MUSICAL ASPECTS OF IBN SANĀ’ AL-MULK’S DAR AL-TIRĀZ
Dwight F. Reynolds [University of California, Santa Barbara]

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-Qādir al-Sa’dī (c.1135-1212), was the son of al-Qādir al-Rashid, Ja’far ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk, and was a friend and correspondent of al-Qādir al-Fāḍil, ‘Abd al-Rahīm al-Bīsānī (1133-99), a close advisor to Salāḥ 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), Waqayāt al-a’yan (Ibn Khalīkān), Mu’jam al-udabā’ (Yāqūt), al-Nujum al-Zānira (Ibn Ṭabhribirdī), al-Sulūk (Maqrīzī), and al-Wāfi bi-l-waqayāt (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:

211
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)

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. 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-Safā‘ī (quoting Yaqt al-Hanawi) states that in the gatherings of Shaykh Abū l-Mahāsin al-Bahnast the linguist [al-lughawi] Ibn Sanā‘ al-Mulk met a Moroccan [maghrībi] who:

...worked at the composition of maghrībi ("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 Maghribi.

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

These two differing views, however, are not entirely contradictory if we surmise that the Moroccan whom Ibn Sanā‘ al-Mulk met in al-Bahnast’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

212
musicians 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 muwashshahāt:

a) A passage treating the metric system of the muwashshahāt, which includes two references to the urghun, a term which has hitherto most often been translated as “organ”;

b) A passage about muwashshahāt in which the aḥyāt and the agfāl sections (the “changing rhyme” and “common rhyme” sections) are of dramatically different lengths which, he claims, could lead to mistakes in the musical setting (talḥān); and finally,

c) A passage about the inclusion of nonce syllables (“lā lā”) so that the lyrics of a muwashshah will fit its melody.

(I) 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:

Muonshahat are in one other respect divided into two groups: those in which the text fits the music and which require no assistance in this [gismun yastiqillu al-talhinu bihi wa-lā yofaqiru ilā mā yu’imhu ‘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 [gismun lā yahtamihhu al-talhin wa-lā yamsh bihi illā bi-‘an yata’aka’a ‘alā lafasatin lā ma’na lahā tukān da ‘amatan li-l-talhin wa-‘ukkāzan li-l-mughannā], such as in the following lyrics by Ibn Baṭṭa‘:

Man tilib // tha’r qatla zabayyī al-hudūj // fattānāt al-hajj

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

The melody would not be correct [al-talhān lā yaṣtaqīmu] without saying “lā lā” between the two sections ending in [the letter] jīm [i.e. between the words hudūj and fattānā] (p. 50).
Dwight E. Reynolds

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, not!".

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-Ṭrāz 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‘ad Rajī’s collection of muwashshahāt entitled Min Kunūzīnā (From Among Our Treasures).

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...

214
Syrian sources affirm that this *muwashshah* was composed in the early 1950's by the Syrian composer Bahjat Hassān. 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, "la" syllables precisely where Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk cites them, and in such a way that they prove Ibn Sanāʾ 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-Tirās* 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'i, 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 Sanāʾ 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.

(2) Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk’s mysterious organ

The next passage of musical interest has led to a large number of interpretations. In yet another of Ibn Sanāʾ 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 Arabic] 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 *taʿlīf* [composition] of the *urghun* and singing them to something other than the *urghun* is “borrowed/artificial” and on anything else is “metaphorical/artificial”. [Or: ...but on something equivalent is acceptable]

*Fā-ʿakharuha mabniyyun ʿalā taʿlīf al-urghun wa-l-ghināʿ bihā ʿalā*
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 Vocablistax 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Castilian</th>
<th>Alcalá’s transcription</th>
<th>Modern transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Órgano instrumento músico</td>
<td>Múcica</td>
<td>múṣiqā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Órganos de plomo</td>
<td>Múcica min a raçaç</td>
<td>múṣiqā min al-rasās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Órgano qualquiera instrumento</td>
<td>Êlet a zāmr</td>
<td>ālāt al-zāmr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 (zāmr).
Musical aspects of Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk’s Dār al-Tirâz

Rather than trying to derive the answer to this puzzle from the term urghîn, 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 muwashshâhât.

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-Tifâshi and Ibn Khaldûn 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 muwashshâhât); al-bûq. The term al-bûq 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-bûq in the Mashriq refers to a long, metal trumpet, and it is this meaning that appears in all Arabic dictionaries. Here, however, is Ahmad al-Tifâshi’s description:

But the noblest instrument among [the Andalusians], and that which gives the most perfect pleasure in dancing and singing is al-bûq. 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, mimzâr], large as al-bûq [here: trumpet], and inserted into its head is an [animal] horn [qarn], then into the horn is inserted a reed-cane [qasha], 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 [qasha 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 ghâyat al-atrâb]. Among [the Andalusians] it is the most festive instruments for singing and dancing in their drinking parties [majlis al-sharâb].


As this passage from al-Tifâshi demonstrates, the Andalusian bûq was nothing like a trumpet; it was a reed instrument, it produced an unusual sound that
Dwight F. Reynolds

was not easily comparable to other instruments, and it was the pride of al-
Andalus. Ibn Khaldûn offers us a similar description in which he calls the
Andalusian bûq “among the best of the reed instruments of this era” [min
ahsan al-‘iql bûq li-hâdhî l-‘ahd] and says that its sound is delightful
[mulûdiyû].17

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

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

Aslam, that young gazelle, delivered [aslâma] 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-bûq 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
Maria, 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 [rabâb]. Closely related to the albogue, albogón and
alboka is the xeramte 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 (arghûl,
mizwîj, and maghîna) 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 bûq, to Ibn Sanâ’ 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 arghûl or yarghûl. 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 buq to an Egyptian by saying that it sounds just like an Egyptian arghul.

To sum up then, Ibn Sanāʿ al-Mulk may quite possibly have heard a description of the Andalusian buq (though we know that he personally never saw or heard one). The term buq in Egypt meant a long metal trumpet, so either the person speaking to Ibn Sanāʿ al-Mulk, or he himself when writing for his Eastern readers, may well have substituted the term that would have meant something similar, namely arghul, in any one of its various pronunciations and spellings. Whatever term Ibn Sanāʿ al-Mulk originally wrote down may also have been deformed through scribal error, for final lam [L] and final mun [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 buq were of a particular type or style. Ibn Saʿid al-Andalusi (1213-86) reports that a physician named Yahyā ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Babhada, who worked in the service of the sultan in the13th century: “composed zajals as a caprice that people sing to the buq [yughamma bihā ‘alā al-buq]”.20 He then includes the text of a zajal of this type which was nicknamed al-Tavyār (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 buq 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 buq but in the court they are sung to the lute) or musical (i.e. there is a certain type of composition that fits the buq), however, is difficult to say.

In summary, the buq – 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 arghul for us to surmise that Ibn Sanāʿ al-Mulk or his informant may have substituted that term. Although I do not consider the buq to be the definitive solution to Ibn Sanāʿ 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 Sana’ al-Mulk’s analysis of muwashshah in which the awzân (sing. wazn, usually translated as “metres”) of the two contrasting sections, the abyât and the aqfâl, are noticeably different. First he discusses an example of a muwashshah in which the aqfâl and the abyât are of the same wazn, and then he discusses the contrasting group:

There is another group of [muwashshah] in which the aqfâl are different from the awzân of the abyât, which is clear to every listener [sâmi’] and whose flavour is apparent to every connoisseur [adâ‘iq], such as the text of one composer:

\begin{quote}
al-hubbu yajnûka ladhâhat al-‘adâ‘iq
wa-lawmu fihi ahlâ min al-qubâlî
li-kulli shay’in min al-hawâ sababu
jadda l-hawâ biyya wa-aslihu i-li’abu
wa-in law kân // jaddun yawmî // kân al-ihsân // min al-husnî
\end{quote}

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 awzân of the aqfâl and the abyât, 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 awzân of the aqfâl and the abyât, he will think that this is acceptable [jâ‘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-awtâr; i.e. will have to retune], when moving from the qafîl and to the bayt and from the bayt to the qafîl.

This is something that should be noted and remembered (pp. 48-9).

Ibn Sana’ 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 Sana’ al-Mulk is mistaken: in fact, García Gómez dismisses one assertion by Ibn Sana’ 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-khîdr (“She appeared from behind the curtain”) is such an example, still performed in Syria and in Egypt today. It is found in Fū’ād al-Rajā’ī’s Min Kunūzīnā in which he lists both the melody and the lyric as old and anonymous [qadīm]. It is also found in Shihāb al-Dīn al-Misrī’s Safinat al-mulk wa-nafisat al-fulk from one hundred years earlier in Cairo. In the Syrian collection it appears within a suite [wasla] in the mode of Bayāṭ [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 Bayāṭ but with slightly different melodic emphasis). In both versions the muwashshah includes three different rhythms: muhajjar, sittat ‘ashara, and yūrūk in Syria and muhajjar, sittat ‘ashara, and samā’i in Egypt. The texts were thus almost certainly sung to the same, or closely related, melodies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dōr (= bayt, ghusn) #1</th>
<th>Rhyme</th>
<th>Melody</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Badat min al-khîdr // fi haykal al-anwâr</td>
<td>A B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tashhī‘ al-badri // wa-takhjîl al-aqmâr</td>
<td>A B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min riqâ‘î khamrî // wa-thoghrûhâ l-khammâr</td>
<td>A B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Khāna (qaf, see)

Qum yā sāqi l-rāh // nastajli l-aqdāh  CC 2
Silsila Ælā lī // jaryālí // tajlā lī // yā sāh  DDDC 3
La-qad tahayya' sukrī ma'a l-mīlāh  C

Dūr #2

Sahhat wa-mā shahhat // min 'ālam al-sirrī (etc.)  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-īmlā lī" is a dramatic break from the awzān of the qaf 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-īmlā lī // jaryālí // tajlā lī // yā sāh

Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk's example:
wa-īn law kān // jaddun yughrī // kān al-ihsān // min al-husnī

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 mashriqi rābāb in the 12th century, at least if it was still tuned as it was in the days of al-Farābī (d. 950), since the upper string, according to al-Farābī was often tuned to the third (that is E♭, E♭, or E♭, for modes in C). The key modal change in this
muwashshahāt is from E♭ to E♭, 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 wāzn 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-khīrī for Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk’s al-Hubbu yajnīka, 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-fuṣūl wa-‘aqūd al-‘uqūl (MS Paris 3333) contains a collection of letters between Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk and al-Qādi al-Fādil and one of those letters includes a passage in which the ever modest Ibn Sanā’ al-Mulk writes of his own muwashshahāt:

... 'ādīrat 'alayhi al-akwābu wa-khuriqat fihi al-thiyābu wa-shadā bihi al-rījātu wa-l-niswānī wa-tarannama bihi al-shayāku wa-l-shubb-bānī [...] wa-ghanā bihi man lā yughannī mugharridān [...] wa-kam min [...] majlisīn shadā fihi wa-alhā al-nadīma ‘an kaṣīhi wa-unsīhi, wa-kam sūfiyin samī‘ahu fa-qāma ilā lahwīhī min qu‘āthi, wa-‘awwādān ghanā bihi fūrā‘ī fī l-nutūq gḥoyat su‘ūdīhī min ‘uṣāh...

... 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
Dwight F. Reynolds

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...

Apparently Ibn Sanāʾ 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 - ṣhadā, ḡammā, tarannama - are all unmistakably musical terms. Even if we might not fully accept Ibn Sanāʾ 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 Sanāʾ 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 muʾārada), 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 Sanāʾ 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 Sanāʾ al-Mulk were primarily, if not exclusively, songs. Even when they were set down in written form (such as in Ibn Sanāʾ al-Mulk's letters to al-Qādī al-Fādil) 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 būg. This was true enough that a visitor from Morocco could say to Ibn Sanāʾ 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 būg - 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 aṣfāl and the aḥyā, 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 ṭabāb-player and/or possibly the harp-player (rūūj/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 "lá lá lá" 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 Sanāʾ 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 Sanāʾ al-Mulk are not expressed with great precision, they are all in fact comprehensible if we recognize that he is speaking of music and not just texts. Certainly none of them are, at least in my opinion, simply "exaggerations".

NOTES

2. For the life of the latter, see Hadia Dajani-Shakeel, Al-Qādī al-Fādil ‘Abd al-Rahm al-Bābī al-‘Askālānī (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.


7. Although some sources cite qalū rather than qalā, 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 qalū mean “their killing of me”.

8. García Gómez may have been misled by another occurrence of “lá lá” in the third stanza of the poem, where the words do indeed mean “No, no!”

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 Kunitānā and all three are listed as old and anonymous [qādim]). 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 scanion.


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).


18. Muhammad Ibn al-Humaydi, *jadhwat al-muqtabis* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnān, 1983): 223. This passage is quoted in Ahmed Tahiri, *Las clases populares en el-Andalus* (Madrid: Sarria, 2003), p. 92; however, the phrase “El flautista de Nakur iniciaba el canto de la muwashshah” (especie de composición métrica) celebre entre la ‘ammā 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.


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.


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, Ḫushshāq and Husaynī, for example) are now commonly referred to as part of Baydū. Thanks to my colleagues Scott Marcus and Jonathan Shannon for their assistance on this point.

