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Music in the Arabian Peninsula. An Overview.

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Jean Lambert

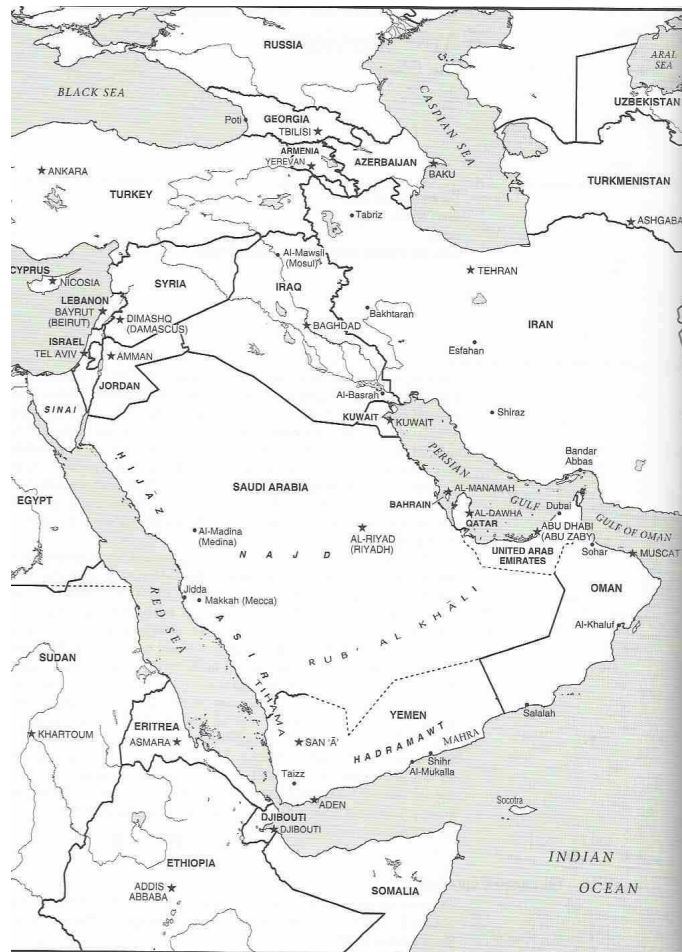
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THE ARABIAN PENINSULA :

AN OVERVIEW

There are many obstacles to understanding of music in the Arabian Peninsula. For a long time, most of the region was closed off to research, informations are scattered and fragmentary, and it was never approached as a whole. Due to the prevalence of oral tradition, little historical data are reliable. Moreover, all concepts do not fit the specificity of the Peninsula : as some scholars note it, here, the conventional distinction between "classical" and "popular" is little relevant, since some of the main musical forms lie somewhere between what is usually meant by these two words (JARGY 1986, 23). Therefore, this article focuses on areas and musics that are little known and tries to make the best use possible of both direct knowledge and available bibliography.



The Arabian Peninsula

One can distinguish in the Peninsula four main areas : the Arabian Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Oman (for the latter, see CHRISTENSEN, *infra*). As in many parts of the world, modern boundaries have arbitrarily separated cultural units : fishermen's songs exist around the whole Peninsula and beduin songs are prevalent in its heart. Although other connections could be established, for practical reasons, fishermen's music will be discussed in the Gulf section, nomads music in the Saudi Arabia section ; the section on Yemen will be concerned mostly with sedentary villagers. Urban music is found in every section, but the Yemeni one will be examined separately. Purely religious genres (*Qur'ân*, prayer calls) will not be treated as such. They have drawn little attention from scholars, as they were felt, correctly or not, to be less specific than others (for Yemen, listen to POCHE 1976 ; for the Gulf : MATAR n.d, 133-136 ; for harp music and possession cult, *infra*, RACY). Finally, Jewish music of Yemen will be let aside, since a large majority of Jews left to Israel in 1948 (for bibliography, see STAUB 1979).

I THE ARABIAN GULF REGION

Two main styles are emblematic of the Gulf : pearl-divers' songs and traditional urban music (for a general overview, see ROVSING-OLSEN 1980 ; MATAR n.d ; DOKHI 1984 ; HANDAL 1987).

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Pearl-divers songs

Pearl-divers songs are known locally as *aghânî al-ghaws* ("the diving songs") or *nahma* ("animal sound", "voice of the whale"). The first transcriptions were published in 1960, and the first commercial recordings in the West in 1968 (ROVSING-OLSEN ; his archives are conserved in the Danish Folklore Institute, Copenhagen). The social context of the *nahma* and the status of the professional singer, the *nahhâm*, is evoked in Koweit by HARBI (1978) and MATAR (n.d), in Qatar by SULAYMÂN (1992) and GHÂNIM (n.d.), in Bahrayn by HARBÂN (n.d.). The *nahma* includes several forms which show little differences between these countries. The repertoire can be divided in two categories :

- songs which accompany every aspect of labour on the boats : hoisting the sail (*khatfa*), dropping the anchor, opening the oysters, etc.. Rythmic cycles are short (MATAR n.d, 80-86), except the *yamâl*, which is non-measured.

- entertainment songs gathered under the generic term of *ffîrî* ("until dawn"), some of them like the *haddâdî* being sung only at night (ROVSING-OLSEN 1980, 513). These prestigious forms have long rythmic cycles (16/8 and 32/8). Their origin is the object of rich legends (MATAR n.d: 50).

There are two types of lyrics in pearl-divers songs : *zuhayrî* and *muwaylî* (RIFÂ'I 1985, 91 ; DOKHI 1984, 302-313). The *muwaylî* has an old fixed style, while the *zuhayrî* is more lively and may be composed of five, six or seven verses. The themes include call for religious protection from the dangers of the sea (works songs), the transmission of navigation's knowledge, as well as love and moral exhortation (entertainment songs).

The instruments are mainly percussion : *târ*, a frame-drum ; *tabl*, a cylindrical drums ; *twaysât*, small metal cymbals. Some are everyday objects : water jars, *jahla*, and grain or coffee mortars

(*hâwon*). Refined hand-clapping resorts to various techniques : "base" (*asâs*), "divergence" (*sudûd*), "answer" (*rudûd*), "intricateness" (*sharbaka*), a binary/ternary polyrhythmic pattern (KERBAGE n.d.). There are at least three main vocal technics : the *nahba*, "lament" ; the *janda*, onomatopoeia in the prelude *a capella* ; the *hamhama*, a bass vocal drone, *nahma's* most characteristic feature (DOKHI 1984, 300 ; ROVSING-OLSEN 1978), which seems to be related symbolically to the voice of the whale. This suggests that more anthropological research is needed to illuminate *nahma's* deep meaning.



(a)

Beside sailors' songs, it is worth to mention urban popular music which used to be performed in harbours like Kuwait, Manama, and Sohar (in Oman) : the *mu'alleyâ*. This satyric poetry, often political, used to be sung in coffee shops called *dâr*, by professional musicians which are organized in marginal groups often associated with prostitution, homo- and trans-sexuality (WIKAN 1982).



(b)

FIGURE 7 Right: Polyrhythmic clapping by a chorus accompanying pearl-diving songs and *zafan* dancing; in this series of pictures (a, b, and c), the hands are clearly clapping against each other's beat. Photos by Jean Lambert, Bahrain, 2 March 2000.



Art music : the *sawt*

The *sawt* is a traditional urban genre in which voice is accompanied by the short-necked lute *'ûd* or *makbas* ("plucked"). It is found mainly in Kuwait and Bahrayn with few differences. Its lyrics include classical Arabic poetry and colloquial poetry, mostly of Yemeni origin ('AMMÂRI 1994-96). The history of its forms and melodies and the role of extern influences are unknown before the Kuwaiti singer and composer, 'Abdallah Faraj (m. 1901), who spent twenty years in India ('ABDUH GHANEM 1986). The *sawt* was commercially recorded for the first time by 'Abd-al-Latîf al-Kuwaytî in 1927 in Baghdad and in 1929 in Cairo, and by Muhammad Ben Fâris (for his biography : 'AMMÂRI 1994) and Dâhi Ibn al-Walîd in Baghdad by His Master's Voice in 1932 (for some discography, HACHLEF 1994). More recently, let us mention Muhammad Zwayd (listen to JARGY 1994) and 'Abd Allah Bughayîth (from Kuwait).

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There are two main rhythmic cycles :

- the *'arabî*, a ternary one :



- the *shâmî*, a binary one :



The interpretation of one of these two rhythms comes in a suite whose ideal unfolding is as follows :

- *Istihlâl* : an instrumental prelude.
- *Istimâ'* or *tahrîra* : a short introductory poem sung on a free rhythm.
- The *sawt* itself, the main part, either in *shâmî* or in *'arabî* .
- *Tawshîha* : a short concluding poem sung on a conventional melody in a mode close to Rast.

The modes are related to those of the classical Arab music (Bayâtî, Rast, Sîkâ and Hijâz), but frequently limited to a pentachord. Denominations of the lute's strings (the treble, *sharâra*, "the spark", and the bass, *bâm*) are similar to the harp's, which seems to indicate some historical connection between the two instruments. Yet, the high quality of playing suggests that the use of lute is ancient. Voice and lute are sustained by hand-clapping and *mirwâs*, a small cylindric double-skinned drum. The dance that goes along with the *Sawt* , the *zafan*, is characterized by sudden leaps and kneelings (HARBÂN n.d.).

Although some melodies have been transcribed ('ALI 1980 ; DOKHI 1984), the specificity of *sawt* requires more research on polyrhythmy, modal practice and vocal techniques. By its oral character and its rhythmic (hand-clapping), the *sawt* belongs to its popular environment, but by its poetry, the lute and the modal system, it is closer to classical Arab music. These various characteristics make of it a very original genre that cannot be classified easily.

II SAUDI ARABIA

Little if any musicological fieldwork has ever been carried out on Saudi Arabia. Nejd will be taken as a reference, since it has influenced the other regions by its political centrality for the last two centuries (with the Wahhabi movement). Comparisons will be made with similar forms from Arabia's margins such as the Sinâi and the Gulf. Hijaz will also be taken into account for its historical importance. Very few is known on Asir, which has been highly influenced by Nejd, Hijaz and Yemen (BÂ GHAFFÂR 1994, 286-326).

1. Nejd

Four main categories of music can be distinguished in Nejd : the *dewînih*, the *sâmirî*, the

'arda and the *riddiyya*.

Dewînih

The *dewînih* (from *diwân*, "poetry collection", SOWAYAN 1985, 139) is emblematic of the nomads in Arabia (*diwân* is also the classical songs of the Yemeni Jews). It is interpreted by a solo singer, a capella or accompanying himself with a one-string fiddle, *rabâba* ou *ribâbih*. Legend says this instrument was built by a woman from the Tayy tribe who was lamenting the loss of her child and had her tongue cut ('OBAYD MBÂREK 1992, 105). The colloquial poetry, lyric, sapiential and epic, is from the *nabatî* genre, whose most famous author is a Nejdî poet who settled in Kuwait, Ibn Li'bûn (1790-1831) (RUBAY'ÂN 1996).

Usually limited to a pentachord (SHILOAH 1980), the melodies show the oldest modal forms in Arab music, precursory to the *maqâm* Bayâtî, Sikâ and Rast. Local theory refers to rhythm as *targ* and melody as *shâlih* (SOWAYAN 1985, 158). There are several variants of *dewînih*, named after tribes or poetic meters : the *mashûb* ("pulled") is melismatic (JARGY 1994, Vol. 1), the *marbû'* has a light rhythm, and the *hjinî*, is a cameleer song ('OBAYD MBÂREK 1992, 105). Many of these forms are practised in the Gulf as well as in Sinâi and northern Arabia (listen to SHILOAH 1972 ; JENKINS & ROVSING OLSEN 1976, 1. A).

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Usually, the poet, *shâ'ir*, who sings a capella are ordinary tribesmen, when *ribâbih* players, who may sing others' lyrics, are often professionals and sometimes belong to pariah groups like the Sulayb (ROVSING OLSEN 1964, 141). A famous singer and *ribâbih* player who died in the 70's was called Ibn Sâfi (SOWAYAN 1985, 12). Although Wahhabis fought it, *ribâbih* is said to be found in the tent of every leading *sheikh* (MATAR n.d: 152).

The *sâmirî*

The *sâmirî* or *sâmri* ("of night time") is an important popular genre among nomads, sedentary villagers and urban people (in the Gulf : KERBAGE 1984, 63). It is sung in festivals, weddings and Thursday evenings. It has several variants like the *skhîrî*, *khammârî* and *'ashûrî* and can also have some healing functions ('ABD AL-HAKIM n.d., 74).

Knealing in the sand, facing each other, and leaving a large space for the dancers, are two lines of ten to twenty persons who will have the role of two choirs. The song is accompanied by several frame-drums (*târ*), one or two cylindric double-skin drums (*tabl*) and hand-clapping (SOWAYAN 1985, 158). Usually, the singer and *târ* players sit at the end of the two lines and the *tabl* is closer to the middle. The members of one line hold the *târ* and sing while those of the other line answer antiphonically and make choregraphic movements with their shoulders, all sitting on their knees (MATAR n.d, 129).

The poetry is lyric and, like in *dewînih*, of *nabatî* genre (SOWAYAN 1985, 140-142). According to 'AQILI, the *sâmirî* is the richest repertoire in Saudi Arabia (n.d., 100). There are only two rhythms, one binary and one ternary, but numerous melodies based on less than one octave. For records of *sâmirî*, listen to JARGY 1994 and BOIS 1999, for transcriptions, DOKHI 1984, 49-76.

In the Gulf, the *târ* bands performing the *sâmirî* are professional or associative groups whose names are painted on each instrument. They also accompany the *furaysa* (DOKHI 1984,

265-269), a dance where men disguise themselves in women's clothes (MATAR n.d., 125, 129-130). There are also feminine orchestras (the *taqqâqât*) which accompany dances where women display their hair ('OBAYD MBÂREK 1992, 86). There are famous soloist women (KHULAIFI 1995)

The "sung dances" of the desert

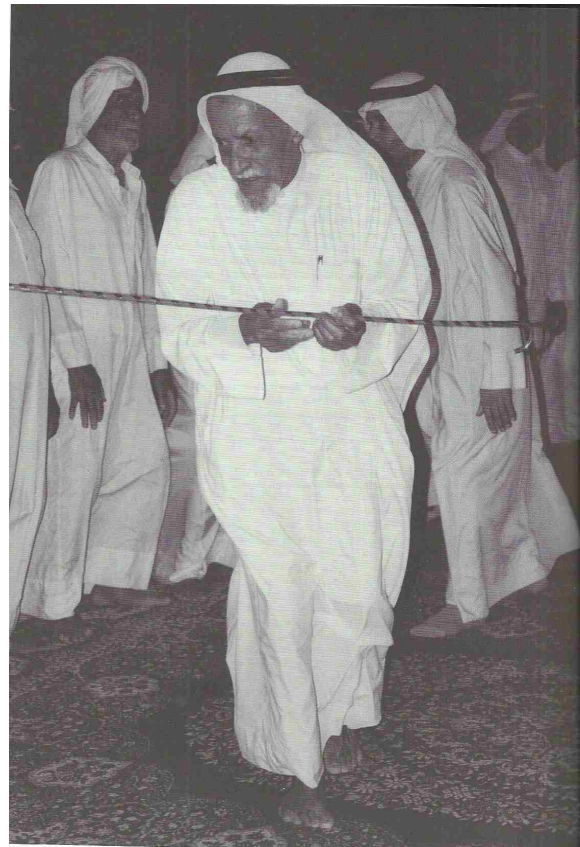
In the center of the Peninsula, some forms combine collective war dance and poetry extolling the honor of the tribe. The melodies are simple as well as rhythmic (hand-clapping, eventually drums) and singing is syllabic.

The *'arda* (or *'ardih*), "demonstration of force", is the most famous of these "sung dances". It gathers all the men of a community (village or tribe). Two ranks of dancers are disposed in a semi-circle ; they wave their swords and play the role of a choir. The steps are hieratic, but there are also acrobatic figures showing the agility and endurance. Between the two ranks, several poets may sing. As a celebration of the manly ideal of beduin life, the *'arda* is central to Saudian identity -the sovereigns have always danced it publicly. It is explicitly distinguished from the frivolous concept of "dance", *raqsa* ('AQILI n.d., 113). A military procession or fantasia, *sabha*, often takes place at the same time (DOKHI 1984, 236 ; 'OBAYD MBÂREK 1992, 53-65). Every region in the Kingdom has its own style. The *'arda* has also a *bahriyya* variant, "from the sea", in the Gulf (DOHI 1984, 235).

The *'arda* is a suite of two or three rhythms, the *takhmîr* and the *'irqâb* (SOWAYAN 1985 ; 'AQILI n.d., 117). It is accompanied by several *tabl* and *târ*, but also small cymbals (*tûs*). A large cylindrical drum, *dammâm*, is carried to move around the dancers (MATAR n.d., 102-104). Usually, the *'arda* is accompanied by a antiphonal and syllabic song, the *hidwa* which praises the tribe's honor and the sovereign.

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In the *'ayyâla* of Oman (cf *infra*, CHRISTENSEN) and Emirates (AWHÂN 1988 ; listen to JENKINS & ROVSING OLSEN 1976, 6. B), two lines of dancers armed of swords or sticks face each other, step forward, then withdraw ; their heads make a little back and forth movement which recalls the head of a walking camel. They are accompanied by polyrhythmic patterns played by the drummers who stand in the middle. Also named *wahhâbiyya* in Oman, this dance shows evidence of influences from Nejd.



The *'ayyâla* : a solo dancer with a stick between two files of male compatriots, Bahreyn (ph. J. Lambert)

From the north to the south, there is a continuum of dances whose names are based on the close linguistic roots RZF, RZH, RDH and DHH ; they are all tribal dances accompanied by antiphonal song, hand-clapping and no instruments : *razfa* of the Emirates (ROVSING OLSEN 1980, 513) and *razâf* of Qatar (KERBAGE n.d), *razha qasafiyya* of Oman (*infra*, CHRISTENSEN), *radha* in Sharja, (listen to JENKINS & ROVSING 1976, 1.B.4.), *radîhî* of Sinâi (SHILOAH 1972, 17). In Hadramawt the *razfa* is performed for religious festivals ; solo dancers step forward from the rank to perform acrobatic feats (SAQQAF n.d., 37), very similar to the *zafan* of the Gulf. In Yemen the *razfa* is an antiphonal song performed by tribes and the army when marching (ROSSI 1939, 111). The *radha* in Kuwait is a feminine procession dance. The *dahha* is a collective dance of northern Arabia (in Sinâi *dahhiyya*, SHILOAH 1972, 17 and until northern Syria), accompanied by hand-clapping and rhythmic respiration. In northern Arabia, *dahha* is accompanied by improvised poetry (BÂ GHAFFÂR 1994, 215).



FIGURE 8 Above: Saudi Arabian musicians: the man who is standing is playing a *duff*; the seated man is playing a type of *tabl*. Photo copyright © by Byron Augustin.

Poetical contests, sociable rhythms and tribal calls

When poetry is improvised (a very old tradition in Arabia), music has a lesser role, although it is not absent of performance. In the *riddiyya* (or *mrâdd*, or *galta*), two poets improvise on their turn (*radd* means "answer") and a choir sings *a capella* the last verse (SOWAYAN 1985, 142-143). A similar structure of performance is found in the *habbût* of Oman, the *bâla* in Yemen (CATON 1991 ; YAMMINE 1995), and the *dân* in Hadramawt (see Yemen section).

In northern Arabia, social occasions and festivals are necessarily accompanied by coffee. The coffee grinding is the occasion of a rhythmic "call", a symbol of hospitality which is beaten with the pestle in the mortar when grinding, without any voice or dance.

In the whole Arabia, tribal calls may adopt more or less musical forms. In the Emirates, the *nadba* shows a superimposition of several different animal-like shouts (from high pitch head voice to lowest drone) which



FIGURE 6 Bedouin coffee grinder, *al-mabbash*, from Jidda. In northern Arabia, coffee grinding is an occasion for a rhythmic "call"; and pearl divers' songs of the Gulf region may be accompanied by a coffee mortar used as a musical instrument. Photo copyright © 1989 by Byron Augustin.

concludes itself with a rythmed contrapuntic pattern.

The Hijaz

Although Hijaz was the historical birthplace of Islam and the cradle of Arab music in the Umeya period, it remains relatively unknown because of its modern history. At first a cosmopolitan center, Hijaz declined under the Wahhabis who mistrusted its liberal tradition.

The first modern evidence of music in the Hijaz was brought by a Dutch orientalist converted to islam, who described a wedding ceremony and the songs performed there (HURGRONJE [1888] 1931, 130-140). He transcribed a song for the head-dress (of the bride), *ghunâ al-kharît*, as well as some religious songs (Id., 119) performed by a *meqassid* along with a choir of *raddâdîn*. He also evokes the golden youth of Mekka which used to listen to the *qanûn* and to the South Arabian lute, *qanbûs* near a holy woman's shrine, Sittanâ Maymûnah (Id., 44). Hurgronje also gathered the oldest recordings of the Arabian Peninsula (in Jedda between 1904 and 1907, GAVIN 1985) and deposited one *qanbûs* in the Ethnographic Museum of Leiden.

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Many popular genres exist in Hijaz (BÂ GHAFFÂR 1994, 34-210), but it will be dealt here mainly with the urban *Hijâzî* tradition. The cylinders of 1904-07 show a rich sample of it (as well as several Yemeni pieces). Later recordings by Muhammad al-Sindî (who died in the 70's) show that the solo singer, playing the lute himself, is accompanied by a frame drum and a *darbuka* which are held together. There is a major evolution between the Jedda recordings and those of al-Sindî : as in Yemen, the *qanbûs* has been replaced by the Egyptian lute.

The *Hijâzî* style has a non-measured part, the *mawâl* or *majass* (from *jassa*, "to explore", BÂ GHAFFÂR 1994, 52) sung in classical Arabic and often found in the middle of a measured piece. The rhythmic cycles are binary, one of them ressembles the Yemeni *wastâ* (LAMBERT 2002), an other one the Egyptian *wahda* :



There is a ternary cycle as follows :



There is also a cycle called *shargayn*, which seems to be at 10 beats.



FIGURE 5 A musician from Hijâz plays double percussion parts simultaneously on a *darbûka* and a *qâr*, which he holds together in his left hand and forearm. Photo by Jean Lambert, 1 March 2000.

The most common melodic modes are variants of the oriental Rast, Bayâtî and Sikâh, with very few flat notes. Poetry is often of Yemeni origin (notably of Yahyâ ‘Umar, 18th century), reflecting a continuity of culture between Hijaz and Yemen. Nevertheless, the specificity of a

hijâzî style is obvious in certain melodic phrases, in the syncopated beats of the double drums which punctuate the musical phrases with their particular timbres, and other stylistic aspects.

III THE TWO YEMENS

Unified in 1990, the two Yemens represent a huge variety of regional styles and circumstances of performance, due to their natural and social diversity : there are sedentary farmers, nomads and fishermen as well as townspeople. Although Yemeni music has a very specific identity rooted in an old culture, it also has some common points with other musics of the Peninsula. Three main regions can roughly be distinguished : the Zaydi Highlands, the Shafii coastal plains, and the inner Hadramawt (for more details, one may also consult LAMBERT 2001).

Villagers of the Highlands

Being the stronghold of the Zaydis, a moderate Shiite sect, the Highlands are the historical heart of Yemen. They are a good example of the importance of music in social life : work songs, tribal songs and dances, magic invocations and festivals music.

The *mahjal* is performed during harvest and other collective works. Usually chanted on two notes and a very simple rhythm, it has humorous lyrics. The *hâdî* is a love song performed by women during the thinning out of sorghum leaves. It is unmeasured, with a large ambitus. Other songs go along with more solitary labour like the plowing's *maghrad*, the cameleers' *jammâli* (YAMMINE 1995), the well-diggers' *masnâ*, the housewives' *'aghânî* .

The *bâla* is a poetical contest, usually performed at weddings. The *zâmil* song extols honour and the warlike virtues of the tribesmen. It is composed and performed in local political events, wars and weddings (CATON 1991). It is a responsorial form, whose rhythm is close to a marche, and whose melodies are usually tetratonic (YAMMINE 1995). In the same context as *zâmil*, the dance *bara'* is an occasion for the tribe to represent its political solidarity in a choreographic way. It is a suite of three or four sections. The dancers, as many as fifty, are arranged in a semi-circle and make stylized movements with their dagger (*janbiyya*) (ADRA 1982). The *bara'* is accompanied by two kettle drums (*tâsa* and *marfa'*), which show influence of the Mamluk or Ottoman *tubul-khâneh*. They are struck with sticks by the *mzayyin*, professional musicians who have important social and ritual functions in the daily life of the villagers : religious festivals, weddings, announcements, alarms.

Aside from the Islamic ritual genres, music also has magical functions which are linked to agriculture and cosmology. During periods of drought, "prayers for rain" (*salât al-istisqâ*) are offered, and a specific farmers' song, the *tasgiya* is sung for calling the rain. During eclipses of the moon, specific hymns are sung to plead for the remission of sins.

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In the villages, the wedding ceremonies are conducted by the *mzayyin* who play in small bands of three instruments : *mizmâr*, a double-reed clarinet, *tabl*, a double-skinned drum and one copper plate. While playing their instruments, the drummers sing in unison with the clarinet. This orchestra accompanies the dance *lu'ba* ("game"). The dancers gather in groups of two or three and wave their daggers. Women dance in the same style, but without daggers and without *mizmâr* (YAMMINE 1995).

The coastal plains : Tihama, the Outer Hadramawt and Mahra

These coastal regions (as well as some mountains like Hugariyya and Yâfi') have certain historical links and cultural similarities. The inhabitants belong to the mainstream of orthodox islam (the Shafii legal school) and local sufism plays an important role in their music. They have more links with the rest of the Peninsula than the isolated Highlands. Tihama music is little known, but practice of *zâr* is definitely similar to what it is in the Gulf, as well as the use of the harp, *tanbûra* (listen to BAKEWELL 1985, POCHE 1976). Hadramawt is even less known, but its fishermen songs are related to those of the Gulf ('OBEID 1989), especially in the use of hand-clapping and lyre (*samsamiyya*) (for more details, see LAMBERT 2001).

A well-spread feature is the drums band (ELSNER 1990). In Tihama, it is composed of several cylindrical, frame-drums and kettle-drums of various sizes. They are mostly played by people of low status, the *akhdâm* (BAKEWELL 1985). These popular bands have important social functions. In Tuhayta, the day of the Festival, drummers conduct the pilgrimage to the local sufi mausoleum, compelling every merchant of the souk, by playing and dancing in front of his shop, to give alms to the Sainton. In Shihr (Hadramawt), a rather similar band, *al-'idda*, leads processions in town. Inhabitants of different districts of the town confront each others in dance, which sometimes gives rise to actual fights ('ALI 1988). The two kinds of orchestra show a strong African influence. The most wide-spread form is the *sharh*, a quick polyrhythmic cycle also called *sawâhili* ("coastal").

In ancient harbours like Mukalla and Shihr, there is a strong tradition of urban music, the '*awâdi*' ("the one of the lute"), which is associated with the famous singer and '*ûd*' player Muhammed Jum'a Khân (d. 1965). This style is at the crossroads of many influences, from India, Africa and the Gulf. Its little orchestra always includes at least one violin.

It is not yet possible to discuss the variety of music in Mahra and Soqatra. These regions have been linguistically isolated (four different South Arabian languages are still spoken there). This has favored the preservation of archaic features in a mainly vocal music. Incantations are notably used in an exorcism ceremony, the *râbût* (LONNET and SIMEONE-SENELLE 1987). Some of this music has been recorded as early as 1902 (ADLER, 1906).

The Inner Hadramawt

Popular music is very rich in Hadramawt valley. It is particularly famous for the Beni Maghrâh songs for the ibex hunt (*al-qanîs*) and the theatrical game that follows it (SERJEANT 1951 ; SAQQAF N.D., 31-32). This section will deal only with the old towns music, Seyyun, Shibam and Tarim (for more details, see LAMBERT 2001).

The *dân* is a poetic contest with improvisation which takes place at indoor night gatherings. It is as much a social ritual as it is an entertainment. Two or three poets confront each other, composing in turn a quatrain in a speaking voice. A specialized singer helps them by repeating a refrain based on rhythmized combinations of the nonsense syllables "*dân, dân*". To help the singer to put the words in melodic shape, a scribe repeats them for him and writes them out for posterity (listen to HASSAN 1998). In a variant called *shabwânî*, the *dân* is performed in the open air, after a long preparation of dances accompanied by the '*idda*' band.

At weddings, the most usual genre is the *zerbâdî* dance ; it is accompanied by a beveled flute, *madrûf*, an oblong double-skinned drum coming from India, *hâjir*, and several *mirwâs*. The *zerbâdî* gives evidence of influences from Southern Asia, remnants of ancient migrations to Java and Gudjerat : slow tempo, delicate rubato, varied drums timbres.

IV UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF MUSIC IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

This brief panorama shows the great variety, as well as the undeniable unity of music in the Arabian Peninsula. There are many common features from the Gulf all the way to Yemen, across the Nejd and the Hijaz. However, these similarities are often obscured by varying terms -although it is also true that similarities of vocabular sometimes hide real differences.

Tribal dances related by their forms and functions include : the '*ardih* of Najd, its variants in the Gulf, and the Yemeni *bara*' (the word exists also in Oman). All around the coasts, African influences can be found in the Gulf (ROVSING-OLSEN 1967), in Yemen (BAKEWELL 1985) and in Hijaz (HURGRONJE 1888, 13). Polyrythmic patterns of a binary rhythm against a ternary one (ROVSING-OLSEN 1967, 150-151), as well as refined hand-clapping are found all around the coasts, although they are found less in the interior. It is difficult to dertermine whether these features are a result of external influences.

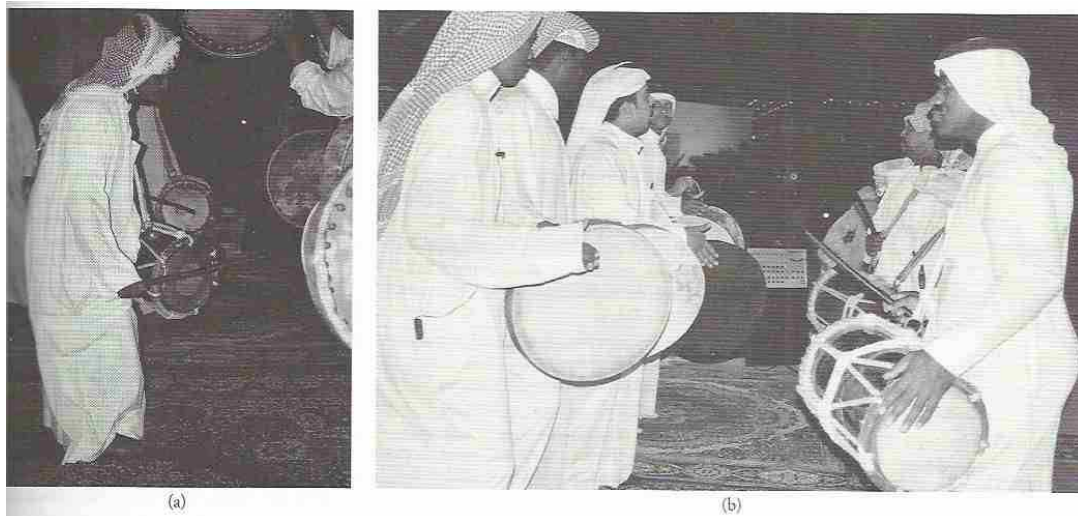


FIGURE 9 '*Arda bahriyya*: In this dance, one or two *tabl* drummers (a) face a rank of *târ* drummers (b), playing a polyrhythmic dialogue. Photos by Jean Lambert, Bahrain, 2 March 2000.

History has separated genres that seem to have had a common origin : the *nabâtî* poet Ibn Li'bûn, born in Nejd and settled in southern Iraq, inspired both the *dewînih* and the *sâmîrî* ; in the Nejd, '*arda* tribal dance and *hadwa* song are parts of the same form ; however, in Yemen the *bara*' and *zâmil* which have similar functions, are performed separatly. On another hand, some styles overflow national or natural borders : through the desert, *dewînih* and *sâmîrî* have spread in almost every country ; in the Gulf, the *sâmîrî* and the '*arda*, which are presumably of "beduin" origin, are also practised by fishermen. Sailors' musical forms of the whole Arabia are related to

each others, not only by simple contact, but through distant meeting points like Zanzibar and Singapore. Arabia conceals a lot of unexplored common features : the *muwaylî* poetry of the Gulf is attributed by pearl-divers to an Omani legendary figure, Humaydî b. Mansûr (DOKHI 1984, 303), who, in the Yemeni Highlands, is also said to have composed many work songs (YAMMINE 1995), in a similar poetical style.

Various forms of traditional urban music also have common features, characteristic of the Peninsula. The *sawt* of the Gulf, the *hijâzî* of Arabia, the *'awâdî* of Hadramawt or the *ghinâ san'ânî* have a large number of common texts ('ABDUH GHANEM 1986 ; 'AMMÂRI 1994-96), though fewer common melodies. More significantly, they have preserved a classical tradition of the soloist who is both a singer and a lute player -a practice which is fading away elsewhere in the Arab World. The lyrics are composed in a literary style marked by local dialects. Poetry and music are closely linked (LAMBERT 2002). This traditional urban art was cultivated through male social sessions (*dîwâniyya* in the Gulf, *magyal* in Sanaa, *mabraz* in Aden), although that is changing now.

In the Arabian Peninsula, theory focuses more on rhythmic variations, than on modal variations, which are rare. The dominant scales are based on tones and three quarters of a tone, diatonic are less spread and seem to have been so through foreign influences (like in Yemeni fishermen songs). Although these modal structures are very empiric, there are particular variations : the *tawshîha* of the *sawt* is reminiscent of the various forms of *tawshîh* in Yemen (LAMBERT 2002) ; the *majass* in Tihama and Hijaz seem to be a mixture of melodic material and modal concepts ; the tendency to end a piece on a pitch other than the fundamental of the melody is widely spread.

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Long before the advent of recording, music travelled throughout the Peninsula, and Yemen seems to have been playing a major role in this circulation : in the last hundred years, there were Yemeni texts and melodies in the Gulf and as far as the Sinaï ; and Yemeni musicians were to be found in Mekka at the beginning of the 20th century and in the Gulf today. In Hijaz, there were also singers coming from other regions, like Ibrahîm al-Sammân (d. 1964), a Syrian who became a muezzin of the Great Mosque of Medina towards the end of his life (MAHDI 1986, 133-134).

Today, these musicians and arts are responding to intense pressure for change and commercialization (POCHE 1994), caused by the rise of cassette industry, petroleum production and emigrant labor. Henceforth, melodies will still cross the seas and the desert (QÂSIMI 1987), but at an accelerated pace...

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