

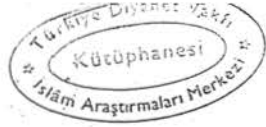
# SUFISM MUSIC AND SOCIETY

## IN TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST



Edited by Anders Hammarlund, Torbjörn Olsson, Elisabeth Özdalga  
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# SUFISM, MUSIC AND SOCIETY IN TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST

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# Sufi Music and Rites in the Era of Mass Reproduction Techniques and Culture

JEAN DURING

In the past Oriental music could only be transmitted orally: from master to disciple. Without this personal transmission, it risked being lost forever. All this changed with the advent of modern technology. Today modern recording devices make possible the collection of Oriental music. The development of various media allow for its dissemination on a wide scale. Thus it has become possible to learn Oriental music without having to rely on the personal relationship that is at the heart of the traditional process of transmission.

Considering the fact that music and mysticism share many of the same structures of transmission, it would be interesting to examine how modern means of diffusion have influenced Sufi music. It is significant to note not only the reaction of the dervishes to these new factors, but also the influence the media have had on the public. In this vein, it is interesting to investigate how public demands have changed the orientation of the musical practices of the dervishes themselves.

The contemporary attitude of dervishes toward the transmission of their music ranges from a very strict conservatism, having as its goal the preservation of secrets, or at least the sense of the secret, to a kind of liberalism that condones the use of the means of transmission and distribution of their music in order to create a new attractive image of themselves. This is not a new phenomenon. In fact, in the past, some Sufi lodges owed a part of their success to the quality of their *samâ'*, which was attended by music lovers; however, with the diffusion of music through concerts, records and cassettes, the narrow field of Sufi music has become considerably enlarged. On the one hand, forms of music that are strictly Sufi have become popularized due to the impact of the media; on the other hand, the dervishes are in a position of having to adapt their practices to the new means offered by modernity, the "mediatic brewing," and the circulation of cultural goods and information.

The phenomena considered here provide a cultural framework within which the traditions existing in Iran and especially in Kurdistan can be examined. However, this framework can be used to examine other traditions as well. In order to better understand contemporary dynamics, an attempt is made to contextualize forms of music called "Sufi", in other words, to consider them in relation to their public as well as other genres. It is necessary, in effect, to limit the cultural terrain in which the "mediatic factor" has contributed to transformations, the ruptures and the levelling, which have defined the actual musical landscape. It is sometimes possible to discover the origins of changes that ultimately occur. Through an examination of the context in which change has occurred, it becomes possible to locate its source. In certain cases, the vulgarization of traditional musical style is the natural consequence of the interaction of Sufi music, and different forms of art music. Before laborating on the central issue of this article, I want to give a few examples. What needs to be

addressed is how the sense of the secret, or of the obligation of preserving it, has become transformed by the diffusion of Sufi music through the media. How has this diffusion encouraged the development of new forms of unveiling of the deeper secrets that are brought about both through the performance of the music and through the rites associated with it. This process is not unlike that brought into the foreground by the concepts of *aura* and of *cultural value*, found for example in the philosophy of Walter Benjamin who has argued that the quality of being a work of art is lost under the effect of mass reproduction.

### Sufi Music and Persian Art Music

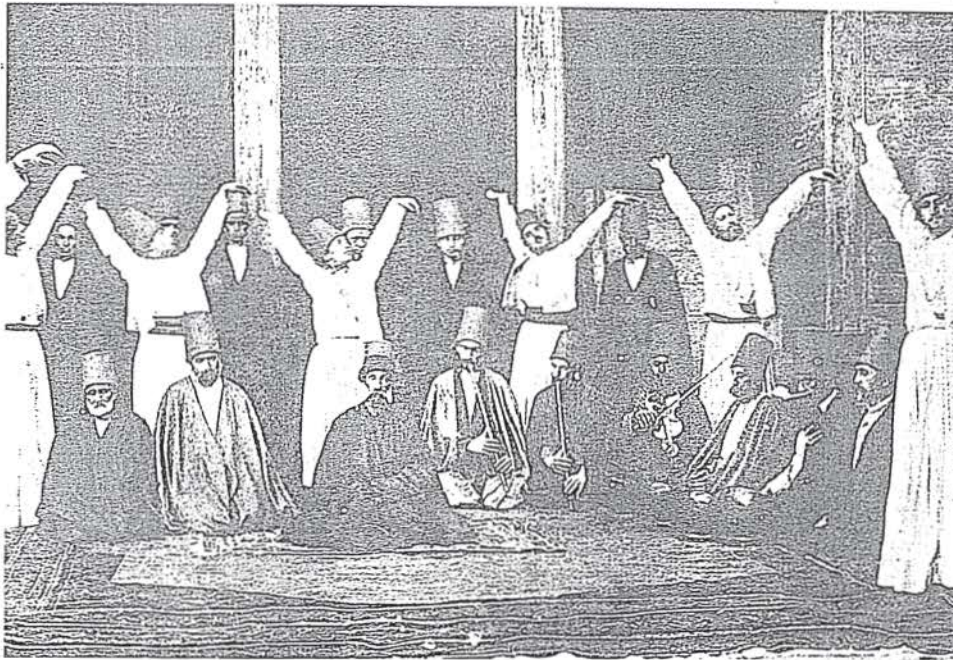
Sufi music, as its culture in general, is not homogeneous. Thus, musical forms and repertoires vary from one Sufi group to another. In the past, it was common practice for Sufis to invite (and pay) professional musicians to play in their *samâ'* rites. These musicians would interpret classical melodies and solemn songs having literary content in ways compatible with their *ahvâl*.<sup>1</sup> Exchanges between art music and Sufi, or spiritual, music occurred from the very beginning, because boundaries between them were porous or fluid.<sup>2</sup>

The Sufis or dervishes of Iran have therefore not generated music unique to themselves. The melodies and styles of their songs are in line with classical Persian music, generally without instrumental accompaniment. In the Shiite brotherhood of Ne'matollâhi Gonâbâdi, one of the most important in Iran, musical practices reflect the strict conformance to Islamic Law (*shar'iat*, which was in some periods a vital necessity). Accordingly, for example, women remain in an adjacent room, and the only form of music allowed is the song performed *a cappella*. If a dervish with a beautiful voice is found among the performers, he is asked to sing something to close the meeting. He usually chooses a poem by Hâfez or Sa'di or a passage from *Masnâvi* by Mawlânâ Rumi, which he cantillates using classical modes and melodies (*gushe*). Even within a repertoire of simple tunes having secular lyrics (*majâzi*), the dervishes may interpret them in a spiritual sense. In other settings, the chanting may be accompanied by an instrument considered less mystical than others, such as by the *ney* or

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1 The Sufis undoubtedly began by summoning professional singers who would interpret the songs in a symbolic manner. After the hagiographs, it appears that the musicians of Rumi or Abu Sa'id Abi'l-kheyr were such professionals. An old Tadjik bard tells of how in the past he would sometimes be invited by dervishes to play and sing at the mosque. It is likely that some brotherhoods avoided the development of specific repertoires in order to conform to the *shar'*.

2 It is the same for such genres as the Shiite Persian song (*nowhe*, *marsie*, etc.), the classical song (*radif*) and the dervish song, not only because the modes and rhythms were the same, but also because certain religious songs were at the same time also performed by dervishes. Classical musicians were often affiliated with a Shiite lodge, where a place was reserved in seances for the mystical song. These songs did not make up an organized repertoire, a style or a specialization of their own. Nevertheless, they were not expressed in the same way in a *xânegâh*, or in a private gathering as in a concert. In the former it was not expected that dervishes exhibit vocal prowess or subtle modulations, but warm expression and feeling. Such interpretations appear alongside demonstrations of virtuosity or performances of extremely gay or exuberant melodies. Pieces having a particular emotive or meditative character are chosen from the learned repertoire. By using nostalgic modes, they include many soft and emotive melodies (for a discussion of this, see the rather lengthy article by M. Frishkopf on the Egyptian *inshad*). In Iran, the Shur, Homâyun, Esfahân, Dashti, and Afshâri are often played. Of the classical repertoires most suited to the Sufi mood, the most current are the Sufinâme (and Sâqinâme), Çereyli, which have a slow and sober melody, and the *gushes*, Gham Angiz, Leyli and Majnun, Râz o Niâz, *Jâme darân*, as well as others that are more gay in spirit such as the Tusi and the Chahârpâre, and, of course, nearly all of the *Masnâvi* (primarily that of Afshâri) since this genre is by definition a mystical one by virtue of its literary component.



A group of dervishes posing in front of the photographer (Istanbul: end of nineteenth century).

*setâr*.<sup>3</sup> Generally, when, under these conditions, they listen to music *a fortiori* dervishes practice their interior *zêkr*. Notably, in the meetings of this brotherhood, the Koran is only chanted during Ramadan, where custom requires one *joz'* to be recited each day at sunset.

The frontiers between art music and Sufi music are difficult to trace since the public as well as artists and producers continually mix up the classifications. This partially stems from the fact that the distinction between the sacred and the profane is not very clear in Muslim cultures. Moreover, if a classical singer is himself dervish, one can assume that all the music he performs, at least at the *xânegâh*, is spiritual in nature. The question can be raised as to whether otherwise religious music reproduced by someone else, but in another, non-religious, context can still be considered Sufi music. Examples of the circulation of repertoires include that of the *ta'zie*, the Shiite religious opera. A great number of its tunes have been incorporated into the body of classical music. Since the singers of *ta'zie* were often classical masters, it is possible to argue that the tunes constituting the repertoire of religious opera were in fact originally borrowed by these musicians. Even in the highly specific case of the sacred Kurdish music of the Ahl-e Haqq, an essential piece such as *Jelô Shâhi*, "before the King," would be considered *majâzi* (profane) by some, and mystical by others, who would argue that the "King" being referred to is the "spiritual King". One interpretation of this phenomenon is that the melodies of this genre were originally sacred, then have become profane, and then have eventually been restored to their mystical dimension. In other cases, it is recognized that the music in question actually has its origins in festive music, although it is argued that the *jam* (the spiritual meeting) is also a festival. Moreover, few people concern themselves with the real origin of the melodies; what matters is that someone with authority decrees that they are of a particular origin. Differences of opinion appear not as a result of any real difference in origins of the melodies but rather as conflicts of authority and legit-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. During, *Musique et Mystique dans les Traditions de l'Iran*, (Paris: IFRI-Peeters, 1989). At wedding celebrations a much smaller tambourine, called a *dâyre*, is used.

imacy. Two examples of the circulation and interaction between the artistic and spiritual domains can be given.

In general, Persian art music tends to look for the subject matter of its renewal in rural or provincial popular melodies. The songs of Kurdistan, Gilan or Persia have enriched the repertory, and have even given birth to such new modes as *Shushtar*, *Bayât-e Shiraz*, *Kord*, *Gilaki*, or *Amiri*. Historically, it was not uncommon for musicians to become interested in ritual music as well. Moreover, the fact that many were of Kurdish origin contributed to the integration of Kurdish elements. Another factor which favored these borrowings was that there has always existed in Persian music (at least for the last two centuries) a tendency towards spiritualization - a tendency which has been favored by the cultural climate of the Islamic regime.

With "mediatic brewing," classical musicians, who for the most part live in Teheran, have become acquainted with the music of the Qâderi Kurds and, to a lesser extent, of Ahl-e Haqq, which differs from the Persian tradition of Sufi music. Since about 1977, these musicians, in particular those of the Qâderi, have exercised an influence on Persian music, or at least on those arrangements designed for concert or for cassette recordings.

An example of Kurdish influence in Persian music is the introduction of the grand Qâderi *daf* into classical ensembles. The *daf* is a sacred instrument charged with symbolism. In principle, it can only be played at *zêkr* ceremonies; it would be considered a sacrilege to play it at a wedding party. Despite these restrictions, the *daf* has experienced a growing success among secular musicians for the last 10 to 15 years. The first time that it was used in a classical concert (at the Shiraz festival in 1976), it was with special permission from the sheikh of the brotherhood. Actually, the dervishes permit its use for serious music, such as art music, or to accompany Kurdish songs having a moral and spiritual content (close to the *xânegâh* repertory). It was first played by Kurdish dervishes, then by secular musicians, and finally by non-Kurds. Certain "uninitiated" *daf* players have reached a high technical level, but dervishes say that it is necessary to be initiated and affiliated in order to play correctly.

The powerful resonance of the *daf* justifies its use in the center of large ensembles, but it has subsequently carved out an increasingly important place for itself within smaller ensembles. Acoustic considerations are not the only priority,<sup>4</sup> however, and even in large ensembles the *daf* is requisitioned not only for its power, but for its scenic image and the symbolism attached to it. In addition to the dervish touch, the *daf* puts into effect a rich and powerful gesture, which is very effective on stage. Furthermore, considering the ease with which they have integrated Kurdish pieces into their Persian concerts, it is not unusual for the classical Persian groups having Kurdish origin, such as the eight-member Kâmkâr family or the Andalibi, to have adopted the *daf* as a distinctive element in their music. These groups sometimes play *xânegâh* tunes, which lend themselves to instrumental interpretation, and some (such as the "classical Persian" singer of Kurdish origin from Ta'rif) go as far as composing half of their program with Sanandaj Qâderi *xânegâh* songs, despite the fact that they themselves are not dervishes. For connoisseurs, these interpretations are noth-

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<sup>4</sup> The use of the *daf* within the classical context is rather different: The main difference is the sound quality. This is because of several factors, one of which being the choice of finer skin (from sheep rather than from goat). Another has to do with the quality of the stroke. Most importantly is the fact that the percussionists are asked to play rather softly so as not to drown out the melody being played by the other instruments. Thus on commercial recordings, the sound of the *daf* is losing ground in comparison to even the delicate lute, the *setâr*. On account of technical ingenuities, it has become possible to replace the traditional cup drum (*zarb*) with the *daf*, even in very light ensembles.

ing but fairly flat imitations compared to the performances of the adepts. The fact that the former make use of an instrumental accompaniment of the utmost finesse does not make them any more captivating.

Another mystical instrument that has recently appeared on the scene of art music is the *tanbur* of the Ahl-e Haqq of Kurdistan.<sup>5</sup> It is a kind of two-string lute (one string generally being doubled), a very close variation of which played equally with the fingers of the right hand, is found among the Alevis of Eastern Anatolia. For the adept, the *tanbur* is sacred: it is embraced when it is picked up; it is never placed on the floor, and must be arranged in its cover in a high place in the room, from where it spreads its *barakat* throughout the house. Reserved for ritual or mystical use, its repertoire has only recently begun to be divulged. Nevertheless, despite its sacrosanct character and the mysterious aura that the Ahl-e Haqq maintain around this music, and although the instrument is poorly adapted to any other repertoire than its own, it has progressively come out from behind its veil and has become integrated into classical ensembles, notably by Shahrâm Nâzeri, a celebrated Persian singer of Kurdish Ahl-e Haqq origin. While he may use it for playing one or two sacred melodies in concert, he generally uses it for profane Kurdish melodies. He plays it in a systematic manner in order to accompany himself in certain melodies and to give himself countenance. Recently he released a cassette (entitled *Motreb-e mâhtâb ru*) where the main accompaniment is carried out by a group of *tanbur* players. It goes without saying that the constitution of such a group is a recent innovation in Iran.

The Kurdish mystical mode does not permit further use of the *tanbur*, because this instrument is traditionally fretted to give a chromatic scale, which limits its use to a few Persian modes only. Curiously, no one has ever dared to add more frets, arguing that one would then detract from the specific character of the *tanbur*. The intention was indeed to introduce a "mystical citation" and a Kurdish element in Persian performances, and not simply to recruit a new instrument as had been done with the *rabâb* and the *qichak* of the Sistan. Moreover, they could have used the *dotâr* of Khorassan, a variant of the *tanbur*, but with a more "Iranian" scale, but they did not do so, since this instrument does not have the mystical aura of the *tanbur*. In contrast, it is the players of the *dotâr* who have borrowed it from art music. The improvisations on the *tanbur* have also inspired such musicians of classic tradition as Jalâl Zolfonun in recordings made on the *setâr*, accompanied by the *daf*. We will further see that he has developed a sacred repertoire himself.

### Preservation of the Secret and Diffusion of Patrimony

The position of the dervishes varies considerably with respect to the divulging of their music and of their rites, and above all, the modern means of diffusion and reproduction. Even when it is only a question of preserving their tradition, they can be reticent. For example, a Tunisian doctoral student at the Institute for Turkish Studies in Strasbourg working in Tunis has not been able to obtain authorization to take video films of dervish seances, despite his family's support. A well-known Arab ethnomusicologist no longer had the right to film or record the Qâderi or Rifâ'i dervishes of Aleppo, even though she was very well-received by the sheikhs. The argument, she says, was only that it was necessary "to preserve the secret," or probably more accurately, the sense of the secret, or, the sense of the sacred, an essential point we will return to.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. During, *Musique et Mystique*, Livre III, 2nd part.

In contrast, in Bagdad and in Iranian Kurdistan, the Qâderi dervishes open their doors to all and gladly allow themselves to be filmed. Contrary to the Ahl-e Haqq, who, in certain periods had to carry out their *jam* and their *zeker* ceremonies in secret, for example in underground sheepfolds, the Sanandaj Qâderis have a home of their own and hook up loud speakers to diffuse their songs outside to the entire neighborhood, as is sometimes done in the mosques.

Although the dervishes are not particularly given to showing off their prowess on the stage, they are prepared to make use of video films to make themselves known. Cassettes recorded in the grand Kasnazani *xânegâh* in Bagdad and distributed in Iranian Kurdistan demonstrate the most extraordinary of exploits performed in front of foreign witnesses who verify absence of deceit. If one were to visit one of the well-known Sanandaj *xalifes*, it is likely that the visitor would be invited to watch such cassettes. In contrast, to my knowledge, one has never filmed a Ahl-e Haqq *âtesh xâri* seance, where burning coals are placed in the mouth.

I will here give a few examples of this sense of mystery, as it is expressed in musical traditions, as well as the subtlety with which the secrets are unveiled. Hâtam Asgari Farahâni (born 1932)<sup>6</sup> considers the old masters of song, several of which he has visited, as spiritual authorities or Sufis who knew certain secrets, such as the therapeutic power of modes, and who did not transmit their music to anyone. He says that his master, Aqâ Ziâ, did not want to teach even his most beautiful melodies to his own son, since he was convinced that he would immediately pass them on to another singer, who would then record them and have them broadcast over the radio. Aqâ Ziâ himself was "tested" for eight years by his own master before the latter decided to show him all he knew, without concealing anything. The secret was preserved for a long time by Asgari; it is only recently, as he approaches sixty, that he has begun to transmit his repertoire.

However, even in this context of initiation and esotericism, the technical means and processes of divulsion and diffusion have influenced the transmission of this jealously kept music in different ways. The repertoire of Asgari is three or four times larger than those of other masters of song; even his better students have had the chance to go on tour. In order to transmit his repertoire, he has begun to resort to cassettes and has published a *dastgâh* (*Navâ*), as long as eight hours - it would fill eight cassettes. His memory is not infallible, especially when it comes to the melodies that he has created or that he receives as inspiration through a dream. Therefore, when something is revealed to him, he immediately records what he has heard, and wherever he goes, he carries a small portable recorder.

Furthermore, commercial recordings have the advantage of designating certain people as the veritable keepers of repertoire. This phenomenon of appropriation has appeared with recordings which, from this point of view, have had the same effects as writing had in the Western world. The public attributes authorship of a melody to its interpreter (one says, for example, "Sharjarian's Bidâs," as one would say, "Pavarotti's Aria of Figaro"). Aqâ Ziâ refrained from singing in front of the famous master, Abolhasah Sabâ (d. 1957), whom he reproached for claiming authorship of the melodies that he interpreted. Asgari bore a large grudge against the author of these lines, after an incident in which a piece from his repertoire, the *gushe* Bidâd, which he had recorded for himself, was copied by others and ended up falling into

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of this master and his very original approach to the history of Persian music, as well as its symbolic significance, cf. J. During, "La voix des esprits et la face cachée de la musique? Le parcours de maître Hâtam 'Asgari'", in M.A. Amir Moezzi (ed.), *Le Voyage initiatique dans l'islam, Mî raj et ascension céleste*, Paris: E.P.H.E., 1997.

the hands of a celebrated artist who sang it in concert. This kind of incident, made him decide to publish his own repertoire. These examples show that at one important level, the sense of the secret has been principally linked to an object whose exclusivity one wants to maintain; however, on another level, it is also a question of preserving the sense of its value, without which the object would lose its aura. These two levels do not exhaust the sense of the secret, as will be seen.

The idea that elements having inestimable value exist in the preserved musical repertoire has its origins in the evolution of Arab-Persian music itself. It is said that the famous Abbasid singer, Ishaq al-Mawsili, heard a woman in the street sing a melody so captivating that he offered a large sum of money in order to find her again, so that he would be able to learn it. Asgari tells how his master thanked him one day for a particularly chivalrous gesture, by singing a rare tune to him on a street corner. His master found the tune so precious that he has not yet been able to find anyone worthy enough to receive it. The following testimony by Asgari demonstrates the value that the dervishes attach to certain melodies as well as the place that the classical song occupies in the Ne'matollâhi assemblies.

One evening I had a dream in which three dogs were attacking me in the middle of some ruins. They were at the point of devouring me when the sheikh Hâjji Mohammad Râstin arrived: he beat the dogs and chased them away. The next morning, a soldier appeared at my house to inform me that Mr. Râstin wanted to see me. I went to his house, and after the greetings he said to me: "Good! I saved you from these dogs but there is a stipulation: you must give me an interpretation of Leyli and Majnun. It is I who will tell you when and where" ... Hâjji Mohammad Xân loved dawn and his dervishes would come to find him during these hours. One morning while I was with him with his dervishes, he asked me to sing the *gushe* Leyli and Majnun. I was intimidated in front of all these Sufis and attempted to get undressed, but he said: "you owe me this song". Then I sang. It was always the same thing; each time I had a meeting with him, he asked me to sing and I would interpret an entire *dastgâh*. He knew the music and he would play the *târ*.

It is quite clear that profane and sacred music do not constitute distinct categories. What equally concerns the sense of the secret is that art music obeys Sufi structures of initiation. In the ensemble, the entire canonical repertoire of Iranian *radif* was, up to a certain point, considered a precious treasure that one transmitted only to those who had been judged dignified. Abdollâh Davâmi (a master of the same tradition as Asgari, d. 1980) said to his close relatives that he would prefer to leave this world taking with him his repertoire, rather than to leave his songs to the disposition of the first comer who would want to sing them.<sup>7</sup> In the past, said Asgari, there were three levels of instruction and one only attained the third level after many years of proving oneself on the moral plane. According to him, even the most well-known singers have not gone beyond the second level, perhaps not even the first. The repertoire is fundamentally the same, but it develops and becomes more complicated at the second and third levels. These degrees reproduce the Sufi stages of *shari'at*, *tariqat*, *mar' refat* or those of disciple, *sheykh*, and *qotb*.

<sup>7</sup> In the musical tradition of Lucknow, the percussion repertoires (*tabla*) of certain great family lines (*gharana*) have totally disappeared. This is because their trustees did not consider their sons worthy enough to receive this musical tradition, which, especially within Shii circles, was considered to be a sacred deposit. Similarly, Ravi Shankar dispenses a special recording (*xas talim*) to a few advanced students who are responsible for keeping secret certain principles of *alap* composition (S. M. Slawick, "Ravi Shankar as Mediator Between Traditional Music and Modernity", in S. Blum, P. Bohlen, and D. Neuman (eds.), *Ethnomusicology and Modern History*, (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

Under these conditions, it seems rather paradoxical to divulge this third stage so widely, as has been the case through recordings, and this after thirty years of silence. Consequently, a general question can be posed: why (and how) are the secrets revealed? Asgari is content to say that he received the permission to divulge his repertory through a kind of inspiration from the souls of the old masters with whom he is in contact - a frequent case in the traditional music of Asia. We will, nevertheless, propose alternative responses to this question.

Even as Asgari has been practicing the maintenance of the mystery while revealing a part of it, other masters have certainly been more discrete. That is the case of Ostâd D., a learned person, dervish, or *'âref* with Zoroastrian tendencies, versed in the esoteric sciences and in chanting. He does not claim kinship with a prestigious line like Asgari, but presents himself as the semi-exclusive trustee of an ancient body of songs that have disappeared, or of semi-secrets that he has collected on campaigns in Kurdistan, Persia and Lorestan. He recalls the repertoires of caravanners, shepherds, *xânegâh*, *masnavi xân*, etc. but discloses very little of these melodies. During a discussion, a well-known classical musician, fascinated by these songs and with the personage who concealed them, proposed to record them, accompanying himself with his own instrument. Ostâd D. responded: "it is impossible for you since I must sing these songs at dawn, towards 4 o'clock in the morning, and you would not be able to maintain the rhythm." His esoteric vision of Persian music, classical as well as popular, has made an impression on certain reputable musicians of whom he has become adviser or master; however, contrary to Asgari, he has never lifted the seal of the secret on his art or on his powers. Apparently, musicians are content with his rather poetic-like aura, through which he breathes life into these secrets. In his company, they maintain the highest idea of the value of their patrimony and their mission as trustees and transmitters.

Even in a more banal recording, such as the one made by the National Television of the music of N. A. Borumand, one of the important transmitters of instrumental repertoire, the recordings remained inaccessible for many years.<sup>8</sup> When someone was finally allowed to listen to them, it was under the condition that he would speak about it to no one. Gradually, there were leaks, and copies began to circulate to a point where all musicians were able to have access to them. Fifteen years later, two transcriptions and five complete recordings could be found on the market. The sense of this attitude was the maintenance of the myth of the value of the repertoire and of the restraint maintained by the circle of the initiated. For pedagogical reasons, N.A. Borumand taught orally while forbidding all recordings. Nevertheless, another reason may have been of the potential impact they might have: perhaps, if he had permitted recording, he would have lost the exclusivity of his repertoire. Suddenly rendering it accessible to all through cassettes, an important part of the process of transmission, which is the basis of tradition, would be erased. Moreover, the repertoire would be reduced to the level of simple merchandise that anyone could buy and keep in his home. This is contrary to the conceptualization of the repertoire as a *word* that one could receive only after many years in the apprenticeship of a master with whom one is intimately connected, and gathers the spirit of tradition.

The group that has best protected its music from propagation by the media has been the Ahl-e Haqq (apart from the fact that their *tanbur* has been used in classical ensembles). Their music was kept secret, only performed in rituals, where nobody but the adepts participated. Among Iranian musicians no one knew about this tradition.

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<sup>8</sup> In this connection, it is necessary to know that for the last 2000 years in China, musical repertoires have been under the control of the army. Some of them, such as the Uygur Onikki Muqam, are as inaccessible as military secrets.

The sacred and secret character of this music stems from its thematic contents that are drawn from the revealed books of this tradition (*Kalâm*, *Daftar*) and to the fact that it has been jealously preserved by the *kalâm xân* (reciters) and *seyyeds* (the equivalent of the Alevi *dede*). The veneration for the sacred texts can be illustrated by this anecdote: a dervish who was reciting the *Kalâm* while working in his field has a loss of memory and is unable to remember a verse. He immediately puts aside his plow and takes to the road in order to consult a *kalâm xân*, an connoisseur of *Kalâm* in a distant village. Thus the sense of secret and of the *takie*, which is still very strong in the Ahl-e Haqq, has contributed to raising the value of religious and musical patrimony.

In the 1970s, Darvish Hayâti, a somewhat impassioned Ahl-e Haqq dervish obtained mediatic success by singing with his *tanbur* a song dedicated to Ali, which was based on a classical Persian poem by Sâber Kermâni. The fact that he played the *tanbur* in public and that he was paid, earned him the reprobation of many adepts. Recently, a few Ahl-e Haqq soloists have appeared who sing *kalâm* while accompanying themselves on the *tanbur*. It becomes a matter of forging a compromise between original performance (the *jam*, which requires the presence of a group) and the concert, where without being an accomplished master (or an "enthusiast" as the dervish mentioned above), no Ahl-e Haqq *kalâm xân* would be able to hold his audience with only his song and accompanying himself on his instrument.

Towards 1977, a concert recording that included a traditional *zeker* was even diffused (in small quantities) by the cultural center of Niâvarân. This was the first public dissemination of Ahl-e Haqq music. However, it was a very tentative appearance at best, probably due to the reticence of the adepts. The true *zeker*s, which include ecstasy and invoke non-typically Islamic personalities such as Dâwud or Soltân, cannot easily be disclosed to the profane public, even if many Ahl-e Haqq own *zeker* cassettes and listen to them at home or in their car.

The obstacle has been surmounted in two ways: by creating new hymns, often in Persian, and by using the *tanbur* to accompany profane Kurdish or Persian melodies, as Nâzeri has done. A third way consists of having the hymns played by five or six, or even more, *tanburs* at a time. Here, too, something of the repertoire is presented but without revealing the essential, which is the character of the *zeker* and of spiritual states. In effect, the melodies stand out from these ensembles as laminated, cut up and stripped of their flavor. It is necessary to note that one of these distortions imposed by state representation in general is the search for the mass effect: one cannot just present a single musician lost on the stage; a large number has to be assembled.

In the face of all these manifestations, which give only an incomplete and imperfect idea of the sacred repertoire and of the performance of the *tanbur*, certain guardians of the grand tradition succumbed. Breaking the seal of the secret, they permitted a young *tanbur* player, Shahâb Elâhi, youngest son of the great master Nur Ali Elâhi, to play in public the transcendental pieces of the repertoire, which had previously been transmitted exclusively within the family. Nevertheless, it was done with parsimony, interposed between two spiritual songs in Persian composed for the occasion and interpreted by a mixed choir, as is often the case among the Ahl-e Haqq Kurds. It seems that the concern was not simply to perform to an Iranian public (by introducing the *târ* and the *ney*, by singing in Persian).<sup>9</sup> The idea was to *show*

<sup>9</sup> The integration of Iranian or "foreign" elements is not, moreover, new in the Ahl-e Haqq musical tradition. There is reason to believe that the use of the *daf* is not traditional but rather inspired by Qâderi *zeker*s or borrowed from folklore (for the *daf* in question is different from those of the Qâdaris.) Through their contacts with the other brotherhoods, certain Ahl-e Haqq groups have also learned to sing in Persian, particularly the hymns dedicated to 'Ali. They have also adopted Iranian styles. It was said that a singer and player of the *tanbur* who was also a very respected spiritual personality composed many songs within this genre in order not to "use" the ancient *kalâm*s through repetition.

something (the competence of the performer, the authenticity of the repertoire, etc.), while at the same time *hiding* the essential, namely the emotional or mystical dimension of the sacred music.

This music, which had so many times to emerge from the shadows, received recognition in the media with the publication of the album "Le chant du Monde" ("Songs of the World"). It consisted of six compact disks of the repertoire of Ostâd Elâhi, the unequalled and charismatic master of the sacred Kurdish *tanbur*, taken from archives dating back to the 1960s. These exceptional documents, recorded in private seances, were guarded as relics by his family for thirty years. Their being brought to light is also indirectly due to the power of the media, in response to either the opportunism or laxity of certain Ahl-e Haqq dervishes, who broke the rule by playing for the profane, and above all by usually playing in a mediocre fashion. The publishing of this music determined who the heirs to the music would be. At the same time, it demonstrated at a single blow the nature of this music and who its true trustees were. However, even though the recordings of this master have been made public, nearly nothing has been revealed of the conditions under which he played his music or of the incredible effects that it had on the audiences, effects attested to by many written testimonials in the family archives. In the unveiling by recordings, the magical aspect of the musical performance and of the devotional context (of the interior *zeker*, or *samâ'* type) have been disregarded. Perhaps the reason is that explications of this type of phenomenon were not permitted and a recording could restore only the artistic or purely acoustic aspect of the performance. We note as well that the publication of these archives was made possible due to highly sophisticated restoration techniques (such as the program, "No Noise").<sup>10</sup>

### Sufi Music on the Oriental Scene

As all these examples demonstrate, to a certain extent at least, that the sense of secret is compatible with the unveiling or popularization of musical practices and mystical rituals. A remarkable example of the popularization of the Sufi chant is that of the Pakistani *qawwâli*, a professional genre intended for the public of Sufis, *qalandars*, *malangs*, dervishes, or simply for pilgrims visiting the tombs of saints. With radio, record, and then the recovery by World Music, the *qawwâli* has become an international commercial product. Many of these hymns can be heard in every disco club in India and Pakistan, arranged in diverse ways. These include the pop style of the famous *Jule La'l*, whose adaptations are innumerable, as well as variations of *Dama dam mast qalandar*. This rather banal phenomenon is occurring everywhere, under less commercial forms as well. One can think of, for example, the Alevi bards, whose audience has gone beyond the circle of initiated.

But above all, the emergence of Sufi music in the field of the profane is not a new phenomenon. The most ancient case of mediatic success is perhaps that of the great mystic and poet, Erâqi. While on a forty-day retreat ordered by his sheikh, he continually hummed mystical chants he had composed. The dervishes who heard him from behind the door were seduced by these chants and began to repeat them - so well that in a few days they were known throughout the whole town and sung in the taverns. Learning this, the sheikh ended up releasing Erâqi from his retreat early.

<sup>10</sup> Moreover, there is reason to believe that the transmission of this music will not remain in the cloud of *jamxâne* but rather will use official channels and modern techniques. It is even possible to learn the rudiments of *tanbur* in Paris or in Köln in some cultural associations in the presence of representatives of the Guran tradition, just as one can learn the Mevlevi *ney* or the Qâderi *daf*.

The texts of classical Sufism furnish a number of allusions to what can be called the *samâ*' of the vulgar (*avvâm*). In light of current phenomena, it can be deduced that it was a question of mystico-religious festivals organized by some non-affiliated, but in which specialized musicians produced themselves in a mystical repertoire (cf. especially, Frishkopf).

Even certain spectacular structures have deep traditional roots. If, for example, the *qawwâli* can be commercially recovered, it is because it had certain predispositions. In fact, the classical *qawwâli* unite on the same stage a well-knit group constituting a hierarchy of singers, choristers and percussionists. In this setting, the dervishes assume the role of passive listeners: they can only express themselves by getting up to dance and by bringing their offering of wads of small bank notes that they drop on the heads of the performers. If the *qawwâli* has become a mediatic commodity, it is because it was already a religious commercial product. In short, it was a spectacle, a dramaturgy of ecstasy confined to professionals. This is completely the opposite of Kurdish traditions, where the roles are distributed between one or two soloists and a participant assembly, intensely and in a less formal manner.

A broad spectrum of practices exists since the ceremonies emerge from "popular Sufism" or "informal Sufism," and range from dates on the religious calendar to those which serve to mark a social event such as a marriage. In certain cases, the Sufi component is completely lost but a certain sense of the sacred subsists nevertheless in the performance. The following is an example of this.

With the disappearance of lodges in Tajikistan, certain particularly striking practices, such as those of *zêkr*, have subsisted in the collective memory as vestiges. In Panjkent, for example, within the context of a wedding party, a senior member of the party designates a few young people and directs a *zêkr* with them, beyond all explicit reference, but executed with concentration and seriousness, after which the festival continues.<sup>11</sup> As for the southern Tajiks, they have conserved some songs and a sketch called *qalandar bâzi*, in which a person puts on a patched gown, hold a staff and declaims a *qalandar* chant. The Turkmen, too, practice a *zêkr* completely cut off from its roots and context, during private festivals. They do not hesitate to present this *zêkr* during their folkloric spectacles or their concerts.<sup>12</sup>

These manifestations form part of a trend toward "folklorization." They border on parody when they are staged by the cultural authorities. This was formerly the case in Teheran in the seventies, where official spectacles were given in large halls. In the middle of these spectacles, Darvish Hayâti would be placed on stage as if he were already in ecstasy and performing his *zêkr* while chanting all alone with his *tanbur* and waving his dishevelled hair. The discomfort was accentuated by the fact that in the same spectacle, the ballet troupe of Rudaki Hall would dress up as dervishes and interpret a choreography inspired by a Mevlevi, crying *hu* and *haqq!*

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11 This custom is not unrelated to the survival of the *zêkr* tire (called *zarb*) beyond the brotherhood in the Yaghâb valley, an extremely remote region in Panjkent, where many traditions have been preserved (cf. Th. Levin, *The Hundred Thousands Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 235).

12 We saw a much more interesting spectacle put on by the Turkmen (of Iran). They staged two healing rites in a folkloric and theatrical fashion. They first presented an "insane person," a *djinni*, or lunatic. A player of the *dotâr* would then play an appropriate melody in the effort to cure him. Next, a *porkhân* healer armed with a horsewhip (like the *qamchin bakhshi* of Central Asia) who would attempt to frighten the *djinn* by whipping and threatening him. Finally, a group of "dervishes" would arrive singing hymns and performing *zêkr*, standing in a circle in the manner of the Yasavi or Qâderi of Central Asia. Then the patient would become calm and enter their circle, soon followed by the *porkhân*. Thus, without even directly intervening, the dervishes would succeed where the power of the shamans had remained impotent. This fifteen-minute spectacle was performed as part of the Hôze Honari festival (cf. infra).

Is it necessary to deplore such representations, and if so, according to what principles? Understandably, one could invoke the obligation of discretion (*takie*), which binds the adepts to one another, or the taboo of spiritual commercialization. However, in the eyes of the public, the dervish passed for a *majzub*, an enthusiast avoiding his obligations, as is often found among the *malang* or *pakir* of the Sind, for example. On the other hand, what can be said about the *mevlevi* spectacles organized by the Ministry of Culture for years in Konya, in which the dancers, originally at least, were not even dervishes? And what can be thought of the latest initiatives, apparently spontaneous, consisting of having women dressed in colored gowns dance, within the context of Turkish *mevlevi* dervishes? Is it a question of opportunism, of the argument of marketing, of adaptation, of innovation, or of the liberation of women? In order to settle the debate, it would be necessary to know if the impulse for change comes from within or from an external force, such as a political will or commercial demagogic stakes. However, these changes are not as abrupt as they appear since they occur on a well-prepared terrain: as artificial as the official *mevlevi* ceremony in Konya may seem, it is only the end of a process of ritualization that has been transforming the *samâ'* for a long time as a representation of the *samâ'*. Furthermore, in an important sense, it is a representation of the *samâ'* of Mevlânâ Rumi, a highly codified commemorative rite, a dramatization with a well-measured dose of ecstasy, not so much true-to-life as signified by symbolic gestures. The example of the *mevlevi ayin*, liturgy of the well-established and completely anticipated repertoire, prefigures what generally becomes the transpositions of the Sufi rites used on the public stage.

As it is not possible to reconstitute the stages of this process of dramatization, one will try discerning the underlying motivations and the implications of these different types of adaptation. It is equally essential to understand why and how different groups get involved in the processes of diffusion. It could be interesting to follow the transformations of the rituals in spectacles through their presentation on the Western stage. There has been an increase in the number of Western concert programs including what is called "Sufi" groups, whose performances contain as often as not as much art music as music truly coming from the Sufi tradition. Raising this issue, however, is a digression. We must, rather, restrict ourselves to the manifestations situated on the margins of the concert circuits, stemming directly from the activities of lodges and organized by them.

## Between Concert and Ritual

The diverse Ne'matollâhi Gonâbâdi Safi' Ali Shâhi branches do not possess a particular repertoire. Some of their adepts have been fine musicians or even great masters. Yet, while they sometimes made a contribution, they didn't have a regular function in the meetings.

In the branch whose *qotb* is the psychiatrist J. Nurbaxsh, ritual music holds a less important place. Nevertheless, during festivals held by this brotherhood in the 1970s, classical musicians (*ney* players and singers), as well as Kurdish Qâderi groups, who perform their *zeker* completely, and sometimes even Ahl-e Haqq<sup>13</sup> were invited. This

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<sup>13</sup> It may seem curious for a relatively orthodox Shii brotherhood to invite pure Sunni Qâderis as well as such heterodox Imamites as the Ahl-e Haqq. It is more surprising yet to see some Qâderis to invite some Ahl-e Haqq to perform their *zeker* under the guise of an introduction to the Qâderi ceremony that they held for us near Tehran in 1989. In this case it was Kurdish solidarity that was the driving force, rather than mystical ecumenical sentiments.

lodge was very powerful and had sympathisers among the ruling class. When it established itself in England after the revolution and opened its *xânegâh* in Europe and the United States, it became necessary to respond to the new public demand composed of Iranians in exile and a minority of Europeans. The lodge developed two aspects: publications, which were still very embryonic in Iran, and, music thanks to the formation of groups of "Sufi music." In their concerts, the stage is generally decorated with the paraphernalia of the lodges: *kashqul*, *tasbih*, hatchets, etc. as well as large *dafs*, tambourins, borrowed from the Qâderis. A dervish dressed in old-fashioned attire with all his accessories walks into the room. The participants are dressed in long white shirts (as the Qâderis and some Ahl-e Haqq) and felt headdresses, which was not their custom in Iran. One notices among the men the presence of one or two women, dressed the same way, who sing and play the *daf*. It is noteworthy that the entrance of women in the ritual circle may constitute the decisive innovation at the end of this millennium.

The music is composed of measured or free improvisations by the *ney* - thought to be the universal symbol of the Sufi soul - which is played by a good professional, of non-measured *âvâz* songs, or a singer accompanying himself on the *tanbur*, equally improvisational, a practice that is borrowed from the Ahl-e Haqq *kalâm-xân*. A choir resumes with refrains and *zeks*, but pronounced in Persian. The styles and rhythms are of the Persian genre and are reminiscent of the religious songs, the *rowze xâni*, and the songs of *xânegâh*. In themselves, these songs and melodies are not any less authentic than what one hears for the most part in the *xânegâh*, but it is the ensemble, the composition of the group, the chain of sequences and above all the organization "in concert" or spectacle (with Sufi decor) which seems in contrast to tradition. In general, this music is not sufficiently artistic to be presented as "concert." Nor is it sufficiently strong or authentic to pass as a simple Sufi manifestation. To what end, then, are they organized? It could be argued that their objective is to reinforce the adepts and sympathisers in their affiliation while presenting their ritual within a public and official framework. However, it is necessary to note once more that this concern is not new: Mawlânâ Rumi gave *samâ'* with his dervishes in the palace of the Emin Parvâne, within a framework which is perhaps not far from the one of our concert halls and other cultural centers.

The question of the authenticity of Sufi representations is open to a number of interpretations. Without making a value judgement, one can distinguish levels of authenticity, such as *fidelity* to an original model, *sincerity* of the implication, or *intensity* of experience. For the majority of dervishes, an authentic *jam* is one where there is some *hâl*, emotion and a just intention. After that, the forms can adapt themselves. The following example is evidence of the problems that present themselves when one goes from the restrained sphere of ritual and its music to the public sphere.

Recently, a group of Ahl-e Haqq formed in Germany took a decisive step in presenting to the public (in a concert hall) the *jam* ceremony, as it is practiced among the Kurds. I had the occasion to closely follow their preparation. The purpose of these representations was to appear in public as a spiritual and cultural group in the heart of their adopted country. This emigré position favored their awakening and also made possible the elaboration of such a program, which would be difficult to conceive of in Iran. There was also the concern to preserve or restore a tradition which was in the process of being lost in exile, notably in the transmission to their children. The group worked a lot in order to rediscover the old melodies or their non-altered versions and to enhance the artistic level about which the adepts no longer seemed to care to much.

The strongest motivation, however, was highly symbolic and mystical: the group

wanted to create an atmosphere of spiritual dynamism. The event had to evoke spiritual reflection in their adopted country and to bring *barakat*. This is all well and good, but in this case, why must there be a public? First of all, for any event there must be witnesses, with whom their fervor can be shared. In this way, people were not considered as simple spectators since blessed offerings, *niaz* (under the form of sweets), were distributed to them. This type of consideration runs through all mystical religions, but the degree of conviction these adepts had, concretized by the force of their ecstasy, was particularly prominent. These different interpretations are not contradictory, because they are situated on different levels; nevertheless, "the divulgence of the secret," if it can be called that, has certain paradoxes.

In the passage to stage representation, the group has been surrounded by multiple precautions in order to simultaneously respond to the requirements of authenticity and sincerity. Nevertheless, the requirement of being understood by the public obliges it to sometimes act contrary to the principle of authenticity. Moreover, while the innovations have not failed, when looked at more closely, or while discussing the subject with dervishes, it becomes clear that there are actually precedences to these innovations or adaptations such that nothing can really be considered artificial. The most striking innovation is the presence of women around the circle of men during the free *zehr*, something that was an exceptional occurrence in Kurdish villages. However, it is known that women have an elevated status in Kurdish homes, particularly those of the Ahl-e Haqq, who in this sense, too, are close to the Alevis. This tendency can only be highlighted while bearing in mind the Western context. With respect to the costumes, there is some uncertainty as to what should be worn. "Natural," e.g. everyday clothes, would be detrimental to group harmony. On the other hand, Kurdish clothes are elegant but artificial (because this group only wears the Kurdish pants). One ends up opting for long white robes, which, while being conscious to accentuate the element of liturgy in the *jam*, is "in reality" more relaxed, even though there is some risk of presenting the image of a Sufi lodge, which the Ahl-e Haqq defends itself as being.

The problems associated with scenic representation are derived from the inexorable misalignment between the existence of transparency and the need to be understood correctly. In other words, what is demonstrated needs to be shown well, and in a manner that avoids misunderstanding. What this concern reflects is the underlying tension inherent in attempts at revealing rituals without disclosing fundamental "secrets" contained within them. All representation is still an anamorphosis. It is a kind of "translation" that carries with it the danger of excess and deficiencies as it is transformed into different idioms.

Several paradoxes emerge. The fundamental one is that the essence of the ritual is a type of secret. It is through the performance of the ritual (which was formerly accomplished in secret) that its substance is revealed. In order to get around this, the assumption is made that the spectators are fully capable of participating to a certain degree in the fervor of the adepts; this is why they were integrated symbolically in receiving the *niaz*. However, for the spectators to become part of the process, the dervishes had to curb the free course of their emotion and of their *hâl*, so as not to frighten the public or be seen as savages. Nevertheless, the force of the *zehr* and the ecstasy that it provokes (and which was supposed to touch little of the public) were actually the *raison d'être* for the representation. The need to simultaneously show and retain produced a paradoxical situation that was difficult to manage. The question arises as to whether it wouldn't be better if all the dervishes were to refrain from all manifestations of enthusiasm, with perhaps only one or two of them being caught up in an expression of ecstasy.

The idea of ecstasy upon demand constitutes yet another paradox. Under such conditions, the process of reaching and demonstrating a state of ecstasy is questionable. The authenticity of ecstasy comes into question when it can be programmed in advance to reach varying degrees of intensity or to assume different theatrical forms. A similar concern over authenticity appears in the classical question of the authenticity of the Sufi concept of *tavajud* (translated as "excitation" or "conditioning"). Originally, the Sufis would assimilate it into the simulation and later on, to a stimulation, freeing a real ecstasy (*vajd*). Carried out in this manner, it was considered praiseworthy. From this perspective, this group of Ahl-e Haqq can be seen as practicing a sincere, albeit controlled, *tavajud*: only one member of the group was permitted to transform it into *vajd*, with the rest of the group prohibited from doing so. Even though this *vajd* is not "real" in some sense, it can still be considered valid and not simply a simulation since those experiencing it considered it to be an intense form of *tavajud*.

A distinction also has to be made between the existence of quality music and the principle according to which the song served to connect the function of the melody and its inspiration: the preference was to repeat a well-established program in order to palliate all musical slippage. However, while acting there was the risk of dulling the sensibility of the participants and ending up with a *jam* without *hâl*. It is probable that this same aesthetic greatly affected the rituals, which passed from the stage of participation to that of representation.

The program should culminate, as is the custom, with very rapid refrains on two or three notes. For the Kurds, it is these melodies that are the most stimulating since it is through them that the final state of ecstasy (called *hâl*), is reached - passing through the body with the speeding up of the tempo. This is far from being the rule among spiritual music, however. Accordingly, in order to signify the *hâl* to the emigré Iranian public or to Westerners, whose customs are different, it was decided to put aside these rapid and agitated refrains and to limit themselves to melodies that were more moderate, less primitive and more pleasant to Westerners and Iranians. But in doing so they also conformed to tradition since according to the Ancients, the rapid and agitated refrains and simplified melodies did not have a place in the *jam*.

The final paradox is that if this group is in the process of becoming the guardian of Ahl-e Haqq musical tradition, it has only been possible by breaking out of the narrow circle in which it is confined, in order to set itself up as an object of representation, under the gaze of the Others. However, during the evening of the concert they forgot all these problems and performed a wonderful *zeker*, with a very deep, even though slightly controlled, *hâl*.

The reason I have paid special attention to the problems encountered by this particular group in the process of transforming a ritual into a public performance, is because these problems might as well have been the same for many other Sufi groups opening their rituals to the public.

Of a completely different nature is the crude Sufi and para-Sufi representation of musical rituals that we are going to describe now. In 1994, a festival of popular Iranian music was organized in Teheran. It brought together for many weeks the best non-classical musicians from the four corners of the country. While its aim had not been to reach a very large public, this event attained unprecedented dimensions. The initiative came through the *Howze honari* (the Arts Foundation), a powerful semi-private institution, run by the *hojat ol-eslâm* Zamm.

Many points in this enterprise merit discussion. The most striking aspect was the way in which the Iranian culture presented itself on stage, contemplated itself as in a mirror, apparently without the slightest shade of ideology. The musicians of the mountains and deserts were simply invited to present their songs and their melodies

as they had customarily done in their own context, without artificiality, and without particular *mise-en-scène* decorations or costumes.

This type of concert is not new. Since the festival of Shiraz and Tus, in the 1970s, Iranian intellectuals and artists have learned to appreciate their popular bards, their religious opera and their story-tellers. The first of these manifestations always addressed themselves to a cultivated and Westernized elite. In the case of the festival of the *Howze honari*, the 'distanciation' implicated by the detour of Westernization was much less clear after 14 years of Islamic regime. A desire to bring the whole world together on friendly terms was demonstrated in the generous hospitality offered to the musicians. The participants, which numbered about a hundred, were invited to remain during the festival to listen to their colleagues who had come from other provinces. Thus, seated in the first rows were not the notables, but Kurdish or Baluchi musicians listening for example to the *ashiq* of Tabriz.<sup>14</sup> Let us, however, return to the question of Sufi music.

The pinnacle of this festival, at least from the point of view of drama and paradoxal representation, was reached with the Sufi seances and the rites of trance. First to perform were the Qâderi of Sanandaj, directed by Mirzâ Ghowsi, who gave a complete seance, with 12 dervishes and 4 cantors. During the 1970s, this *xalife*, also cantor, was sometimes invited to participate in religious festivals in the grand Ne'matollâhi *xanegâh* and was even invited to sing with his group in front of the Empress during a religious concert given in Teheran (Niâvarân).<sup>15</sup> In these concerts, the few dervishes who accompanied him would be limited to the initial part of the ritual, the *zehr tahlil*: a few adepts would listen to the cantor (*xalife*) and a chorus of two or three subordinates would accompany him on the *daf* tambourin (a *samâ'* would be performed on the basis of antiphonic chants.) The part of the *zehr* proper (*zehr-e here* or *qiyam*) was always slurred. But why, in effect, were the chants authorized but not the *zehr*? Perhaps it is because the chants appear to induce emotion and tears, which are admitted by religion, whereas the *zehr* brings ecstasy and agitation, which are more problematic for the common people. Furthermore, the organizers did not want to portray this violent aspect of the ritual. Whatever the reasons were, it remains that (in contrast to the Ahl-e Haqq) the Qâderi always opened their doors to the local public, who evidently respected their practice. Moreover, they sometimes practiced *zehr* in a public place, in their own milieu.

It can be assumed that the conditions were different in Teheran in 1994 because there Mirzâ Ghowsi's group performed an integral *zehr*, with the one exception that the adepts did not practice their well-known fakir prowess (*tiq bâzi*). While several reasons can be proffered for this change of attitude, the main one is probably the fact that one was now in an Islamic Republic and that, *a priori*, the spectators were taken up by the cause and that they could be considered as a public of sympathizers.

If this *qâderi zehr* unfolded as a normal seance, another *zehr* brought together other Sunni dervishes from Khorasan (*Torbat-e Jâm*) in a seance completely astonishing by its total absence of stage quality and by the anarchy that reined. The dervishes belonged to the Naqshbandi Mojadadi order. Some were completely absorbed in themselves, while others performed their individual *zehr*, each according to his own technique. Among them there were two who played the *dotâr* and sang or sighed exclamations, each for himself, without listening to the other. The cameramen

14 At other Ne'matollâhi concerts, the unifying effect of large numbers used to bring together a group of some thirty dervishes with many instruments, under the direction of a well-known musician, himself a dervish.

15 The best Sufi singer of Sanandaj, Xalife Karim, has never accepted any invitation, whether it be from the Empress or the Islamic Republic.

had to slip in among the participants to capture these extraordinary images, unperturbed by the many incidents that occurred, such as, for example, microphones falling from their tripod. This seance remains in itself an enigma. It may seem astonishing that it was given in front of an assembly comprising religious shiites and intellectuals of the capital. Nevertheless, the global religious context may help explain how dervishes were able to continue performing their usual *zehr*, without the public being fully aware of all its connotations.

This festival also devoted an evening to a seance of Baluchi *mâled*, a semi-Sufi rite with seated dances culminating in trance. In addition, eight evenings of trances from Baluchistan (three *guâti* seances and one from *zâr*) and from the Persian Gulf (three seances being directed and sung by a woman and one by a man) were held. It is no longer a question here of Sufi or para-Sufi rite, but of a cult of devotion to the spirits (*zâr*, *nobân*, *mashâyex*). The trance is the result of making contact with spirits, which from the Islamic point of view, is even more suspect (without speaking of the fact that four of these rites were reserved to give priority to women). None of this seemed to be problematic to the organizers, even though the *xalife* are considered pagans by the local authorities in the Persian Gulf, where they are from, and have difficulty performing their rites there.

There remains the question as to how these rites, which are by nature secret and at times have been suspected of being heretic or paganistic, were able to be carried to the stage without their actors being the least embarrassed, and without the trustees of Islam declaring them an anathema. Even if the young and dynamic *hojat ol-islam* Zamm has grand ideas, and represents the liberal avant-garde, he is obliged to maintain a certain theological coherence. It is perhaps for this reason that before the seances, a general presentation is given that explains how seances function as curative rites. The chants, melodies, and rhythms are said to generate a therapeutic power, well known by doctors of the past. Moreover, the many religious invocations expressed by these chants made it easier to admit the legitimacy of the rituals.

But perhaps the fundamental reason for the tolerance manifested towards the rituals can be found in the fact that these rites were isolated from the social and cultural system in which they exist. Presented on stage, the rites are seen less as a spectacle than as simply an object of observation. As is often the case in Iran, beauty was the main objective, camouflaging the rest. The impeccably dressed participants were seated on an enormous and magnificent carpet surrounded by vases and bouquets of flowers. The staging of the spectacle, although very sober, constituted an essential *alibi* which enabled it to be brought into the domain of the arts, as one could expect in this "Art Institute." The idea of representation or *mise en scène* was so strong that all these events were recorded in three simultaneous ways: through audio, video, and film. In order to put together a "complete file," the plan was to film the best traditional masters in their own environment, and devote an entire film to each of them. All this undertaking is evidence of an intention to enhance the value of a cultural heritage through staging of a spectacle, where the actors are invited to look at one another mutually. This method was much more sophisticated than ordinary fieldwork, collection of films or recordings, or gathering "folkloric" groups for the sake of entertainment.

In addition to the aesthetic touch, there was in this method a scientific concern, which is one of the conditions for justifying musical exercising. It is in regard to this criterion that western or eastern art music or even jazz are authorised, where as other varieties of music are banned. But if so, how can folk music be justified? Through its moral authenticity, its purity, its conformity to tradition, and/or its functionality. The way chosen to avoid this difficulty was to present it in an "objective" framework of cul-

ture and erudition, to wrap it in a discourse, and to consider the traditional musicians as holders of a knowledge and treat them as high artistic personalities.

### Conclusion: The Sense of Secret and the Time of Transparency

The last examples mentioned are rare cases where the rituals are delivered as spectacle. No recourse is made to accommodation such as "reframing" since the public is considered as initiated. In all the other cases, there are distortions, displacements, paradoxes, ambiguities, understatements, and intentions. The most important of these follow.

First, it is necessary to remark that for a secret to function, or for one to consider it as such, it must be expressed in a particular manner. It is at least necessary that one knows that something exists as a secret, to which some have access or keep. It is for this reason that the mystics play with the unveiling in all the required nuances. As it has been seen, they only give signs of it and are far from delivering it.

There are reasons to believe that this has always been the case; however, it is necessary to consider a new factor: the propensity to display everything into the open, which is so characteristic of our period. One of the effects of the flow of diverse information is the evoking of a form of indifference or, at best, tolerance. With the broadening of perspective of Muslim society, a phenomenon such as Sufism risks becoming unnoticed. Under these conditions, the Sufis, instead of hiding (as the Ahl-e Haqq did, for example) are, on the contrary, obliged to signal their presence. The music is an excellent means, as understood from such groups as the Alevis or the Ne'matollahis of the diaspora, who literally have elaborated new forms of Sufi concerts.

Finally, with the "cultural brewing," the sense of the secret and of the mystery loosens ground. Faced with the invasion of music of all sorts, the value of ritual music becomes relativized when it simply becomes part of a mass consumption of goods, as is the case of *qawwâli*. The veneration for secret or rare repertoires, transmitted or performed within a framework of initiation, is dulled with their divulgence. It is the same for sacred and secret texts, such as the ones of the Ahl-e Haqq: no longer known by heart by the pious adepts, nearly all of them have been published. No one can withdraw from this current, and when an individual or a group takes the first step towards divulgence, the others are annoyed and often end up by giving up in turn in order to advance their personal idea of the veracity or out of a spirit of rivalry. To the phenomena of mediation can be added the explosion of "societies of proximity" (and from them, "secret communities") under the effect of rural exodus and demographic pressure.<sup>16</sup>

In order to counterbalance this process, a new sense of the past is developing, which expresses itself through the official preservation of traditions. However, it is difficult to escape the perversity of taking recourse in the media to rescue patrimony. It has the contradictory effect of both fixing it and reproducing it through such means as recordings and/or films. In other words, it is kept alive by the media by finding for it a public. All of this amounts to demystifying the traditions and to transforming spiritual as well as cultural values.

Certain aspects of these processes were described more than sixty years ago by Walter Benjamin<sup>17</sup> in terms applicable to the object of our discourse. According to

<sup>16</sup> This phenomenon is particularly striking for the Alevis and other related groups.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin, W. 1971: "L'oeuvre d'art à l'ère de sa reproductibilité technique," in *L'homme, le langage et la culture*, Paris, Denoël-Gonthier.

him, there is in the history of the work of art, a movement of "cultural value" towards "exposition value." Originally, the preponderance of cultural value made the work of art a "magical instrument" and prevented it from being recognized as art: "it is the cultural value that acts to keep the works of art secret".<sup>18</sup> When this value is lost, one begins to expose them and reciprocally, "in times of the techniques of reproduction, what is attained in the work of art is its aura".<sup>19</sup> Thus with their reproduction (e.g., writing, recording), the aura of the melodies and of the sacred texts of oral tradition fades, and one of the consequences is that the faithful do not want to make the effort to learn them since they have them at their disposal as object. To ensure the continuity of tradition, it would have been more profitable sometimes to preserve the mystery and not to unveil it all.

But this is exactly the point: if the Sufis have so easily conformed to this mode of transparency, it is perhaps because they have learned that these means do not bring about a true divulsion of secrets, given that they only deliver the appearance in the form of the musical object. All the rest, which makes tradition not preservation of an object but a process of transmission, does not become evident in the recording, the spectacles, or the video, so that when all is said and done, the true secrets are themselves preserved.

One of the lessons to be drawn from these examples is that even if the media make accessible all sorts of music, including ritual music, it is not sufficient to ensure a correct transmission of patrimony. For example, the *daf* is propagated by recordings and videos, whereas classical singers have believed that they have the power to appropriate the repertoire of Qâderi song simply because they were Kurds. Therefore, the dervishes have always affirmed that it is necessary to be a dervish in order to play the *daf* appropriately, and one can conclude that it is the same for the song. Some Ahl-e Haqq say the same thing with respect to the *tanbur*.

What the imitators do not know, and what the reproductions do not transmit, is the nature and quality of the existential experience lying behind this form of music. They constitute its "aura", "the authority of the thing", intimately tied to its "here and now".<sup>20</sup> Thus, when a Qâderi *xalife* sings for the Prophet, for 'Ali or for the *Ghaws*, he creates a fervor and a communicative conviction which upsets the dervishes, and even the laity. He is himself familiar with "states of altered consciousness" and subtle energies activated notably by the *zeker* and asceticism. It is the same with the listeners. There is some reason to think that when he plays the *daf* and when he sings (done only within the framework of a ritual), his music disengages something else, especially when clever imitation is provided by a good percussionist. In the case of the Qâderi, it is the impression of force which dominates. In other traditions, on the other hand, there are other qualities that are not taught any more in conservatories. These include such qualities as emotion, sincerity, purity, liberty or gracefulness.

At a most elementary level, the same phenomenon is seen in the transmission of the patrimonies of art music: one can have at his disposal all existing sources and even have them memorized; it is only in the relation of master to student or in a "milieu of proximity," among the "people of the secret," that the art of performance can be learned. The same can be said for mysticism: it does not matter that the rites, texts, secret *zeker*s reserved for the initiated, and those familiar with the hermeneutic and the esoteric sciences are revealed, because it is only through personal contact with a sheikh that one can actually become a dervish.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 151.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

The real secret is not what is hidden; it is not circumscribed in a closed space upon itself, as an "interiority." As Deleuze and Guattari explain,<sup>21</sup> the secret, on the contrary, is a pure form of externality - the absolute outside, something which always extends beyond us, which is stronger than we are and something that no one can "hold" or enclose. The fact is that it is not simply a matter of contents; neither is it something that can be transmitted or reproduced. Rather, it is through a moment of grace that the process of transmission is achieved.

Thus, through the confrontation of the ritual with the means of mediatic reproduction and diffusion it becomes understood that the secret, the mystery, and the sacred are not enclosed in relics, objects, words, sounds, or books. Furthermore, it becomes clear that by rendering these forms or symbols accessible, one does not release much of the spiritual essence - essence that, as soon as one believes that it has been unveiled, has already been invested with other symbols and has found other forms of effectuation.

Accordingly, a historical approach to the Tradition should not limit itself to the description of this process by pointing out with nostalgia how the "inner" is submerged by the "outer", how the aura and the cultural values are swept away by the stream of mass reproduction and diffusion. Instead, it should localise the space where the 'secret game' takes place, the way in which it is represented and exposed. It should follow the shifts of meaning through the bias of the "communities of the secret", the outline of which are shaped and reshaped according to the exposition of the secret. Degrees of unveiling of the secret exist between different groups: lines of division are continually being redefined between initiated and affiliated, people of the community and sympathisers, spectators, critiques and observers. Hierarchical degrees of genre, such as *avvâm*, *xâs* and *xâs al-xâs* are constantly being created. Concomitantly, a group can unveil secrets or, on the contrary, create others in order to redefine its range of extension, playing alternately with mystification and demystification. This is also what the examples demonstrate to us: the position of the spectator is not the same in a Sufi concert, in a ritual-spectacle, or in a classical concert. A deep analysis of the "strategies of unveiling" must also bear in mind the ways through which reception occur by the public, an aspect that has only been touched upon in this chapter.

Translated from the French by Sylvia Zeybekoğlu

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21 Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1980: *Mille plateaux*, Paris, Editions de minuit, p. 440.