



Turath n°2

Algerian Journal of Cultural Anthropology

December 2023

Musicology in/of the Maghrib in the Colonial Context Revisiting Jules Rouanet



Center of Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology-Algeria





مركز البحث في الأنثروبولوجيا الاجتماعية والثقافية – الجزائر

Centre of Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology - Algeria
Centre de Recherche en Anthropologie Sociale et Culturelle - Algérie

تراث

عدد 2

المجلة الجزائرية للأنثروبولوجيا الثقافية

Turath N°2

The Algerian Journal of Cultural Anthropology

Volume	Issue	Month	Year
1	2	December	2023

Website (Publisher):

<https://journals.crasc.dz/index.php/turath>

ASJP (Review & Editorial Accreditation System):

<https://asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/920>

ISSN: 2830-9863 | EISSN: 2992-0698

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"Turath"

The Algerian Journal of Cultural Anthropology

A biannual journal published by the Centre of Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology
(CRASC), Oran (Algeria)

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Turath

The Algerian Journal of Cultural Anthropology

Turath
Volume 1 Issue 2 / December 2023

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Presentation

Revisiting the Colonial Musicology of Jules Rouanet at the Time of “Decolonization”

Jonathan GLASSER¹
Ahmed Amine DELLAÏ²

The essays collected here revisit Jules Rouanet’s writings on music in the Maghrib, one hundred years after the publication of his landmark essay in the *Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du Conservatoire*. We do this fully cognizant of the complexity of the task. On the one hand, Rouanet’s *La musique arabe du Maghreb* remains the most ambitious study of its kind, and one that has until now received only a modest amount of scholarly attention. On the other hand, it is a work that was profoundly shaped by the prejudices of its author and his colonial context. Thus any serious engagement with Rouanet’s thought must grapple with the question of what to do with colonial scholarship in a contemporary moment marked by the “decolonial” impulse in so many scholarly fields.

When our dear late colleague Hadj Miliani first proposed this project in December 2020, our hope was to gather contributions representing a range of disciplines that together would allow us to take seriously Rouanet’s 1922 essay. The purpose was not to render homage to Rouanet. Instead, we envisioned a sober, grounded examination of the essay in its many facets, with a sidelong glance to its Mashriq-focused companion essay titled *La musique arabe*, likewise published in the pages of the *Encyclopédie* (Rouanet 1922 and 1922a).³ These explorations would include the context of its creation: Rouanet’s interlocutors, his prejudgments, his readers and critics, and the broader cultural and political context in which he lived and worked. They would also include an engagement with the musics that Rouanet was writing about, both in his day and in the one hundred years since the publication of the essay. Hence these contributions would be both a critical reading of Rouanet and a recovery of his work as a source of knowledge about musical practices in the Maghrib.

It felt urgent to devote attention to Rouanet’s essay in large part out of the conviction that it has too long been overlooked.⁴ The reasons for this oversight are complex. While Rouanet has been continuously cited by Algerian scholars and musicians into the present, he undeniably belongs to a colonial moment that Algerian intellectuals have understandably confronted with some ambivalence.⁵ In musicological scholarship about the Maghrib more widely, Rouanet is often remembered as one of a range of European scholars working in the colonial context during the interwar period, alongside Alexis Chottin and Prosper Ricard in Morocco and Baron Rodolphe d’Erlanger (and secondarily Antonin Laffage) in Tunisia (Davis 2004; Guettat 2004; Poché and Lambert 2000: 135-142; Pasler 2012-2013). While this contextualizing move makes a great deal of sense (even if it needs to be expanded beyond the French colonial sphere to include Henry George Farmer, Robert Lachmann, and Patrocínio García Barriuso, and no doubt

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, William & Mary (Virginia, USA).

² Researcher at CRASC.

³ The two essays have been digitized through the Bibliothèque nationale de France: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1237270/f201.item.r=Rouanet,%20Jules%20%201922%20%20La%20musique%20arabe%20%20Encyclop%C3%A9die%20de%20la%20musique%20et%20dictionnaire%20du%20Conservatoire%20>.

⁴ Except for the work of Bouhadiba 2019.

⁵ See, for example, Bouali 1968; Bouzar-Kasbadji 1992; Saidani 2016.

others; see Katz 2015, Davis 2013, and Calderwood 2018), it has meant that the singularity of Rouanet's work has too often been missed. Not only did Rouanet's contributions predate those of d'Erlanger and Chottin and provide something of a model and foil to them, but in certain respects his are the sociologically richer. Lacking the highly technical approach of d'Erlanger, Rouanet's work conveys a vivid sense of musical practices in his day, particularly in the *nûba* tradition of Algiers. And while it is less focused and polished than Chottin's work on Morocco, Rouanet's ambitious, frequently tendentious mapping of a vast constellation of musical practices onto sociopolitical patterns rooted in the Maghribi past clearly provided inspiration for Chottin.

Ironically, it may have been precisely Rouanet's importance to early twentieth-century European scholarship on music in the Maghrib and in the Arab world more widely that helped lead to his marginality. Coming to Arab and Maghribi music nearly a half-century after Francisco Salvador Daniel's pioneering work in Algeria, Rouanet did more than any other European figure to bring these musical traditions into the francophone print sphere in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, the culmination of Rouanet's efforts in 1922, despite the many laureates it received in the French sphere, was soon overshadowed by d'Erlanger's massive collaborative project, which, like Rouanet's twin essays, aimed to join the study of classical sources with attention to contemporary practices in both Mashriq and Maghrib. The first of d'Erlanger's six volumes, published in 1930, anticipated his organizing of the Congress of Arab Music held in Cairo in 1932, an event from which Rouanet was conspicuously absent even if his influence is evident in some of its printed matter, such as Mahmoud Ahmed El-Hefny's introduction to the *Recueil des Travaux* (1934).⁶ The scale of d'Erlanger's interventions and their prominence in the public eye drew some of the luster away from Rouanet's oeuvre. There was also a striking contrast in the two figures' reception among Arab intellectuals: whereas Rouanet received some sharp criticism from the Lebanese-Egyptian musician, scholar, and translator Alexandre Chalfoun (1927; see Annex), d'Erlanger enjoyed a generally positive reception in Algeria (al-Madani 1930), Tunisia, and Egypt. With regard to the relative lack of attention to Rouanet in recent decades as compared to d'Erlanger, Chottin, and Farmer, it might also be possible to read this as symptomatic of the difficulties that colonial Algeria presents for contemporary scholars of North Africa: too old a colony, too radically tied to France, colonial Algeria as a field of "indigenous affairs" comes to be a vague backstory or counterexample to a more defined situation in neighboring countries. Unfortunately, such an approach tends to downplay the coloniality of Tunisia and Morocco under the French Protectorate, diminish the continuities among the Maghrib countries both before and during the colonial period, and bracket colonial Algeria as essentially unknowable.

But if Rouanet's writing can be read in starkly ideological terms, so that "[le] jugement de valeur, esthétique, social, humain étouffe ici l'analyse musicologique" (Bouhadiba 2019: 69), it can also be read as a rich document that, when read in a certain light, stands to illuminate a great deal about musical practices in the Maghrib of his day. Although it takes careful attention to notice, *La musique arabe dans le Maghreb* bears traces of the relationships Rouanet had with Algerian musicians and listeners, including Edmond-Nathan Yafil, Mostefa Aboura, Mohamed 'Ali Sfindja, and Ben Farachou. Particularly as concerns the *nûba* repertoire of Algiers and Tlemcen, the essay frequently provides rich insight into musicians' and listeners' own understandings of the repertoire. In addition, Rouanet gives partial, frequently partisan, yet nonetheless precious accounts of a wide range of musical practices of his day. As a reading of

⁶ Farmer's devastating critique of Rouanet's *La musique arabe* would not appear until 1946, but it is certainly possible that Farmer's skepticism regarding Rouanet's scholarship had something to do with the latter's absence from Cairo.

Tamara Turner's contribution to this issue reveals, Rouanet's account of musics associated with Black Algerians, particularly in Laghouat, combines racist tropes with remarkably detailed information about social and musical practice. And the transcriptions that Rouanet provides (some of them from the pen of Aboura, it seems), alongside his accounts of musical modes, rhythms, and instruments, provide a rich resource for scholars seeking to gain an understanding of the musical landscape of his day, particularly as regards Algeria. Students of colonial-era musical practices in the Maghrib ignore Rouanet at their own risk.

This collection of articles by no means exhausts every facet of Rouanet's essay. Instead, it provides a sense of what might be done through a close reading of it, including through exploration of the ideological assumptions undergirding Rouanet's musicological work, as exemplified in Hicham Chami's placement of his thought within its broader European colonial context in North Africa and beyond. At the same time, it is essential to trace the musical networks in which Rouanet worked and that he helped to shape. As pointed out above, and as Guettat has indicated (2004: 284), a close reading of Rouanet's writings reveals connections to many other indigenous Algerians. Rouanet also had an important influence on European and North African scholars. The contribution by Hadj Miliani explores the fertile and difficult relationship between Rouanet and Yafil, which gave rise to musical projects that had a long-term impact as well as to a politically loaded polemic that appeared in the columns of *La Dépêche Algérienne* in 1927. The essay by Jonathan Glasser is a close reading and contextualization of the Arabic-language musicological writing of Ghaouti Bouali, an Algerian scholar whose work straddled the European, Mashriqi, and Maghribi intellectual scenes of the turn of the century, and whose work Rouanet cited only to dismiss. And Helena Tyrväinen's tracing of the career of the Finnish musicologist and composer Armas Launis demonstrates the European reach of both Rouanet's work and the indigenous Algerian musical scene beyond the French sphere.

Multiple essays revisit musical practices treated by Rouanet. These contributions fill in gaps in Rouanet's approach, revisit musical practices as they have developed since, and, in a gesture that points out the "positive" possibilities of his work pioneered by Elsner (1992), Yammine (1999), and Plenckers (2002), also draw on the essay as a valuable source of information. Nacim Khellal provides a close reading of Rouanet's treatment of Kabyle music, bringing the exploration of his ideological assumptions into the domain of a specific regional practice. Tamara Turner offers a critique of Rouanet's reading of "Black music" in Algeria while at the same time pointing out the valuable clues he provides concerning the musical traditions of Black trance traditions. And Salvatore Morra looks at Rouanet's considerable discussion of the instrumentarium to problematize our understanding of the differentiation between the 'ūd and the kouitra in the modern period.

Finally, we have included in an annex a series of documents related to the contributions to this volume, in the spirit of our late colleague's admonition to dig beyond the known sources. They include an invaluable passage from Armas Launis's accounts of his conversations with Yafil regarding the musical lineage of Sfindja, translated from the Finnish by Helena Tyrväinen; the texts of Rouanet and Yafil's 1927 exchange in *La Dépêche Algérienne*; and a selection of Chalfoun's critical comments regarding Rouanet's *La musique arabe*.

In conclusion, we would like to pay homage to the late Hadj Miliani who gave birth to this collaboration, in the hope that the conversation he so energetically launched will continue⁷.

⁷ This collaborative project would not have come to fruition without the precious help of Nidaa Abou Mrad, Abdelouahab Belgherras, Ahmed-Amine Dellai, Marybel Dessagnes, Fazilet Diff, Daho Djerbal, Lamia Fardeheb, Azedine Kinzi, Ouail Laabassi, Mehdi Megnaoua, Mohamed Miliani, Karim Ouaras, Martial Pardo, Dwight

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Reynolds, Saliha Senouci, Youssef Touaïbia, Mourad Yelles, and all the contributors, as well as the support of our colleagues at CRASC. For the documents gathered in the annex, I would like to recognize Helena Tyrväinen, Asta Schuwer Launis, the university librarians of William & Mary who located Chalfoun's rare work, and Rachel McGraw. Hadj Miliani left us before he could write his contribution, but the editorial committee of the journal *Insaniyat* kindly authorized the republication of his article, « Déplorations, polémiques et stratégies patrimoniales. À propos des musiques citadines en Algérie en régime colonial », which appeared in 2018.