

MCM 3017

Tunisia

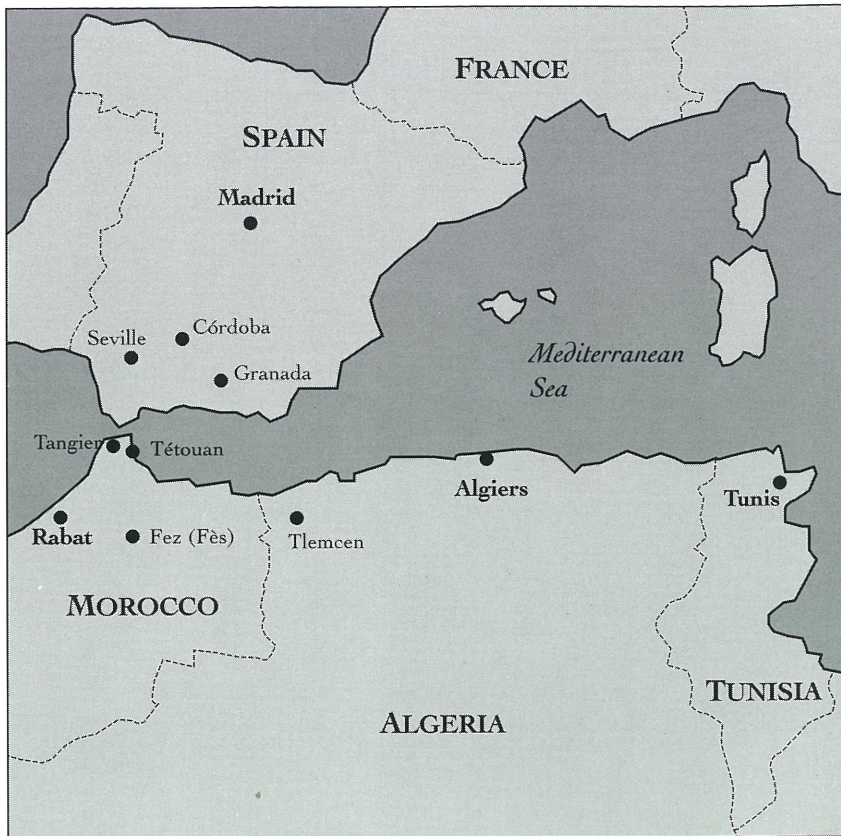
and North Africa

Musical Arabesque

*An Andalusian
Pilgrimage*

MUSIC OF THE EARTH





Tunisia and North Africa

MUSICAL ARABESQUE:

An Andalusian Pilgrimage

Track Listing

- | | | | |
|--|------|--|-------|
| 1. <i>Ma'lūf</i> : FOR A TRAVELLER,
from <i>Nūbah ashaban</i> | 7:14 | 5. <i>BSIT</i> , first movement from <i>Nūbah</i>
<i>istifral</i> (excerpt) | 12:15 |
| 2. <i>'ūd Taqīm</i> in <i>rast ʿddir</i> | 3:09 | <i>Nūbah</i> Demonstration: | |
| | | 6. <i>Nūbah al-rast</i> | 6:12 |
| <i>Nūbah</i> Rehearsal Scenes: | | <i>Nūbah</i> Concert: | |
| 3. <i>Nūbah sikah</i> (excerpt) | 8:26 | 7. <i>Nūbah rast ʿddir</i> (excerpt) . . | 23:32 |
| 4. <i>Nūbah ramul elmaya</i> (excerpt) . | 7:29 | Total Time: 68:40 | |

*Italics indicate non-English musical types and styles. Titles are in capital letters.
Because these are field recordings, there may be some extraneous noise despite the high fidelity utilized.*

Field Notes

by Nobuo Mizuno

In 1982 and 84 I traveled to the Maghreb and experienced firsthand the Andalusian music still alive in various cities of the region. Maghreb, an Arab word meaning “where the sun sets” (“west”) refers to the northwestern Africa region that includes Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. I was astonished by the extent to which the current practice of this classical music tradition is still firmly embraced by the people. This account conveys some of my thoughts and impressions from these journeys.

What is Andalusian Music?

The classical Arab music tradition from Andalusia is called “*al-Andalus*.” Andalusia, on the Iberian peninsula, was under Islamic rule during the Middle Ages. The “Father” of this

music was the master musician, Ziryab (died 850 C.E.). Even now, Ziryab continues to be much beloved by the people of the Maghreb. Wherever, throughout my fieldwork travels, I encountered musicians, they mentioned the name of this cultural hero.

Ziryab served in the court of Hārūn al-Rashīd, the fifth caliph, during the height of the ‘Abbāsīd era (750-1258). During this Islamic dynastic period, frequent east-west trade resulted in a rich culture that incorporated Greek, Persian, and Indian influences. Baghdad was the capital.

Following a feud with his teacher, Ziryab left Baghdad. After wandering throughout northern Africa for many years, he made his way to Andalusia and Cordoba, the flourish-

ing capital of the post-*Umayyad* era (756-1031). During this Islamic dynastic period in Spain, the arts and sciences enjoyed wide support and protection in Cordoba, which became the center of the western Islamic world. Many European students and

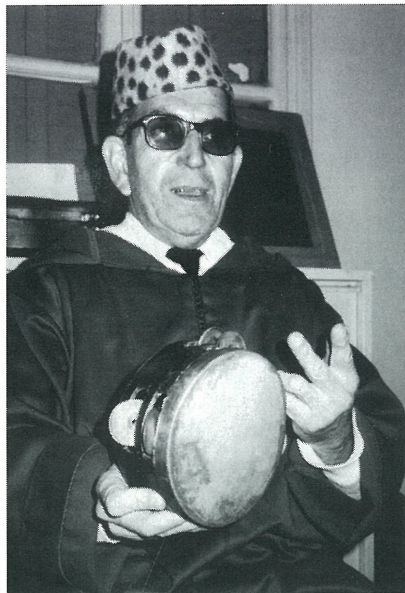
scholars traveled to Cordoba for study.

In Cordoba, Ziryab was welcomed by the monarch, Abd al-Rahmān II, and, in the first half of the 9th century, launched a brilliant musical career. While serving the court at



Nūbah concert, Fez. Note rabāb (center), ʿūd (right)

Cordoba, he made significant contributions to Arab music tradition, including improvements to the *'ūd*, a lute-like plucked chordophone, descended from the Persian *barbat* and ancestor of the Japanese *biwa* and



Ṭār player, Fez Music Academy

European lute and the most important instrument for traditional Arab music. He also refined several musical genres and established the Andalusian *nūbah* (the colloquial pronunciation of *nawba*), a suite-like set of songs and instrumental pieces. The 24 *nawbāt* (plural) corresponded to the 24 different modes on the “tree of temperaments” (*shajara al-tubū*), the representational tonal system based on Islamic philosophy in which musical modes are associated with the trunk and branches of a tree and have mystical, therapeutic, or cosmological significance. *Nawbāt*, which literally means “order” or “turn,” comprise the main body of the Andalusian music repertoire and originated in the practice of having musicians perform “in turn” at the Andalusian court. Long poems, including *muwashshah* (Arab court poetry) and *zajal* (popular poetry in Andalusian dialect), provided the songs’ texts.

The Maghreb Today

The Moorish people (mainly Berbers), who developed a brilliant civilization in medieval Andalusia, eventually succumbed to Christian

reconquest (*Reconquista*)—the Christian restoration movement that began around the 9th century, strengthened gradually, and concluded with the fall of Granada in 1492—and fled to the Maghreb region. Andalusian music also crossed the sea again, and thus court music from the great cities of Andalusia (e.g., Cordoba, Seville, Granada) became an orally-transmitted, classical repertoire inherited and cultivated by the people of the Maghreb. Today, Tunis, capital of Tunisia, Tlemcen in Algeria, and Fez and Tetouán in Morocco can be considered the “meccas” of Andalusian music, since they were direct ports of entry. However, many other cities also carry on this musical tradition in their own ways.

Although Andalusian music usually means the *nūbah*, the form differs from area to area even within the Maghreb. Generally, in Libya and Tunisia it is known as *ma’luf*, in Algeria as *gharnāti*, and in Morocco as simply “Andalusian music.” The musical structure and characteristics of the *nūbah* also vary subtly. As I have not yet visited Libya, the

following discussion is limited to Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Here, then, are brief introductions to the Andalusian music currently [1992, Ed.] found in these countries.

In Tunisia, East Arab influence is



Rabāb player



strongest in the Maghreb region. The Rashidiyya—or National Music Academy of Tunisia, established in 1935 and named after Muhammad al-Rashid Bey (1756-59), a great protector of Andalusian music—is the music center of Tunis. The director is Salah el Mahdi, a distinguished musician, scholar, and head of the Music Division of the Cultural

Ministry (Ministère des Affaires Culturelles). Professor Mahdi is internationally known for *La musique arabe* (1972), and *Patrimoine musical Tunisien* (9 volumes, 1979), among other works, and is highly respected worldwide as the premier scholar of Maghreb music. He and the Rashidiyya are the present day keepers of *ma'lūf*, the traditional

music of Tunisia.

In Algeria, both the national Conservatoire de Musique et de Déclamation and the Conservatoire Municipal de Musique et de Déclamation in Algiers are leaders in music education. Every city, however, supports numerous, private, Andalusian music performance and educational organizations that play crucial roles in involving the general population in a very lively traditional music scene. At a large music club I visited in Algiers, many adults and children attended both large and small *nūbah* ensemble rehearsals every evening with great commitment (track 3). They practiced passionately and sounded splendid, far beyond what one normally expects from “amateurs.”

I also traveled to Tlemcen in the hilly area of northwestern Algeria. Although its population is only about 80,000, the town had 5 amateur music organizations. In the evening, groups of instrument-toting children and young people gathered everywhere to perform and enjoy the *nūbah*. Each region of Algeria also hosts annual *nūbah* festivals, at which performance

groups compete. There are also international music festivals that focus on the *nūbah*.

In Morocco, on the western end of the Maghreb, cities including Rabat, Casablanca, Marakesh, Fez, Tetouán, and Tangier are centers of Andalusian music, but Fez and Tetouán are the most notable direct inheritors of the tradition. There, a vibrant traditional music culture continues to thrive under the leadership of superb musicians based at the municipal music academies.

Many variations of the *nūbah* are thus found among the Maghreb nations, and it can be said that Andalusian music experienced an even more brilliant renewal in the Maghreb. The variations, of course, are due to the process of oral transmission, which has also resulted in the loss of over half of the original 24 *nūbah* repertoire. Still, the *nūbah* tradition remains strictly oral in Algeria, and notation is never utilized. Occasionally, for clarification, I notated modes on the five-line staff and showed it to musicians, but they either expressed immediate and outright disapproval or explained that

notation detracts from the true form of the music. Such adherence to the exclusively oral transmission of classical music is quite remarkable. Tunisia, however, now relies extensively on notation, and music academies in Morocco have also begun notating the *nūbah*.

Characteristics of Andalusian Music

A *nūbah* is indicated by its mode—called *tab'* in the Maghreb. *Nūbah sikāb* (track 3), for example, is a *nūbah* in the *sikāb* mode. The biggest difference between Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan modes is in the use of quarter tones (half of a semitone). These and other microtones are found in Arab modal scales. Quarter tones are clearly present in Tunisian *ma'luf* but not in Moroccan music. This is related to the fact that the Tunisian and Algerian regions came under Ottoman rule in the 16th century, but that Morocco escaped and thus remained less influenced by the intricate, microtonal Turkish musical style [see MCM 3016 in this series]. It also means that, originally, Arab modes and melodies did not

have quarter tones, and that ancient Arab music had a much simpler sound than the microtonal style known today. Thus, Moroccan *nūbah* preserves a truly old style.

Arab music also has rhythmic mode units called *iqā'*, which are strongly related to the poetic meter of the song texts. Again, the Tunisian *ma'luf* has the most varied, detailed, and complex rhythmic structures—including distinctly polymetric patterns—of the region's various styles of Andalusian music. There is also a clear Turkish rhythmic influence as well. Moroccan rhythm, by comparison, is relatively simple and frequently in regular meters such as 3, 4, 6, or 8.

Musical Instruments in Nūbah

The *nūbah* ensemble usually consists of a few string instrument players. The instrumental sections of *nūbah* may principally feature *rabāb*, violin, *ūd*, guitar, *kwitnī*, *mandle*, and cello. The zither-like *qānūn* and the *nāy*, a pipe, may be added. Percussion instruments include the *ṭār* and *ḍarabukkab*.

The *rabāb*, a bowed chordophone, is the most important instrument,

especially in Algeria and Morocco. The *rabāb* used for Andalusian music in the Maghreb has two strings and a boat-shaped body, hollowed out from a single piece of wood, with a membrane stretched over it. The *rabāb* player, who carries the melodic framework of the *nūbah*, essentially serves as the orchestra conductor. This instrumental part, therefore, normally falls to the master musician-director of the ensemble. In fact, the great Andalusian musicians throughout the ages played the *rabāb*, although they also studied all the *nūbah* instruments. In Algeria and Morocco, the violin rests in the lap and is held upright.

The *qānūn* is a plucked chordophone of the zither family, with 78 parallel strings and a flat, platform-shaped resonator. It is played with picks attached by rings to the index fingers of both hands and is a precursor of the

cimbalom and *cembalo*.

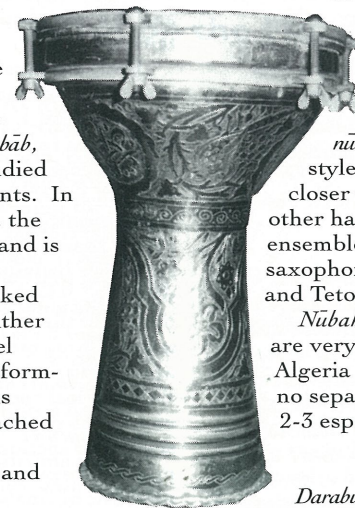
The *nāy* is a reed pipe, with 6 finger holes on top and 1 underneath. It is held vertically at a fairly steep angle and is blown with the lip placed on the edge of pipe, producing a breathy timbre similar to the *shakubachi* (Japanese bamboo flute).

The *ḍarabukkab* is a goblet-shaped drum made of wood, ceramic, or

metal, with a sheep- or fish-skin membrane, played with fingers of both hands.

As discussed earlier, Moroccan *nūbah* preserves an older style of music that remains closer to its origins. On the other hand, I saw examples of ensembles with piano, tenor saxophone, and clarinet in Fez and Tetouán.

Nūbah performance customs are very unique. Particularly in Algeria and Morocco, there is no separate chorus aside from 2-3 especially fine-voiced



Darabukkab

singers: the instrumentalists themselves, following the *rabāb* player's lead, sing along in unison while playing. In this regard, one of my most memorable encounters took place at a *nūbah* concert in Fez. This was a benefit concert by the celebrated, contemporary, Moroccan *nūbah* master, Abdelkrim Rais, and musicians of the Conservatoire de musique, Fez (Fez Music Academy). The performance featured a 20-member orchestra. After the instrumental overture, when the players gradually started to sing, the capacity audience of about 600 people sonorously joined in (see track 7). Swept up into this grand chorus, I realized how completely *nūbah* belonged to the people.

Musical Arabesque

In short, the structure of Andalusian *nūbah* can be described as a "musical arabesque." The arabesque—from the French for "Arabian"—is an ornamental design of spiraling curves, radiating star-shapes, braids, entwined vines and leaves, Arabic script, and other such geometric scrollwork characteristic of

Islamic art. These patterns commonly adorn architectural frescoes and manuscript bindings. The term "arabesque" also connotes "sole," "only," and "budding"—that is, an arabesque design may consist of cumulative leaf patterns, but the entirety constitutes a single whole. Thus, the "many" create an infinitely unfolding "one," which symbolizes the cosmos, transcendence, and eternity, and the one absolute god of Islamic faith.

Both the music and poetry of *nūbah* are abstract in nature, non-individualistic in content, and arabesque-like in form, with repetitive and symmetrical organization. Persons described in the text are always generic or anonymous; even the poets never reveal their own identities. Love songs are usually non-physical and platonic. The music matches the nature of the poetry with simple, monophonic melodies. The poetry and music proceed together, with symmetrical repetitions that may be connected or disconnected, from section to section. The resulting musical form reflects the infinite: a network of finely-wrought, short, and

equally important sections that does not progress organically or systematically towards any single climactic point. In other words, the *nūbah* is a non-developmental, perpetually self-renewing form in which the music can essentially begin or end anywhere. There is, however, a heightening of tension and an expressive outlet at the

end of each section, when the performer repeats an earlier phrase. This aspect also corresponds to the arabesque model. Thus the *nūbah* can be referred to as a musical arabesque.

(Author's note: This article is reprinted, with additional new material, from the October 1985 issue of *Arab Topics*.)

Notes on the Music

1. *Ma'lūf*: FOR A TRAVELLER, from *Nūbah asbaban*: *Asbaban* is a mode, of Turkish origin, containing quarter tones. This excerpt is about a woman yearning for an absent lover. The performance is by the most traditional Tunisian *ma'lūf* ensemble, directed by Salah el Mahdi. The orchestra consists of 1 *nāy*, 2 *'ūd*, 1 *qānūn*, 5 violins, 1 cello, 1 double bass, 1 *ḍarabukkāb*, 1 *naqqarāt*, and 1 *ṭār* (tambourine). The mixed-voice chorus has 6 women and 9 men. The *naqqarāt* are a pair of metal drums on stands and are struck with sticks.

Conductor: Mohammed Sada
Ma'lūf ensemble: The Rashidiyya
 Traditional Music Ensemble

Recorded: 9/29/82 at the Rashidiyya in
 Tunis

2. *'ūd Taqsūm in rast eddir*: *Rast eddir* is an indigenous Maghreb mode. This selection is an improvisation on the *'ūd* by the celebrated Tunisian musician, Salah el Mahdi. The *'ūd* is the most popular instrument for Andalusian music. The Tunisian *'ūd* has 4 or 5 courses (pairs) of strings; Mahdi's instrument has 5.

Recorded: 9/30/82 at the Gurret kajno (recreation hall) rooftop in Malsa, outside Tunis

Nūbah Rehearsal Scenes:

3. *Nūbah sikāb* (excerpt): At the El jazairiya el moshriya, a music association, or club, in Algiers city, many adults and children participate in *nūbah* practice with great dedication. This performance features an ensemble of 30 young people rehearsing with Ahmed Seli on *mandle* (also called *mandle granada*), a fretted, mandolin-like instrument, but larger, with 6 sets of strings and a flat back. The instruments in the ensemble are *kwitrā* (a small, fretless *ūd* with 4 sets of strings), violin, *mandle*, *ūd*, guitar, *qānūn*, *darabukkab*, *rabāb*, and cello. The performers also sing as they play their instruments: "bring me water (actually wine), for I fell in love today."

Recorded: 11/13/84 at a music association rehearsal site in Algiers

4. *Nūbah ramul elmaya* (excerpt): A performance by Riyad Andalus, an amateur ensemble in Tlemcen, conducted by Malti Mohammed. Tlemcen is renowned as a primary source region for Andalusian music. Instruments heard in this excerpt include *ūd*, violin, mandolin (4-stringed, flat-backed), *tār* (tambourine), and *darabukkab*.

Recorded: 11/19/84 at the Tlemcen City Cultural Center

5. *BSIT*, first movement from *Nūbah istifral* (excerpt): Tetouán is also a mecca of Andalusian music. This performance is by 19 students at the Conservatoire de musique, Tetouán. The conductor is Mufarej Moftar. A tenor saxophone joins a violin, cello, double bass, *ūd*, *rabāb*, and *darabukkab*. The instrumentalists also sing while playing.

Recorded: 11/29/84 at the hall of the Conservatoire de musique, Tetouán

A Nūbah Demonstration:

6. *Nūbah al-rast*: Abdelkrim Rais and musicians of the Conservatoire de musique, Fez demonstrate the musical patterns for the five *nūbah* movements—*bsit*, *qaim wa nuwf*, *btāyh-I*, *derj*, *quddām*. The instruments are violin, *ūd* (5 multiple and 1 single set of strings), and *tār* (tambourine).

Recorded: 11/22/84 at the Conservatoire de musique, Fez

A Nūbah Concert:

7. *Nūbah rast eḍdir* (excerpt): From a concert held at the grand hall of the Kasel al Munebih in the old town section of Fez. The performance features an ensemble of 1 *rabāb*, 9 violins, 1 cello, 4 *ūd*, 1 *tār*; 1 *darabukkab*, and 3 singers, led by master musician Abdelkrim Rais (b. 1912).

This love song is based on orally-transmitted poetry, including *muwashshab* and *zajal*, in Moroccan dialect. The capacity audience

joined in on the song, and the hall became animated with singing voices.

Recorded: with assistance from Yoshiuki Takashina on 11/24/84, at the Qaṣr al-Munebih in Fez

Credits:

Original Japanese Version:
Producers: Yuji Ichihashi & Aki Sato
Director: Masaya Murakami
Recording and Notes: Nobuo Mizuno
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Editor & Translator's Note

These notes have been translated, for the first time, from the original Japanese and edited as judiciously as possible for an English-speaking audience. In translating and editing these notes, we have attempted to preserve the authors' original tone, as well as the essential information. Some references aimed at a Japanese audience have been eliminated but little else. The fieldworkers who recorded these selections represent a variety of disciplines and approaches, and this is reflected in the notes. Some, for example, are more musicologically detailed, while others present the point-of-view of an enthusiastic traveler learning about new cultures and peoples.

Translating always presents challenges, and these are amplified when the material being translated itself contains many terms from yet another language. Often, the Japanese fieldworker attempted to preserve original terms, such as the names of people and musical instruments, through direct transliteration into

Japanese. Since transliteration involves capturing one language's sounds in another's alphabet, it is subject to unavoidable inaccuracies. These are compounded when a second transliteration — as here, from Japanese to English — occurs. Some terms can be checked by using recognized authorities and references, and we have done this wherever possible by following spellings used in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980 edition) and the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986 edition). We also appreciate the assistance of Mr. Yuji Ichihashi, at the Victor Company of Japan, and the original writers in reviewing our work and making suggestions.

Some spellings, however, have remained problematic, especially the names of people and some places. In those cases we have followed standard Japanese-English transliteration practice and have attempted to be as consistent as possible. We have also followed western practice, rather than Japanese, by placing surnames second.

Non-English terms are in italics.

— MG and TN