

LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF THE TUNISIAN *MALUF*

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The form of Tunisian music known as *maluf* is afforded special status in Tunisian popular culture. Its song texts are direct descendants of the Andalusian *muwashshahāt* poetic form. *Maluf* is thought to have originated as court music in al-Andalus, and arrived in Tunisia with the influx of Muslim and Jewish refugees who fled from Spain to the northern and coastal towns of Tunisia between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. Until the twentieth century the *maluf* tradition was maintained principally by Sufi brotherhoods and was transmitted orally from generation to generation. Following the Congress for Arab Music (Cairo, 1932), the Rashidiyya Institute instigated the transcription of the *maluf* lyrics and musical score. This had the effect of freezing what had been an oral repertoire, with its inevitable flux and change, into an established canon. Despite a state-sponsored attempt to propagate this official version of *maluf* throughout the country, other unofficial versions still remain. Ruth Davis, in her recent book *Maluf: Reflections on the Arab Andalusian Music of Tunisia*,¹ as well as providing a more detailed history of *maluf* than is offered here, has dealt with the question of canonisation and the various versions of *maluf*, focusing on the melodic aspects. Following on from Davis' work, I have begun to examine the linguistic differences between the published/government version of the *maluf* and a number of other co-existing versions, from the point of view of the text. In this paper I begin with an overview of the history of *maluf*, and then consider some of the linguistic differences between the official version and other unofficial versions of the *maluf* that are still performed in Tunisia today.

Maluf (with the literal meaning of familiar or customary, cf. the Classical Arabic *ma'luf*) is a form of urban music, and its repertoire is mainly vocal. It seems to have originated as court music in al-Andalus and is attributed to Abu al-Hasan 'Ali Ibn Nafi', known as Ziryab, meaning lark or blackbird. He was a freed Persian slave, who was driven out of the court of Harun al-Rashid in Baghdad and took refuge in the court of 'Abd al-Rahman II in Cordoba in AD 822.² There he founded a music school and "developed new compositional principles based on a system of 24 melodic modes".³ Umayya Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz Abi 'l-Salt, is credited as being the one who conveyed the repertoire to Tunis in around 1100 and there established a music school. With the influx of Muslim and Jewish refugees from Spain to the northern and coastal towns between the twelfth and seventeenth

centuries, this form of Andalusí music firmly took root in Tunisia.

Lafran-Jones (1977) posits that “ignoring marginal subsequent losses and additions, the *maluf* repertoire was probably fixed in tradition during the eighteenth century and transmitted from generation to generation of musicians by chiefly oral means since that time.”⁴ Yet it is doubtful that the *maluf* repertoire which is sung today is word for word that of the Andalusí court. It is believed that many insertions to the *maluf* repertoire were made by anonymous composers throughout the history of the *maluf*. The evidence for this lies in the abundance of Tunisian Arabic admixtures to be found in the *maluf* repertoire. It is interesting that *maluf* has managed to retain its musical uniqueness, despite influences from the Middle East and Turkey which have affected many other forms of Tunisian music. Lafran-Jones notes that these influences “were grafted into the *maluf* system rather than superseding it”.⁵

Davis (1986) maintains that it was aristocratic amateurs, Jewish professional musicians, and members of the Sufi brotherhoods who were responsible for the spread of *maluf* in the northern and coastal regions of the country.⁶ Indeed, until fairly recently the popularity of *maluf* has been limited to these areas. The public performances tended to be given by Sufi musicians. Davis (1986) notes: “In the [Sufi] lodges, the *maluf* was typically sung after the weekly public ceremonies, which generally culminated in trance; the secular songs were supposed to calm the heightened emotional atmosphere, and the entire congregation joined in the singing”.⁷ The aristocratic amateurs did not give public performances but tended to play for their own pleasure.

The turning-point in the status of *maluf* was the First International Congress for Arab Music, held in Cairo in 1932. The conference highlighted the need for the preservation and promotion of musical traditions and, in the case of Tunisia, the safeguarding of those indigenous traditions in the wake of the rising popularity of Egyptian music. As a result, in 1934 the Ma‘had al-Rashidiyya was set up by seventy patrons of *maluf* from various professions, including professional musicians, intellectuals, poets, doctors, lawyers and also enthusiastic *maluf* amateurs. It was named after Muhammad al-Rashid (d. 1759), who had been Bey of Tunis and was himself an amateur *maluf* musician. The aim of the founders was to conserve this form of traditional Tunisian music and to counteract the influx of Middle Eastern music, particularly Egyptian, which was flooding the Tunisian market at this time. The official historian of the Rashidiyya, Salah al-Mahdi, describes how “Tunisian musicians were abandoning their own tradition and imitating the visiting Egyptian celebrities, not only musically but also in their dress and dialect”.⁸

Up until this point *maluf* had been preserved and transmitted orally via

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the Sufi lodges. With the founding of the Rashidiyya, efforts began to transcribe the *maluf* repertoire into musical notation. During the late 1930s and early 1940s members of the Rashidiyya painstakingly transcribed the repertoire, which they collected from the sheikhs and put into Western musical notation.

Since 1961 *maluf* has been officially designated the national musical heritage of Tunisia and is now considered the Tunisian classical music. Also at this time, a nationwide network of cultural institutions was set up in towns and cities throughout the country. Known as *dār ath-thaqāfa*, each of these cultural centres established its own amateur *maluf* ensemble. Thus the popularity of this type of music spread to rural and desert populations where it had previously been unknown. The concomitant of this popularisation, combined with the negative attitude of the post-independence government towards the Sufi brotherhoods, was the secularisation of *maluf*.

The performance milieu of *maluf* was radically changed with the designation of the genre as the Tunisian Musical Heritage. From being performed in traditional social contexts such as weddings, circumcisions etc, in Sufi lodges as well as in cafes, *maluf* came to be performed only in the context of specific *maluf* concerts. Indeed, as al-Mahdi pointed out, this was also one of the aims of the Institute: "The essential goals of the Rashidiyya Institute were first, to achieve the highest possible performance standards for the *maluf* and second, to create for the *maluf* a dignified and respectable public, secular environment which would guarantee it a social status consistent with the high quality of its music and poetry, the prestige associated with the Andalusian heritage, and the respect it enjoyed as the only secular musical repertory admitted into the Sufi lodges. The founding of the Rashidiyya represented an attempt to remove the *maluf* from vulgar environments such as cafes with their hashish smokers and wedding celebrations with their alcohol, in which Middle Eastern songs and inferior Tunisian repertoires also paraded."⁹ Indeed, the efforts of the Rashidiyya seem to have proved successful in that it is generally held that today's *maluf* audience are members of the higher social classes. The annual *maluf* festival held in the small northern Tunisian town of Testour is a testimony to the continuing popularity of the genre.

Notable efforts were made to collate and safeguard the *maluf* tradition. In the 1930s the Rashidiyya began the process of collecting the *maluf* from the sheikhs of Tunis, and in the early 1960s a Ministry of Culture project resulted in material being collected from forty sheikhs from different parts of the country. What was obvious was the differences between the versions of the *maluf* texts that the various sheikhs had provided. Each sheikh claimed that their version was the closest to the Andalusian original.¹⁰ Under the auspices of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the First National Conference

on *maluf* was held in the Tunisian coastal town of Tabarka in 1963, with subsequent congresses in Tozeur and Carthage in 1964.¹¹ The aim of the conferences was to iron out the discrepancies between the different versions, and to come up with a definitive musical score and text so that the whole of Tunisia would use the same version. This would also prevent disputes such as whether the Testour version was more correct than the Sfax version, or whether the Zaghouan version was closer to the original.¹² In order to achieve these aims members of the Rashidiyya and a number of sheikhs collated and recorded the *maluf* texts and melodies they knew, transcribed them and these were then compared with the Rashidiyya versions by the Committee for Musical Comparisons (under the direction of Muhammad Triki) and the Committee for Literary Comparisons (under the direction of Uthman Ka'ak).¹³ According to the committees there were "no essential differences between the versions".¹⁴ However, controversy still remains as to how comprehensive these transcriptions were.

The committee also decided that the grammar of the Classical Arabic sections should be corrected and the pronunciation of the Tunisian Arabic and Andalusian Arabic parts standardised.¹⁵ It is unfortunate that the whereabouts of the original, "pre-corrected" transcriptions of the versions of the *maluf* recorded by the sheikhs and the Rashidiyya are not known. Had these been available it would have been possible to compare them with the nine-volume version published by the Ministry of Culture.

Following the committee's work, the now "corrected" and standardised version of the *maluf* was distributed to all the sheikhs, who were sent back to their various parts of the country to pass on this definitive version.¹⁶ Emissaries were also sent to each *dār ath-thaqāfa* to teach each *maluf* group the corrected version. The official version of *maluf* gradually usurped the status of the various regional versions. Davis found that "the official view, represented by Salah al-Mahdi and his successor at the Department of Music and Popular Arts, Fethi Zghonda, was that such alternative traditions simply did not exist: any divergences from the official version were considered either 'non-essential' or 'incorrect'".¹⁷ Davis also notes that in the traditional *maluf* heartlands of Zaghouan and Sidi Bou Said the official version came to be considered as "the pure, unadulterated version of the repertory originally imported by the Andalusian refugees, which had become distorted and fragmented through centuries of oral transmission and neglect under foreign rule".¹⁸ Thus, after centuries of existing as an oral tradition, part of the Tunisian collective memory, the *maluf* was effectively "frozen" into an established canon. This official *maluf* is in effect a record of the amalgamated versions of a number of *maluf* variations which had evolved up until the early 1960s. However, it seems that despite the efforts of the Tunisian Ministry of Culture to propagate the standardised version of the repertoire, other unofficial versions continued, and indeed still continue, to be performed.

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The following examples from the *maluf* lyrics demonstrate a number of linguistic differences that are evident between the official, printed version and other unofficial versions of three *nubat* (suites). The first example shows three variations of the same *Barwal*, which is *Barwal 6* from *Nubat al-Ḥsīn*.¹⁹ Musical analysis of this text can be found in Davis (2005: pp. 112-15). The published version is the official Ministry of Culture version:

Published Version

mā bīdū qadiyya, il- 'abdu miskīn mā lū ikhtiyār
il-hawā adnā fu'ādī wa al-gharām 'adhhab qulaybī
yā sham 'a dawayya insī mutayyam afnāhu as-sahar

The decision is not his, the poor slave has no choice
Love consumed my heart and passion tortured my little heart
O bright candle, keep company the man enslaved by love, who is exhausted
by sleeplessness

The next version is that of the renowned Tunisian musician Khemais Tarnane (1894-1964).

Tarnane Version

yā raytu qaziyya mā bīdū qaziyya al- 'abdu miskīn mā lū ikhtiyār
il-hawā aznā fuwādī al-gharām māziq qulaybī
yā sham 'a zawiyya wāsil 'ubaydik afnāhu s-shar

O I saw a problem, the decision is not his, the poor slave has no choice
Love consumed my heart, passion is ripping apart my little heart
O bright candle, come close to your little slave whom sleeplessness
exhausted

The addition of the phrase *yā raytu qaziyya* at the beginning of the first line of the *Barwal* is the first noticeable variation from the printed version. In terms of phonological differences, the pronunciation of the voiced emphatic dental plosive /d/ as in *adnā* (consumed), which is in its Classical Arabic form in the printed version, is rendered in its Tunisian colloquial form as the emphatic voiced interdental fricative /z/ in the Tarnane version, as in *aznā*. The word *fu'ādī* (my heart) in the printed version is in Classical Arabic but is in the Tunisian colloquial form *fuwādī*, without the enunciation of the hamza, in the Tarnane version. This is despite the fact that this lexical item is

semantically Classical Arabic and does not appear in Tunisian Arabic. The other phonological difference is that the word *as-sahar* (sleeplessness) in the printed version is in its Classical Arabic form, whereas in the Tarnane version the initial consonant cluster favoured by Tunisian colloquial Arabic is present thus rendering the word *s-shar*. Line 3 shows pronounced lexical differences – *insī mutayyam* is replaced with *wāsil ‘ubaydik*, although both have similar meanings. That there is a difference between the official printed version and the Tarnane version is somewhat surprising as Khemais Tarnane was the main source for the transcription of the *maluf* by the Rashidiyya, which was the basis for the Ministry of Culture’s official version.

The third version of the *Barwal 6* is that of the veteran musician Tahar Gharsa (1933-2003). He was a student of Tarnane and appears to favour Tarnane’s version of the *Barwal 6*. There is very little variation between his version and that of Tarnane. In the lead into the first line he sings *yā yā bīdū qaziyya*, rather than *yā raytu qaziyya*, and in line 2 he omits the verb *aznā*, favouring the onomatopoeic *aaaahhh*.

Gharsa Version

yā yā bīdū qaziyya
mā bīdū qaziyya il-‘abdu miskīn mā lū ikhtiyār
al-hawā aaaahhh fuwādī al-gharām māziq qulaybī
yā sham ‘a zawīyya wāsil ‘ubaydik afnāhu s-shar

O, O the decision is his
The decision is not his, the poor slave has no choice
Love, aaaahhh my heart, passion is ripping apart my little heart
O bright candle, come close to your little slave whom sleeplessness
exhausted

The next example displays rather more pronounced differences between the “official” printed version of the *Btayhi al-Awwal* from *Nubat al-Aṣbahān*²⁰ and the sung version performed by the ‘Isawīyya troupe of Testour, recorded in 1983. Musical reference and analysis of this text can be found in Davis (2005: pp. 79-87).

Printed Version

<i>fi jannati al-firdawsi</i>	<i>ra‘aytu al-qusūra al-‘āliyya</i>
<i>rāmī ramā b-il-qawsi</i>	<i>harbuhu bi-shafratin māḍiyya</i>
<i>yā hal turā man kān</i>	<i>minhu bi-ḥāl ḥubbī malīh</i>
<i>yuharrak al-iskān</i>	<i>wa yughrī al-‘aqla ar-rajīh</i>

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'ahyaf zarīf fattān mā fihi 'ayb ilā shahīh
yu'allalka bi-l-būs wa yahuzzu as-sumra al-'āliyya

In the garden of paradise I saw the high palaces
An archer aimed an arrow at me with his bow; his spear has a sharp blade
O I wonder who there is who is as handsome as my lover
He stirs up the neighbourhood and entices the rational mind
Most slender, elegant and charming, his only fault is stinginess
He makes you ill with kisses, brandishing the tall lance

Testour Version

fi jannata il-firdawsa ra'ayta hūr il-'ayn
rāmī ramā b-il-qawsa ḥarbah bi-shafra māziyya
yā ḥal turā man kāna minhu bi-hāli ḥubbuh malīh
yuhayyarik il-makān wa yughribu il-'agla ar-rajīh
hayif zarīf fattān mā fiha 'aybun ilā shahīh
yu'allilik bi-l-būs wa yuhizzu is-sumra al-'āliyya

In the garden in the garden of paradise
I saw the virgin of paradise
An archer aimed an arrow at me with his bow; his spear has a sharp blade
O I wonder who there is whose love is as nice as his
He disorientates you and estranges your rational mind
He is slender, elegant and charming, his only fault is stinginess
He makes you ill with kisses, brandishing the tall lance

In the Testour version the normal rules of *i'rāb* (desinential inflections) seem to be transgressed in the end vowelings of nouns, e.g. *fi jannata* rather than the correct Classical Arabic *fi jannati* in the printed version, and *b-il-qawsa* instead of *b-il-qawsi*. Also in the Testour version, the rendering of the third person masculine singular pronoun suffixes is colloquial in form as compared with the Classical Arabic forms of the printed version, e.g. *harbah* in the Testour version and *harbuhu* in the printed version, and *fiha* in the Testour version and *fihi* in the printed version. The verb morphology of the verbs *yu'allilik* and *yuhizzu* in the Testour version are colloquial forms of the Classical Arabic verbs *yu'allalka* and *yahuzzu*, which appear in the printed version. So it would seem that despite the intentions of the Committee for Literary Comparisons to correct the grammar of the Classical Arabic sections

of the *maluf*, in performance situations such considerations are not always observed.

There are also obvious lexical differences between the printed version and the Testour version. The first occurs in the first line where the printed version reads *ra'aytu al-quṣūra al-'āliyya* (I saw the high palaces) and the Testour version is *ra'aytu ḥūr il-'ayn* (I saw the virgin of paradise). In line 3 the change in pronoun suffix from *ḥubbī* in the printed version to *ḥubbuh* in the Testour version changes the meaning of the line. *yā ḥal turā man kān minhu bi-ḥāl ḥubbī malīh* (O I wonder who there is who is as handsome as my lover) in the printed version becomes *yā ḥal turā man kāna minhu bi-ḥāli ḥubbuh malīh* (O I wonder who there is whose love is as nice as his) in the Testour version. Line 4 in the printed version reads *yuharrak al-iskān wa yughrī al-'aqla ar-rajīh* (He stirs up the neighbourhood and entices the rational mind). This becomes *yuhayyrik il-makān wa yughribu il-'aqla ar-rajīh* (He disorients you and estranges your rational mind) in the Testour version. Although these two versions are similar-sounding, they are quite different in meaning.

The final example is a comparison of the printed version of the *khafif* from *Nubat al-Sika*²¹ and a recent rendition, recorded in 2003, performed by Ziad Gharsa (b. 1967), who is one of Tunisia's most revered contemporary musicians.

Printed Version

sāhib al-'uyūn al-ḥiwāra la-ha zaraf wa ma'ānī
āsh ḥāl takūn az-zīyāra xallī yakūn al-fulānī
rūḥī nahabha bi-shāra yawman narāh wa yarānī

mā abda'a an-nawwār 'alā shutūt as-sawāqī
k-aḍ-ḍayā ma'a an-nujūm wa al-laylu bāqī
wa ḥaqqā 'ahidna wa yawm at-talāqī
anā al-wāfi' abadan 'alā l-'ahd bāqī

The one with the beautiful eyes, they have charm and meaning
How long will the visit be? Let it be with so and so
I would give my soul as a token so that every day I could see him and he
could see me.

How wonderful are the flowers on the banks of the brook
Like the light with the stars and the night I remain
I swear by our promise and the day of our meeting,

I, the faithful one, will always keep the promise.

Gharsa Version

lī ṣāhib il- 'uyūn il-ḥiwāra lahum shaghaf wa ma'ānī
āsh ḥāl mā takūn il-hazāra khallī narāhu kafānī
rūḥī nahibhālu bi-shāra yawman narāhu wa yarānī

mā abda 'a an-nawwār 'alā shutūt as-sawāqī
ka-z-zīyya ma 'a n-nujūm wa l-laylu bāqī
wa amraza al-ḥashā wa lā ṭabīb wa lā rāqī
wa qaṭa 'na laylana wiṣāl wa 'ināqī
wa ḥaqqi 'ahdīna wa l-yawm at-talāqī
lā akhūmu abadan 'alā l-'ahdi bāqī

I have a friend with beautiful eyes that have passion and meaning
How long will [my] wasting away last? Let me see him, it's enough for me
My soul I would give to him as a token so that I could see him every day
and he could see me.

How wonderful are the flowers on the banks of the brook
Like the light with the stars and the night I remain
My heart is sick and there's no doctor or magician
We spent our night meeting and embracing
I swear by our promise and the day of our meeting,
I will never betray the everlasting promise.

A line by line analysis of these two versions reveals marked differences between them. In line 1, the version offered by Gharsa with the insertion of the possessive + pronoun *lī* (I have) changes the meaning from that of the printed version. Gharsa's version reads "I have a friend with beautiful eyes" whereas the official version reads "The one with the beautiful eyes". Also in line 1 is the lexical difference between the word *zaraf* (charm) in the printed version and *shaghaf* (passion) in Gharsa's version. In line 2 a variation occurs where the printed version employs the word *az-zīyāra* (the visit) while in the Gharsa version the Tunisian colloquial *il-hazāra* (the wasting away) is used. Morphophonological differences are evident in line 3 in the use of the two verbs in Andalusī Arabic, *nahabha* (I would give) and *narāh* (I could see him), in the printed version whereas Gharsa uses the same verbs

but in their Tunisian colloquial forms *nahibhālu* (I would give him) and *narāhu* (I could see him); in the last example it is the use of the masculine singular pronoun suffix /*hu*/ that differentiates it from its Andalusian counterpart.

In line 5 we see two varieties of the same lexical item but in a variant form in each version. In the printed version the Tunisian colloquial *aḍ-dayā* (the light) is used; Gharsa uses the Classical Arabic *ka-z-ziyya*, albeit with colloquial pronunciation of the phoneme /*z*/. Gharsa then proceeds to add two lines to the song, *wa amraza al-ḥashā wa lā ṭabīb wa lā rāqī, wa qaṭa'na laylana wiṣāl wa 'ināqi* (My heart is sick and there's no doctor or magician, we spent our night meeting and embracing). These are not present in the printed version. In the final line there is another lexical variation; the printed version reads *anā al-wāfi abadan* (I, the faithful one) and the Gharsa version reads *lā akhīnu abadan* (I will never betray).

In this brief analysis of a few examples of text, a number of linguistic differences between the official and unofficial versions of the Tunisian *maluf* are evident. A larger sample of text would no doubt reveal that this phenomenon is widespread and that, despite efforts to standardise the repertoire, there are a number of versions of *maluf* still sung in Tunisia today that co-exist with the official version. Thus the Tunisian *maluf* is not just an artefact but continues to be a living art form.

NOTES

1. Ruth Davis, *Maluf: Reflections on the Arab Andalusian Music of Tunisia*, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005. This is the culmination of an extensive series of articles that have been published in a number of journals since the mid-1980s.
2. Christian Poché, *La Musique Arabo-Andalouse*, Arles: Actes Sud, 1995, p. 35.
3. Ruth Davis, "Arab-Andalusian music in Tunisia", in *Early Music*, Vol. XXIV/3, August 1996, p. 423.
4. Lura Lafran-Jones, "The Isawiyya of Tunisia and their music", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1977, p. 187.
5. *Ibid*, p. 12.
6. Ruth Davis, "Modern trends in the ma'luf of Tunisia 1934-1984", unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, 1986, p. 1.
7. *Ibid*, p. 29.
8. Ruth Davis, "Modern trends in the 'Arab-Andalusian' music of Tunisia", *The Maghrib Review*, Vol. I, 2-4, 1986, p. 58.
9. Davis (1996), p. 101.
10. "Sayakūn la-na mālūf muwaḥḥadun" ("We shall have a united *maluf*") *Al-idhā'a*, Vol. 10, no. 5. 12.8.63.
11. Ruth Davis, "Cultural policy and the Tunisian ma'luf", *Ethnomusicology*, Winter 1997, p. 7.
12. See note 9 above.

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13. Davis (1997), p. 7.
14. Salah al-Mahdi & Muhammad Marzuqi, *Al-Ma'had al-Rashidi l-il-Musiqa al-Tunisiyya*, Tunis: Mansharat al-Ma'had al-Rashidi l-il-Musiqa al-Tunisiyya. 1981, pp. 81-2.
15. See note 9 above.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Davis (1997), p. 13.
18. *Ibid*, p. 14.
19. *Nubat al-Hsin, Patrimoine Musical Tunisien*, Vol. 5, Ministère des Affaires Culturelles et de l'Information, n.d.
20. *Nubat al-Ashbahān, ibid*, Vol. 8.
21. *Nubat al-Sika, ibid*, Vol. 5.

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