

# PERIOD ARABIC MUSIC

## What do we know?

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# OUTLINE

What we don't have: period notated music

what we do have: treatises, poetry, and anecdotes  
early treatises try to define rhythm  
descriptions of instruments, or lists of names  
tuning for a Moorish lute

oral tradition still in North Africa, claim to be direct descendants of Andalusian music

some important early treatise writers:

**Ishaq al-Mawsili** (d.850AD) [boon companion of Harun al-Rashid!]

formulated 9 rhythmic modes

He also classified songs based on rhythmic mode, with melodic mode as a subdivision.  
His work not extant, but clearly important and quoted in later writers.

## **Al-Kindi**

3 extant treatises: *Book of Stringed Instruments*, *Epistle on Informative Sections on Music*, *Epistle on the Knowledge Concerning the Composition of Melodies*, and lost treatise *Epistle on Rhythm*

Ideas he wrote about include relations between the rhythmic mode of a song and 1) the proper time of the day or night to perform it, 2) the human emotions of the song text, and 3) humours (from the Greek)

**Al-Farabi** died in 334/950 AD at over 80 yrs old (so born b4 258/872-3 AD)

studied in Baghdad, was considered "2nd master" of philosophy after Aristotle, also a performer of Mid-Eastern music

wrote *Book of Rhythms*, *Book for the Basic Comprehension of Rhythms*, and *Kitab al-Musiqi al-Kabir* (Grand Book of Music) which was 2 books, only 1st survives  
(bk 2 was commentary on earlier writers)

bk 1 in 2 parts: 1 a) philosophy of music b) intro to acoustics; 2 "The Art Itself"

**Al-Isbahani** born 284/897 AD, died 356/967 AD

wrote *Kitab al-Aghani/ The Book of Songs*

depicted musical and social life of the caliphs and their musicians in anecdotal form  
(lived a debauched life)

didn't organize songs by mode or singer or poet

instead picked most interesting -- had good stories associated with them (re composition or singer or poet) & "best" songs [literary prequel to Arabian Nights?]

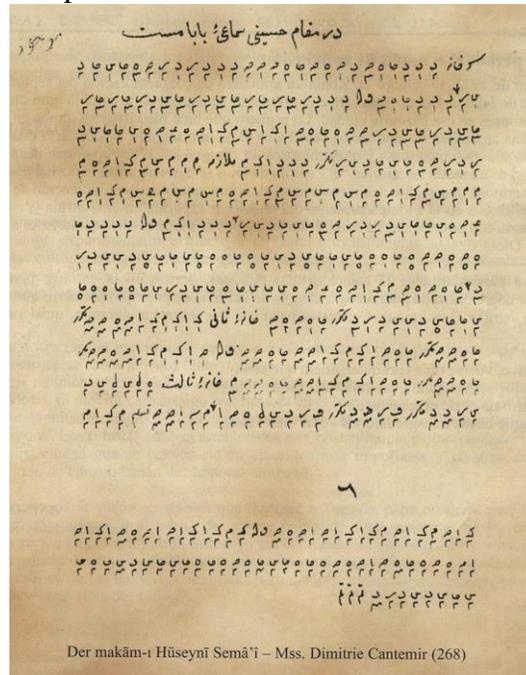
**Al-Bataliawsi** (444-521AH/ 1052-1127AD)

Philologist from Andalusia, wrote a commentary on a great poet

Passage in his commentary states that rhythms of Ishaq al-Mawsili still being played in Andalusia in 12<sup>th</sup> century!

Earliest notation: Dimitrie Cantemir from Moldavan court 1673-1723

He was at Ottoman court (as hostage, then diplomatic envoy), invented a musical notation and wrote book with some 350 songs (9 of his own). Also wrote a famous history of the Ottoman Empire.



Der makām-i Hüseyinī Semā'ī – Mss. Dimitrie Cantemir (268)

next: Frenchman Baron Rodolphe D'Erlanger (1872-1932) went to Morocco/Algeria in early 1900s and wrote stuff down as he heard it  
author of 6vol. work La Musique Arabe (1930-59), from aristocrat German-Jewish banking family, lived in Tunisia from 1911 'til death in 1932. patron and scholar

what can we know based on this?

almost nothing for sure

make educated guesses

do lots of listening - far afield may relate (Arabic kingdom stretched from Iberia to India)

still play maqamats in Central Asia (are recipes from Afghanistan that match 13c Andalus)



9 Rhythmic Modes of Ishaq al-Mawsili from Al-Farabi (Sawa)

1. NAMELESS (repeating 8th notes - fastest)
2. LIGHT (repeating 8th notes - medium speed)
3. AL HAZAJ (repeating 8th notes - slowest)
4. AL-RAMAL (3/2 half, quarter, dotted half)
5. LIGHT RAMAL (3/4 quarter half)
6. 1ST HEAVY (4/2 half half whole)
- 7 1ST LIGHT-HEAVY (4/4 quarter quarter half)
- 8 2ND HEAVY (5/2 half whole whole)
- 9 2ND LIGHT-HEAVY (5/4 quarter half half)

I am not presenting about tuning/scales as I haven't come to any definitive conclusions yet. ☺

Random Thoughts comparing Western vs. Eastern

mainly Arabic, Hindi and Asian

thoughts on maqams -- from Morocco to India and Central Asia, have this concept [diff. ragas/noubas/maqams for different times of day, associated with different emotions]

My hypothesis is from Persia, but unprovable - pretty safe to say disseminated by Arabs/Islam

have heterophony rather than harmony

start with non-rhythmic alap/taxsim/improv before main section

we should be trying this: improvised intros, heterophony

define heterophony: a "not quite unison" unison, or "the simultaneous variation of a single melodic line"

definitions of ragas/maqams/Jewish modes are not just scales, but include typical patterns, main note, secondary note...

this is like early directions on chant modes (from Jewish?) probably still applies to Byzantine and other chant

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## HISTORICAL ARABIC

Sawa, George Dimitri. Music Performance Practice in the Early Abbasid Era, 132-320AH/750-932AD. Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989.

sources are Al-Farabi's (872-950AD) 2 books and al-Isbahani's Book of Songs.

Sawa, George Dimitri. Rhythmic Theories and Practices in Arabic Writings to 339AH/950AD. Institute of Mediaeval Music, Ottawa, Canada, 2004/9?.

incl.s short chapter about Al-Bataliawsi's (1052-1127AD) commentaries on iqa in Al-Andalus.

## ARABIC /ANDALUSIAN

Davis, Ruth. Ma'luf: Reflections on the Arab Andalusian Music of Tunisia. Scarecrow Press, 2004.

Farmer, Henry George. A History of Arabian Music through the XIII century. London, 1929.

" " An Old Moorish Lute Tutor. Glasgow, 1933.

\*Liu, Benjamin M. and Monroe, James T. Ten Hispano-Arabic Strophic Songs in the Modern Oral Tradition. Univ. of California Press, 1989.

\*music and texts

## CURRENT MUSIC

Touma, Habib Hassan. The Music of the Arabs. Amadeus Press, 1996.

Powers, Cameron. Arabic Musical Scales: Basic Maqam Notation. GL Design, Boulder, Co. 2005.

" " Harmonic Secrets of Arabic Music Scales: Fine Tuning the Maqams. ", 2012.

Egyptian Music Appreciation & Practice for Bellydancers. by George Sawa, 2009-10

# DISCOGRAPHY

## ARABIC:

Classical Arabic Music: a recital of Muwashahat. Afif Bulos & his Ensemble. Folkways Records, 1976, reissued Smithsonian 2007.

The Art of the Early Egyptian Qanun, vol.s 1 & 2. George Sawa et al. The Traditional Arabic Music Ensemble, 2008-9.

Egyptian Music Appreciation & Practice for Bellydancers. by George Sawa, 2 CDs, 2009-10

Taqasim: Improvisation in Arab Music. Ali Jihad Racy, buzuq (saz) and Simon Shaheen, ud. Lyrichord, reissue 1991, orig 1981?

Maqam Kurd, Maqam Nahawand, Maqam Bayyati.

Maqams of Syria, field recordings by Deben Bhattacharya in 1955 and 1960, reissue ARC Music 2002.

## DISCOGRAPHY CONT.

### EARLY MUSIC groups:

From Byzantium to Andalusia: Medieval Music & Poetry. Oni Wytars Ensemble, Naxos 2006.

Iberian Garden: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Music in Medieval Spain, vol.1 & 2. by Altramar. Dorian 1995, 1997/8.

Jordi Savall directing Hesperion XXI:

Orient-Occident: 1200-1700. AliaVox 2006.

Istanbul: Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723) "The Book of the Science of Music" and the Sephardic and Armenian musical tradition, AliaVox 2009.

IN HIS OWN CATEGORY: An Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Turkish Sephardic Troubadour  
The Historical Recordings of Haim Effendi of Turkey. Jewish Music Research Centre, Jerusalem, 2008.

A 4 CD set of recordings made from 1907-1927 by a famous Jewish singer of the Ottoman Empire.

### RECOMMENDED:

Look for discs by Deben Bhattacharya, ethnomusicologist

Listen to any Moroccan/Tunisian-Andalusian music

For Central Asian, watch for *Music of Central Asia* by Smithsonian Folkways

### WEB SITES:

<http://www.maqamworld.com/>

An indispensable site if you are trying to learn Arabic rhythmic and musical modes.

<http://www.sharjahart.org/programmes/web-radio>

The recordings are in Arabic, but with English transcriptions. #4 on the song Lamma Bada is interesting – it features 2 early recordings, one from 1910 and the other 1924, of 2 different artists doing the same song. Currently there are over 140 programs.

<http://www.oudforguitarists.com/sheet-music/>

A free sheet music site

<http://www.carmine.com/haflasongs>

Carmine Guida teaches and plays haflas at Pennsic (and elsewhere). He's got some free sheet music and a maqam and a rhythm cheat sheet.