a suit of raw silk in the ‘*ubaydī* style. His horse was richly decorated and was held by his servant. In the past he had performed before ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Nāsir. He performed on the *būq* the verses by Ahmad ibn Kulayb about [his beloved], Aslam, and an excellent singer sang it while he played:

Aslam, that young gazelle, delivered [*aslama*] me to passion.
An antelope with an eye that obtains whatever he desires
An envier slandered us and questions will be asked of that slander
If [he] desires a bribe for our union, my very soul shall be the bribe.¹⁸

The term *al-buq* has also survived in Spanish as *albogue* and its derivative *albogón* (the big *albogue*). Not only do we have a number of medieval images of this family of instruments, including in the *Cantigas de Santa María*, but in Iberian folk music various different forms of the instrument have survived until the present, particularly, interestingly enough, among the Basques of the Pyrenees, where it is called the *alboka*, and who also still perform on the rabel [*rabāb*]. Closely related to the *albogue*, *albogón* and *alboka* is the *xeremie* on the island of Ibiza in the Balearic islands and the *gaita serrana* which is performed in the mountainous regions just north of Madrid. They are all, along with their modern Arab equivalents (*arghūl*, *mizwij*, and *maqrūna*) from the family of single or double clarinets.

Now let us imagine that someone from al-Maghrib or al-Andalus is describing this instrument, the *būq*, to Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk, perhaps the “Moroccan informant” mentioned by his medieval biographers. Although the name of the instrument would not correspond to the description, the description itself – fitting one piece of cane into another until it ends in a special mouthpiece made of a small reed – would have been completely recognisable to an Egyptian for it could apply equally well to the instrument which in modern times is called the *arghūl* or *yarghūl*. In older texts the name appears in a variety of different spellings – with long or short U, with

final N or final L, and with either initial A or U. The reason for the various spellings, according to one medieval Arabic treatise, is precisely because they all derive from the word *urghun* (“organ”).¹⁹ Even more important is that the two instruments *sound* very much alike; if one has heard both, it is very easy to imagine someone from al-Andalus or the Maghrib describing the Andalusian *būq* to an Egyptian by saying that it sounds just like an Egyptian *arghūl*.

To sum up then, Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk may quite possibly have heard a description of the Andalusian *būq* (though we know that he personally never saw or heard one). The term *būq* in Egypt meant a long metal trumpet, so either the person speaking to Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, or he himself when writing for his Eastern readers, may well have substituted the term that *would* have meant something similar, namely *arghūl*, in any one of its various pronunciations and spellings. Whatever term Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk originally wrote down may also have been deformed through scribal error, for final *lam* [L] and final *nun* [N] are infamously easily confused.

If we return now to our original text, the idea of *muwashshahāt* being “built upon the composition of the *urghun*” might still seem awkward, but here another medieval text offers us nearly the same phrase and allows us to surmise that *muwashshahāt* and *zajals* that were sung to the *būq* were of a particular type or style. Ibn Sa'īd al-Andalusī (1213-86) reports that a physician named Yahyā ibn 'Abdallāh ibn al-Bahbada, who worked in the service of the sultan in the 13th century: “composed *zajals* as a caprice that people sing to the *būq* [*yughannūna bihā 'alā al-būq*]”.²⁰ He then includes the text of a *zajal* of this type which was nicknamed *al-Tayyār* (the Flyer). Normally, of course, the melody of a *zajal* or any other song should be able to be performed on any instrument – the lute, the *būq* or even sung *a capella* – so it is noteworthy that these *zajals* are associated with one specific instrument. Whether the implication is social (i.e. common folk sing *zajals* to the *būq* but in the court they are sung to the lute) or musical (i.e. there is a certain type of composition that fits the *būq*), however, is difficult to say.

In summary, the *būq* – referred to in *Dār al-Tirāz* as the *urghun* – would fit the parameters we have been looking for: an instrument that was distinctly Andalusian and which was commonly used to accompany singing. Though it itself was not known in Egypt, it was similar enough in construction and in sound to the Egyptian *arghūl* for us to surmise that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk or his informant may have substituted that term. Although I do not consider the *būq* to be the definitive solution to Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's mysterious organ, I believe it has as much merit as other candidates and should certainly be added to the list of possibilities.

(3) Retuning in performance

A third passage of *Dār al-Tirāz* which offers us explicit musical information

occurs in Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's analysis of *muwashshahāt* in which the *awzān* (sing. *wazn*, usually translated as "metres") of the two contrasting sections, the *abyāt* and the *aqfāl*, are noticeably different. First he discusses an example of a *muwashshah* in which the *aqfāl* and the *abyāt* are of the same *wazn*, and then he discusses the contrasting group:

There is another group of [*muwashshahāt*] in which the *aqfāl* are different from the *awzān* of the *abyāt*, which is clear to every listener [*sāmi*] and whose flavour is apparent to every connoisseur [*dhā'iq*], such as the text of one composer:

al-hubbu yajnika ladhdat al-'adhali
wa-lawmu fihi ahlā min al-qubālī
li-kulli shay'in min al-hawā sababu
jadda l-hawā biyya wa-asluhu l-li'abu
wa-'in law kān // jaddun yughnī // kān al-ihsān // min al-husni

Love makes it a pleasure to be rebuked

To be blamed for love's sake is sweeter than kisses

In love all matters have their reason

Love for me grows grave though it started in play

But if there were // luck that served // there'd be mercy // from this beauty

Here you can see the distinction between the *awzān* of the *aqfāl* and the *abyāt*, and that this difference is extremely clear. Only those among the people of this art who are very well versed in this science are brave enough to attempt to compose this type of *muwashshah*, and they deserve to be recognised as masters by their contemporaries. For when a newcomer to this table [i.e. a beginner] hears this *muwashshah*, and sees the clear distinction between the *awzān* of the *aqfāl* and the *abyāt*, he will think that this is acceptable [*jā'iz*] in any *muwashshah*, and he will create something that is unacceptable and which does not fit the music. His failure will become clear at the moment of performance, for the singer on some instruments will have to change "the tightness of the strings" [*shadd al-awtār*; i.e. will have to retune], when moving from the *qufl* and to the *bayt* and from the *bayt* to the *qufl*. This is something that should be noted and remembered (pp. 48-9).

Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk starts out speaking about what appears to be an issue of metrics, but ends up speaking about what is clearly an issue of melodic modulation which involves retuning the string instruments. Emilio García Gómez dismisses this passage out of hand saying that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk is mistaken: in fact, García Gómez dismisses one assertion by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk as "absurd," another as an "exaggeration," and rejects this passage saying the author is simply "incorrect".²¹ Personally, I am little inclined to dismiss

primary texts in such a cavalier manner, particularly since there appears to be a rather simple explanation which would make sense of this passage.

Remembering that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk expects us to be able to “hear the example in our head” and therefore follow his argument, and once again deducing from the text what we should be looking for, it would seem that the example he offers is of a *muwashshah* in which there is both a melodic and a rhythmic (or metrical) change in the shift from *bayt* to *qufl* and back again. Do such *muwashshahāt* exist?

In both North Africa and in the Mashriq – indicating that this is probably a rather old feature since it is found in both regions – the musical change that occurs when going back and forth between the *qufl* and *bayt* sections often involves a change of tonal centre (that is, the melodic phrase is located higher or lower than the previous phrase) but most often does not involve a change in rhythm or a radical change in poetic metre. In North Africa this is considered patently impossible, because every *muwashshah* has been categorised and placed within its *nūba* (suite) according to its rhythm and that rhythm does not, and cannot, change during the song. But there are *muwashshahāt* in the Mashriq where the rhythm changes along with the tonal centre when the song shifts back and forth between the *qufl* and the *bayt*, and some of these *muwashshahāt* appear, given the limited documentation available, to be among the oldest examples in the repertory.

Badat min al-khidr (“She appeared from behind the curtain”) is such an example, still performed in Syria and in Egypt today. It is found in Fu'ād al-Rajā'ī's *Min Kunūzinā* in which he lists both the melody and the lyric as old and anonymous [*qadīm*].²² It is also found in Shihāb al-Dīn al-Misrī's *Safīnat al-mulk wa-nafīsat al-fulk* from one hundred years earlier in Cairo.²³ In the Syrian collection it appears within a suite [*wasta*] in the mode of *Bayātī* [d-e[♭]-f-g-a-b[♭]-c] which is the mode of the *bayt* [in modern Syrian terms, the *dōr*] while the *qufl* section [in modern terms, the *khāna*] modulates to the mode of *Busalik* [d-e[♮]-f-g-a-b[♭]-c]. In the 19th-century Egyptian collection it appears under the mode *'Ushshāq* (a mode that contains the same notes as *Bayātī* but with slightly different melodic emphasis).²⁴ In both versions the *muwashshah* includes three different rhythms: *muhajjar*, *sittat 'ashara*, and *yūrūk* in Syria and *muhajjar*, *sittat 'ashara*, and *samā'ī* in Egypt. The texts were thus almost certainly sung to the same, or closely related, melodies.

| <u>Dōr</u> (= <i>bayt</i> , <i>ghusn</i>) #1 | <u>Rhyme</u> | <u>Melody</u> |
|--|--------------|---------------|
| <i>Badat min al-khidri // fī haykal al-anwār</i> | A B | 1 |
| <i>Tazhū 'alā l-badri // wa-takhjul al-aqmār</i> | A B | 1 |
| <i>Min rīqihā khamrī // wa-thaghruhā l-khammār</i> | A B | 1 |

Khāna (= *qufl*, *simt*)

| | | |
|--|------|---|
| <i>Qum yā sāqī l-rāh // nastajli l-aqdāh</i> | CC | 2 |
| <u>Silsila</u> → <i>Wa-implā lī // jaryālī // tajlā lī // yā sāh</i> | DDDC | 3 |
| <i>La-qad tahayya' sukri ma'a l-milāh</i> | C | |

Dōr #2

| | | |
|--|-----|---|
| <i>Sahhat wa-mā shahhat // min 'ālam al-sirri (etc.)</i> | E F | 1 |
|--|-----|---|

She appeared from behind the curtain // in the form of lights
She outshines the full moon // and puts the stars to shame
Her spittle is my wine // her mouth the tavern-keeper

Rise, O cup-bearer // let us bring forth the goblets!
Fill for me // my wine // reveal yourself to me // O friend
My drunkenness has come about with [the presence of] these beauties

She poured out, and was not stingy, // from the secret world (etc.)

If we look at the Arabic text we can see that the third section, starting with “*Wa-implā lī*” is a dramatic break from the *awzān* of the *qufl* and *bayt* sections and, like the example given by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, includes a series of rhymes in rapid succession:

Modern example (“*Badat min al-khidr*”):

wa-implā lī // jaryālī // tajlā lī // yā sāh

Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's example:

wa-'in law kān // jaddun yughnī // kān al-ihsān // min al-husni

Our modern example therefore has the basic characteristics that we deduced that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's example “should” have in order to prove his point, namely, a change in both rhythm and melodic mode, as well as a rapid sequence of rhymes. This structure is common enough to have received a technical musical term – *silsila* [lit. “chain”] – in Arabic songbooks of the last few centuries, presumably from the idea of a rapid “chain” of rhyme words. The modulation that occurs between the sections is furthermore precisely of the type that would have required retuning the *mashriqī rabāb* in the 12th century, at least if it was still tuned as it was in the days of al-Fārābī (d. 950), since the upper string, according to al-Fārābī was often tuned to the third (that is E², E^b, or E[♭], for modes in C).²⁵ The key modal change in this

muwashshah is from E^ḥ to E^ḳ, which would have required that the *rabāb*-player retune his instrument.

If we then re-read Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk in the light of this example, we can see that his reference to the difference in *awzān* between the “common rhyme” and “changing rhyme” sections may equally well be read as a reference to changing *rhythm* (rather than poetic metre) since the term *wazn* can refer to either, and that it is quite likely that in his example there was a change in rhythm and melodic mode at the same time. Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk does not carefully distinguish between the rhythmic and modal change – but as we have seen, he does not appear to have been a scholar of music theory and it is precisely from an amateur or layperson's point of view that one might confuse the effect of the change in mode and the change in rhythm. Judging from our modern example, it seems quite possible that were we able to *hear* Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's example, his argument would make perfect sense, and, in fact, if we substitute *Badat min al-khidr* for Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's *al-Hubbu yajnikā*, his argument makes sense even today.

III. Did Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk compose his *muwashshahāt* as poems or as songs?

Given the amount of doubt I have cast upon Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's musical expertise, one might well wonder whether his own *muwashshahāt*, such as those he included in *Dār al-Tirāz*, were composed as poems or songs, and, if the latter, whether he himself composed the music. Another, as yet unpublished, work by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk provides a partial answer. *Fusūs al-fusūl wa-'uqūd al-'uqūd* (MS Paris 3333) contains a collection of letters between Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk and al-Qādī al-Fādīl and one of those letters includes a passage in which the ever modest Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk writes of his own *muwashshahāt*:

... 'udīrat 'alayhi al-akwābu wa-khuriqat fihi al-thiyābu wa-*shadā* bihi al-rijālu wa-l-niswānu wa-*tarannama* bihi al-shuyūkhū wa-l-shub-bānu [...] wa-*ghannā* bihi man lā *yughannī* mugharridan [...] wa-kam min [...] majlisin *shadā* fihi wa-alhā al-nadīma 'an ka'sihi wa-unsihi, wa-kam sūfiyin sami'ahu fa-qāma ilā lahwihī min qu'ūdihi, wa-'awwādin *ghannā* bihi fa-ra'ā fī l-nutūq ghāyat su'ūdihi min 'ūdih...

... to the accompaniment of [my *muwashshahāt*] the cups have been passed round, and at hearing them [the listeners] have ripped open their gowns; they have been **sung** by women and by men, they have been **sung** by elders and by youths [...] those who do not know how to **sing** have **sung** them as sweetly as the chirping of the birds [...] O in how many [...] gatherings have they been **sung** causing those present to be distracted from their wine and the company, and how many Sufis

have heard them and out of pleasure given up their abstinence, and how many lute-players have **sung** them and in performing them reaching the pinnacle of pleasure with their lute...²⁶

Apparently Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's *muwashshahāt* had a nearly irresistible – one might even say dangerous – effect upon the general population. The critical point for our purposes is that the terms he uses for singing in this passage – *shadā*, *ghannā*, *tarannama* – are all unmistakably musical terms. Even if we might not fully accept Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's claims for the popularity of his *muwashshahāt*, he is clearly stating that they were *sung*. We do not know, however, whether he himself composed the tunes. Given that Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk was in almost every other way copying a tradition he did not know firsthand, we might well hazard a guess that he set his texts to already extant tunes, that is, that he composed his *muwashshahāt* by *contrafactum* (the musical equivalent of *mu'arada*), a widespread practice which we can document from almost all periods of the *muwashshah*'s history and which is attested, among others, by al-Tifāshī in the 13th century, only a few years after Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's death.²⁷

Conclusion

A number of the points made above are inferences and are far from being proven beyond shadow of doubt, but for the sake of argument let us propose to accept these various conjectures for a moment and ask: What is the portrait of the *muwashshah* as a musical tradition that results from this reading of *Dār al-Tirāz*?

First, *muwashshahāt* for Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk were primarily, if not exclusively, songs. Even when they were set down in written form (such as in Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's letters to al-Qādī al-Fādīl) they were discussed as songs and his letters themselves make reference to people singing them. Second, *muwashshahāt* were sung to the accompaniment of a variety of musical instruments and in al-Andalus they were often performed to the Andalusian *būq*. This was true enough that a visitor from Morocco could say to Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk something along the lines of: "Well, it is perfectly fine to sing *muwashshahāt* to other instruments, but if you really want to hear them sung well, you have to hear them sung to the *būq* – otherwise it's just not the real thing." In the 12th century, as today, the majority of *muwashshahāt* did not include a rhythmic shift between the *aqfāl* and the *abyāt*, though some did, and though the two sections might be based in different tonic centres or even different modes, a good composer would avoid modulations that required the string-players – namely, the *rabāb*-player and/or possibly the harp-player (*rūta/jank*) – to retune.

Most *muwashshahāt* did not follow the classical Arabic metres and were composed to fit the music, probably quite often an already extant tune,

for if one were composing a lyric and melody together, there would be little reason to add “lā lā lā” to fill out the musical line. The technique of singing nonce syllables as “padding” was apparently not used in classical art singing of the period. In addition, many *muwashshahāt* were already popular enough in the Egypt of Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's day that he could assume that anyone who chose to read his book would be familiar enough with the best-known songs that he could present arguments based on that knowledge. Finally, although some of the arguments made by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk are not expressed with great precision, they are all in fact comprehensible if we recognise that he is speaking of music and not just texts. Certainly none of them are, at least in my opinion, simply “exaggerations”.

NOTES

1. The most important studies of *Dār al-Tirāz* include Martin Hartmann, *Das Muwaššah: das arabischen Gestrophengedicht* (Weimar: Emil Felber, 1897); Emilio García Gómez, “Estudio del <Dār at-Tirāz> Preceptiva Egipcia de la Muwaššaha”, *Al-Andalus* 27 (1962): 21-104; Linda Fish Compton, *Andalusian Lyrical Poetry and Old Spanish Love Songs: The Muwashshah and Its Kharja* (New York: New York University Press, 1976); Jawdat al-Rikābī, ed., *Dār al-Tirāz fī 'amal al-muwashshahāt* 2nd ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1977); Muhammad Ibrāhīm Nasr, *Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk: Hayātuhu wa-shi'ruhu* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tibā'a, 1967); and Muhammad Zakariyā 'Inānī, *Dār al-Tirāz fī 'amal al-muwashshahāt: Dirāsa wa-tahqīq* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 2001).
2. For the life of the latter, see Hadia Dajani-Shakeel, *Al-Qādī al-Fādil 'Abd al-Rahīm al-Bisānī al-'Askānī (1131-1199 AD)*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1999).
3. All page numbers given for quotations from *Dār al-Tirāz* are from *Dār al-Tirāz*, ed. Jawdat al-Rikābī, 2nd ed. All translations from the Arabic are my own.
4. James Monroe, “The Tune or the Words? (Singing Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry)”, *Al-Qantara* 8 (1987): 265-317.
5. Khalīl Ibn Aybak al-Safadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt* (Wiesbaden: Frantz Stagner, 1962): Vol. 27, p. 230.
6. Muhammad Zakariyā 'Inānī, *Dār al-Tirāz*, p. 9; Ibn Abī 'Udhayba cited by Miqdād Rahīm, *al-Muwashshahāt fī bilād al-Shām mundhu nash'atihi hattā nihāyat al-qarn al-thānī 'ashar al-hijrī* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Nahda al-'Arabiyya, 1987): 134.
7. Although some sources cite *qatlī* rather than *qatlā*, I agree with al-Rikābī's reading, for it is surely the maidens who slay (male) pilgrims with their arrow-like glances and not the poet who has slain the maidens. An alternative, though more awkward, reading would have *qatlī* mean “their killing of me”.
8. García Gómez may have been misled by another occurrence of “lā lā” in the third stanza of the poem, where the words do indeed mean “No, no!”
9. Fu'ād Rajā'ī and Nadīm al-Darwīsh, *Min kunūzinā: al-halqa al-'ūla fī l-muwashshahāt al-andalusiyya* (Aleppo: n.p.): 174.

10. My sincere thanks to my colleague Jonathan Shannon who provided me with this information from Syria.
11. There are other reasons to wonder if indeed this is a modern composition: it is quite short and simple, resembling the older songs in the repertory much more than 19th- and 20th-century compositions; it does not share any stylistic features with other *muwashshahāt* by Bahjat Hassān that I have been able to study; both the mode and rhythm are archaic (there are only two other songs in the mode *husaynī* and only one other song in the rhythm *mudawwar 'arabī* among the 138 pieces included in the collection *Min Kunūzinā* and all three are listed as old and anonymous [*qadīm*]). If Hassān did compose this *muwashshah*, he went to great lengths to create a piece that appears to be quite old.
12. This passage is built around a play on words drawn from the terminology of Arabic prosody which was originally drawn from the image of a Bedouin tent: a verse is referred to as a *bayt* (a tent), a hemistich is a *shatr*, originally the flap of the tent door, and so forth. The “pegs” are units of one short plus one long syllable and “cords” are units of one long syllable in traditional Arabic scansion.
13. Consuelo Lopez-Morillas, “Was the *Muwashshah* really accompanied by the Organ?” *La Corónica* Vol. 14, no. 1 (Fall 1985): 40-54.
14. The *Vocabulista* was compiled in Granada in the years following its fall to Ferdinand and Isabel and first published in 1505. Its musical vocabulary has been studied by Rodrigo de Zayas in *La música en el Vocabulista granadino de Fray Pedro de Alcalá 1492-1505* (Seville: El Monte, 1995).
15. This translation presents only slight emendations to that already published by Benjamin M. Liu and James T. Monroe, *Ten Hispano-Arabic Songs in the Modern Oral Tradition* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989): 43-4.
16. Muhammad Ibn Tāwīt al-Tanjī, “al-Tarā'iq wa-l-alhān al-mūsīqiyya fi Ifrīqiya wa-l-Andalus”, *Abhāth* 21 (1968): 115-16.
17. Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, ed. E. M. Quatremère (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 2002): Vol. 1, pp. 353-4.
18. Muhammad Ibn al-Humaydī, *Jadhwat al-muqtabis* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1983): 223. This passage is quoted in Ahmed Tahiri, *Las clases populares en al-Andalus* (Madrid: Sarria, 2003), p. 92; however, the phrase “El flautista de Nakur iniciaba el canto de la *muwashshaha* (especie de composición métrica) celebre entre la ‘amma de Córdoba” does not occur in the Arabic text and is apparently an interpolation by the author. The four monorhymed verses do not, in fact, appear to be part of a *muwashshah*.
19. See Amnon Shiloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (900-1900)* (Munich: Henle Verlag, 1979): 376-83.
20. 'Alī ibn Mūsā Ibn Sa'īd al-Andalusī, *Al-Mughrib fi hulā l-Maghrib*, ed. Shawqī Dayf (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964): Vol. 1, p. 177: *wa-lahu azjālun 'alā tariqati l-badāt allāti yughannūna bihā 'alā l-būq*. The phrase *tariqat al-badāt* (lit. by way of a caprice or whim) led Julian Ribera y Tarragó to interpret this passage as follows: “The physician Yahya bin Abdu-l-lah Al-Bahdaba [sic] took a notion to compose very original *zejels* accompanied by wind instruments, like the horn, instead of by strings” – quoted from the English edition of *Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain* (New

York: Da Capo Press, 1970), p. 137, note 67. This interpretation, however, is not borne out by the Arabic text. It is just as likely that the phrase “by way of a whim” simply means that this physician composed *zajals* as a pastime, not that singing *zajals* to the *būq* was “highly original” for as we have already seen, other sources demonstrate that singing to the accompaniment of the *būq* was already widespread in al-Andalus.

21. E. García Gómez, “Estudio”, pp. 34, 51, 59.

22. Fu'ād al-Rajā'ī, *Min Kunūzinā* (Aleppo 1956): 156-8.

23. Muhammad Ismā'īl Shihāb al-Dīn al-Misrī, *Safīnat al-mulk wa-naḥīyat al-fulk* (Cairo: n.p., 1856): 202.

24. In addition, there has been a historical shift in the categorisation of melodic modes in Egypt and Syria and several modes that were considered distinct and had separate names (*Busalik*, *'Ushshāq* and *Husaynī*, for example) are now commonly referred to as part of *Bayā'ī*. Thanks to my colleagues Scott Marcus and Jonathan Shannon for their assistance on this point.

25. Rodolphe D'Erlanger, *La Musique arabe* (Paris: Guenther, 2001; rpt. of 1930), Vol. 1, pp. 280-6.

26. Quoted in Nasr, *Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk*, p.139.

27. Liu and Monroe, *Ten Hispano-Arabic Strophic Songs*, p. 37; al-Tanjī, “al-Tarā'iq”, p.102.

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