

Musk and Amber

The Fine Arts of Andalusian Spain

Part 3

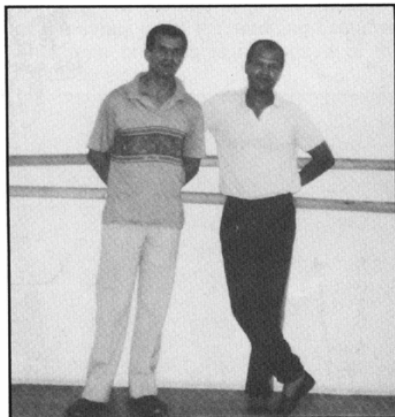
By Barbara Siegel (Habiba)

The musical legacy of Andalusian Spain is the special heritage of the cities of North Africa. As early as the 10th century through the 17th, when the last expulsion by the Christians occurred, Andalusian Arabs came and settled in the great cities of North Africa. They came initially because of infighting among themselves and, later, as the Spanish Christians reconquered Spain. Just as the Jews were expelled in 1492, Islam was outlawed in 1500. Those that wanted to stay were expected to convert to Christianity.

In Tunisia the Andalusian refugees, called Moriscos, retained their cultural identity. They settled in towns like Side Bou Said bringing their traditional crafts and architectural techniques.¹ Those who had been farmers settled in the countryside and tried to duplicate the beautiful farms they lost, full of longing for their Spanish homeland. They brought with them oranges, almonds and apricots. The later arrivals in the 16th century brought new world tomatoes, hot peppers and potatoes.² The greatest concentration of Andalusian refugees settled in the Cap Bon, Bizerte and Medjerda.³ Expert potters, stoneworkers and tilemakers settled in the Cap Bon on the Mediterranean. The stoneworkers of Dar Chabaane provided the stonework for the restoration of the Alhambra.

The active interchange between Spain and Tunisia insured that literally hundreds of songs, with *muwashshahat* poetry for lyrics, remained in the classical music repertoire. The musical suite, or *nawbah*, developed in Andalusia and was transplanted to the great cities of the Maghreb. For a time, it had a parallel development: There is a Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian *nawbah*. Tunisian *nawbah* is called *malouf*. The tradition survived hundreds of years and has even undergone periodic revivals. The tradition was carried on through the 19th century and included women singing and dancing the classic repertoire. While in the Middle Ages slave girls had a prominent role, later on self-employed public singers in taverns and more respectable self-employed women entertained at weddings and special events.

Although the urban repertoire always included Andalusian music, a major movement grew in the early 20th century to rescue it from decline and to combat



Bechir Dridi, drummer with the National Troupe of Tunisia, and Habib Trabelsi, dancer.

French influence.⁴ There was a renaissance of research and interest that culminated in the founding of a music conservatory, Rashidiya, in 1934.⁵ It was named after an 18th century Turkish ruler of Tunisia, Muhammad ar-Rashid Bey, who also worked to preserve *malouf*. The goal of the school was to provide a place for respectable male and female musicians to develop and perform. While they did accept and train female musicians and actively solicited female singers, they were not included in the official written history of the institution.⁶

In 1956 Tunisia won independence from France. One of the first acts of the new Bourghiba government was universal public education and equality of men and women under the law. Previously most women had access only to the body of women's folk music orally transmitted from the Berber and Bedouin tradition. In many towns there were established music conservatories where both boys and girls received instruction in musical instruments, voice and dance. The Tunis Conservatoire, the home of the National Troupe, takes the best young musicians and dancers in the country. Even now, women are encouraged to concentrate on singing and dancing. They seldom play instruments or compose. The director of the Tunis Conservatoire, Salah al Mahdi is so well respected for his research in Andalusian music that he has been nicknamed Ziryab, the

nickname of the first truly Andalusian musician who revolutionized music in Spain in the 9th century.⁷

While the music has been handed down orally there developed the urban Andalusian dance style. According to Viviane Lievre's survey of North African dance, the "style Andalou" is found in the great cities of the Maghreb. It is a feminine style of dance performed at the end of a classical concert and is still an amusement of the wealthy families. The movements include inclining the head graciously while the arms make arabesques to the melody. She also mentions the play of rich fabrics that enhance the performance.⁸

All the time I was learning better known peasant-style dances in Tunisia, I was aware of another tradition of music and dance, the *malouf*. I also had seen a different style at parties. When I went to Tunisia in June 1990 it was to study this other form. I contacted my teacher Habib Trabelsi, engaged a drummer, and rented a studio in a small music conservatory, Conservatoire Kaddour Srafi de Musique et de Danse. The result was a completely new musical education. These new rhythms opened the door to research and many exciting discoveries about music and the role of women in Arabic classical music and dance.

I worked with my longtime teacher Habib Trabelsi and drummer, Bechir Dridi, who has been with the National Troupe for 18 years. Although a performance of a musical suite, or *nawbah*, takes 1 1/2 hours, the troupe has a short piece which goes through the four typical rhythms in six minutes. We spent hours working on four rhythms and the movements which are appropriate for them. It is common in the Middle East not to use music but just drum rhythms to insure students understand the rhythms first. In attending beginners classes with the troupe some years ago, we repeated steps over and over again to a lone drummer. I was made to repeat these new rhythms in the same way.

The first rhythm we worked with is 10/8 called *malouf samai*. It is a slow and stately and leads off the piece. Delicate arm movements are very important and footwork, there is no other word but courtly for this rhythm. The second rhythm, called *bataihi malouf*, has a dramatic intensity that makes it the most reminiscent of Span-

Illustrations below of Medieval Spanish
Islamic dress from *Les Costumes
Traditionnels Feminins de Tunisie*, Tunis,
Maison Tunisienne de L'Edition, 1988.

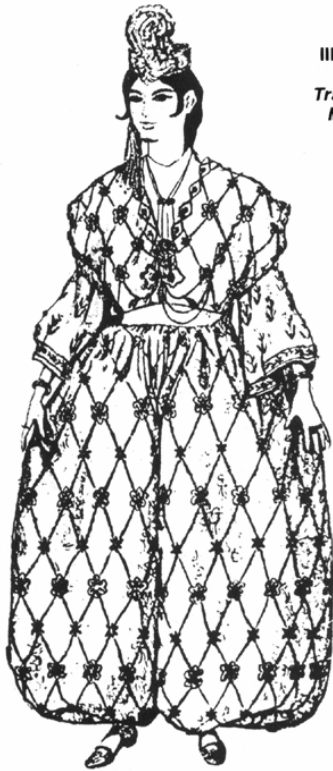


Fig. 1 Tunis wedding costume: short tunic (jebba) with Turkish style pantaloons (serwal). Early 20th century



Fig. 2 Raf-Raf wedding costume: elaborate vest (fermla) and shirt (kamis). Worn for the Jelwa ceremony (the displaying of the hennaed hands).



Fig. 3 Tunis at-home costume: short tunic (jebba) with Andalusian style pantaloons (serwal) and pointed hat worn by Jewish women. 19th century.



Fig. 4 Raf-Raf costume worn for the Jelwa ceremony (the displaying of the hennaed hands): long tunic (jebba). Early 20th century.



Fig. 5 Raf-Raf costume (third day), worn for the Jelwa ceremony (the displaying of the hennaed hands): long tunic (jebba). 19th century.

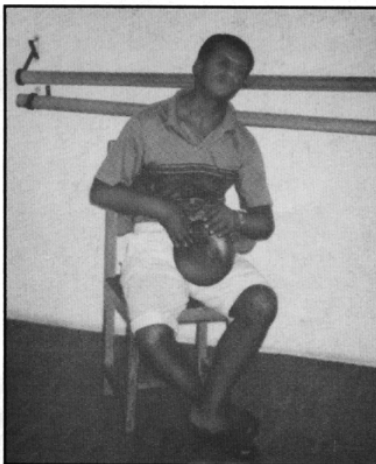
ish music. The next one, called *nuwachat*, brought a joyous relief. And finally, a 6/8 rhythm called *khatam malouf* made up the finale. We used a tambourine for the *batahi malouf* and the *khatam malouf*. This material was so different from anything I'd done in Tunisia. There is absolutely no torso work. It consisted of footwork and lovely graceful arms. Level changes were done without undulations. There was one instance of very tasteful shoulder shimmy. To be in Tunis without twisting was very odd. The dance style was also very sedate considering the erotic nature of the *muwashshahat* themselves.

Luckily a performance of the troupe coincided with my visit. It was a benefit performance for the handicapped at the Palais de Congres. They did a variety of numbers including *malouf*. Men and women are in this particular number. The costume that the female dancers wear for this dance reflects the urban Tunis tradition. It has become common as a wedding costume used all over Tunisia and is a blend of Andalusian and Turkish elements. Some of the narrative dances used costuming that was more accurately medieval. This would be similar to the short tunic and leggings pictured in the illustrations of this article. (Figure 3) The earliest representations of medieval Spanish dress come from a 15th century Spanish manuscript.⁹ They appear in Part I of this series. When we think of Tunisia we most often think of the rural peasant style of dress. This is the Bedouin/Berber tradition, predating the Andalusian influence. The *melia* and *chial* pins go back to Roman times.

A troupe on the island of Djerba also used the typical wide pantaloons with a lace blouse with vest and the hat. The lace blouse also looked extremely good under a *melia*. This allowed them to do quick costume changes. The Djerba troupe also used scarves in their performance. I have seen several examples of the scarf dance with this more urban costume. It fits with the account given by the Kinneys of the flirtatious version of this dance performed in the cafes. The scarf dance originated as a flirtatious cafe dance during which the chosen for the evening received the scarf.¹⁰ Later on when Tunisia was trying to gain independence from France, cafe dancers started performing the dance with a red scarf in one hand and a white in the other. These were the colors of the then secret Tunisian flag. After independence the national troupe made the scarf dance one of their signature pieces.

The main difference between the rural style of dress worn by the Bedouins and the urban ladies is that the rural women were wrapped or draped garments and the urban women wore cut and sewn garments. There are many different variations on these two themes in every province in Tunisia. An analysis of the names of garments in medieval Spain and of modern Tunisia show direct correspondence as well as do the actual garments. The ele-

ments of traditional dress are basically the same. It is thought that the refugees not so much imposed their styles of dress but that in the medieval period the basic structure of the clothing was the same in both places.¹¹ The big difference, though, was the superior decorative artistry and new techniques of embroidery and silk work that the refugees brought with them. The town of Raf-Raf near Bizerte is a celebrated village of Andalusian origin. It is famous for having the most beautiful regional costumes in Tunisia due to the quality and skill of its decoration.¹² The costumes of Raf-Raf and Tunis are illustrative of the evolution of the wedding costume. This style of dress is composed of the following elements:



Bechir Dridi

The undershirt, called *kamis* by the Andalusian Arabs and *knijja* by the Moriscos of Tunis, is a flowing shirt of embroidered cotton or linen. The town of Raf-Raf is famous for embroidering them for troupe-seaux. In the 13th century Spanish Christians had adopted the embroidered cotton or linen shirts of Andalus called *camisas margomadas*.¹³

The tunic, *jebba* in Tunisia and called *aljuba* by the Spanish Christians, is an overgarment made of a large rectangle closed in front without sleeves. In Grenada a bi-colored tunic was fashionable and was adopted by the Christians. Some of the earliest preserved wedding garments in Tunisia are bi-colored tunics. An example of an Andalusian bi-colored tunic can be seen in Part I of this article. *Jebbas* come in both long and short versions.¹⁴

Pantaloons were worn as undergarments and as overgarments. They were made in velvet, silk, satin and cotton. Known as *sarawil* or *serwal* in Arabic, in the age of the Caliphs in Spain they were called *zarguellas*. This urban garment was worn by both men and women. At the beginning of the 20th century the women of Tunis and Bizerte wore enormous pantaloons of white fabric under their veils for going out of the house. There was also a knee-length

style that was worn with a knitted legging that fit tightly from knee to ankle. In Bizerte women wore a tight legging of silk with embroidery concealing the ankle and calf. This showed below the street veil. The Turkish mode of dress had a major influence in the Tunis style. The Tunis *sarawil* are extremely voluminous and long in the Turkish manner.¹⁵

The vest, called *fermla* in Tunisia and *ghlala* in Spain, reveals a Turkish influence in two ways: It is often worn over a caftan, a purely Turkish garment, and it is sometimes fastened by many little buttons which did not mark the original Andalusian ones. The decoration of the buttons with *passementerie* is Andalusian.¹⁶

Two styles of shoes come from this time period. Shoes with cork soles called in Tunisia *gorg* and in Spain, *al corq*. The last Andalusian immigrants brought black leather shoes with flat soles called *chebrella* in Tunisia and *xerevilla* in Spain.

There is one element of female dress that is common to all inhabitants of Tunisia — the veil. The large white modesty garment has its counterpart in medieval Spain as well. There was also a highly decorated short veil that just covered the head and shoulders. It is called *mandil* in Tunisia today. Obviously the Spanish Christians adopted it — the *mantilla*.

As we have seen, the Andalusian contribution is very much alive in most facets of North African life: cuisine, clothing, art and architecture, music and literature. Longing for their Spanish homeland inspired the Andalusian refugees to carefully preserve their musical tradition. This has allowed us to catch a glimpse of the *jariya* who sang and danced in the noble houses of the al-Andalus. Along with the public dancing girl, the *ghaziye*, she is one of the principal figures in our dance heritage. ❖

1. Susan T. Rivers, "Exiles from Andalusia," *Aramco world*, July-August 1991, v.42, no.4, p.12. 2. *Ibid.*, p.16. 3. J.D. Latham, "Contribution à l'étude des immigrations andalouses et leur place dans l'histoire de la Tunisie," *Recueil d'études sur les moriscos-andalous en Tunisie*. Madrid, Dirección General de Relaciones culturales, Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura; Tunis, distributeur, Société tunisienne de diffusion, [1973], p.27. 4. Lura JaFran Jones, "A sociohistorical perspective on Tunisian women as professional musicians," *Women and music in cross-cultural perspective*, edited by Ellen Koskoff. New York: Greenwood Press, p.73. 5. *Ibid.*, p.74. 6. *Ibid.*, p.76. 7. *Ibid.*, p.78. 8. Viviane Lievre, *Dances du Maghreb d'une rive à l'autre*. Paris, Editions Karthala, 1987, p.73. 9. *Les costumes traditionnels féminins de Tunisie*. Tunis, Maison Tunisienne de l'Édition, 1988, p.19. 10. Troy and Margaret West Kinney, *The dance: its place in art and life*. New York, Tudor Publishing Co., 1936, p.205. Also, personal conversation with informant, Habib Trabelsi. 11. Clemence Sugier, "Parures traditionnelles des tunisiennes comparées à celles des femmes de l'Islam espagnol," *Études sur les Morisques-andalous*. Tunis, Ministère des affaires culturelles, Institut national d'archéologie et d'art, Centre des études hispano-andalouses, 1983, p.191. 12. Clemence Sugier, "Les coiffes féminines de Tunisie," *Recueil d'études sur les moriscos-andalous en Tunisie*. Madrid, Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales, Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura; Tunis, distributeur, Société tunisienne de diffusion, [1973], p.348. 13. Sugier, *Parures*, p.181. 14. *Ibid.*, p.185-6. 15. *Ibid.*, p.187. 16. *Ibid.*, p.188.