

## The Musical Journey- Re-Centring AfroAsia through an Arc of the Blues

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*The essential difference between cante jondo and flamenco is that the origin of the former must be sought in the primitive musical systems of India, that is, in the first manifestations of song, while the latter, a consequence of the first, cannot be said to acquire its definitive form until the eighteenth century....The former is song imbued with the mysterious colour of primordial ages; the latter is relatively modern, its emotional interest eclipsed by that of the other. Spiritual colour versus local colour: that is the profound difference...That is to say that, cante jondo, like the primitive musical systems of India, is merely a stammer, an emission, higher or lower in pitch, of the voice, a marvelous buccal undulation, that breaks out of the echoing prison of our tempered scale, will not suffer the cold rigid pentagram of our modern music, and makes the hermetic flowers of semitones open in a thousand petals.*  
(Federico García Lorca, 1922)

Lorca's insight in his lecture on the "Deep Song" is feisty, it is right within the vein leading to the heart of musical craft; somewhat inaccurate but poignant because as a musically gifted man who could play the piano (1) and write words infused with the echoes of the *Cante Jondo*, he could sense the pathways of this musical journey, close to a century earlier than this exploration. We too are in search of how to make the "hermetic flowers of semitones open in a thousand petals".

1

A listener who is interested in tracing common nuances and inflections in musical expression across vast geographies and cultural formations is bound to come across an astounding set of melodies that bear a remarkable similarity to each other: an "arc of the blues" or for Lorca, the trajectory of the "cante jondo". (2)

It then depends on where hers and his sensory acuities were located to start with: starting from the Indian subcontinent and neighbouring regions, the nuances would travel through West Asia to reach Mali via the Mediterranean, Ethiopia, Nubia, Southern Europe and North Africa. Or s/he could start the other way around, from Africa to travel to the East covering vast landscapes all the way to the Punjab.

In West Africa it was to be in conversation with another arc as the years unfolded, one whose cardinal point was firmly located in the vicinity of the slave plantations of Bahia, Alabama or Cuba.

In turn at each point of such a tracing, there would be melodic loops stretching backwards as well, from each of these places to others, indicating crisscrossing movements and encounters.

It is our strong contention that if we listen carefully for soundscapes and their associational clusters, although instrumentation, arrangements and notation differ, there was and is a familiarity that is uncanny. There appears to be a common *aesthetic constellation* that defines musicality.

We argue that this *constellation* is a creation of human interactions of the long *duree* of 700-1400 AD, a product of long distance trade and travel in a world (in the words of Sheila Abu-Lughod-3) that was quite vibrant “before European hegemony.”

What might be this history of interaction and travel and why is it important? How would this be related to the manner in which such an aesthetic constellation emerged? A realisation that this arc of sorrow and loss in music and the words that accompany its singing show remarkable commonality, despite significant variations from Kashmir or Kerala to Mali, and that interrogating how this might have come about might lead to new directions in understanding music, societal change as well as emotional landscapes.

We therefore intend in this project to reconstruct the actors and cultural formations of this long *duree* that made all this possible and to bring them out into sharp relief, as far as possible archives and scholarship permit- to reconstruct their lives, their social servitude, their creativity, work, actual words and where possible, their music. Since most of them were women slaves and/or women in servitude of all cultures and faiths from all imaginable slave routes, it will be trying to deepen the already exciting insights that for instance Suzanne Meyers Sawa (4) has brought to light in her work. Also, as historical and musicological work increases, a more refined picture is emerging too: F. Mathew Caswell’s recent book, *The Slave Girls of Baghdad: The Qiyani in the Early Abbasid Era* (5) confirms our sense that women from everywhere were at the epicentre of creativity in poetry, performance and poetry. What needs deeper exploration is precisely their centrality in the development of the craft.

The broader music we are aware of after all “talks” about migration, separation, refugeedom, persecution and intense nostalgia and expresses itself, in varied ways, through combinations which in the Indian tradition are classified under the Bhairavi family of scales<sup>1</sup>. It would be closest to the natural minor scale in Western classical music, the Phrygian scale in ancient Greek music and corresponding to the Hijaz Makam in Turkish, Persian or Egyptian classical music systems. Further, across these vast distances, it also underpins contemporary musical expression around these themes, indicating a historical trajectory across space and time that left deep imprints through emotion and the power of the forms that might have travelled. So, from the Heer in the Indian subcontinent to the sorrowful Khala/khalo songs of the Nguni tradition, from there to the Amanes or Rembetica in Greece, Cyprus or Turkey to the Nuba, Melhun or Muwashshah in Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco, to the Soleares, Segurías or Bulerías flamenco songs in Southern Spain, the same echoes are heard.

This essay attempts to put across a set of ideas about the emergence of such musical forms and traditions around this minor note based melodic family, through the travels of people and goods. It is located as it should at the intersection of Creative Work and Aesthetics, Poetics and Musicology and Historical Materialism.

2.

The idea for this musical journey started in that order: creative work, aesthetics, poetics and musicology and a materialist conception of history. Excuse us as authors speaking in the third person in the following paragraphs to weave the sense of how we got to all this. The idea for this exploration or journey started from a simple illumination: Sumangala Damodaran had

spent a tortuous time in Delhi under the strict supervision of the Sufi scholar and musician Madan Gopal Singh (6) on the reconstruction of a “Heer” from the 1940s about the Bengal famine. Not only was it hard to get the right notes from the octogenarian singer and composer of the Indian People’s Theatre Association from whom she acquired the lyrics of the song, but Punjabi was one of the few Indian languages Damodaran did not speak. The reconstruction of the haunting lament, its performance and recording by Damodaran (7) became one of the key songs on the CD, *Songs of Protest-A Forgotten Tradition*. But a simple seemingly arcane fact became decisive: the Heer, a ballad form from North and North-western India that originated from the Heer-Ranjha love story, was somehow linked musically to the story of Shirin, Khosrow and Farhad, the troika of lovers of the poetry and music of the Persians and the Abbasids.

This was followed by Madan Gopal Singh’s lecture/performance at the Ambedkar University (8), Delhi. He bedazzled everyone with stories, connections and multiple renditions of the Heer. His research, he claimed had him collect 56 such versions, of which he only managed to use 34 in his work. All of them somehow were about the sorrow and loss that characterised the Heer-Ranjha stories. He provided the gathering with four versions starting from the one that he had helped Damodaran with, moving then to a version from the Afghani borderlands; then back to an Indian version sung traditionally under a Banyan tree in the villages of the Punjab all through the night and then, one from the desert of Rajasthan.

This proved to be eerie stuff. The seven year exploration that led to Sitas’s (9) draft of *Slave Trades*- the long and taxing contra-Rimbaud poem- that traversed Southern Africa, Ethiopia, Nubia and Cyprus was jam-packed with musical echoes of his childhood or of his later attempts to be conversant with form. The Gopal Singh desert song left him dumbstruck: it was no longer the “sounds-like” of what Sumangala Damodaran had sung but the clincher, it was the arc of the blues itself.

By the time Sitas had ran up and down Durban’s and then Cape Town’s streets shouting “Eureka” and/or discussing it with his musical pundits, Damodaran had crafted a lecture for the Ambedkar University which started from the Madan Gopal Singh’s examples and clips of Bhairavi performances, Bhimsen Joshi’s “Babul Mora Naihar Chhooto Jaye”; Parvin Alipour’s Shirin (Iran); samples of Middle Eastern Amanes and a Greek Rembetika; Sephardic Jewish Gitano Sounds from Morocco and La Caita’s Flamenco piece- “the Blackbird. (10). The journey was on.

Having started from the India of Sumangala Damodaran’s and Madan Gopal Singh’s ideas and work and hints at the plausibility of this project, it would be fitting to stretch it even further South. A serious rapport had occurred between composers and musicians like Neo Muyanga, Sazi Dlamini and Damodaran (11) over a joint project *Insurrections* –the CD has been produced for the University of Western Cape’s Centre for Humanities Research. That there was such an aesthetic constellation was obvious in a visceral sense and defined both Neo Muyanga’s work with flamenco master Paco Pena (12) for the Royal Albert Hall in 2012 in Misa Flamenca and his work with the kora Master Toumani Diabate (13) and with Ethiopian and Sudanese string players.

South African composers and musicians were more than familiar with the transatlantic world of sound, the music of African slaves from Bahia all the way to the free jazz of the late 1950s- the “slave sublime” was their second nature. At best, John Coltrane’s and Don Cherry’s (14) gesture towards the East and its tonalities was familiar. For Muyanga (15) and

Dlamini, exposure to Indian musicians convinced them that the journey was necessary. The presence of the Onavillu in Kerala and its Nguni cousin that Dlamini excels in was a small initial clue that is by now thickly layered with commonalities. Shirin's lament made sense.

Creative work among movements of socialist thinkers, artists and performers necessarily brings with it questions of the aesthetic and reflections on what is it that is being listened to. And once that questioning starts and the form is understood as poetry and as musical composition, then the glaring question becomes how did *it* travel, who were its carriers and when?

Through the travels of this minor note based melodic family, we seek to argue the following:

1. Understanding the emergence and transformation of musical traditions or more generally art traditions has to necessarily be about a critique of canons, of the 'ethno' of ethnomusicology and of various centrism, whether Euro -, Indo-, or Islamo-centrism. Further, it is necessary to understand cultural formations as having historical roots, rhizomes and influences that go far beyond what are commonly understood as links between people and their cultures. Thus, the cultural influences in the Iberian Peninsula, or 'Islamic' North Africa, or the Indian subcontinent can be seen, through music, to be constituted by connections that are more extensive and involving more categories of people than what is known and acknowledged in historical or musicological work. This is important not only for dealing with arguments about cultural essentialism, but also to make sense of actually observed forms, to get to the root of what constitutes and changes them over time.
2. Over and above the critique, it is necessary to provide a different mapping of how music moved and how each setting mimicked, transformed, enhanced and nudged it all through long-distance movement of goods, symbolic or material and people. It is the mapping of such aesthetic constellations that, we believe, provides interesting ways of understanding cultural transformations.
3. The carriers of the music, across all locations, were to a large extent slaves, people in servitude, nomads and various other 'subaltern' people, large numbers of them being women, although the histories of the creation of musical traditions usually attribute their development to male rulers, conquerors and male-centered traditions, especially for the medieval period. Thus, the debates around Iberian or Andalusian music are trapped within the Abrahamic traditions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, what is known as 'modern' and 'rational' European music attributes its qualities to refined tastes of white bourgeois societies, and debates around Indian music are mostly about Hindu or Islamic influences, without an ability to break out of such straitjackets. However, careful listening as well as an unbiased uncovering of historical detail brings out clearly the role that the slaves, the wanderers, the street performers and nomads played not only in carrying music forms but also in contributing to the development of musical canons, philosophies and perspectives, exemplified by the case that we discuss in this paper.
4. Thus, what is seen as Hindustani or Carnatic is perhaps a profound sedentary elaboration of such travelling soundscapes; what came to be known as the European classical tradition perhaps needs to acknowledge influences from numerous 'others'; what occurred in Ethiopia between the 7th and 10th centuries and China during the Tang dynasty might be fascinating mutations of the very same and so on. Therefore, we need a non-essentialist understanding of music as always on the move, *borrowed, elaborated, transformed, revolutionised, and passed*

*on within and across boundaries.* We also need to understand musicians and composers as bearers of an *aesthetic acuity* which is open to the world of formed and transformed sound. Of course, in certain historical periods a canon becomes fixed, deviation is abhorred and masterful repetition of it becomes the marker of good music.

In arguing the above, we present below some tentative narratives around the development of musical traditions in and between four centres: Persia from the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century AD, Kochi/Kerala 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, Baghdad 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century AD and Cordoba from the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards. From there, creativity fans out in multiple directions. Along with the narratives, we will touch upon what might have been the innovations at each point but we will avoid at this stage technical musicological discussions. It is hoped that through this, we can begin to talk about the acuities and sensibilities that are at the heart of all music and also arrive at an egalitarian and self-reflexive understanding of the relationship between aesthetics and society.

3

As above mentioned, there is a pressing need to bracket ethnomusicology away, if this journey is to achieve its intended goal- to fathom out how music moved and moves. This is a philosophical and socio-historical imperative and not an attempt to demean the work of the ethnomusicologist as such. Bruce Nettl's wonderful introduction to the field *The Study of Ethnomusicology: 31 Issues and Concepts* are both convincing and hearty, and the credo that it is "the study of music in culture" (16) and that it is a "study of the world's music from a comparative and a relativistic perspective" (17), which is respectful and egalitarian is noteworthy. And as a field it has spent the last two decades reflecting seriously about its own limitations and the ideas it has projected about musical "others". There would be very few that would deny that the ethnomusicologist's gathering of tones and semitones from the "out there" has enriched our lives and the cultural contextualisation has helped in making difference and variety a fact. (18) Yet, the bits in isolation of each other make the comprehension of the arc difficult and stifle any attempt to comprehend movement and change: we are left with Lorca's hermetic flowers.

A bracketing of ethnomusicology, as argued above has to go hand in hand with the rejection of the West-centric idea of music and its relation to modernity. This is drenched in a high-brow and an elitist conception of the music of the Western Imperium and has been sharply articulated in Max Weber's *The Rational Foundations of Western Music* (19) and was perversely supported by scholars like Theodor Wisengrund Adorno. For Weber, the "beautiful", the "profound" and even the "ugly-as-sublime" was to be found in the West's compositional culture, that is, in the tension between the rationality and organisation of its harmonic structures and the intensified, lyrical expressivity it permitted and controlled at the same time.

To quote: "without this quality modern music would have been neither technically nor meaningfully possible. Its meaning rests on the fact that tone successions are not treated as an indifferent series of semitones..." (20). Weber's contrasting "other" was demeaning. It was the "unorganised conglomeration of nonrational tone successions".(21) Each word carries with it a little devastation: "unorganised" as opposed to "organised", "conglomeration" as opposed to "composition", "nonrational" as opposed to "rational", "tone succession" as opposed to "harmony" and to quote: "only the elevation of many-voiced music under notational art created the composer proper and guaranteed the polyphonic creations of the

Western world in contrast to those of all other people, permanence, after effect and continuing development”. All this needed a make-over as it is no longer enough to ascribe achievement and rationality to the West and cast the rest’s contribution as what Weber calls the “nonrational tone successions”.

Yes, something distinctive did occur in Europe that enhanced compositional and organisational processes during the rise of bourgeois society. The road from the violin and the piano to Beethoven has been more than impressive. And Theodor Adorno has a point in his *Aesthetic Theory* when he states that: “Beethoven’s music is as much a part of the revolutionary emancipation of the bourgeoisie as it (also) anticipates the latter’s apologia”. (22) The achievement of a complex polyphony in his work was at the same time an uneasy acceptance of a declining status quo. Yet even this achievement was not a virgin birth, unrelated to the world around it. The greatness in compositional form from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards in Europe until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is not only based on a Bakhtinian appropriation of forms from lower classes as it has become fashionable to say, but also from many peculiar ‘others’.

More pressing though in this deliberation is the need to get rid of the perverse idea that ethnic, national or civilizational adjectives are a scientific correlate of musicality. Yes, as a construct of social power and sometimes as an empowering declaration or even a statement of received notions based on territorial histories and cultural confinements, it is possible to bring the adjective African, Greek or Persian, Tamil or Indian or Andalusian next to music, but if serious about the craft, such a political act obfuscates more than it reveals.

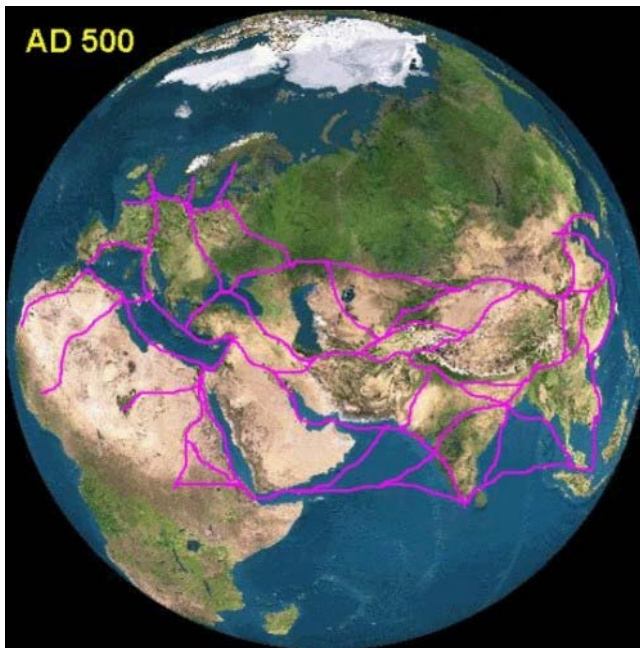
To arrive at an understanding of emergences and transformations, it has to be about a critique of the canon, of ethnic epithets, of Eurocentrism, of Indo- or Islamo- or other such essentialisms and of the constant mild bickering within the Abrahamic traditions over let us say the music of Andalusia. Or, to give another example, it is not correct when we say that “African musicality is linked to ritual”; rather it is more accurate to say that African power elites used musicality to define rituals of submission, defiance and social reproduction. That the relationship between music and ritual becomes canonical and indeed ingenious thereafter is another story. So it was with the elaborate organisation of ragas in Hindustani and Carnatic music- a remarkable achievement but never a virgin birth nor a spiritual direct transmission from the pages of the Vedas.

Understanding how “musicality” moved over land or boat thus requires us to note that there were fascinating connections between far flung places through music and musicians, connections that are not adequately acknowledged in historical or musicological work.

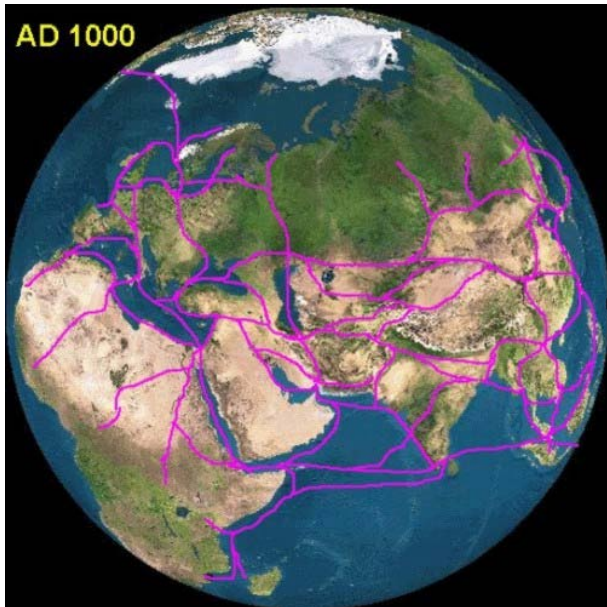
It further points us to the fact that this period, from the 6th to the 14th century AD also happens to be the period where philosophies and theories of music performance practice were beginning to be written, reflecting and articulating many of the pathways. While this is the beginning, also of canon formation and exclusive identification as ‘Islamic’ or ‘Indian’ or various other, apparently distinct and unrelated essences and rules, the texts themselves are beginning to reflect the varied influences on the musical forms and, importantly, the kinds of people who created and carried the music.

However difficult the work for this journey might have been, it was made easier by an impressive proliferation of archaeological and historical work that has shaken out the very Eurocentrism that rendered most of the world an opaque mush awaiting four Portuguese ships to round the Cape so that it could be discovered. Most useful was work on long-distance trade and urban supply routes that by now spans millennia. For the novice, Andrew Sherratt's (23) *ArchAtlas* project is a quick demonstration of what makes our claims obvious. It visually reconstructs in 500 year intervals such long-distance and urban supply routes from 3500 BC to 1500 AD. Our story is captured by three, the map of 500AD, the map of 1000AD and the map of 1500 AD.

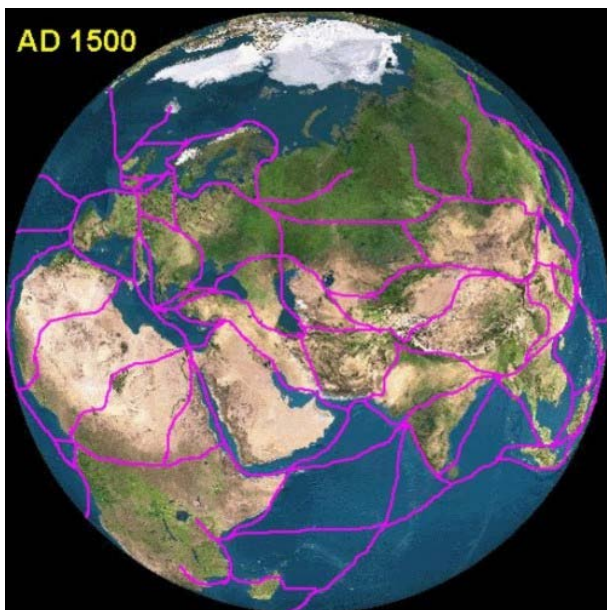
Map One



Map Two



Map Three



The movement of goods and people, the proliferation of urban centres and the centrality of the stations of our journey is more than obvious. Of the 14 cities with more than 100 000 people in 1 000 AD the only one in today's Europe was Cordoba at 450 000. The megacity of the time was Baghdad at close to a million people. They both decline by 1500. Kerala is an epicentre both in 500 and 1000 AD and in the latter case in a world that is highly bunched towards Persia. By 1 500 with 7 major centres in 1 000AD, China in the Ming period is at the heart of all long-distance trade. One of our tasks will be to construct an equivalent mapping of music and its wanderings.

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So our journey will start from Persia, because once upon in real time there was a Shirin and a Khusrow the II, the fascinating empress and emperor of the late Sassanid period. There was



no Farhad then, he was a later figuration, the work of poets and artists of the Islamic period. Khusrow was a Zoroastrian, Shirin was a Syriac Christian. Khusrow won his throne back through the help of Emperor Maurice of Byzantium and indeed, the young incumbent was hidden from his pursuers in Syriac Christian territory. It has remained hard to separate fact from fiction in their legendary love affair. One critical issue was that Ctesiphon's cultural formation was enticingly syncretic: Shirin's Greco-Aramean-Armenian and Christian traditions, Khursow's ancient Persian literature and poetry received a serious boost- the very survival of ancient Greek texts on philosophy and music owed a ton to the Sassanids and the Syriacs.

The court was more than fascinating: the two of them gathered a fine array of musical and creative talent which has been subsequently canonised as the foundation of classical Persian/Iranian music. Both the White Palace and Shirin's Gardens were mythologised in poem and song and for the four or five court musicians and composers, Barbad seems to have had the better press. He was after all, Khusrow's favourite. The key point was that they were a cosmopolitan ensemble, recruited from a variety of settings and brought into servitude. One of the musical geniuses was Sarkash (who was we are told from her "race" and a Christian Syriac- a name like Sarkash is so not Geek as to hint at Urdu and/or South Indian origins. Whether he was a slave, it is unclear.)

In Ferdowsi's version, "Sarkesh" was jealous of Barbad and tried to stop him from entering the palace but fails and Khusrow is scripted to say "You've no talent, you are as bitter as colocynth, and Barbad is like sugar." (24) With that Sarkash was sent away. Barbad is inconsolable with the imprisonment and killing of Khusrow and the "degeneration" of Persia and declares: "That if my hand plays any song again/ I should be struck from the roll of men/I'll burn my instruments and never face/the enemies who dealt you this disgrace". According to Ferdowsi (25) Barbad cuts off his four fingers and returns home mutilated; there, he burns all of his instruments.

Assuming that Barbad was an indigene and according to most sources he was, Ctesiphon and Bishampur as urban centres were far from being insular. His very prowess was informed by a variety of influences. His ability to move Khusrow to tears was not a parochial whim. He was at the top of his craft. A century back before Khusrow's reign, Bahram V imported thousands of musicians from India during King Shangol's reign, an experience that was fraught with socio-economic problems, but a wonderful complement to the Nestorians with their minor note laments. (26)

To remain in Persepolis: Sarkash, Barbad and the wondrous woman composer and performer/harpist Nagisa/Nakisa and many others (Rantin, Bamshad), were at the heart of a compositional renaissance and more than entertaining the Court, were part of the apprenticeship of hundreds of musical composers and performers who were literally exported to China, Punjab, Kerala, Byzantium, Sudan/Nubia and Ethiopia. Most of them were status-linked chattel and were guaranteed a good life far away in other Courts.

There are historical accounts of how such musicians were absorbed within the cultural formations of the Sui and Tang dynasties. (6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, AD). Apart from performances they were supposed to also provide musical training within a large section of the court that employed thousands of musicians. Although we have not researched this systematically, some facts are out there in Wikipedia: this importation was consolidated into the first musical academy for the training of musicians and facilitated the crafting into music

some of China's most important poems (27) At first performances were organised within 10 musical styles, seven foreign (Samakrand, Bukhara, Fu ran, India, Korea, Vietnam and Persia) and three local. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century there was a process of synthesis into a new Sino-centric style that combined all. This digression takes us away from our journey but demonstrates in a sublime way its point.

It is also too early to speak about African musical presence in Sui or Tang China. The evidence of a large number of African slaves in the Chinese literature of the Tang dynasty is recorded with some relish in Chang Hsing-lang's, "The Importation of Negro Slaves to China Under the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-901),(28) the unsystematic nature of the report gives only an impressionistic picture of their role in a number of lowly occupations. What it also reveals is a rudimentary awareness that the "Kun-lun" came from close to Libya and they were of two kinds: Abyssinians and people from "Monomatoba", two centuries before the rise and decline of the Zimbabwe kingdom. We are convinced that no such "importation" would have been bereft of music.

So back to our Sassanids: whereas this Persian musical energy was to be found in every urban concentration, its elaboration into a profound formal statement seems to have been closer to Khusrow's and Shirin's court and among the above circle of musicians. Whatever was bequeathed to them or borrowed was elaborated, enhanced and transformed not only to please the courtly audiences but to define poetic and musical excellence. The codification of the seven "Royal modes" (Khursovani/Xosrovani); their thirty *lahns* and the 360 *dastans* (melodies) that defined the classical style are attributed to Barbad and to Nagisa, Plumbing through (29) scholarly work on Persian music, the direct compositional and improvisational link is difficult to make, yet the allusions and the epic poems set to music like the "Garden of Shirin", the "Sovereign's Garden" seem to be too linked to that court to be incidental.

Later too Nizami's poetic masterpiece of the enchanting love triangle has Shirin/Sirin listening to Barbad playing his four-string "qatar" and singing in the tent next door about his master's undying love for this beautiful woman. But this tale too, was alas composed 500 years later! (30)

The real Shirin though packed quite a "punch": apart from her legendary devotion to Khursow she was an "activist" empress.( 31) Realising that her people, the Christian Syriacs were under prosecution and hardship and knowing through her maritime networks that Syriac merchants and settlers were well ensconced in Kerala, she organised a mass overland migration through the Sassanid lands, overland on the Indian subcontinent to reach the Kerala South and the heart of the spice trade.

That such Syriac and Sassanid networks were more than vibrant was an obvious fact: Cosmas Indicopleustis a Syriac merchant and later a Sinai monk was her contemporary and his celebrated account of voyages to Africa and India was confirming familiar migrations and terrains.(32) When in 628AD Khosrow was done for by the crisis his war against Byzantium brought onto his subjects, his very own son made sure he was killed and a truce negotiated. Shirin was to take her own life before the Moslem jihad engulfed them all. In the meantime, thousands of Christians and Zoroastrians took to the paths she had negotiated.

From around the 7th century onwards, but particularly from the 9th century AD, the love story of Shirin and Khosrow came to be written about and idealized as fabulous love story. Ferdowsi (33) celebrates her valour and asserts that "her death was praised by all the world".

Later it was crafted as a symbol of nationhood and loss over several centuries across Persia, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Byzantium, India and Afghanistan.

Did her favourite musicians, the talented Sarkash and the wondrous female performer, Nagisa, move to Kerala or any other part of India? What kinds of music might have emerged in Malabar and other parts of the western coast between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries of the millennium, reflecting the extensive movements that we have talked about here?

4.

One crucial node that is missed out entirely in the analysis of musical traditions in India is the relationship of the Persian empires and the Arab world to the regions of Malabar and Kochi in what came to be known as Kerala on the south-western tip of the Indian peninsula. It is only in more recent times that actual networks of connections between the Sassanid empire, the Arab world, Africa and the western coast of India, particularly Malabar and Kochi, are beginning to be uncovered. Like with Baghdad and Delhi, Kochi must have been an important cosmopolitan centre, given these connections and the varied communities of people who lived there between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. As such it has to be part of the arc of sorrow under our streetlight.

There were multiple connections between what now is Delagoa Bay, the polities up the Limpopo (Mapungubwe) and Zambezi rivers, Madagascar, the areas of the Zanj (Zanzibar and now Tanzania), Axum and the West Coast of the Indian subcontinent, especially Kerala and Sri Lanka. It seems that from the 4<sup>th</sup> Century on, the Sassanids were important carriers of cargo and people. Pius Malekandathil (34), who has documented the Persian maritime links with India, particularly Kerala, noted that the Sassanid connection with India's western coast, through the ports of Gujarat, Konkan, South Canara, Malabar, Coromandel and Sri Lanka got established from about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD onwards. As early as 345 AD, seventy two mercantile families of Christians are said to have migrated from West Asia with Thomas of Cana and settled down in Cornelur (Cranganore) in Malabar, a small part of a wave of migrations into Kerala from West Asia.

The important point about Kerala's religious pluralism is not lost in historical work and in fictional accounts from Salman Rushdie to Susan Vishwanathan. As abovementioned Cosmas Indicopleustis, attests to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century maritime interconnections between Syriac Christendom, Ethiopia, the island world of the Indian Ocean, Kerala, Gujarat and Sri Lanka. His *Christian Topography* is mostly flat earth nonsense and dogmatism, but the existence of Syriac settlements there is more than corroborated.

By the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, there were migrations of Nestorian Christians and Zoroastrians from Persia to Kerala as well and in this period, the politics of maritime trade between the Sassanids and the Byzantines unravelled. The Byzantine emperor Justin roped in Ethiopian Christian traders to explore trading links with Kerala in an attempt to wrest control over the trade away from the Sassanids. This, initiative as Pius Malekandathil documented, was foiled during the reign of Khosrow II who pioneered important human, material and cultural links with India and whose story is important for our narrative.

During his reign, as Shirin was sending her people to those parts of the Indian subcontinent, Khusrow was active in consolidating trade and cultural relations: the game of chess (Chaturanga in India) is believed to have been introduced to Persia (where it was known

as Shatranj). Later, when Persia was conquered by the Arabs, the game quickly spread all over the Middle East and then to Europe.

Furthermore, under Khusrow, Jundishpur was developed as a leading centre of Persian medicine, in which the Indian Ayurvedic system was syncretised with the Greek system propagated there by the Nestorian Christians. Also, in medicine, the Charaka Samhita, the famous Indian medical text by the physician Charaka was translated to Persian and then to Arabic in the 7th century. (35)

In Kerala, the Brahminical order was under-construction with the Namboodris beginning their incursion at around that time too and helping re-establishing the dominance of Hinduism against the growth of Buddhism. It is at the same time a refuge for Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews and Arabs and given, the tragic culmination of the Khusrow murder and the Shirin suicide, the refuge of some of the Persian best talent. This important, pre-Malayalam and pre-Carnatic period found not only creative outlets in popular theatre, song and poetry but although asserted in public, it still remains an historical cypher.

The historiography of the area during the years that interest us is scant- there are passing references about the Dravidian/Tamil polities and a few musicological texts which will be got back to anon and there are histories of Kerala Christians and Jews (scant references on Arabs and Persians/Parsees) with some reflection on the liturgical traditions. There is even less on the interaction between linguistic and religious communities and only hints at the political economy of the time, its cultivation, its trade.

Leela Omcherry's work covers the period from when Hinduism asserted its dominance in the late 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and it is the most often quoted paragraph in official Kerala documents: " the early music of Kerala, with *natya* line at its helm, finds an eloquent expression in the contents of the chapter called *arangettru-kkadai* of *Chilappathikaram*, one of the five great epics of the ancient Dravida literature, for which an exhaustive commentary has been supplied by *Adivarkku-Nallar*, its leading commentator. This music had its heyday during the dominance of *Jainism* and *Buddhism* in south India, a few centuries before and after Christ. It is said to be the mirror of the music culture of the above sects, famous for their artistic achievements and organizations. As centuries moved on, these two religious systems were overpowered by Hinduism which came as a storm to uproot them. Yet, it took a few centuries for Hinduism to establish its supremacy. Though religion changed music and other arts they were not very much affected during these years except for the fact that from then onwards, the spiritual line became more prominent." (36)

Even the *Chilappathikaram* epic which has been the subject of very serious musicological analysis by S. Ramanathan and by Lewis Rowell (37) remains hanging in the absence of a robust historiography. As a work in and of itself it is a testimony of a remarkable performative and theoretical system. In the words of Rowell: their teachings are both a fossil record of the music from which they arose and a tribute to human ingenuity in formalising the sensuous world of musical sound and translating it into concepts that can be taught, learned and remembered. And they are interrelated: in the case of Tamil music, there are probable connections to the ragas of modern South India, as well as possible historical links with the music of neighbouring West Asia and the eastward spread of Indic culture throughout the Southeast Asian mainland and archipelago."(38)

Rowell's is a theoretical *tour de force* where he unpacks the historical layers of commentary to arrive at a clear description of the Tamil modal system, which, by the end of his analysis, he declares unique (39). It is most enjoyable where he sketches out the idiosyncratic feats of it, its allusion to nature-scape of deserts, hills, cultivated lands and forests, to the astrological coordinates that define its structuring. But we feel, he pushes formalism to a degree that starts jarring with historical fact.

In his effort to define the *differentia specifica* of the Tamilian system, he bends the stick too far in terms of uniqueness and distance from the Persian: "the Tamil scales were diatonic, with none of the chromatic tunings of the Persian scales to the west, and no hint of the equidistant scales and more restrictive sets of modal rotations heard today in various regions of Southeast Asia. For our purposes, the most appropriate comparisons are to the modes of the medieval Catholic Church and the scales of ancient Greece and India." (40). He goes on to state that there is no hint, "that these systems are the result of the spread of culture from one region to another." (41). He concedes though, (42) that the "pattern of rotation reminds us of ancient Chinese practice in which the basic pentatonic scale was derived by ascending perfect fifths and then rearranged in consecutive steps within the compass of an octave". And he concedes too that those Phrygian and Dorian resolutions in the Tamilian system might echo the ancient Greek.

Our historical point is different and always on the side of those who want to facilitate the opening of the "hermetic flowers of semitones": Southern India and its Tamil world were not an insular or inert part of the world that received influences that in turn modified or rejected them. They were active parts of the whole world system of the time. Their poets and musicians were part and parcel of the construction of what was to become the "Persian" tradition or what the Tang Dynasty Chinese inaugurated as a tradition. Similarly, the astrological, the Phrygian, the Greek are suggestive but peculiar abstractions and so was the claim about a resemblance to the music of the Catholic Church which in chronological order was a rather suspect inclusion. If the music was discordant to Persian chromatic scales, it was not because of distance and/or ignorance but precisely because of a politics of differentiation. We are surprised that Rowell is sensitive to the politics of coloniality and resistance in relation to the Namoodri/Brahminic "imposition" from the North but not to the Sassanid currents of the time. Here an understanding of Buddhist and Jainist resistance to Zoroastrian and Christian currents needs further exploration. But the minor notes of the lament were there even in the distinct Tamil system, especially in what Rowell terms the "New Tradition".

That the "lute" players were from both genders and that both genders excelled in the craft. Text 2 of the poem describes how "she took up the perfect lute/in her hands and sang a sweet song/Entranced, she played it on the lute..." (43) In the history texts consulted so far there is no mention of who the musicians were and what was their world.

There is also the glaring absence of people's/folk music. It is asserted but never elaborated-who were "the" people? Who were the plantation workers, the urban servant classes of Kerala's trading success? Who were the agrarian masses? Who were the Black Jews, Christians and Animists of the time? What cadences did they bring from Axum and further South in Africa? What were the responses to all this by the Dravidian majority? How did they respond to Shirin's people?

The point is not about the local transmutations only, but how creative people from the Western shores of South India contributed to the further elaboration of musical formation

elsewhere. According to the grand philosophers of Baghdad, such musicians were there in their midst and they did “contribute.” According to conventional Indian historiography there is very little commentary.

Kerala’s multi-layered society was subordinated to the all engulfing Hinduism of the new regimes of power in the years to come. The *nayanars*, the *saivists* the *alwars*, the *vaishnavists* had significant sway in devotional music. By the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, the musicality of Kerala was to go two ways: an intensity of devotional hymnody surrounding the theocratic sway of temples and the refinement of craft that was to lead from Tamilian musical systems in negotiation with Hindu formalisms to the elaboration of a Carnatic musical universe. There was always a third: the hybrid folk-ways of the underclasses and as the caste system was refined later, of the lower caste and Dravidian poor.

5

Indian musicians were not absent from Baghdad’s ascendance. Baghdad itself emerged as a vibrant city a stone’s throw away from Ctesiphon on the ruins of the Sassanids. Its energy was incomparable. : “into the bazaars of the city came porcelain, silk and musk from China; spices, minerals and dyes from India and the Malay Archipelago; rubies, lapis lazuli, fabrics and slaves from the lands of the Turks in Central Asia; honey, wax, furs and white slaves from Scandinavia and Russia; ivory, gold dust and black slaves from Eastern Africa...rice, grain and linen from Egypt; glass, metal ware and fruits from Syria; brocade, pearls and weapons from Arabia; silks, perfumes and vegetables from Persia”. ( 44). It was a cosmopolitan and multicultural centre, a centre of science and translation (Nestorians and Syriac Christians were translating the Greek classics, Persians, the wonderful poetry of the Sassanids, Indians texts of literature, mathematics and astronomy. And, “musicians, music theorists and music literateurs were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, colours and creeds...The music product was a conglomeration of musical styles (Near Eastern, Arabic, Persian and Byzantine), whereas music theory first blindly copied Greek models, then assimilated and moulded these models....”(45)

This is the story of Baghdad- a highpoint of philosophical reflection in the 9th Century. Baghdad’s refined aesthetic tastes and vibrant ethos came not only from its own inhabitants, but from a constant movement of musicians and travellers who brought with them knowledge and experience from faraway lands. Thus, while art, both as philosophy and practice, is known to have flowered especially during the Abbasid era, its energy was never about self-combustion.

There is a better picture now of the sociology of performance, the relationship between slavery, gender and manumission. There is a clearer picture of the role of the “Qiyān”, the women in servitude, their portraits as great women poetesses, performers, singers and composers and it is possible to start moving towards the explication of the relationship between art and power.(46) The task ahead is to connect a deepening historical sociology of gender with the profound musicology produced at the time and re-discovered in the present.

There has been serious work about the emergence of various ‘traditions’ and philosophies of music that point out the influences, the confluences and the distinctions. George Dimitri Sawa begins there from what has been termed the ‘Arabic’ or later ‘Islamic’ music tradition. In his work, the genius of theoretician and performer Ibrahim al- Mawsili and his prowess as a composer takes centre stage and it is reconstructed through the imposing sources of the

time: al-Farabi's *Kitab-al-musiqa-al-kabir* (*The Grand Book of Music*) and Abul-Faraj-Al-Isbahani's *Kitab-al Aghani* (*Book of Songs*). (47)

It was in this vibrant context that al Farabi, matured into a towering intellectual writing about logic, philosophy, ethics, politics, metaphysics, grammar, mathematics, music, alchemy, superstitions and astronomy" (48). His Aristotelian influences have been well noted but his stance is a polemical departure from them as he derives his musicology from actual Baghdadi compositional excellence, exemplified by master musicians like Al Maswili and his compeers. This does not stop al Farabi from offering a profound and showy explication of the classical Greek tone system in his *Grand Book of Music* , leaving it there as an encyclopaedic backdrop for future use, because he admired its logical perfection.(49)

Ibn Khaldun, the historical sociologist of the Islamic world, gives backbone to Sawa's multicultural reading of Baghdad even though he is rather abrasive and dismissive about Arabic traditions. To quote generously from his celebrated historical work: and "(the Arabs) did not know anything except (poetry), because at that time, they practiced no science and knew no craft. The desert attitude was their dominant trait... When such humming was applied to poetry, it was called singing. When it was applied to the praise of God or some kind of recitation (of the Qur'an), it was called *taghbir*. Abu Ishaq az-Zajjaj explained this word as (derived from *al-ghdbir*, that is, melodies) reminding one of *al ghabir* "that which remains," that is, the affairs of the other world. The Arabs continued this way during their desert and pre-Islamic period. Then, Islam made its appearance. (The Arabs) took possession of (all) the realms of the world. They deprived the non-Arabs of their rule and took it over. They had their well-known desert attitude and low standard of living. In addition, they possessed the thriving religion (of Islam) and that (Muslim) religious severity which is directed against all activities of leisure and all the things that are of no utility in one's religion or livelihood. Therefore, (music) was avoided to some degree. In their opinion, only the cadenced recitation of the Qur'an and the humming of poetry which had always been their way and custom, were pleasurable things...

... Then, luxury and prosperity came to them, because they obtained the spoils of the nations. They came to lead splendid and refined lives and to appreciate leisure. The singers (now) left the Persians and Byzantines. They descended upon the Hijaz and became clients of the Arabs. They all sang accompanied by lutes, pandores, lyres, and flutes. The Arabs heard their melodious use of sound, and they set their poems to music accordingly. In Medina, Nashit al-Farlsi Tuways, and Sa'ib Khathir, a client of `Abdallah b. Jafar (b. Abt Talib), made their appearance. They heard the poems of the Arabs and set them to music. They did it well, and they became famous. Ma'bad and his class of singers, as well as Ibn Surayj and his ilk, learned from them. Continual and gradual progress was made in the craft of singing. Eventually, in the days of the `Abbasids, (the craft of singing) reached its perfection with Ibrahim b. al-Mahdi, Ibrahim al-Mawsili, (Ibrahim's) son Ishaq, and (Ishaq's) son Hammid. (The music) and the (musical) sessions of Baghdad during the ('Abbasid) dynasty have remained a topic of conversation down to the present time". (50)

Yet, as Sawa points out for the case of music in the Abbasid era, al-Farabi's work, like a lot of similar work about the emergence of musical traditions under princely patronage, including in Northern India, was primarily concerned with court musicians, be they slaves or not: "These musicians, who owed their livelihood to ruling patrons, were in no position to depict in their songs, the political, social and religious upheavals of the early Abbassid period. It is then the Baghdad of palaces and gardens, of lavish wealth and leisure that is

associated with this type of music.” (51) There is a need as he implies to dig deeper for the voices of discord.

However technical Sawa’s musicological discussion is vital. For example, discussion of the “iqas” (52), rhythm and meter and their relationship to “attacks”, conjunctives and disjunctives (53), fundamental forms and embellishments, notes, modes and ornaments (54)); most importantly though, his discussion of the detailed system of al Farabi’s tone system (55) demonstrates what was preserved from older systems- Persian in particular; what was added on the lute (a fifth string) and a reorganisation of frets. However technical, this is a vital index of how the Abbasid era, transformed and preserved a profound musical tradition.

Al-Farabi’s classic is a treasure trove of musicology is matched only by contrast by al-Isbahani’s book, 50 years in the making (which runs in its Cairo incarnation into 21 volumes!) provides a monumental sociological and literary coverage (56) of poetry, song, music and musicians and most importantly the context of performance as such. .

Using Al -Isbahani’s work, Sawa reconstructs for us the centrality of the Majlis (57) and the formal and informal gatherings they implied, the variety of song and texture, the rules governing slave and non-slave performers; the primacy of song and poetry over instrumental work; as “music and song texts came from various eras, from the pre-Islamic down to Abbasid times” (58). He also provides a structured idea of how musical and textual change occurred. His contention is suggestive: “while musical change was born out of creativity as well as incompetence, and could be caused by both musician and/or audience, textual change was always creative and exclusively audience-inspired”. (59)

In conclusion, Sawa stresses the refinement of music and theory that occurred during the - Abbasid’s in a Baghdad that was flourishing. Much of this music he asserts is part of a living legacy and carries strong continuities into the present (60)

The Abbasid era was also distinctive for its active encouragement of cross-cultural influences, seen extensively in the case of music, from discussions on the ‘scientific’ nature of music (its importance in the universe, measurement of pitch intervals, and the principles of construction of musical instruments) to cosmological and metaphysical meanings of music (61) and applications for healing and therapy. Arabic translations of Greek music treatises became available throughout the known world.

6.

It is known that the music of Baghdad moved, through human jealousy, to North Africa, to Andalus and Cordoba, to the areas where the Ummayyads had spread to or migrated. It was alleged, that Ishaq al-Mawsili, the son of the famed Ibrahim, ordered one of the principle carriers of the music, Abu-l-Hasan Ali-ibn Nafi, or Ziryab as he came to be known as, out of Baghdad after Ziryab’s petulant debut in Harun-ul-Rashid’s court. In most sources about Ziryab, we encounter a genius, supposedly of African descent, a manumitted slave, a master musician and theoretician who had the courage to disagree with his mentors. So he had to go.

Ziryab’s move to Andalusia was not unique: it was part of a process of migration, of intellectuals and artists and part of large movements of Arab, Berber and Moor people into parts of southern Europe, particularly to the Iberian peninsula, in the 9th century, after the



setting up of the Ummayyad dynasty in Andalusia as well as in North Africa in the early 8th century.

There, the multicultural musical tradition that became known as the “Andalusian School” was developed which in turn reflected strong connections to Baghdad and later, with the coming of the Roma, with influences from India as well.

Notable among the creative networks of the time were four slave women singers – Qamar, trained in Baghdad, Qalam, Fadl and Alam-al-Ajfa, trained in Medina. Qalam was of Basque Christian origin, captured at a young age and sent to Medina to train as a musician. She was also a famed dancer, a calligrapher and a reciter of Arabic poetry. She was later purchased for the Ummayyad caliph at Cordoba and brought back to Spain. Two male singers too from the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, Alun and Zarqun, pre-dated Ziryab, and were among the first to travel to al-Andalus from the East.

Ziryab was something of a ‘complete aesthete’, it appears he established a school of fashion and a school of culinary arts in Cordoba, in addition to his infrastructure for musical instruction and development.

Ibn Khaldun wrote rather positively about Ziryab. To quote from the *the Muqaddimah*: “The Mawsilis had a young (apprentice) servant, by name Ziryab, who had learned from them how to sing. He learned so well that they became jealous of him and sent him away to the West. He joined al-Hakam b. Hisham b. `Abd-ar-Rahman I, the amir of Spain. He (al-Hakam) honoured him greatly. He rode out to welcome him. He showered him with gifts, fiefs, and allowances. He gave him a place in his dynasty as one of his boon companions. The musical heritage Ziryab left in Spain was transmitted down to the time of the *Reyes de taifas*. In Sevilla, (the craft of singing) was highly developed. After (Sevilla) had lost its affluence, (the craft of singing) was transplanted from there to the coast of Ifriqiyah and the Maghrib. It spread over the cities there. A sprinkling of it is still left there, despite retrogression in the civilization of the region and the decreasing power of its dynasties.”(62)

Ibn Khaldun’s *Maqaddimah* is however jaundiced it was about Sub-Saharan Africans and however narrow his understanding of music’s subservience to mathematics (63),( his “it is the knowledge of the properties of sounds and modes and their numerical measurements. Its fruit is the knowledge of musical melody”) his idea of refinement is deeply sociological (64) it is about the: “transition of dynasties from desert life to sedentary culture...”It enslaved people of the former dynasties and employed them in their occupations and their household needs. From any of them, they selected skilled masters of the various crafts....(developing a culture of” luxury and refinement in food, drink, clothing, buildings, weapons, carpets, household goods...music”. (65)

There is dignity to the range of Zyriab’s project. But was the essence Persian as Ibn Khaldun implies? As we have emphasised earlier, the essence if that ever is the right word was a haunting music of slaves and captive women, dreaming of desire, home and the misery of yokes. They came from everywhere, courts and empires funded their means of expression, dynasties forced the organisation of their canon, religions clipped their words- Sarkash, Nagisa, Zyriab whoever, were responsible for adding strings, shaping the hollows of the instruments and made emotion real. As Richard Hall (66) describes in his *Empires of the Monsoon*, slaves were everywhere, black and white, women and men either as booty or chattel.

While the Ziryab story is fascinating and very important in understanding the emergence of the Andalusian music tradition, it is possible that his image emerged as larger than life over time. There are at least two versions that attempt to cut him down to size; the one is biographical and the other is musicological.

Carl Davila, in his “Fixing a Misbegotten Biography, scours through an impressive volume of sources to correct and take a bit of the shine off Ziryab’s genius providing “a more complicated and human feel” (2009: 126) to his person, to point out that most of the larger than life accounts come from people like Aslam who was “probably Ziryab’s great-great-great grandson” (67)

There is something that disturbs the author which is significant even if we have to cover the same ground as described by Ibn Khaldun above: “Ibn Abd Rabbih gives us an account of Ziryab himself, in which he tells us ‘Ibrahim-al-Mawsili had a black slave (‘abd aswad’) who was named Ziryab, and who was naturally gifted in singing. Ibrahim taught him, and at times (Ziryab) was present with him in the majlis of (Harun) al-Rashid, singing for him”. Note that in this, one of the earliest references to him, Ziryab was not a student of Ishaq Al-Mawsili’s, as many sources state, but a slave of Ibrahim, his father, who died in 188/804. Ziryab would have been about 15 years old when Ibrahim died, so the association is at least plausible. “This detail is problematic, however, for if Ziryab were a slave, how would he have been able to leave Baghdad, apparently on his own? It is possible that, as a black man (apparently of African descent,) it was taken for granted in Ibn Abd Rabbih’s time that he was a slave, rather than freeborn. Yet, as Ziryab outlived Ibrahim, it is conceivable that his son Ishaq manumitted him.”(68)

This is a surprising paragraph- a young boy who sings in a majlis is not an accomplished musician! At 15, he could have been a precocious talent but where did he learn to play a variety of instruments and compose? Reading Al Farabi, through Sawa’s eyes and understanding the complexity of the musical craft someone, more accomplished would have been involved and if it was not Ibrahim or Ishaq al-Mawsili, it had to be someone formidable because the aesthetic judgement of the Baghdadi world was quite refined. ! Cavilla (69) has Ziryab leave Baghdad in 813 AD at the age of 24; places him in Syria for two or so years, arrives in 816 AD at the age of 27 until he gets into trouble in Tunisia over a “fateful song” and arrives in Cordova approximately at 821 AD at the age of 32. Is there exaggeration involved in the original accounts?

Ibn Abd Rabbih relates too that later on Ziryab fell out with his host Amir Allah (200-816) in Ifriqiyya (Africa/Modern Tunisia) when he sang a song at court based upon a poem by Antara, the famous half-black hero poet of pre-Islamic Arabia. The emir, being himself of mixed race, interpreted the song as insulting and chased him away with a threat of a beheading. (70). How this could be so offensive is remarkable- the entire Islamic world prized Antara Ibn Shaddad, the son of a noble leader and his Ethiopian slave, Zabibah. Growing up in servitude, being called Al-Aghribah Al-Arab (the Arab Crow) he rose to heroic prominence and to poetic glory and his verses on chivalry, courage and his love for Alba were folklore then and continued to grow and was one of the famous seven “Hanged Poems” of the Arabic past. There was also the “Romance of Antar” which is the oral elaboration of his craft that was published in 32 volumes in Cairo, in 1307.(71)

But what is fascinating is that Ziryab is received in the Cordoba court by another musical master, the Jew Al Mansur. The story of Jewish migrations and creativity has to also be

brought into focus in a non-hermetic way too. At least this has received some attention and Jordi Savall's *Jerusalem* (which followed on a very enticing *Istanbul*) project is a monument to that. (72)

Davilla (73) notes that Zyriab could be the “founding father of the Andalusian music tradition” but he is not interested in his craft but rather to “alter the contours of his biography by situating him more clearly in the larger Mediterranean world of the third/ninth century”. (74) He is therefore rather cavalier in reporting about the music: “Ziryab left a lasting impression on the musical culture at the Umayyad court. In addition to his improved “ud”, he is said to have introduced elements of Greek musical philosophy which linked the strings of the “ud” (and their associated modes) with the bodily humours. He also established a school for training musicians, using techniques that master musicians have employed for centuries afterwards. In addition, Ziryab is said to have known ten thousand songs, which formed the basis for the music in Cordova for generations”. (75)

But at least Davilla makes an important point about the centrality of slave-girls in Ziryab's career (76), and how this institution was extremely important to the elite music of Cordova. There were 12 male musicians at Abd al-Rahman's court (all of them freemen, including Al-Mansur the Jew and some of Ziryab's sons...and 38 female slave-singers who were either owned or trained by Ziryab. They played a major role in preserving his subsequent legacy.

There is a bizarre sequence where Ziryab's relation to his two slave-assistants, Ghizlan and Hunayda is discussed: “It was said of him that the *jinn* used to teach him at night one song from a *nawba*. He used to rise quickly from sleep and call his two female slave-singers, Ghizlan and Hunayda, who took up their “uds”, and he took his. Then he communicated to them what was taught in his sleep, and he wrote the poetry for them and hastened back to his bed. When he arose in the morning, he remembered neither poem nor melody, nor did he know who made him forget that because of his intoxicated state, since he was only grasping (the music) in his inebriation. Those female singers of his informed him of what he had communicated to them, and he ordered them to sing it for him, and when they did that, he memorised the information. Then he took his “ud” and corrected the composition of the song, and completed for them what they had omitted in it. And so they were called “Ziryab's two (song-)holders” (*masikatayn*). Afterwards, they went into the palace to teach (it to) the singing girls, and thus they made this information about their master known there and verified about him”. (77)

This makes for amusing different takes- what if Ziryab was so intoxicated as to learn to live with the story of jinns and dreams in his imagination. It is probable that Ghizlan and Hunayda provided him with their daily compositions, he in turn elaborated or changed a bit here or there, presented them as his own dream-work. The women by enhancing the mythology of the man, guaranteed getting their livelihoods secure!

Such women slaves were from everywhere and they were being imported from many musical schools as abovementioned.. Three of his more prominent singers were known as the Madaniyyat/Medinians and Ziryab's “song holders” – a third one, Urba made up the troika. There was another mentioned, Shanif but the information at this stage is too scant to establish her relative status. He trained most and quite a few he sold or gifted, spreading the influence of his style and composition.

In fact, interesting for our analysis here is another feature of the slave-based system of musical patronage and development – the distinction between the ‘higher-class slave girls, the qaynas and the jawariyas, the lower-class ones’ in Baghdad, North Africa and Cordoba and between similarly ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ placed (whether slave or not) performers, the Troubairitz and Joglaressas, in several parts of Occitania, or the courtesans and the street performers in Northern India in subsequent centuries. It seems like access to a place in Ziryab’s ensembles lifted talented women into ganya status.

There is at least a glimpse of the class structure of al-Andalus and within that how women-noble, freed slaves and slaves lived and what their contribution was to poetry and music. Maria J. Vigueira (78), “Asluhu Li’l-Ma’ali-on the social status of Andalusian Women”. Their voice-traces point to how for most, their profession and/or their non-Moslem status, afforded aesthetic and carnal satisfaction. Of course there were examples of formidable noble women like Wallada to really stretch the limit, but her exception proved the rule of Moslem patriarchy.

The musicological downgrading of Zyriab’s genius and originality by Owen Wright (79) in his piece on “Music in Muslim Spain” that a number of innovations ascribed to Zyriab appear to be either exaggerated or fanciful”. One of the points that Wright concedes is that Zyriab and his cohorts developed a proto-version of the *nawba*, but even here its modalities of progression are ancient. The conclusion by Wright that the music “that lies behind picture and page remains elusive and enigmatic as ever”.

Anwar G Chenje, raises the issue of inheritance: “ the musical legacy of Zyriab was kept alive by his pupils who were natives of al-Andalus. Thus from the 9<sup>th</sup> Century onward, the Andalusians began to make their own contribution to the field of singing and music. Ibn Firnas (d.888) is said to have been the first teacher of music in al-Andalus. He was followed by a group of teachers who dealt with the theoretical and practical aspects of music. We owe Ibn Abd Rabbihi a collection of songs. He was followed by Yahya al-Khudujj of Murcia (twelfth century) who wrote a *Book of Songs*. Ibn Fathun (eleventh century) wrote treatises on music, as did his near contemporary Said of Toledo. Perhaps the greatest musical theorist of al-Andalus was the philosopher Bajjah, whose book on music was ‘as popular as was that of al-Farabi in the East’. He was followed by Averroes and by the two great Andalusian mystics, Ibn Arabi and Ibn Sabin...” (80)

7.

We know that Cordoba was sacked and that a variety of migrations and exiles followed. We are privileged to sit in front of two maps looking for clues of how the arc of the blues was stretched further: of 1000 AD and 1500 AD. The latter tells us where the musical diaspora could have moved to: Fez in Morocco was an obvious space, and it did. (81) Cairo and Lisbon were two others, and in the latter case to the Americas. Gondar, Zanzibar and the Congo were also obvious destinations. Paris, Genoa and Venice if converted to Christianity were comfortable destinations as the cities were beginning to flourish. Istanbul and then the world of the Safavids was attractive as well all the way to a pulsating realm of the Ming in China. But also it could have moved to Delhi where, remarkable hubs of energy started their tenure.

Madhu Trivedi’s pioneering new work recounts the story of Delhi and how it got established as a cosmopolitan musical centre between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries with the Turko-

Persian migrations to Northern India from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The presence of musicians from 'Arabia, Khorasan, China, Bukhara and other places who made a 'beeline for the newly founded city of Delhi' by the thirteenth century has been documented by historians of Indian classical music and was recorded by medieval historian Isami (82)

The significant presence of 'Indian' musicians in China, Persia, Baghdad and perhaps even as far as Cordoba or Morocco, is something that is less known than, say, the influence of Persian music on Indian musical traditions. Furthermore, Nazir Jairazbhoy's study of the North Indian (Hindustani) music tradition refers to the favourable assessments of al-Djahiz (the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD biologist, philosopher, theologian of the Abbasid dynasty) and al-Masudi (the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD historian and geographer) about Indian music and the profound impact that the musical tradition that he encountered had on Amir Khusrow, who migrated in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and is known to have himself exercised a major influence on the development of the North Indian musical tradition. (83)

In Delhi, artisans and musicians came from the West: from Ray and Shiraz; from the capital of the Buyids, Isfahan, the capital of the Kakuyids, and from Marv and Herat. Trivedi demonstrates how a synthesised Parsi-u-Hindavi musical tradition emerged by the fourteenth century, with Turko-Persian and Indian classical hues, all absorbing the desi (regional and local) popular traditions. Further, Indian musicians had a significant presence in Baghdad as well and musicologists had substantial knowledge of Indian music systems and styles of performance. It could not be otherwise because what Richard Eaton has termed the "Persian Cosmopolis"- that linguistic, cultural and aesthetic sway that defined a continuum from modern day Iran to China came to overlay and interact with what Sheldon Pollock has termed as its prior "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" with fascinating mutations and innovations. (84).

Interestingly, these also happened to be the periods in which two significant texts were written: the *Brhaddeshi* in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, was the first one. This codified what existed then as the 'Hindu' musical tradition; it was to be followed up much later in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Sarngadeva's *Sangita Ratnakara*. Both absorbed and re-defined a host of influences from elsewhere.(85)

However, even the recognition of such syncretisms, or the acknowledgement of multiple influences, might be seen as confining, in our view. It cannot explain, for example, how there is a remarkable resemblance between a certain kind of a 'Heer' sung in the desert regions of the Punjab and a certain flamenco song that refers to the 'blackbird' and which talks about persecution of Gitano people across centuries and how all this makes sense in vast regions in Africa.

Madhu Trivedi also underscores the role of female performers in the North Indian classical music tradition— courtesans, slaves, street performers and rope dancers - in the transmission and development of musical forms like the *qaul* (the *qawwali*, which Amir Khusrau refined in the fourteenth century, which was considered a form of *git*, in the Indian musical forms), the reconstitution of the Sufi sama (or the mystic séance) with syncretic influences, to name two. During the reign of Sultan Muiz al-din Kaiqubad in the late thirteenth century, musicians, jesters, jugglers and Bhands, traditional Muslim customary performers and rope dancers, occupied the court as entertainers, with many of them being slaves.(86)

What is particularly interesting in Trivedi's documentation is the extent to which 'subaltern' performers of various kinds, including slaves, showed expertise in multiple artistic and

*philosophical* traditions. (87) These were not necessarily part of the marginal or socially ostracised traditions, as much work has uncovered from the medieval period, but were integral to the processes of formation of canonical traditions, in this case the North Indian classical music tradition.

8.

By 1500 most of the urban formations we have been describing were in decline: Kochi or Calicut, Baghdad and Cordoba. There were by then 19 mega-cities with Beijing topping the million “mark” in its streets. The Ming Empire had 7 of such cities, Vijayanmar in the south of India rose at the expense of the coastland, only to decline rapidly. Delhi was on the ascendance too. Ten of such cities were in Asia. Cairo and Istanbul (declined somewhat after the Ottoman take-over from the Byzantines) and Fes in Morocco took over from Cordoba. For the first time three European cities made their appearance: Venice, Genoa and Paris. It is uncanny how obvious it is for serious musicians: for example, it is this sense of place and of aesthetic acuity that allowed Jordi Savall to construct a cry for peace through music and song across civilizational fault-lines in the much acclaimed work, *Jerusalem*. For us Jerusalem traps the music within the Abrahamic fault-lines. (88)

For African musicians like Neo Muyanga and Sazi Dlamini, the journey is about the world of the Southern coastline of Africa as well, and its interconnections to the Lunda and Kongo kingdoms, to Zanzibar, Abyssinia, Madagascar, the Arabian Peninsula, Nubia, Kerala, Baghdad and beyond that the Indonesian Archipelago- perhaps, China and the other way around. Their craft, meets the Hindustani, Carnatic and what preceded it within these Empires of the Monsoon. But from there, the route takes their musicality all across the world to reach Western and Central Africa.

For all of us is in a world of long-distance trade, the way the arts moved on the back of people and chartered human chattel, creates the prospects of an acuity that is cosmopolitan and human. That the pioneers of this were the “subaltern” slaves, brings the inverse formula- that surplus feeling, emotion and affect in the long term have trumped surplus value.

Let us help each other listen and reconstruct their voicings and map a different map of an emerging humanity. There is room for all in the rendezvous of history as Aime Cesaire at once intoned and hoped for decades back and there are Lorca’s hermetic petals of semitones to conjure.

1. See and listen to Frederico Garcia Lorca on piano and Argentinita on vocals on the CD, *Collecion de Canciones Populares Espanolas*, Lydia Nieto, 1997.
2. Frederico Garcia Lorca (1922) “Deep Song” (*Importancia histórica y artística del primitivo canto Andaluz llamado ‘Cante Jondo’*)
3. Sheila Abu-Lughod, (1991) *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford: the University Press)

4. Suzanne Meyers Sawa (2002), "Historical Issues of Gender and music" in Danielson, V et al (eds) *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Volume 6: the Middle East, London: Routledge
5. See Mathew F. Caswell (2011) *The Slave Girls of Baghdad: the Qiyas in the Early Abbasid Era*, New York: Tauris.
6. Madan Gopal Singh (2008) *Songs of Madan Gopal Singh*, Folk Punjab Website.
7. Listen to Sumangala Damodaran (2010) *Songs of Protest- a Forgotten Tradition*, (EMI, Delhi)
8. Madan Gopal Singh (2011) Lecture on the Heer, Audio-File, Ambedkar University
9. Ari Sitas (2000) *Slave Trades* (Cape Town: Deep South)
10. Bhimsen Joshi for example in his "Babul Mora Naiha Chhooto Jaye" Raga Bhairav, Available on YouTube; also on YouTube, La Caita, (1992) "Blackbird" from the film *Vengo*.
11. The CD by Sumangala Damodaran et al (2012) *Insurrections*, Cape Town: University of the Western Cape
12. Paco Pena (2009) *Misa Flamenca*, (Nimbus Records)
13. Toumani Diabate, (2008) *Mande Variations* (Nonesuch Records)
14. John Coltrane (1965) *Ohm* (Impulse); Don Cherry (1965) *Complete Communion*, (Blue Note);(1971) *Orient (BYG)*; (1991): *MultiKulti* (A&M); Cherry, Don with Codona (Walcott, Vasconcelos) (1979. 81, 83) *Codona*, vol. 1,2,3.
15. For his music see Muyanga, Neo (2011) *Dipalo*, Cape Town: Neosong;
16. Bruno Nettles (2005) *The Study of Ethnomusicology: 31 Issues and Concepts* (Illinois: the University Press), p. 12
17. Ibid, p.13
18. There is a formidable scholarship on many of the spaces we will be visiting- Persia is unthinkable without the introductory work by Ella Zonis (1973) *Classical Persian Music: an Introduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), Hormoz Farhat's (1990)-the *Dastgah Concept in Persian Music*, (Cambridge: the University Press); and Bruno Nettl's (1992) very own, *The Radif of Persian Music*, (Champaign III: Elephant and Cat.) Our Baghdad station would have been lost without George Farmer's work on Arabian music: (1925) *The Arabian Influence on Musical Theory* (London: Reves) and (1929) *History of Arabian Music to the Thirteenth Century* (London: Reeves) Don Michael Randel's (1976) "Al-Farabi and the Role of Arabic Music Theory in the Latin Middle Ages", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 29 (2); Owen Wright's (1978) *The Modal System of Arab and Persian Music, AD 1250-1350*, London: Oxford University Press . Jean Jenkins Poul Rovsing Olsen, (1976) *Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam*. London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, Ltd. Of all as shall be seen below Dimitri Sawa's (1989) canonical, *Music Performance Practice in the Early 'Abbasid Era 132-320 A.H/750-932*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989 has proven to be invaluable. Andalusia/Andalus has also a growing cast of eminent scholars- see Anwar G. Chejne (1974) *Muslim Spain-Its History and Culture*, Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press; Amnon Shiloah (1991), "The Meeting of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Musical Cultures on the Iberian Peninsula (before 1492)." *Acta Musicologica* 63.1 (1991); Owen Wright (1992) Music in Muslim Spain, in Jayyusi, Salma Khadra (1992 ed) *The Legacy of Muslim*

*Spain*, (Leiden, New York, Koln: Brill Publishers); Jareer Abu-Haidar (1993) "The Case for the Arabic Origins of the Muwashshahat: Court Poetry and Burlusque in Al Andalus , *Maghreb Review*\_ 18, 1–2, 1993; and Nadir Marouf (1995) "Structure Du Répertoire Andalou: Quelques Problemes De Méthode." In N. Marouf (ed) *Le Chant Arabo-Andalou: Essai Sur Le Rurbain Ou La Topique De La Norme Et De La Marge Dans Le Patrimoine Musical Arabe*, Paris: Harmattan, 1995. They all provide enough of a portraiture and analysis to make the nuances of the emerging cultural formations sensible.

19. Weber, Max (1969 ed) *The Rational Foundations of Western Music* (The Southern Illinois University Press)
20. Ibid. ps. 101-2.
21. Ibid p.88
22. Adorno, Theodor Wisengrund (2001) *Aesthetic Theory*, (University of Minnesota Press), p.342
23. Andrew Sherratt's website is unfortunately an unfinished project. ([www.archatlas.dept.shef.ac.uk](http://www.archatlas.dept.shef.ac.uk)- See Themes-Lond Distance Urban Supply Routes). His contribution to archaeology and world history has been enormous- for a brief obituary/overview see Alexander A. Bauer, (2011) Life is Too Short for Faint-Heartedness, The Archaeology of Andrew Sherratt, *Journal of World Prehistory*, No. 24. What is missing and he was aware of that are the routes from Polynesia, Madagascar, Mapungubwe, Zanzibar and their links to the routes he was tracing. Also if one adds the historical work of Jan Vansina for the West Coast of Middle to Southern Africa a southern world of material and symbolic exchanges becomes possible from 700-1100.
24. Ferdowsi, Abolqasem (2007-tr. David Dicks) *The Shahnameh: the Persian Book of Kings*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p.816.
25. Ibid. p. 825
26. In a work like this we have to take a stand on a serious historical ambiguity: who were these imported musicians? Almost every historical publication about the Roma cites the fact that 10 000 *Luri* (musicians) were gifted to the Sassanids to entertain their working people with music. It would make a great difference to our narrative, if this first migration could not be linked to the Roma. Such an early migration would have the 'Roma' or 'Gitano' as important carriers of the melodic family that we are interested in and whose movements connect India, Persia, Central Asia, Central Europe and Spain in ways that make it possible to identify musical connections. Further, the Roma perhaps became carriers of the musical and dancing traditions of the *jawariyas*, or *joglaessas*, or other categories of 'lower class' female slave performers in Andalusia. In another version though, between 800 and 900 AD, a large number of people believed to be *Chandalas* were shown to have migrated and so on. We will leave the decision between these two dates that involve 300 years distance between them until we are sure after rigorous research in which way these always-to-be-made subalterns become central to the transmission of forms beyond boundaries. Suffice is to say that if their story starts from the Sassanid years, their migrations would carry a different set of musical traditions.
27. For some broad brush-strokes see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, Anne Walthall and James B. Palais (2006) *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin



28. Hsing-lang, Chang,(1930), “The Importation of Negro Slaves to China Under the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-901), Catholic University of Peking, *Bulletin* no.7, p 37-59
29. For example, Hormoz Farhat’s (1990) *The Dastgah Concept in Persian Music*, Cambridge University Press, but also the prior works of Ella Zonis (1979), op cit. and the subsequent work like Bruno Nettl’s (1992) op. cit work on classical Persian music.
30. See Nizami Ganjavi, Jamal al-Din Abu-Muhammad Ilyas, (12<sup>th</sup> Century) *Husrav and Sirin* in Persian Literature in Translation, Website of the Packard Humanities Institute.
31. See Wilhelm Baum’s ,(2004). *Shirin: Christian, queen, myth of love, a woman of late antiquity, historical reality and literary effect*. (Gorgias Press)
32. Cosmas Indicopleustis’s 7<sup>th</sup> Century *Christian Topography* is available on Line through multiple E- sites
33. Ferdowsi, op.cit. p. 831
34. Pius Malekandathil, (2010) *Maritime India- Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean*, (New Delhi, Primus Books)
35. Ibid.
36. Leela Omcherry (2000) *Studies in Indian Music and Allied Arts* (Delhi: Sandeep Prakashan). The quote is from all official sites of Kerala be they historical or tourism-linked.
37. Ramanathan, S. (1979), *Music in Chilappathikaram*, (Madurai: Madurai Kamaraj University) and Lewis Rowell, (2000) in his “Scale and Mode in the Music of the Early Tamils of South India” *Theory Spectrum*, Vol.22 no.2
38. Rowell, op cit, ps 135-6
39. Ibid p.141 and p. 154
40. Ibid. 141
41. Ibid 141
42. Ibid 152
43. Ibid p. 142
44. Dimitri Sawa, op.cit p. 3
45. Ibid, p.7
46. See Mathew F. Caswell’s *The Slave Girls of Baghdad: The Qiyān in the Early Abbasid Era*,op cit.
47. Sawa, op cit. See his Introduction, p.i ff
48. Ibid. p. 14
49. Ibid. 79
50. Ibn Khaldun, (2004-trans Rosenthal) *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*(Princeton University Press), p. 101-2
51. Sawa, op cit. pgs, 1-2
52. Ibid p. 35ff; also, Randel (1976) op.cit.
53. Ibid, p.39
54. Ibid p.72ff
55. Ibid. pgs.78-83
56. Ibid. p. 24
57. Ibid, p.111
58. Ibid, p.170

59. Ibid. p.192
60. Ibid. p. 206
61. See Ali Jihad Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge U. Press, 2003.
62. Ibn Khaldun , op cit, 137
63. Ibid. p. 372
64. Ibid, p. 138-9
65. Ibid, p. 139
66. Richard, Hall, (1998) *Empires of the Monsoon: A History of the Indian Ocean and Its Invaders* (London: Harper Collins)
67. Carl Davila, (2009), "Fixing a Misbegotten Biography: Ziryab in the Mediterranean World, in *Al-Masaq-Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* (21:2),p. 130
68. Ibid, p. 128
69. Ibid, p. 132
70. Ibid, p. 128
71. The Romance is also available freely on E-resources. For a commentary, see Diana Richmond (1978) *Antar and Alba: a Bedouin Romance*, London: Quartet Books.
72. Jordi Savall, (2009), *Jerusalem* (Alia Vox)
73. Davilla, op cit, p.122
74. Ibid, p.123
75. Ibid, p. 124
76. Ibid, p. .133
77. Ibid. p. 134
78. See Maria, J. Vigueira, (1992), "Asluhu Li'l-Ma'ali-on the social status of Andalusí Women". In Jayyusi, Salma Khadra (1992 ed) *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, (Leiden, New York, Koln: Brill Publishers), p. 708
79. Owen Wright, (1992) op cit. p. 559
80. See Chejne, (1974) op cit. p. 373-4 ; also, Jenkins and Olsen, (1976), op cit.
81. Schuyler, Philip D. "Moroccan Andalusian Music." *World of Music* 20.1 (1978): 33-44.
82. Madhu Trivedi,(2012) *The Emergence of the Hindustani Tradition*, (New Delhi: 3 Essays Collective)
83. See, Nazir Jairazbhoy, (1971) *The Rags of North Indian Music: Their Structure and Evolution* ( London: Faber and Faber)
84. There was no time or space to integrate the fascinating take on what pre-existed our starting point with Khusrow and Shirin. For a more popular summary of the enormity of what we are eliding here see Richard Eaton, (2013), *Revisiting the Persian Cosmopolis*, *Asia Times*, July, 19<sup>th</sup>.
85. Sarngadeva (12<sup>th</sup> Century) *Sangita ratnakara*, Available Online at Archive.Org
86. Trivedi, op cit. It has to be emphasised that slavery in South East Asia was both varied and different from its Trans-Atlantic counterpart. See Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Eaton,(eds),(2006) *Slavery and South Asian History*.Indiana University Press. Although the time-frame of this volume is mostly about the period after the 1500s, its main point seems sensible.
87. Trivedi, op cit.
88. Savall, op cit.

