A Sense of Tradition in Eastern Musical Cultures

Four Lectures on Tradition and Aesthetics in Islamic Culture Through the Bias of Music

Jean During

A Nemo-Online Special Edition

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The Foundations of Islamic Aesthetics

Introduction

These four lectures will question tradition as foundation basis in Islamic cultures, and more specifically, with art and music.

Firstly, what would be the point in questioning Islamic culture traditions rather than questioning others? To start with, 84% of Muslims are of Sunni confession and define themselves as *ahl as-sunna,* meaning 'people of tradition'. Here, the term 'tradition' refers to social customs and ritual prescriptions instaured by the Prophet.

It has great implications, though not as much at a dogmatic level than it has, especially for some emotional states. This is the reason why I shall be speaking more about what makes traditionality than about its contents.

Secondly, for about two centuries, the frame of mind, which I call 'traditionality', has been confronted to what we call modernity - more and more aggressively. Thus, modernity could be defined as the abandonment of tradition, or the emancipation from tradition, or even its precise opposite.

Thirdly, the world of tradition has become so alienated to the Modern West that what makes its strength and its essence is mostly forgotten. In the West, tradition survives residually. In the provinces, it survives within folk-lore, family customs, etc. It has ceased to be a world horizon as it has thinned into customs. It has been emptied of its significance and became transmitted through habits. Philosophers have described modernity as the loss of 'world order', or the 'withdrawal of Being', the 'disenchantment of the World', Max Weber's 'loss of the divine', and typified by Nietzsche as 'the end of the Divine'. Thus, our interest in Tradition is part of the existential framework questioning where modern societies stand. This is most urgent as we are being told of 'post-modernity' or of 'post-history'. It is now time to understand if this notion implies the return to a kind of Tradition or to its reconstruction.

You will understand, therefore, why it might be useful to understand structures, mechanisms, and dynamics of a traditional culture, such as Islam. But why, might you ask, should one look at this question by the bias of a study of art, and more specifically, through music? The answer may be addressed at different levels.

Firstly, when speaking of Tradition, each of its element is linked to the whole. A musical master used to say that 'if you have understood one of the many traditional arts or

sciences - taking many years - you would also have understood the others.' This might be an explanation often given by Eastern polymath artists, who may be both poets, musicians, and calligraphers - rarely seen in the West. From this principle, whatever the culture considered, the understanding of a deep and live tradition is a criterion, and a key giving access to all others.

Secondly, Eastern music, if such an expression carries any meaning whatsoever, is an art which is transmitted orally, *par excellence,* and as such, it is in agreement with the fundamental meaning of Tradition understood as *traditio*, or a transmission flowing from one to another, or from master to disciple. Furthermore, at a higher level, the practical and aesthetic aspects of Tradition as well as the strength of its impact, gives it qualities of initiatic learning of a quasi-esoteric knowledge. All of these specificities may explain that, within music, the term 'Tradition' takes an eminent meaning which is only accessed by its association of the sacred with the myth.

Thirdly, in many cultures, Music is the bastion of Tradition taken as allegiance to custom, to social connections, or it is understood as a symbol of cultural and identity permanence. Is there anything more anachronistic, for an American, than to sit still in a concert hall and listen, not even dancing, to melodies created in Salzburg or Venice some two or three hundred years ago and which have been preserved and interpreted with a delirious concern for faithfulness, if not authenticity? Music has a deep and strong symbolic bond the aim of which being the maintaining in relation to our past and with our past, to our original communities. As a language of affect, it is also, more than with other domains of culture, the field of scandal and of controversy between Ancients and Moderns.

Fourthly, in the Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Indian and Central Asian Islamic cultures, music has a specific place among other arts. Firstly, compared to poetry or plastic arts, it is the place where tradition is both conservative and dynamic. It has also been the field of theoretical speculation, both scientific and mystical. It has gone far deeper to what is connected with other classical arts, or even to poetry. What is even more fascinating, from our perspective, is that some musical genres appear to enter *in conflict* with Islamic dogma and Law.

Its performance is sometimes considered as rivalry or impiety and is thus relegated at the confines of society, yet at the same time it is valued by scientists and Sufis who are considered as dangerous innovators, by literalists. As for fundamentalists and certain clerics, music, at large, represents chaotic forces of desire as opposed to religious law and morality. It is subversive and constitutes a menace to tradition and social order. Yet at the same time, it refers to a cosmic order having ethical purposes.

Beyond music itself, what is even more important, as far as I am concerned, is *aesthetics*, since it is a field where controversy between Tradition and Modernity, privilegedly, appears to take place.

This is what I would like to address in this first lecture.

A well-known French intellectual, Luc Ferry, wrote that Modernity could be defined as a large movement towards the subjectification of the world:

> 'The history of aesthetics is the emblematic place where the subjectification of the world or the withdrawing of the world characterizes contemporary culture. This is the consequence of a lengthy process' (:33).

Western art has ceased to be the utter reflection of the world in its objectivity or in its intrinsic *truth* and has become something such as *an extension of the self*. This shift can be described as the move from the concept of *beauty* to the concept of *taste*. A genuine aesthetic of taste (as was expounded by French, Italian and German intellectuals around the middle of the seventeenth century) could not have been expressed without setting aside the tradition of metaphysics. Taste is both personal and consensual, but it is not universal. Under these conditions, Beauty is no longer defined as a corollary of Truth, as it used to be in the metaphysical or in the mathematical orders of the world, but it is connected to subjectivity. Beauty is defined as the pleasure and sensations it gives us. The microcosm of the work of art has been replaced by the autonomous and singular world of individuality. Given this lack of an objective surrounding world, which would at the same time supersede us, and call us together, the question arises of the possible constitution of another 'space of communication' between humans. The obvious signs of this withdrawal of tradition from the *beaux-arts* are the breeding place of *individuality*, its climax, in the principle of innovation, and the requirement of originality, which define a specific type of historicity. This modernity which can be traced back in the arts from the beginning of romanticism, is nothing but one of the many steps in a very ancient process. Modernity has undergone many changes. Firstly, there was the philosophical and epistemological stage with Descartes and methodological scepticism. Then came the political stage of the Enlightenment, then the ideological and aesthetic stage or romanticism, and eventually the sociological and conquering stage, or the twentieth century, and coming to our times, perhaps a 'post-post-modernism'.

In the West, in its more radical meaning, modernity implies the primacy *of the subject and the vindication of the sensible world*. I shall remain with this definition, being conscious

that other civilizations, Islam, in particular, have known other types of relationships with the world and other forms of questioning than those epitomised in ancient and Mediaeval thought and art, in classicism, the baroque, modernity, and lastly, with post-modernity. One must tear down the myth of a static or ecstatic Orient, that is, from the time we call Middle-Ages up to the Modern era, the Orient has taken a very coherent and structured view of the world which is crumbling down as a consequence of its meeting with the modern West. A brief glance at the history of Islamic cultures makes it clear that Islamic thought and arts have not always been at the rear guard of this process of modernisation and that on the contrary, they have made their own ways to what we have come to call modernity, or perhaps to their *own* specific modernity. And if this is really the case, a certain number of questions will keep going in these lectures: what is the specificity of our modernity, that is, the modernity of Westerners? Or to put it in other words, *is modernity modern?*

Remarks Concerning the Prejudice about the Immobility of Cultures in the Islamic World

To set the background properly and to dismiss a certain number of common misconceptions, I would like to remind that the history of Islamic thought, from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries, could be described, just as is the history of European thought, as a constant attempt at emancipating the subject from the order of the world. This cosmic order itself did not settle once and for all by Tradition, but had constantly been reorganised or modified. Now, this is nothing but questioning the tradition received from the Ancients, in the sense that at the first stage, Tradition does not allow for individuals to become autonomous, and quoting Heidegger, 'it does not allow the individual to question himself [1].'

The few examples of elements called into question, given here, are but reference points, similar to those belonging to the historical narration of Western culture, with figures such as Descartes, Galileo, the Enlightenment, Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Einstein or others, who, somehow, modified the representation of the world.

We might draw a parallel between the metaphysical revolution devised by Mollā Sadrā Shirāzī (died 1641) and his contemporary, Descartes' *tabula rasa*, which was a great landmark on the way to modernity and the advent of the *subject* as the basis of transcendence. With similar audacity, Mollā Sadrā reversed his own teacher's doctrine as the consequence of an intellectual vision where the priority of existence over essence, appeared to him. This does not mean that this is a kind of Sartrian existentialism; rather it

is something like a fabulous impulse of existence, which places the historical process, not as much in terms of evolution but rather in terms of ascension. Of course, the meta-physical order is eventually kept safe, but by the instrument of this reversal of values, we have a metaphysic cleared of *determinism by essence.* Essence itself, as a matter of fact, is subjected to a process of intensification as a function of the 'act of being', the act of existing. Essences are animated by a trans-substantial movement which runs through the whole scale of creation. Man holds an intermediary place and is considered as the last stage of a series of successive transmutations, and at the same time, as the possible origin of new transmutations, the conditions of which being that he assumes the responsibility of his trans-substantial potentiality. This dynamic vision deeply modified the mould of thought of Iranians; it has found some kind of echo, not only in the very narrow circle of philosophers, but among Sufis too, and it must be stressed that the Sufi impact on popular culture was very significant.

From the point of view of a certain orthodoxy, there is another fundamental subversion which needs pointing out. It has been the achievement of the Sufis since earliest times. Within their system, cosmos, or divinity, does not obliterate the subject. To the contrary, it is within the Perfect Human that the cosmos, or at least the world order, is interiorised and secretly submitted to his will. Man can be the pole or the axes of the world, and this is to be understood in its most radical implications when divinity itself appears in the theophanic figure of the Perfect Human. For us, natural beauty in its highest degree, is man himself. It is therefore within this beauty that the divine unveils itself. Sublimed and subliming Beauty, irradiation of virtues and perfections, light of the intellect, effusion of Love, harmony of numbers and letters, such is the icon of the Perfect Human, the Imām, the celestial Anthropos, the theophanic mirror (Bürgel: 17). Beauty and Truth join in him. He is the 'Subject of Truth' in Christian Jambet's words. This perfection is certainly an ideal but the path which leads to it is most clearly defined. It is at the end of a long process of purification that the saint frees himself from existential stumbling blocks and is able to say 'I am the Truth' *ana l'haqq*, as did Mansūr al-Hallāj in the tenth century, even if the tenets of Islamic Law crucified him for heresy. As centuries passed by, a great number of such people have been condemned, particularly in the Middle East.

We must also refer to the Shi'i imamology which has generated extreme forms of heresies among which the most famous, but certainly not the best understood, is the reformed Ismailism of Alamut. Hasan as-Sabah (died in 1125), heralded the 'resurrection', that is the end of history and the abolition of religious Law. Law and History would soon be 'rebooted' through the brutal intervention of Mongolian armies. But soon after, among

the Turks in particular, the so-called 'antinomian' dervishes appeared, and who were more or less 'out-Laws' (*bi shar'*), and therefore often persecuted in the name of Islamic Law. In a less scandalous, if not less heretical manner, we have also Omar Khayyām (died in 1131), and the poetic trend which produced a great deal of verses attributed to him. He redefined the limits of what we call the world and the very limits of knowledge, itself, drawing a pattern of a purely immanent philosophical surface alien to Islamic tradition. Khayyām's quatrains have become famous precisely at the end of the nineteenth century, thanks to Edward Fitzgerald's brilliant adaptation of 1859. Although pertaining to an ancient genre, English readers found them very modern. This clearly shows how an Ancient can be a Modern. It is of no surprise that Khayyām was a modern, because his main occupation was science.

Examples of this type are numerous in Middle Eastern history. We should take them in consideration when attempting at measuring the place of the individual within the sphere of tradition. In other cases, which have been hitherto referred, there has been some sort of tension or even of break-up of tradition which has often led to scandal, anathema and repression. Obviously, we cannot take the view that this is some kind of a deep epistemic shift or break-up, similar to what the West had been undergoing. And what is more, we should not confuse, in a Marxist line, uprisings and subversion with political revolution or individual movements of protest. Of course, in certain cases, there were social consequences or some rather marginal trends often rejected or discarded by the socio-religious Islamic Law. Yet in fact, it is always another view 'of the world-order', another metaphysic, that is put forward, without noticeable repercussions on the social or political order.

Thus, the subversive tonality of Hāfez's famous lines has no echo outside the ideal and aesthetic spheres where they were recited. 'Come let's pick up the rose and fill the cups with wine, let's split the vault of the firmament and let's draw up new plans[2].'

Besides, these tensions have been rather localised and scattered. These local or individual occurrences, do not fit in with the definition of modernity as social issue. If the changes are different, it is because the premises too, differ.

a) If it is true that philosophy is not the privilege of Greek and Western geniuses, we must agree that it has evolved in a manner proper to Islam. According to H. Corbin, more than a reflexive philosophy, it is a sort of theosophia, a sort of intermediary way 'between the somewhat abstract spiritualism of the philosopher and the narrow literalism of theologians' (1964: 259). Thus, such a philosophical reflection could not bring about a radical subversion but it operated with subtlety on mentalities.

b) The other point which we must emphasize is that if we look at aesthetics as the privileged ground of modernity, we must admit that with regards the sphere of art, and despite Islam's knowledge of Plato and Plotinus, Islam has not explicitly elaborated the issue of Beauty and taste as such, as takes aesthetics in the Western tradition, with Hume, Kant, Rousseau, Baumgartner, Lacépède, or Hegel.

Given this lack of elaborated aesthetics we will have to sketch a theory of beauty by drawing on philosophy, customs and cultural data. At this stage, we should be in a position to define the great pattern of the traditional view of the world. Once this task is done, we will be in a position to grasp, more thoroughly, the steps towards modernization.

The Status of the Sensible World and Beauty in Islamic Aesthetics

We shall first consider the truly specific status of the sensible world and beauty in a Western culture which, like in the Orient, recognises its debt to Plato.

Classical philosophy, starting with Plato, devalues the sensible world. Beauty is viewed as the sensible form of the Idea, that is the sensible, inferior presentation of the Truth. Art bears the scars of human limitations; it is deprived of concept despite it has a propaedeutic function, it is located below the intelligible world. To quote Leibniz, for man, the sensible world is nothing but some sort of 'confused intelligibility'. In Hegel's philosophy, aesthetics is always the inferior expression of concept in the field of sensibility; this despite the historicity of art being admitted as such. It is Kant's philosophy which would provide the appropriate bases for a radical autonomy of the phenomenal, the autonomy of the sensible from the Intelligible, and this, from the point of view of the limited individual. Reversing the traditional direction, it is from a data of sense that Kant tries to explore the metaphysical order. The criterion of beauty is no longer the transcendent harmony of the world. In contrast to classical philosophers, Moderns, such as Montesquieu define Beauty as what is agreeable, without further questioning the ability of the public to judge it. Eventually, Nietzsche by-passed the opposition between the sensible world and something similar to the Intelligible world, the corollary of this opposition being the opposition between the model and its copy. Nietzsche, on the contrary, described the work of art as *its own model*. Therefore, he is the one who vindicated the simulacrum stigmatised by Plato. The world of Truth is split into an infinity of singular perspectives. The world of transcendence gives way to the impetuous flux of life, and through this fissure, modernity flows. This modernity is contemporary with the opening of the broad sphere of aesthetics which comes after sciences.

> 'The historical sciences and natural sciences were needed to fight against the spirit of the Middle Ages; that is, knowledge against belief. We now direct art against knowledge [that is, scientific knowledge]. Come back to life, master the instinct of knowledge, reinforce moral and aesthetic instinct!' (: 59). Thus spoke Nietzsche.

It is unlikely that one could point out such a clear-cut evolution in the Islamic space, where a multiplicity of cultures existed at the same time. So much so that we might say that pluralism was a typical feature of this civilization. In the face of such a cultural and intellectual heterogeneity, it might seem somewhat problematic to put dominant features into relief, and more specifically features which we might say have been playing an instrumental role in art. According to which criterion will we be in a position to decide what is significant and what is not in our perspective? We will have to justify our choices in the course of this lecture, but before this, it may be worthwhile to define the common background of the culture which is here discussed. We will have to define what constitutes its Islamicity.

Islamic Law

What makes Islamicity, is religious Law and its observance. A brief glance at Islamic culture makes it clear that at the foreground, we have the existence of law and regulations to which thought, behaviour, and cultural products have to conform. Law, more often, the interpretations of the law provided by mullā-s, determine behaviour, and to a certain degree, human production. God manifests both Might and Beauty. The World is beautiful and good, but because of its beauty, it might be considered a deception, diverting man from the genuine beauty and the supreme Good. In particular, art has a certain ascendancy, a sort of magical power, which constitutes some menace to religious power.

> 'If not interpreted in this [spiritual] sense, beauty may appear suspect, its fascination dangerous, or even devilish. Instead of being looked at as a reflection of the divine, it will then easily turn into a satanic delusion, a Lucifer-like mask.' (Bürgel: 7)

If the Islamic clergy has controlled artistic expression, it is in order to protect their world from the *one-dimensional reduction* of disbelief. It is a means by which containing any temptation in competition with God, or paradise. For an objective scrutinization of the

specific implications of Islamic Law with regards to traditional art, we must discard a few negative prejudices through the following arguments: rather than being understood, as constraints, religious procedures and laws must be understood as a kind of ecological precaution aimed at laying down limits. For example, there are limits to figuration, that is, artistic representation should not be realistic but must be stylised; or there are limits to sensuality in music and dance and other arts.

a) In establishing limits, law (*shar'*) must be understood not as a constraint, but as a definition, as the measure of everything. The goal of such a law is of course balance.

b) The existence of limits is the condition of artistic creation. The difference is that when it becomes autonomous, art tends to lay down its own limits and these limits are redefined in each singular work of art. As the French poet Paul Valery wrote: 'Art is born with constraints, lives through struggle, and dies from freedom.'

c) The limit is more or less defined by the consensus of the community of believers among whom are also the artists. Thus, they are not to be considered just as victims of the Law.

d) Besides, religious regulation concerning art should not be understood as arbitrary constraints or puritanism but rather as the emanation of a coherent thought, of a vision of the world which puts emphasis on harmony and beauty.

e) The Islamic norms are far from being fixed and immutable, at least in societies with a very high cultural standard. Let us point out that the *ijtihād,* or the effort of interpretation of the Law, is required by Islamic dogmas which we tend to forget too often. This effort of interpretation was one of the major elements in the renewal and the evolution of the cultures which continued to apply this intellectual principle as in Iran. Indeed, the Law can be reinterpreted and fitted to the requirements of the moment. Examples are numerous and they can apply to the status of figurative arts, or the status of music which was often put into question. A recent example is the official position of the Iranian government towards music, which changes and softens year after year. As for the direct effects on art, the following points regarding Iranian culture, should be noted:

- Fifteen years after the Iranian revolution, many musicians and cultured people agreed on enhancing the positive aspect of Islamic constraints on music. They held the view that these constraints were a very good incentive for artists to concentrate their creative effort and 'to go to the core of things', as master Farhangfar said.

- Another implication has been that the traditional artist tends to stand behind his work, rather than in front of it, as is common in Modernity. He does not sign it, he does

not express himself in a work of art, and cannot be individualised. Majid Kiāni[3], a defender of ancient Persian music, said:

> 'You have to adapt your feelings to tradition and not to use your tradition for personal expression. Of course, my feelings, my individual thoughts are here, my personality does not disappear, I do not have to erase myself, but when I am playing I try to maintain a kind of balance between my feelings.' Quote from Hāfez: 'my pain is shared by everyone.'

Another consequence of the impact of law on art is that regulations tend to promote conceptual aesthetics. The three great arts are made up of typical patterns or clichés such as pictorial types, melodic types (*āvāz, gushe*), symbols and images from poetry. The artist sets aside the sensible appearances of nature, leaves aside his personal history and the sensible occurrences of his individuality in order to express archetypes, concepts and universal types. The Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk in his *My name is Red* states that ancient miniaturists had adopted a 'God's head point of view' and depicted the world from above.

In any case, Law is only one aspect of Islamic culture. If religious thought is indeed obviously normative, it is not always imperative. The history of Islamic art is also of transgression and subversion. The authoritarian religious system - which is that of the Muslim mass - could not satisfy intellectuals and intuitive artists. They had developed their own systems without opposing their new system to the primary one, but always trying to complement it. This system, I call gnosis, *ma'rifa*.

Gnosis and the Double Structure of the Sensible World

The doctors of Islamic law divided the world between the 'below' and the 'above' and humanity between believers and nonbelievers. Their respective destinations were paradise and hell. In this way, what Western thought has remembered of tradition, is the image of a world with *two dimensions*: one physical, the other metaphysical. Now, in this system, communication between the two worlds is impossible, for the reason that one is the realm of life and the other, the realm of after-life, the beyond. To accept the other dimension is an act of faith, of imitation, of conformity to custom without understanding. It is true that the dilution of faith, the levelling of the world and the end of hermeneutics, heralds the 'loss of the world' and the loss of Tradition. But this does not mean that acceptance (literally, *islām*) should imply belonging to Tradition because, as I will show, and contrary to very broadly shared prejudices, Muslim sages reject the definition of tradition as simple

imitation or conformism, and to the contrary, provide the opposite definition. What is more important, in the system of the 'sages', you cannot have tradition without a symbolic dimension and without an intellectual or imaginal effort of hermeneutics. And hermeneutics implies a multiplicity of levels of existence and knowledge.

Thus, Sufis and Gnostics have developed a much more complex thought which is multidimensional. Their universe is not double-structured, with the opposition of the sensible and supra-sensible worlds, but it has at least, three levels, three dimensions, or even more. Their view of the world revolves upon the famous opposition of *zāhir* and *bātin*, that is the apparent and the hidden (the veiled), the opposition of the interiority of things and their exteriority. But this is not at all to be understood in a common manner, as the opposition between, say, the sensible and the spiritual world. *Zāhir* and *bātin* go beyond this simplified dualism which opposes face to face the lower and the invisible worlds. Actually, *zāhir* and *bātin* are both aspects of the world and there is a kind of mixing up or rather, articulation of both levels, inasmuch as this pair duplicates itself: there is the *zāhir* of the *zāhir*, the *zāhir* of the *bātin*, the *bātin* of the *zāhir*, and the *bātin* of the *bātin*. God is at the same time the *zāhir* and the *bātin*, the apparent and the hidden, the unveiled and the veiled.

Besides, *zāhir* can also refer to the material world, in the sense of the visible aspect of the concrete or sensible world, and *bātin* can refer to the invisible aspect of the concrete or sensible world. Nevertheless, we will more readily talk of the sensible world as opposed to a subtle world. Because what is at stake here is not so much the opposition between sensible forms and the intelligible, an opposition expressed by the concepts of *sūra* versus *ma'nā*. Instead, of a simple radical opposition between high and low, the system of gnosis is characterised by a hierarchy of realities, a hierarchy in which levels tend to be articulated very subtly on each other, thus opening some kind of paths, from one level to another. Their world is more complex and subtle than in the very simplified and limited vision of the sensible and the visible. and what is really important here is that this hierarchic multiplicity of senses, of meanings, provides an adequate basis for the true existence of something such as the symbolic function. For the plurality of hierarchic levels, is the condition of any symbolic thought, and of any attempt at a hermeneutics, and as we said it before, there is no tradition without it.

In place of a simple and rather blunt opposition, we have a sort of interpenetration, a very subtle articulation or, if you prefer, a metaphysical interface between low and high worlds, and this contact is referred as the imaginal world *'ālam al-mithāl, barzakh.* In this

tri- or multi-dimensional world of the Gnostics, and also of the artists, the essential feature is the *intermediary world*.

We shall now expand on this key notion of Islamic aesthetics.

The imaginal world

Should we simplify things, somehow, we could settle the problem as follows: if art is something other than the simple arrangement of pleasant forms, if it is anything more than convention or social code, or a matter of taste, it must bear the marks of objectivity, of truth. But as we have said, in classical aesthetics, the essence of art is beauty and not truth. As a consequence, we have the following choice: On the one hand, we might say that art is the alliance of truth and form, and then beauty is nothing but a descent of truth into matter. On the other hand, we might say that form is miraculously saved because of absolute beauty, supreme harmony is reflected in form. In any case, there is a gap which is quite difficult to cross between the two terms of this double choice, but the risk is to deny any form of proper transcendence to art, in order to preserve something such as a metaphysic of pure essences. There is, of course, a solution which consists in articulating both levels, but the problem is that no one will ever manage to explain how this articulation takes place. You might tend to belittle art, or err in abstract thoughts about beauty itself, or else you might tend to be satisfied with rough symbolic interpretations. To sum up, the question is the following: how can one establish the articulation between the transcendence of the idea and its immanence in a work of art? The problem is that classical Western metaphysics do not refer to anything beyond the sensible world other than the world of Archetypes, of Essences, of Numbers of Platonic pure Ideas. (And in any case, all sensible determination, that is all formal determination is approached as intellectual illumination.) The West has a philosophy of beauty, but the lack of an appropriate metaphysic of form, tends to provide a specific bias to its reflection upon art, or to weaken it. Now, this metaphysic of form can be found in a very complex manner within the Iranian philosophical tradition:

> 'Because the power of governing the body was given to Spirits, and because, due to the heterogeneity of essences, it is impossible for a direct connection to be established between spirits and bodies, God created the world of archetypal Images as an intermediary, (*barzakh*) linking the world of the bodies to the world of the Spirits.' (M. F. Kāshāni, in Corbin, 1979:205).

The mystical intermediary world is the topos of artistic activity *par excellence,* defined as harmony of the sensory and the intelligible where archetypal Ideas are reflected in forms provided with extension and space but deprived of material substance. This domain lends itself to visionary perception, which is the organ of the active or creative imagination (not to be confused with the speculative or conjectural imagination which is only a form of the sleeping spirit). For this reason, it has been designated as the *imaginal* world, in order to differentiate it clearly from the imaginary.

> 'Everything which resides in the world of Matter - bodies, forms, dimensions, distances, proportions, figures, movements, flavours, odours, sounds, etc., - of all those elements, the archetypal image is found in that intermediary world, existing here, by itself, remaining in suspense, without immanating on a material substance or substrata' (Corbin, *in* Ashtiyāni, 1972:25).

In this dimension, where bodies spiritualise themselves and where spirits take form (Kāshāni) are found all the sublime or terrifying forms structured at hierarchic levels, the highest not being accessible to anything but to the organ of spiritual imagination or inspiration. This dimension, because of ontological affinities, is chiefly that of Art. As Hegel clearly said, the specificity of Art must be located in a kind of intermediary place, which is not without analogy with *barzakh*, as it was defined by Persian Platonists.

> 'With art, the spirit seeks neither concrete materiality, inferior consistency nor the whole extension of an organic object the desires of which demanding, nor purely ideal universal concepts; *rather*, what it wishes is, the sensory presence which should remain sensory but which should rid itself from the scaffolding of its materiality. It is for this reason that the sensory is raised in art to a sense of the work of art and thus holds its intermediary place between the immediately sensed and the purely thought.' (*Esthétique*, 1945 I:63).

In this universe, the place devoted to music is a privileged one compared to other arts: it is a pure dynamic form, a non-material vibration which is, nevertheless, a real one which is a kind of middle-way between matter and concept.

Certain sages such as Mollā Sadrā Shirāzī who died around 1635, went so far as to think that every object of perception in the world of the senses, is only an accident of the spiritual form of this object which exists in the soul. For intuitive people and artists, the gap between these two levels is not clear cut and tends to be blurred. Beauty, as it permeates

certain worldly forms also spiritualises them in the same process, or in other words, tends to extract them from their material shell. Although he does not abandon the world of appearances, the artist is able to perceive the harmony and the light it contains, and for this purpose it is not necessary to refer to another level of reality. The artist has nothing to do but contemplate the sensible sphere as it really exists, and this in order to perceive beings as purely visionary forms, that is, as a kind of epiphanic manifestation. It is in this perspective that we need to understand this prayer of the Prophet: 'My God, let me see things as they are.'

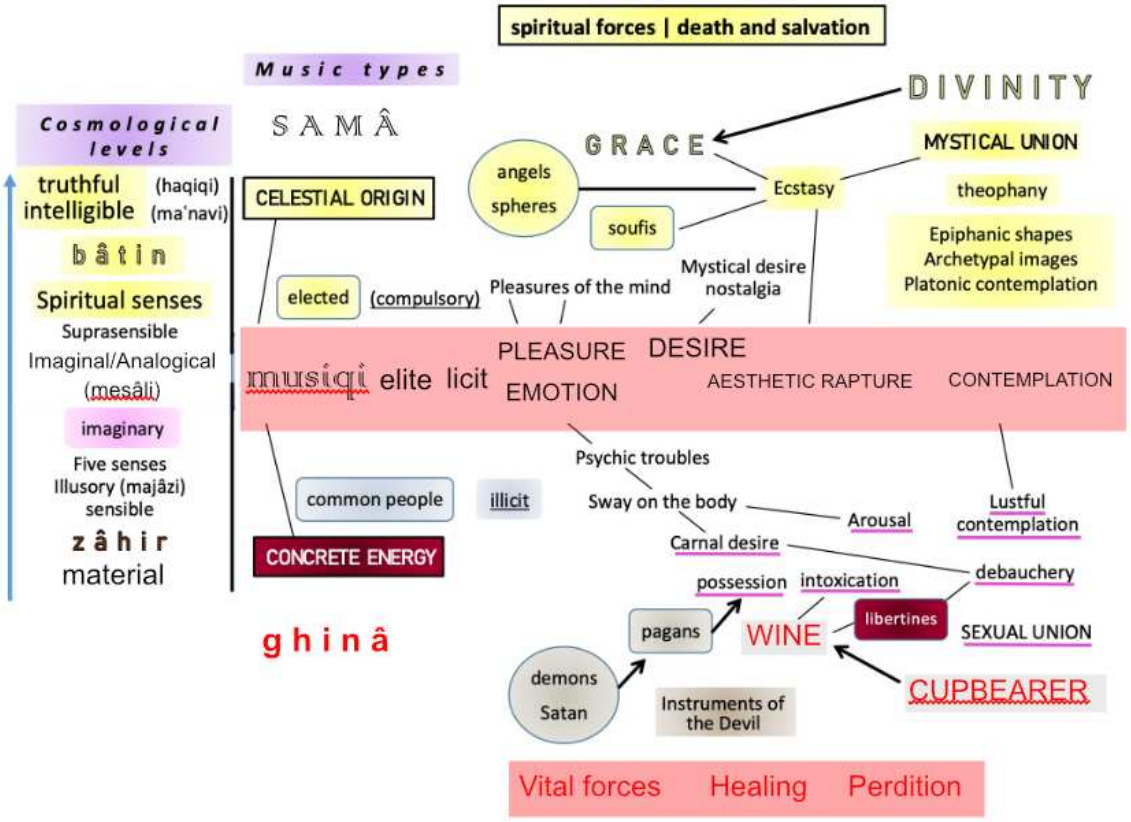

Fig. I. Place of music in the eyes of clerics, common folk, and mystics

The Aesthetic Experience

With regards the status of archetypal forms, Sohravardi (12th century) wrote remarkable lines where he told us about his own mystical audition and visions[4].

> 'Supra sensory realities perceived by the prophets, the initiated and others are still presented to them, at times as lines of handwriting, and at others as sounds of voices, sweet and gentle, or terrifying... Whatever is perceived in a dream: mountains, oceans and continents, wondrous voices, human figures, all these are so many faces and forms existing by themselves, without need of any substratum. It is the same with perfumes, colours and flavours. Mountains and oceans that are seen in a dream, whether it is a true or a false one, how can the brain, or one of its cavities, contain them, in a way that we may understand or explain this capacity?'

> 'Celestial spheres emit sounds that are in no way caused by anything that exists in our sublunary world. [...] Just as the colours of the stars are not conditioned by what conditions colours in our terrestrial world, the same applies with sounds emitted by celestial spheres. It is not possible to say that the sounds of overwhelming grandeur heard by visionary mystics are caused by the undulation of the air inside the brain; for such a powerful undulation, resulting from some disturbance in the brain, is something inconceivable. No, this is a matter of the archetypal image of the sound, and this autonomous form is itself a sound [...]. So, it is conceivable that in celestial spheres, there are sounds and melodies that are conditioned neither by the air nor by a vibratory disturbance, and one cannot imagine that melodies more delectable than theirs could exist.'

Let me now draw a parallel between these words and those of Edgar Allen Poe, the mystical and visionary writer, in his *Marginalia* (433):

> 'When music affects us to tears, seemingly causeless, we weep not from 'excess of pleasure'; but through excess of an impatient, petulant sorrow that as humble mortals, we are as yet in no condition to banquet upon those supernal ecstasies of which the music affords us merely a suggestive and indefinite glimpse.'

Sohravardi's texts are important in the sense that they clearly throw into relief that Islamic aesthetics is directly linked, on the one hand with visionary imagination (clear-audition and vision), and on the other hand with the perception of the world understood as an epiphanic space. Islamic aesthetics goes beyond the 'imaginal world' understood as an interface or articulation between ideas and forms, and in fact finds its climax in the aesthetics of manifestation. 'The world is the mirror of God. Beauty is never absent from this mirror. The Prophet is a mirror [...] the hearth is a mirror which through steady polishing becomes able to perceive God's light' (Bürgel: 138-9).

Creation is thus beautiful, and the human, as a creature is a perfect, achieved being. At the boundaries of the sensible world, perfect beauty is a light which emanates from the Perfect Man (*ibid*. 5, 16). Christianity and Hinduism are not the only religions acknowledging theophany as a human figure. Shi'i and Iranian thoughts are also at the origin of the very powerful figure of the Twelve Imāms of the seventh to the twelfth centuries, and then, of the Pole (*qutb*) or the Perfect saint of the Sufis. Shi'ism has also paved the way for the evolution of arts through the doctrines of Theophany. The divine is not only in numbers, in abstract beauty and geometrical form, it is also in the human being. It is true that the icon of man or woman is very rarely painted, but its description runs throughout the whole of poetry where the description of human beauty is something similar to a metaphysical code of attributes of the Perfect Man, or a code for various levels of divine irradiation.

Analogy, sympathy, correspondences, interface, appearance, hidden, invisible, are the underlying magic of art, to which we must add the illuminative function of art considered as an ecstatic experience.

The 'imaginal world' is indispensable for the direct connection between sensible and intelligible worlds. It must be approached with adequate organs of perception, with so-called 'subtle senses', such as the eyes and the ears of the soul. But there arises a major difficulty in the establishment of an autonomous aesthetic. The problem is with the connection between these super-senses which perceive the hidden aspect of things and the ordinary senses which only perceive the apparent. As a matter of fact, mystics who are familiar with art and in particular with music have prescribed a very interior type of perception. It is not the hearing of apparent sounds with which they are concerned, but rather with the perception of another level of reality. As Mowlānā Rumi, (13th century) said, in reference to the *samā*' 'you need the ears of the soul, not the ears of your body', or in another verse: 'we are not conscious of the flute and the drum'; or as 'Attār (died 1220), wrote, speaking of his verses: 'you have to listen to these words with your spirit and heart,

you must not listen with yourself of mud and water.' We are very close here to an attitude which dismisses art as such. Worldly beauty is only a pale reflection of the beauty which can be unveiled for the senses of the soul. This perspective brings us back to the old scheme of beauty as veiled Truth.

If there is such a radical gap between the senses of the body and of the soul, we cannot possibly see how there might be a connection between them, or how they flow from one to the other. A solution would be to admit that in the same manner as there are imbricated cosmological levels, the perceptive ones are organised in a kind of *continuum* by which our faculties would be susceptible to refinement. If art cannot be reduced to sensible delectation - which the Law disapproves - it does not constitute an aim in itself, because it is totally oriented towards sacred or moral purposes - as believed by philosophers and sages. As for the aesthetic experience, it bursts into mystical ecstasy, at least with music (*samā'*). The place devoted to pure aesthetic pleasure, or a pleasure devoid of any sensuality, but which has not yet transcended into the supersensible - this place has remained rather unimportant in Islamic thought. Nevertheless, it is striking that in relation to music, on the one hand as we have strict followers of the Law who condemn most musical forms as something satanic because of its sensuality, and on the other hand, we have mystics elevating music to the level of angels and celestial spheres, but understanding it in its ideal form accessible only to super-faculties or super-senses of the soul. Between these two extreme positions, we may place the proper field of aesthetics and art criticism as developed with Western thinkers. Now, this field has not been the object of similar speculative developments in Islamic culture. To sum up, there has been much discussion about music, whether in legal or in mystical terms, or even in scientific or technical terms; but we rarely have such discussions for aesthetic terms. There are still hints scattered throughout ancient writings, as well as a few exceptions such as al-Kātib's important work.

The concept of music can be translated in three different ways according to context[5]: *ghinā* is the trivial and sensual form of music, *samā* is its spiritual form which corresponds to the mystic concert, and finally *mūsīqī* which is music taken as science and art. These terms refer to three different levels two of which being opposite and one neutral. The same patterns may be found in opposite spheres in the same relationships, but with different polarities. It is at the neutral level that the intellectual and aesthetic approaches develops, as well as musical theory which is likely to reach a high level of complexity. Yet, with regards hearing and the practice of music, the neutral level has not had much importance in Islamic culture. It was considered as an elementary degree of the spiritual domain or a first step in the fall towards materiality. Coming to facts, the survival and independence of music as

secular art and science is often, more or less, in conflict with religious literalism or mystic sublimation. Apart from patronage and courtly protection, art music must either set aside its sensual aspect in order to become part of the domain of ritual, or it must find a sort of legitimacy within Sufi thought, or in the restricted milieu of the cultured, and music lovers. Of course, there were times and places where artistic and 'scientific' music had developed freely, but this was mainly due to the protection of people holding a high position in the social hierarchy.

Art, Laws and the World

As a conclusion, I shall attempt at building a synthesis of the main characteristics of the specific tradition of classical Persian music, considered in its traditionality. If we accept the spiritual unity in the production of a traditional culture, the conclusion we derive from music considered as an object of culture can also be *mutatis mutandis* for other products. Through music, the whole Islamic *Weltanschauung* is at stake. It is very likely that through its study we might seize the fundamental structure of every tradition.

Ancient treatises provide several elements required for a definition of traditional music, but it is likely that such authors were conscious of prescriptive and discriminatory aspects of their statements, or they might simply had described what they believed without ever thinking that someone might contest their assertions. At present, I find it more careful and interesting to approach the concept of traditionality by questioning contemporary masters who were, obviously, conscious that tradition is to be understood, nowadays, against the background of modernity and in opposition to what is not traditional[6] .

According to the Persian master Kiāni: 'For music to be considered as traditional and to be considered as going along the same line as ancient music, we must take into account five elements, five axes: timbre, intervals, melodic movement, ornamentation, and rhythm.' It is not these elements, in themselves, which are important, but it is rather *the manner in which they are related to the world.* There again, we must say that tradition is holistic, symbolic and synthetic. In this definition of music, there is a perfect model of traditional thought which is also relevant to other fields.

The Link to Nature and Territory

The tone of the voice and the tone of instruments are related to the primary fact that sound is released freely into the air and expands into space, therefore expressing the presence of life. *Havā*, literally 'air', has the same polysemy as it has in English as well as in French: it refers at the same time to a melodic tune (with certain cultures), a particular

disposition or mood, personal or general, and atmosphere, and climate. Thus, music cannot be considered apart from its natural surroundings and climate; even in its most civilised or sophisticated forms, music must not be opposed to Nature. Nature and culture are not in conflict with each other. Traditional culture implies not only artefacts but the whole environment and the relation between the individual and his surroundings.

> 'The sound of our instruments, Kiāni said, must be in harmony with our culture, with our national and moral characteristics. The instrument must reflect the Nature (*tabiyya*) of Iran. Above all, timbre must be in harmony with our cultural, social, natural and religious character, and this we call traditional, *sonnati*.'

Intervals and Pitches

A most important concern for all musicians is the accuracy of intervals between notes of scales. It is an aesthetic criterion, in the strictest sense of the word. It is a criterion linked with a quality, a sensation, and a particular *taste* which rests upon habit and is linked with habitat, or natural home, and thus to territory which is Nature endowed with the signs of those who live within. At almost all levels, the traditionality of a practice or artefact such as language, music, or poetry is in an intimate relationship with the notion of territory. This accounts for politics and nationalism which consider territory as a geo-politically bound framework and a basis for identity, but have misused the very notion of tradition[7]. Territory is also the marking of boundaries for a human group which - such as birds -, marks its space by means of melodies and specific rhythms. In this way we may say that tradition - whether musical or other - is always territorialized, or attached to the earth, to a land. This can be understood in the most trivial ethnic and political sense when, for example, we carefully and often arbitrarily, make a distinction between music of, for instance Iran and Azerbaijan, or Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. But this can also be understood in the sense of cultural reterritorialization (such as in the broad notion of Arabic music extending from Morocco to Iraq). It can also be understood in the sense of a *mystical de-territorialization* that would be followed by a re-territorialization at a supra-terrestrial level, as Sohravardi said: 'In the same way that when you see an elephant, you think of his mother land, India; when you hear music, you recall the place it comes from, that is, the other world[8].'

Affects

Considered in its elementary sense or its mystical or philosophical meaning, tradition always appears to be rooted in the ground, in the earth, in a particular land or territory - more or less symbolised - with which it bears strong relations, at different levels.

At a first level, a consensus must be established among a community; and at a higher level it is a matter of adherence to a higher entity in communion with an ideal. With regards music, the first stage or level is a consensus around *taste*: thus, we have Arabian taste, Indian taste, etc. The second level would be a communication with the supra-sensible world or the ecstatic experience of beauty, as it is more commonly expressed, in particular, with reference to musical experience: thus, we have the Arabic *tarab,* the blues, the Spanish *duende,* the *hāl* of the Persian mystic and music or poetry lovers. For the *hāl*, it is the interior mood or inspiration but for having its specific colour, there must be a specific elementary musical pattern which, - despite constant changes of form - are a guarantee of permanence in tradition. Aesthetics bear a circular relation to its elements. Without aesthetic affects, the performer cannot use these features appropriately: he must be in a state of *hāl* in order to reproduce properly. Conversely, these features are, in a sense, the conditions for this *hāl* or mood. If he plays something else, the effect will be different. Thus, the primary, elementary, fundamental units, such as rhythms, intervals and modal scales, are at the same time the atoms of an immanent and consensual order, and the immutable archetypes of a symbolic sphere or the *topos* of emotion and spiritual experience. It is this two-sided structure which accounts for its permanence. In particular, intervals, which are made of *Numbers* and proportions and are reminiscent of Ideas (in the Platonic sense), they are reminiscent of *Truth*. If you alter them, you alter the order of both worlds, and consequently you endanger culture, you strike people at the core of their sensibility, or so to speak, you steal their soul, their identity. This is what happened in the twentieth century under Western domination, especially in Africa (abolition of equi-pentatonic scales and their replacement with Western pentatonism), in Azerbaijan and Central Asia (elimination of neutral tones, micro-intervals and Zalzalian scales). (See During 2019 b)

Nature

Musical intervals have yet another function in the sphere of tradition. Majid Kiāni wrote:

> 'The meaning of traditional music (*sonnati*) is the collection of melodies played on Iranian earth, or melodies from every part of the country; they are melodies played with the blood of the natives, their emotions, their sentiments, with their work; they are melodies which bring people to a unison. That is what we call "traditional" *sonnati*, and what constitutes the main difference with Western music. And if you want to add anything else, then you will have to rest it upon this ground, that is scales, intervals, melodies which reflect this specific ethos and atmosphere (*hāl o havā*).'

This frame is strictly delimited - geographically speaking. Authenticity is generally dependent on *purity* (a questionable statement), as it excludes any Western, Arabic, Turkish, or Afghani borrowings.

> 'In the Orient... we have a very remarkable balance between man and nature. When you play a traditional melody (*gushe*) you have the feeling that it contains the whole of nature: that is, light, plants, space, colours. Our symbols are also derived from nature. When you speak of a nightingale, you do not imitate the song of this bird - this would not be appropriate - you only take it as a means of expressing your thought, and this is quite effectual.'

Indeed, Persian miniatures, carpets and poetry have this constant reference to natural forms. Apart from symbolic territory - the feeling of belonging to a specific ground or community - the points which are explicitly or implicitly put forward by the supporters of the musical tradition are *symbolic* thought and *ethical* concern.

Symbolism of Verticality

Symbolic thought, which is the condition for any traditional cultural production, relates forms to a code. For example, there are various descriptions of the face of the beloved which are very common in mystical poetry. They all allude to different levels of the divine manifestation. Our contemporary Persian musician (Kiāni) explains that ascending melodic movements suggest the elevation of the soul, or human transcendence. He finds a parallel in the fire that Zoroastrians used to worship as a symbol of purity and truth.

Conversely, the music which is viewed as non-traditional, music which is monotonous, tear-jerking, overemotional, uses descending micro-melodic movement.

As for ornamentation, which is perhaps the fundamental element of Eastern aesthetics, the traditional masters emphasize that there is a contrast in melody between the apparent and obvious, and the hidden, the subtle, the veiled, which makes of music an esoteric science which is the object of traditional transmission in the sense of oral or aural (that is non-verbal) transmission. Ornamentation becomes significant within the context of a paradoxical cast of thought, which is typical of a non-rational or magic view of the world, a view in which detail is as important as the whole. 'We have ornaments which are as discrete as an allusion, but without which the melody would crumble and become empty of all its sense,' says Kiāni. Another Iranian master, custodian of a very different tradition, of the Kurdish sacred lute (*tanbur*), put forth the concept of 'keystone note', of 'celestial note' on which a whole melody relies:

Fig. II. Ideal representation of the Safavi musical system (*Behjat ol-ruh,* mid-16th c.). From centre to periphery: 6 *āvāz* (basic modes), 12 *maqām* (common modes), 24 *sho'be* (annexes), 48 *gushe* (melodic types) & 24 *usul* (rhythmic cycles)

> 'When the musician finds these spiritual notes, his inner state is fully transformed. He has the impression that it is no longer himself who is playing. But the mystery is that the celestial notes, motif or element on which the whole signification of the melody rests is unstable; it ceaselessly moves, it is essentially migratory. Each time one plays the piece, ... it has migrated, and one must look for it elsewhere. And if you do not find it, the melody remains devoid of spiritual savour, without effect and without signification' (During 2003: chap.4)

Ethics

But what is even more important in the evolution of traditional thought is the ethical and moral aspect of artistic traditions. This is a well-known fact with regards poetry and is splendidly displayed in the writings of sages, moralists or mystics such as Sa'di, Rumi, Jāmi, 'Attār. But one should not forget that this is also the constant concern for traditional musicians. I will try to provide some explanation for this:

- If you consider that music has the power of triggering emotions, it must not be put in the hands of some who may use it to excite lower passions. This concern for moralisation accounts for all prohibitions directed against music in Islam, but also in all forms of Puritanism: Judaic, Christian, or even 'revolutionary'. In the imagination of the man in the bazaar, music is often associated with wine and sexuality, and music has to avoid it. But it is striking that in its association with passions, as well as with its moral or mystical transmutation, music cannot reach the status of a 'free art' in the Western sense of the word. In both cases, the function of music is exterior to it.

- Another explanation which is often given is that, aside form, the transcendence which is opened by a personal aesthetic experience is the best guaranty of authenticity in musical performance. This authenticity is related to creativity. Now, we do not have appropriate criteria to measure these super-normal states and the creations which they bring about. The only criteria we have, are ethical. In short, if the artist is a good person, his inspiration will be valid; but if he is a bad person, his inspiration or the feelings he communicates will be evil or bad or poor, vulgar, overemotional, or exciting egos and passions. Kiāni said that:

> 'The way in which you play depends upon the moral or metaphysical values that you have. That is why in traditional education you pay attention to morals above all. Look at ancient masters: they were not ready to transmit their knowledge to any student, because they always took moral grounds into consideration.'

Perfection is Equilibrium

The last point which is often underlined by traditional artists is *equilibrium.* We have already seen in which sense the relation between fundamental musical forms and natural patterns established harmony between man and his environment. This quest for equilibrium, as Kiāni thought, encompasses all elements and particularly thought and feelings (*mahsusāt*). This is the reason why the artist should not completely indulge in feelings or in reason. For this master,

> 'in contemporary Persian art music, you only have feelings; musicians try to play with *hāl*, they try to attract the audience, to be pleasant, to provoke emotion. The problem is that you can express emotions *only within certain limits,* because emotions sometimes derive from the ego; they are sometimes egotistic and sensual. What then should we do? We have to control them. Now the same is true when you speak of music: if emotions arise, I must not express them in music. This is the point where thought comes to the foreground and says "no, this is enough."'

This balance is of great importance and conversely, when thought goes too far, art degenerates and is reduced to intellectualism, to philosophy, to a kind of knowledge. You always have to find some sort of balance... Moderns want to separate feelings from thought. This is a kind of romanticism which lies to itself. Moderns are sincere, but they lie to themselves... this is quite difficult to make clear: the feeling is real, but at the same time, it is not true.

> 'Today, classical Persian music more readily seeks feelings, whereas in the past, what was chiefly at stake in traditional art was the truth, and feelings were only of secondary importance. For example, with calligraphy, you may say that first comes the sense, the meaning, and secondly, the writing. This is the aim. The musician is aims at the Truth. Music or other arts are nothing but instruments through which we need to find the Truth. Feelings come afterwards. But today, it is the exact opposite. This is what happened to European music since the Renaissance.'

At this juncture, we are in the position to define the philosophical premises of Islamic traditional arts. The previous quotation is from a contemporary musician who lived for

two years in France and was quite familiar with Western culture. Now, he lives in an Eastern megalopolis in conditions very similar to our Western frame of existence. What I am trying to suggest is that he must be considered as our contemporary. His view of tradition is very thorough leaving nothing in the shade (although I have quoted him very briefly). Does that mean that tradition should be understood as a principle of life or a view cast upon the world, and not as a content? Does that mean that tradition has passed through centuries indifferent to changes and upheavals? Is the contempt for the tradition of modernity so deep as to ignore it? Of course not. Tradition is constantly subject to conflicts, tensions and trends of decay; it is a prisoner of contradiction and paradox. This is the issue we will try to approach in the next lecture.

II - TRADITION AND MODERNITY: *A MATTER OF TASTE*

The purpose of this lecture is to question Tradition further and attempt at demonstrating how, in Islamic culture, through centuries, the system of tradition had been constantly threatened by a process which can be labelled as 'modernity', to the extent that Tradition had to be reconstructed perpetually.

For the benefit of those who did not attend the previous lecture, I will explain why I privilege art and music as a mean of approaching the sense of Tradition. For many of the arguments that I gave last time, music, as a cultural sphere and field of expression, is a very rich and exceptional manifestation of tradition. The choice of music does not, in any way, diminish the relevance of my conclusions. To the contrary, I assume that these conclusions could be generalised and applied to other arts, and to the wider issue of Tradition.

During the last lecture, I drew characteristic lines of Tradition as they appear in Islamic culture. Firstly, I would like to summarise what they are:

- Any tradition is placed in a *World*; it adheres to meanings, to a truth; it conforms to norms, rules or laws. Loaded with symbols, it relates to the metaphysical or to the super-sensible world. In this respect, the opposite of Tradition would be the loss of references: the 'withdrawing or loss of the World' (*Weltlosigkeit*), 'the disenchantment of the World', which leads to scepticism, agnosticism, relativism, or even rebellion and descent into the sensible.

- Tradition implies an existential attitude and *ethics*. It defines a community of meaning; in its eminent level, it could be a community of initiates (such as scholars, artists, literati, etc.). In its ordinary sense, it unites a society. Consequently, it defines consensuality and implies, up to a point, a kind of erasing of the individual.

- In this respect, anti-traditionalism expresses itself by the rejection or contestation of consensus, the isolation of the individual, which leads to marginality, amoralism or scandal.

- The immediate World of tradition is also *Nature*, in a sacralised view. In particular, artistic traditions establish intimate aesthetics and symbolic relationship with nature, to the earth of the ancestors, to what Deleuze called a 'Natal'. (In its trivial meaning, the Natal becomes the geo-political nation.) Conversely, Modernity is the 'conquest of a Nature' which has been desacralised by sciences, crafts and industries, as Heidegger demonstrated. Modern art, too, moves away from Nature as a source of inspiration, and produces its own autonomous forms.

- Being linked to an unveiling of *meaning*, Tradition relies upon a *personal experience* and awareness which takes different forms such as moral improvement, erasing of the ego,

spiritual states (inspiration, ecstasy, aesthetic rapture) or else. In this view, tradition is initiatic and inspired. At its antipodes is mass culture, demagogy, consumerism or technique.

- Thus, Tradition possesses its *modes of representation* or knowledge, privileges unifying, holistic views, non-critical, concrete, oral or even non-verbal knowledge. It is not interested in the fragmentary, singular, particular, factual, in detail and theory. At its antipodes is abstraction, writing, and critical thought.

Numbers and Cosmic Order

I have alluded to the notions of the Truth and of the World. Before going any further, I would like to point out to what extent Islamic, following Greek and perhaps Babylonian traditions, had developed the *objective* dimension of fine Arts through the science of *numbers* on which the whole organisation of the Universe is dependent. The cosmic order mystics and Gnostics have projected into the microcosm of arts and literature has been defined with a particular precision, by scholars and the literati, and has conditioned Islamic artistic expression perhaps more than religious law.

A striking example is the development of geometric figures drawn from numbers and ratios. Calligraphy, too, is made up of letters which depend on numbers and kabbalistic computations. Yet among all of the arts, it is music which best reflects the order of the universe. Its essence is the cosmic structure, (the sound of celestial spheres), of numbers and ratio (pitch frequency, rhythmic proportions). Thus, it is *rooted in the Intelligible.* Music of ancient times, up to the eighteenth century, was an organised microcosm connected to all levels of the universe: the sky, stars, natures, temperaments or humours (hot, cold, damp, dry, etc.), physiology, psychological or physical types, and so forth. Geometry, calligraphy, architecture, symmetry, language or repertory of forms and types, rhythms, intervals or ratios, numbers, diagrams or Mandala. These are the main *power lines* of Islamic art, and also the conditions of classicism, the conditions of tradition.

These features appear clearly when analysing traditional writings or discourses on music as practice, as science, or as speculative or of symbolic spheres. Yet Tradition does not fulfil our expectations: it is far from being stable, it undergoes constant changes, it decays, degenerates, it is now rejected, now recycled, or even reconstructed. Traditional societies also have a history. Therefore, are these processes of change to be understood in terms of *the dialectic of tradition versus modernity?* If so, would this imply that Western modernity is not modern. By this I mean not radically different from the modernity (or modernities)

of the past. In this case, modernity would be ancient! And conversely, if modernity were ancient, perhaps tradition should be in a sense 'new', or even modern...

But before speaking of opposition, let us first look at what has changed in the course of time. I shall again focus on the data given by musical tradition.

Purpose of Music in its Classical Appearance and its Diversion

There are few explicit sources for the evaluation of change in musical practice and the attitude of the Islamic so-called 'Middle Ages'. The examples I will provide can be considered as landmarks for this evolution.

Fārābī, the great universal scholar of the tenth century, the Oriental Aristotle, had a sharp sense of history or of music evolution. After revisiting the earliest origins of music, he distinguished seven steps of its evolution, the last being the peak of perfection it reached during the golden age, around the ninth century (Shiloah, 1972: 196). We may conclude that, theoretically, once it had reached its perfection, music could not 'progress' any longer, or - perfection being defined as equilibrium - it could change without running the risk of breaking this equilibrium. This is precisely what happened.

For a better understanding of this process, we must go back to the foundations of musical art. Al-Kātib, in the eleventh century is one of the most interesting authors in this respect. His position can be resumed as follows: music is both a *science* (*'ilm*) and a *practice* (*'amal*) (Shiloah, 1972:36); it is relevant to the *intellect* or reason (*'aql*) as well as to feelings or *emotions* (*ihsās*) (al-Kātib/Shiloah: 42). Its perfection lies in the balance of these two aspects. (Note that these definitions came from the contemporary Persian master Majid Kiāni, to whom we referred in the previous lecture. The point here, is that this master had not read Arabic authors.) Science, thus *truth*, largely dominates all other aspects, such as performance practice, emotions, or the pleasure provided by sound and tone (*ibid*.:43, 39). 'The task of music is to move those who possess its *knowledge*' (*ibid*.:41). This statement implicitly discards those for whom audition or practice is only intuitive and emotional. The more one knows, the more it is difficult to be moved and reciprocally[9]. The merit of the musician is not as much his ability to *do* things correctly as to *know what he is doing* (*ibid:*180); to be aware is more important than to practice (*ibid*.:43).

The exemplary traditionality of this type of conception of art rests on privileging knowledge over the sensible, it misses completely the specificity of Beauty. (In the first chapter, we have said that in the West, the elaboration of aesthetics had only been made possible by the withdrawal of traditional metaphysics.) Nevertheless, there is something such an embryo of aesthetics, in al-Kātib's view, insofar as truth loses ground facing

arts. According to Fārābī and other thinkers, music is the daughter of numbers; but for al-Kātib, the part of Truth which makes music a science is actually nothing but a knowledge of *empirical* practice or usage, of data relying on habits, yet never based on acoustic or mathematical laws, nor on metaphysical or cosmological structures, in which he confesses not to believe. In this respect, al-Kātib is an aesthete, and a demanding music lover, rather than a scholar or a theoretician. We might even regard him as a Classic or rather, a Modern, but he fails to give account to Beauty in itself without reference to tradition - of course, tradition in its minor meaning of custom and norm. As well as Fārābī, he claimed that Ancient masters reached an unsurpassable perfection. He saw innovation as decay. 'In modern music, everything that does not follow principles of ancient music can rarely be considered beautiful and can rarely please.' (*ibid.*: 59).

What is the purpose of music for the Ancients and what can be its benefits? What makes music a valuable thing beside its objectivity, is its usefulness and virtues (*ibid.*:36). Art is what is profitable or good, it is what incites people towards the good, towards good morals (*ibid.*:47). This position was held by later authors, as the (anonymous) who wrote a commentary on Fārābī, four centuries later. For him, also, traditional justifications for music practice are:

1) to link with poetry in its moral, spiritual, and philosophical destiny;

2) to have a hygienic function in relieving the soul of tiredness, so that it may devote itself to useful tasks, such as the search for wisdom. (Note that in this way, the function of music equates the function of the theatre!) The author deplores that with time, men have forgotten the moral vocation of music and have only retained its function of entertainment, or *sensible* pleasure. This too, applies to poetry.

> 'People used to look for poems for the only purpose of entertainment, and demanded melodies that provided only the same effects as poems [...] It is for these reasons that religious Laws condemned music. Nowadays, fashionable melodies belong to the kind taken as vile, by virtuous people. Thus, playing music has become degrading because of the condemnation of this contemporary fashionable music has extended to all music in general.' (*Sharh bar Kitāb al-adwār,* trans. Erlanger, 1938: 549-550).

This is a clear allusion to Islamic Law as one of the norms of Tradition: music is licit within the limit of morality, as long as it does not depart from its ethical functions. Aesthetic delight is suspicious of decaying into sensible delectation.

Thus, Fārābī's complaints are found later with al-Kātib, even four centuries later. So, it seems that music has never ceased to decay. Now, the meaning of this decay (or 'modernization') is that it maintains human beings in a purely sensible dimension. The effects of such music are described by al-Kātib: it is sensual, associated with alcoholism and aims only at the pleasure of senses (Shiloah *ibid.:* 44) inducing a vulgar excitement (*tahrīk*) (*ibid.:* 213). Listeners are passive and become quickly intoxicated (*ibid.*: 13). Its *ethos* (*tarab*), is nothing but a 'sort of soft sensual delectation which pleases the unaware listener. ..' (*ibid.*: 213). There is serious, profitable and useful music, fit for the connoisseur and the learned, or 'for the aware listener who may combine the pleasure of the spirit with the pleasure of the heart, in interpreting auditive perceptions through reason[10]' (*ibid.*: 13). The emotion that it provokes consists in a *balance between reason and heart* with a clear domination of reason. It corresponds to 'hearing controlled by reason', and provides 'spiritual delectation, an intellectual joy' (*ibid.*: 213).

This opposition between two types of music, between two types of emotion and two types of listeners, is most ancient and is still pertinent today. We find it with Plato (Timaeus 80b) and in all Sufi writings on the *samā'* or mystical concert, at least until the sixteenth century. It is clearly expressed by a few contemporary musicians, such as D. Safvate[11].

It seems that for the Ancients, the issue was not as much the opposition tradition *versus* novelty than it was Tradition *versus* Modernity. Yet we should, of course, make it clear in what sense the Ancient understood the concept of modernity. This opposition could simply correspond to contrasts of quality: good music and bad music. Yet it seems that it was related to an *idea of temporality.* In their system, what was good, and what was perfect, is what was ancient, because as if through a process of natural selection, what was able to subsist is only what was the best, the authentic, the true. The ancient was, is, and will be; conversely, that what goes out of the compass of traditional criteria, is ephemeral and *will never become ancient.* It is only a gimmick, a fashion, to which one quickly becomes indifferent. Thus, Tradition is synonymous with quality and equilibrium, with clear ethical overtones. Bad quality, imperfection and lack of equilibrium are modern or contemporary, and cannot last because what is modern is nothing. It is destined to become unfashionable.

> 'Their novelties are like fresh fruits; their songs subsist only a short time, then, they rot, like fruit, after which they compose some new ones. They constantly set aside each year what they composed the previous.' (al-Kātib: 58).

These statements coincide perfectly with statements of some Eastern musicians to whom I have spoken. They call these kinds of songs 'songs of the day' (*tarāne-ye ruz,* in Iran), or 'tunes of the time' (*zamānavi* in Central Asia) as opposed to, for example, the canonised Bukharian Shash-maqām repertoire of which they say that 'it is above time'.

Technical Aspects

According to al-Kātib, Modern music is characterised by its sensuality, its brilliance, its rich and sensual effects, the autonomy of instrumental performance, 'the infinite and surprising variety, the lavishness. In short, a sort of decorative art to which the author opposes ancient art which is characterised by *simplicity, sobriety, serenity and stability'* (Shiloah, *ibid.*: 14). His criticism particularly targets the alteration brought forward by some artists, the most famous of whom being prince and singer Ibrāhim al-Mahdi (9th century). According to the *Kitāb al-Āghāni,* he initiated the quarrel between Ancients and Moderns, and shocked connoisseurs by transforming melodies at will. As an answer to the critics, he used to claim: 'I am the son of a king, I sing as I like; in music, I choose what I find pleasant, because I practice singing for emotion (*tarab*) and not for any profit: I sing for me and not for others' (cit. Jargy: 43).

With the debate between Ancients and Moderns, comes the *subjective* character of aesthetic criteria. This becomes obvious, along with more, with the change in the text status. Firstly, the ancient themes of the desert and nomadic life of the Arabs become totally obsolete; the reason is that they celebrate the moral values of tribal societies and account for a naive view of a nature still surrounded by the aura of animism. This is the antithesis of Moderns who magnify, specifically, urban and sensual themes such as love and wine.

Moreover, the text, which confirmed the meaning and the 'truth' of singing, was now relegated to a simple excuse for the pleasure of the ear. To this the development of instrumental music is added, which the ancient Arabs regarded as enhancing singing. Thus, music became autonomous from the words which provided with content. Classical music slips into a pure formal game. During the last centuries. In Inner Asia, and more specifically in Turkey, Iran and India, instrumental music attained an importance equal to vocal music. This evolution raised the main question of the content, the meaning of music, which made certain Western thinkers reluctant to give it the status of art.

In the world of miniature also, there are Persian artists displaying an extraordinary freedom and fantasy, breaking geometrical and literary rules and rejecting perspective in order to feel freer. Later on, the image of a well-ordered world vanished with time, freeing

subjectivity and individualism. The mystical or libertine theme of drunkenness invaded literature, music, and miniature painting.

Has the Islamic world order ever been questioned as a consequence of contacts with the West? As early as the seventeenth century, Turkish and Persian painters studied in Italy, yet Hāfez, who fascinated Goethe, preceded the European Renaissance in the same way that Omar Khayyām was considered a modern in the 1900s. However, he lived during the Western Middle-Ages. There are some kinds of connections between the evolution of Persian music, painting, and thought, and what happened at the same time in Europe. Reading Persian musical treatises, one may conclude that from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries, pure sciences gave way to holistic speculation which connected the elements of the sensible world and the cosmos. Then, in the course of the eighteenth century, symbolic connections no longer interested music theoreticians[12]. They were satisfied with vague descriptions of musical practice. At the same time, towards the end of the Safavids, the great structures of composition collapsed, giving the impressions that a whole world and a whole vision of the world were disappearing.

In Persian and Azerbaijani music, the classical style went out of fashion while a new trend appeared. It was called Romantic and individualist. The old rigidly structured suite or cycle was replaced by a canonic repertoire (*radif*) of autonomous pieces in free rhythm, liberated from geometrical and choreographic structure which unified performers. But instead of a unified repertoire, each master had his own version, and at a lower level, each musician was requested to interpret the *radif* in a personal way, to paraphrase freely in his own style, during a performance. This multiplication of individual perspective and the relativization of the model is at the opposite of the conception of a canonic and (quite recently) sealed repertoires which subsist in Central Asia, in Turkish Sufi Mevlevi ritual, and in the Maghreb, or in cultures where the ancient tradition was preserved.

The privileged musical form is henceforth the *taqsīm/taqāsīm* or *radif* which is by essence and definition an art of discontinuity (*qsm:* division). In Near and Middle-Eastern cultures, though the *taqsīm* could also be vocal, it reached its full dimensions in instrumental performances and progressively gained its autonomy from the word with all its semantics, metrics, and expressive constraints. Timed fragments, not only in free performance, but in measured (rhythmic) pieces in which long cycles (9, 10, 13, 14, 32 beats, etc.) were abandoned as well as large compositions as early as at the end of the eighteenth century. While they still existed, they were often fragmented into shorter units (i.e. 16 beats becoming 4 x 4). Thus, music followed quite the same type of evolution which characterised the shift from Western classicism to Romanticism. Actually, one of the

current styles of what is known today as 'Persian traditional music' is considered 'romantic', sentimental and subjective by connoisseurs. We shall see how pre-Romantic aesthetic theory curiously corresponded to widespread ideas about Persian music.

Landmarks of an Oriental Counter-Chant

Before going any further, it might be useful to remember that all of the articulations of change evoked until now, were found in the evolution of Western art music. In ancient times, for Plato and St. Augustine, music was part of the intelligible through the medium of numbers, through the rationality of the interval, and through the ethos of musical modes. 'Music is an unconscious exercise of arithmetics where the spirit does not even know that it is computing', as Leibniz said. The idea of a physical and mathematical structure of sound was still defended by Rameau, in the early eighteenth century. Man vibrates in sympathy with sounds because, according to some Sufi teachings, he is also made of vibrations. From this comes the concept of *affect* which was a cornerstone of ancient aesthetic theories in Western music, and which corresponds, exactly, to the Arabic notion of *ta'thīr*. During the Renaissance, and perhaps under the influence of theoreticians who wrote in Arabic, musicians looked back to antiquity with the hope of finding among the Greeks, or even in the Middle-East, the secret powers of music. These secrets were supposed to exist within the alliance of word and sound, understood to mean 'content.' It is not sufficient for a melody to be pleasant, it must also have meaning. For hyper-classic composers of the so-called Pleiade, in the late sixteenth century, the intelligibility of music was to be insured by a poem which left the imprint of its meter, its sounds, its meaning, on music or melody according to rules that some claimed to be fully rational. This is one of the major preoccupations of Oriental classical artists explaining in part why they never fully appreciated autonomous instrumental forms[13].

With Rousseau, for whom 'any song that does not say anything is nothing,' the union of music and language is nevertheless of a completely different kind. Linked to the speech language of the origins, linked to the primitive expression of passions, music bears moral meaning and is invested with values: the fundamental melancholy of humankind (Lacépède's view), the sensibility opening to ethics through compassion and pity, leading to authentic humanity. For Rousseau, the one who takes pleasure in the language of *affect* can only be a virtuous man or woman (Chevrolet: 158); thus, he follows the ethical concerns of traditional Oriental masters. This conception is also very close to what prevailed in Iran for, probably, the last two centuries, after the break with classical formalism, to which we allude above. This leads to the assumption that Persian music, too,

at the same time, followed Rousseau's pre-romantic trend, as it was freed from mathematical essence, defined as interiority, as speech of the heart, as sign of affect. It was also freed from rhythmic and symmetrical frames imposed in Europe by dance, an art which almost disappeared in many Middle-Eastern cultures. Music, too, at the same time, became detached from text in order to develop a purely instrumental genre, yet in a way, it was still supposed to speak. Thus, it conquered its autonomy by becoming a human activity and an 'art of genius' resulting, as we have seen, from a vocation and a communication with transcendence. These aesthetic views may seem commonplace today, but we must remember that in Europe, it is only in the nineteenth century that music reached its highest meaning among cultural values and started to be taken as a pure object of thought, or even, a form of thinking, a self-significant language without any need for reference to the sacred.

It is with Romanticism that it became a knowledge or a revelation. Although Kant, who on this point, might have agreed with many mullā-s, music is more a pleasure than it is a culture'. Even for Hegel, although music remains an enigmatic tongue of passion, it justified the accusation of formalism because it was semantically non-explicit, and only the light of the word could save it.

It is obvious that the conception of the Romantics harmonised with those of Orientals, and if Rousseau had had the opportunity of listening to their musical gatherings, he would have found a perfect illustration of his ideas and his tastes in the same way Gobineau (mid 19th century) found the essence of Greek tragedy in the Persian *ta'zie* (religious opera), in the same way Goethe revered Hāfez' genius.

However, for Orientals in general, the autonomy of music had not gone as far as neither negating all expressions, nor obliterating the individual. The aesthetics of Hanslick (19th century), culminated with Stravinsky and his musical objectivism, a sort of hyper-classicism which refused any 'significant complicity with the listener.' This hyper-classicism was still not adequate to account for Oriental aesthetics, although in some cases, music became a pure formal game, a logic devoid of emotional content, as in Indian instrumental music, particularly for percussion. These are constructions which can be defined, after Hanslick, as 'pure acoustic forms in movement' without any references other than to themselves and constructions which are gratuitous. Nevertheless, in such music there remains, most frequently, the fundamental notion of significant complicity with the listener.

Before reaching this point, music had to go through several stages. Firstly, it had to be purified of its status as a melodic icon, a sacred object to refocus into the interiority of

the individual. This was achieved in Iranian music over the past fifty years. The values of inspiration, creativity, originality and personality of style and improvisation have become exalted to the detriment of conformity to standards, fidelity to repertoire, and fixed composition.

A second stage is that music had been uprooted from its purpose as sensible delectation, which was also current in European art music, until the sixteenth century. Today, there are several attempts at an ethical justification for music. (The most striking, but perhaps also the most superficial and ephemeral, was the revolutionary Islamic expurgation.) Beforehand, Middle-Eastern musicians had also to renounce mechanistic views of the intrinsic effects of sounds, of affective colour of the modes and rhythms in relation to the order of nature and the cosmos. This was the condition for giving just due to the 'talent of free inspiration,' quoting from Descartes, and finally restoring the ethical and moral vocation of music (as did Rousseau and Lacépède).

These few landmarks which deserve to be developed in real comparative aesthetics are, however, sufficient to provide with the impression that the ways of the West and the East (particularly Persia) are similar to the both parts of florid counterpoint. One voice anticipates, or echoes a motive, in the other voice, sometimes crossing over a few notes, or progressing synchronically and in parallel.

The Social Frame: Status and Attitude of Artists

Professional artists in past times, with a few exceptions, were totally dependent on their patrons and class systems. The musician was at the service of the powerful and contributed to their prestige. They had to obey caprices of the patron or host, to improvise or choose melodies according to their patron's expectation, hoping for a reward... (*cf.* Sawa: 143). The situation of Western composers and even painters was not much better until their emancipation in the nineteenth century. This was re-evaluated at the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, probably under Western influences and with the advance of secularisation.

There are a few anecdotes announcing this change which showed that the artist did not want any longer to place himself at the service of a prince: in India, there was a similar and significant scene represented in several miniatures. The reverse is seen in classical hierarchic structures where the king stands in a modest attitude while his prestigious court musician, Tansen, listens to a great master, the hermit Swami Haridas (Delvoye: 225s). It is said that the king vanished in the ecstasy provoked by his singing. Then, he asked Tansen why he could not sing along with Swami Haridas. Tansen answered, 'I sing at the court of

a powerful sovereign, but my master sings for God.' In another version, he says, 'I sing for a sovereign of the world whereas he sings for himself.' (*ibid.:* 221) As we have seen, Al-Mahdi, the Abbasid prince musician had a similar claim. In Persia, Sheikh Khazāne, who, at the end of the nineteenth century, was forced by the Shah to sing for him, refused his gifts as a sign of protest, and in order to be exonerated from singing any longer, for people, went to a dentist and had all his teeth pulled out[14].

Mentalities have changed and the attitude of the artist announced the advent of modern times. This movement would become more and more obvious in the East and in the West, the evolution seemed to run in parallel. In Inner Asia appeared a notion of artist (*hunarmand*) balancing the 'craftsman of entertainment' (*mutrib, 'amale-ye tarab*) which was the definition for a musician. This notion sometimes went as far as Western myths: the authentic creator was in advance of his time or understood only by a small advanced 'connected' elite. (Actually, his creative motivation was often conditioned only by the will in opposing himself to composers who have come before him.)

As Art music withdraws within private circles, the musician conquered his autonomy and independence. He became emancipated from his social functions, and art music was now in the hands of talented amateurs and refined dilettantes unknown from the public. Why did this development of dilettantism happen? One good reason was to avoid the trap of dependence or alienation.

The artist's intellectual and social emancipation, as well as other significant changes in the musical phenomenon, can be understood as a 'natural' evolution of mentalities. In olden times, the artist, and especially the musician, was nothing but a craftsman of royal *grandeur,* or a servant in charge of the entertainment of aristocrats who did not value them. Now, he belonged to the whole nation, which made him its spokesman.

This process which took shape at the same time as art music in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey, started to wilt in the 1920s. Its propagation was related not only to the end of the patron-ship, but to the mass media phenomenon. It was the consequence of a network of contingent factors linked, on the one hand, to technical progresses allowing for permanence and mediatization, and, on the other hand, to political changes and the beginning of democratisation. We shall give an overview of this in the following pages.

The Effect of the Media

As far as music is concerned, the deepest upheaval in the perpetuation of traditions had neither been Arabian or Mongol invasions, nor the direct impact of Western thought, but the simple fact that few people have yet lucidly evaluated all the consequences: all music

Fig. III. Lute rosette by Abduh Nahhāt (1930). Ideal representation of the Arabian modal system, similar to the ancient Persian at Fig. II. From centre to periphery: (basic modes), 12 *maqām* (usual modes), 24 *sho'be* (annexes), 48 fragments.

was henceforth recorded, broadcast or distributed, reified forever in objects such as records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, CDs and finally the Internet available to everyone.

In Iran, this phenomenon happened in three phases:

1) mass broadcasting by radio and then by newer audio media, leading to the simplification of classical norms and the lowering of standards;

2) the fixing of repertoires (through notations or recordings) and the canonisation of some of these repertoires, adopted as national emblems and identity markers, a phenomenon also observed in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Xinjiang (up to 2010).

3) the perpetuation of musical traditions by intellectual means other than oral and face-to-face transmission; the revival of canons and the search for and recovery of historical materials in order to give new impetus to music.

In the first phase, Persian music fell into the public domain and into the hands of demagogues and in a network of profit-makers and manipulators. Even in its most artistic forms, music became a commodity. After the earliest mediatization brought about by 78-rpm records (which were intended for the wealthy class because of their price), the appearance of radio in 1941 placed within popular reach, the most accessible aspect of artistic music, which could be called 'meso-music.' Vinyl discs did not contribute much to broadcasting (unlike the role they played in the USSR), but cassettes experienced much faster, more extensive, and more sustainable growth in the East than in the West.

Thanks to these media, everyone could listen to the best artists and more often, mediocre ones. The circle of experts was broken. Music flowed into a consumer society. Everyone saw themselves competent in judging it, and mass judgement henceforth acclaimed stars in contradiction to the judgement of specialists. This could have well marked the beginning of the end of tradition, and the advent of modernity.

This demagogic process also affected Egyptian tradition, though it could also be regarded as beneficial. After having chosen the usage of only simple and popular poetry, great composers deliberately sacrificed classical art in order to appeal to the masses throughout the Arabian world and even beyond.

Meanwhile, over the 1960s-1975s, a ‘sweetened’ or ‘sweet’ style (*shirin navāzi*) had developed in Iran, which responded to the demand of a new bourgeois social class. This was made possible mainly by listening to the Golhā radio programs of that time which have been stored, in their entirety, on a remarkable internet site (www.Golha.co.uk). The vast majority consisted of so-called ‘meso-music’, or ‘light classical’, by musicians who played no significant role in transmitting the tradition but who were able to exploit it skilfully.

I consider the following anecdote to be of great significance for the history of Oriental music: in the 1940s, the young Iranian master Habib Somā'i had an argument with the director of the radio station, where he denounced the demagoguery which was corrupting music programs. The dispute heated up, and the master slapped the technocrat. This violent reaction marked the first phase in a process of popularisation or, better, demagoguery. Under these conditions, Somā'i, together with numerous Iranian masters of the 1940s to 1960s, chose to retire from the stage and decided to cultivate their art for themselves and for a few faithful listeners[15].

This lasted until the 1970s, after which, tradition chose to use to its own benefits the same weapons that it had jeopardised. In hindsight, it appears that the development of 'meso-music', a toned-down genre that is also somewhat sensuous and affected, did not profoundly alter the nature of the musical ethos, which is ultimately a more important element than style or aesthetics, in defining traditionality. Another factor, also related to technique, almost undermined its foundations.

Nostalgia and Optimism: *The Ethos of Tradition*

If technical progress led to a reconsideration of the mechanisms of music transmission and dissemination, it was also the bearer of a modernity ideology that had a deep impact on artistic productions. Concerning music, the most significant change had been with ethos. By the middle of the twentieth century, modern Orientals found traditional melodies nostalgic and monotonous; they wanted to replace them with uplifting and colourful tunes.

In Iran, dolourism (accentuated by Shi'i holy history) was regarded as a fundamental trait of national consciousness, and the ethos of music was supposed to reflect the sad and tragic history of the people[16]. More recently, this sadness was suppressed by the oppression of the imperial regime. The same arguments were put forth by the Soviets to discredit Uzbek art music the ethos of whom being the same: it 'was created [...] while the Uzbek people were doubly oppressed by the *khans* and *beys* and the yoke of Russian imperialism, so that the leitmotifs of Uzbek music were lamentations, mourning and tears[17].'

In other cultures, it is the myth of exile that was put forward to justify pathos.

B. Nettl (1970:73-96) reported that Iranian music lovers of the 1960s (at the pinnacle of meso-music) unanimously agreed that Iranian music (and poetry) was sad for the same historical reasons, but also, what is more interesting, because 'sadness is an emotion nobler than others.' On the other hand, said he: 'One of the most fiercely criticised points by many non-musician academics was the unjustified sadness of traditional music in a country

whose economic and social development must be accompanied by hope and optimism[18]' (*ibid*.).

Nostalgia, as the ethos *par excellence* of many musical traditions in the East, is a fact confirmed *a contrario* by reformists, modernists who, here and there, rebelled against the state of music and wanted to add their optimistic note. For example, directives were given by the Chinese communist party to encourage Uighur songs in C major, culminating in the upper octave in the final. A great Iranian musician, such as Colonel Vaziri (1886-1981), wanted to change the *hāl* (ethos) of Persian music - which he considered negative or pessimistic - making of it a positive or optimistic music inspired by that played in nineteenth century salons. These attempts were rejected by the connoisseurs, but the optimistic trend manifested itself during a while in a 'revolutionary' style, until the war with Iraq which induced a return to a new form of pathos, or better expressed, 'sentimentalism'. Later, the main aesthetic stream valued the pure formal playing showing virtuosity sustained by hectic drumming, but without neither optimistic nor pathetic touch.

Those who pretended to be 'Modern', had not understood that the ethos of nostalgia could not be interpreted as a simple affect such as melancholy, grief, or even of some form of masochism in the name of which some Oriental literary critics condemned it. It did not relate to historical contingencies, and no collective psychoanalysis could have attributed it to a trauma going back to the childhood of a Nation. The question is not to trace causes, but to detect secret affinities between this ethos and the idea of tradition from which it seems inseparable.

Opinion was on the wrong track, but it showed the right direction by invoking the past. Etymologically, nostalgia is the aching for the return, or being homesick or for a lost paradise, but not the regret for a something, but for a 'world'. In this regard, Ghazali (died in1111), in his *Kimiyā-e Sa'ādat*, explained that music arouses nostalgia for an upper world the greater harmony and beauty of which being reflected within. For Sohravardi, hearing music evoked the nostalgia of our place of origin. Nostalgia is a desire, which, paradoxically, is not striving towards the future but towards the past, or rather referring to the representation of an origin. It implies a special relationship with the past and creates a circular communication between the past and the present, between presence (or presentification) and absence. Heidegger said that 'nostalgia is the pain brought about by the proximity of the remote[19]'.

Here, the point is the structural analogy between the principle of Tradition and the ethos of nostalgia. The idea of Tradition refers to an Origin, a 'vertical time' (*zamān*

anfusi) as Muslim theosophists see it, and which is updated from time to time, from effectuation to effectuation, but always as though defined in relation to that origin, and in fact, in some sort of 'timelessness' and 'spacelessness' (*lā makān*). Tradition is not a stand-by or a return on the horizontal time axis but a loop, a retrojection. It is a way by which living the moment more intensely in memory or in the representation of a past, of living presence in absence and vice versa. While the opposite of tradition, let us say conquering modernity, is at odds with its past, in projection, and necessarily optimistic, as revolutionary songs, or innovations want to be.

Incidentally, in general, the healthiest traditions often keep a nostalgia alive for the 'good old days' and a depreciation of the present. Behind the apparent bitterness, one must understand the ethical implications of this kind of talk: the good manners (*adab*) of tradition require self-effacement of those who are the custodians. To acknowledge that the Ancients were better and to recognize what we owe to our masters, is an important part of the transmission machinery.

The Nationalist and Political Factor

Among the contingencies contributing (or parallel) to significant changes in the ecology of tradition, the political factor deserves special attention.

In Europe, modernity, that is, the withdrawal of tradition and the advent of individualism corresponds to a requisitioning of legitimacy of the transmission of power which goes along with secularisation.

The first weakening of Persian classical music can be identified during the 1920s, with the elaboration of the Constitution and the end of the Qājār dynasty. During the same period, Ataturk in Turkey and Central Asia Communism implemented all the means by which to move from feudalism to modernity. In both cases, the break was marked with the abolition of the Arabic script and traditional clothing.

It is significant that Iran has not changed its writing or undertaken a linguistic reform, thus preserving a full access to its literary past. Clothing has not been reformed, but freely adapted to Western fashion. More importantly, music has not suffered standardisation and intervals, scales and modes have not suffered, which was not the case in some neighbouring countries.

With the rise of the Islamic Republic, music suffered new pressures, but contrarily to a common view, the status of classical artists is now re-evaluated or raised, at least verbally, because of its ethical aura, and under the influence of the Western model. Islamic puritanism was once again applied, but did not harm musical forms labelled as 'serious' and

'scientific' ('*elmi*); it only proscribed some provocative and vulgar genres. Moreover, folk culture was valued as an expression of authenticity (*esālat*). Some oriental instruments (the *'ud,* the *kamānche,* the *qānun*) were rehabilitated and eclipsed the violin and the piano which were nevertheless played and tuned in the oriental manner. However, the revaluation of the tradition was mainly superficial and did not yield the expected results. Likewise, Islamisation was a surface phenomenon and although it sparked a renewed devotion among the masses, it led to a rejection of religion among the educated classes. The loss of the original and quintessential meaning of Shi'ism in its recent politicisation and socialisation had been underlined by many scholars of Islamic philosophy. For Henry Corbin (1971-2, I: 34) the loss of tradition could be the consequence of the socialisation of spirituality or of the spiritual. Still, in recent times, Persian Islam was:

> 'preserved from the intermingling with social-political passions, racist and nationalist exasperation. That is why the universal supra-national meaning of the concept of Islam lived and appeared much more clearly nowadays in such a country as Iran.'

This statement from 1970, was valid as long as there were no questions of religious or temporal power. With the takeover of the clergy, Islam entered into a horizontality of historic time on the surface of political territory, while by its original vocation, Islam was expatriated or re-territorialised in a celestial territory. After this, 'tradition became a funeral procession or a register of conformist opinions', as Corbin said (1971-2, I: 33). The loss of tradition, the 'pillar of modernity,' according to Shayegan, it is a shift of the field of vision from above to below; the passage from metaphysics to the social, and then to history, that is, the loss of a symbolic dimension.

Nation, Terroir, Tradition

The attempt to revive the 'old world' under the guise of democracy failed to re-energise musical tradition. Ideological unification and the utopia of merging the people into one great Islamic nation only served to accentuate the autarkic and nationalist tendency of traditional musicians, especially as exchanges with their neighbours were limited by events. Islamization was meant to be globalising, but the feeling of identity - ethnic and national - was still very strong at the individual level, though more discreet, less demanding, and less politicised than, for example, pan-Turkism.

The demand for authenticity overflowed on a radical ethnocentrism, which Shayegan underlined, for all fields of culture:

> 'What is good is what grows up here under this burning sun. What springs spontaneously from this ground: that is, what is authentic and indigenous. No matter if it turns disastrous. This authentic thing can be an idea, an object, a class, a person.'

Therefore, under the pretext of creativity, one seeks desperately new forms and since they are not easy to find, they turn towards folk music which is still untouched, and arrange them in the same way as did European nationalist composers of the nineteenth century. So, the traditional (*sonnati*) became synonymous with the national (*melli*), authenticity, nourished the identical claim, and this as a kind of national academicism, a state music and official art supposed to be original and indigenous, and promoted as national heritage.

Thus, in many cultures, tradition merged with nationalism, and authenticity fuelled a sense of identity. The result of this process was a kind of official national academy, a 'State music', or 'State traditionalism', a phrase Sabine Trebinjac applied to national types of music of China, and which can also apply to cultural policies, but not the one with which we are dealing.

Preservation or Exploitation

In fact, Iranian Islamic cultural agencies have shown little interest in musical practices and have therefore not instrumentalised them. Nothing has been decided by higher-ups, apart from a few restrictive directives. As for the rest, musicians themselves have made their choice. Various contingencies related to technique, market laws, patronage, and legislation, among others, do not explain these choices. Just as social facts must be analysed as resulting from combinations of social causes, works of art must be understood as products of particular thoughts, processes, or intentions which take precedence over all other factors. Contingent situations certainly influence the course of tradition, but the direction it takes depends on individual decisions and not on inevitable determinism. For example, with regards media propagation, there are two extreme positions.

Some argue that 'traditional style' had had its time, that people are tired of ancient sounds, that they must be given pleasant things. Others argue the exact opposite: it is not up to the musician to anticipate demand, it is up to the audience to decide. People will only

ask for what is given to them. Therefore, all it takes is to deliver good music. But delivering 'good music' is not that easy, and here again the options are diverse. It is possible to maintain quality by sticking to the old style and repertoire, but, on the one hand, the audience may get bored, and, on the other hand, it is difficult to restore the original freshness of music, a bit like a tasty dish that is served to the same guests every day, and most often reheated or served cold.

If access is given to a large stock of ancient songs[20] , they can be presented a few at a time during concerts and on CDs in order to maintain the interest of the public. This option is facilitated by access to recordings, but in that case the songs must be reproduced with the same quality as the originals, which is not within the reach of all musicians. In best cases, the reproduction and imitation of the Ancients will lead to a natural and creative evolution of the tradition. This seems to happen in rather restricted circles of connoisseurs far from the media circuits, a situation that is probably noticeable in many cultures and at various times.

In most cases, one draws on musical heritage by varying the presentation and embellishments *ad infinitum* - staging, orchestration, instrumentation, mixes, remixes, etc. - but with no creative input. This option is almost the rule in several Western genres, notably opera. All audiences do not have the same expectations, and, paradoxically, Westerners are more interested in ancient art than are, for example, Iranians. The attraction of the latter to novelty and their interest in all aspects of modernity is a special feature of their culture which is unparalleled in Inner Asia. As imitation (*taqlīd*) is disfavoured in the musical tradition, innovation *a priori* benefits from the credit given to creativity. Under these conditions, a number of musicians have embarked on various paths that generally fall into the category of fads already stigmatised ten centuries ago.

Ancient forms are questioned by the simple fact that they must change together with aspects of culture. The quality of this change is of no importance. One must just look modern to be in. Most of the musical production misrepresented as 'Persian tradition' or more honestly, as 'Iranian music', or not presented at all, is described by demanding audiences as 'disposable' in the sense of 'single use only' (*yek bār masraf*), like a paper handkerchief. Facing this situation, a talented musician criticized by 'modernists' for his conservative positions attempted to show that Moderns are themselves outmoded as fashions die out, whereas, to the contrary, as a transmitter of tradition, he lays the bases for the perpetuation of Persian music, thus projecting himself into the future and being much more modern. But others are pessimistic and think that the new wave is more of a tsunami that will sweep away much more than repertoires but moreover, the way music is made and thought.

In keeping with the principle of the ever-present possibility of circumventing contingent obstacles or even a U-turn of the situation, few musicians who have benefited from good traditional training seem to be opening a new path. Media coverage has made it possible not only to unearth and propagate recordings dating from more than a century, entire corpuses, such as the *radif*, of which there are now a dozen accessible versions, but also to find much older sources, and to discover in Turkey and Central Asia vestiges of Persian music from past centuries. It is a bit like the discovery and diffusion in Europe of medieval or baroque music, lute tablatures, Gregorian chant, or other vestiges. The difference is that in Inner Asia and the Arab world, transmission was not interrupted and the framework was not broken and reformatted, as happened in Persia. Therefore, there is a possibility for a movement of reappropriation and revitalisation of ancient canons and, even more, of simply playing pieces composed four centuries ago by Persians and notated clearly in Ottoman Turkey as early as the seventeenth century (see Mohafez 2020). The future will tell whether this musical tradition will find a new lease on life, but there is no guarantee that, in this age of globalisation and the confusion of aesthetic references, these forms will be to the taste of the public. This process of taste change was lucidly sketched by Voltaire:

> 'Taste may go off in a nation, this misfortune usually occurs after centuries of perfection. Afraid of being imitators, artists look for out-of-the-way paths; they stray far from the beautiful nature which their predecessors seized; there is merit in their efforts; that merit hides their defects; the public, loving novelty, runs after them; it soon gets sick of them, and new artists appear, who make new efforts to please; they move even farther from nature than the former; taste is lost; we are surrounded by novelties that quickly cancel each other out; the public no longer knows where it stands and people regret the era of good taste, which cannot come back; it is then held in trust by a few great minds, far from the crowd' (Voltaire, Encyclopédie, 1757, vol. 7, p. 761, our translation).

The promotion of Invention

During the Renaissance, conformity to antiquity and the incarnation of tradition was still valued. But this was not the case later. The value of antiquity is the conformity to a norm considered as having a superior essence. Now, when it happens that this norm changes, originality ceases to be a non-value and can even be required from the artist (Ferry: 37, also Pamuk: 674). This evolution is not without relation to what happened with

Middle-Eastern art, with the difference that the confrontation with progress and with Western novelties had probably modified the perception of arts in general.

The old scheme was as follows:

STABILITY OF TRADITION >> REPRODUCTION OF ARTISTIC MODELS >>
PRODUCTION AT THE LEVEL OF HANDICRAFT.

The new scheme became:

IDEOLOGY OF PROGRESS >> INVENTION OF NEW FORMS >>
PRODUCTION AT THE LEVEL OF ART.

Yet, this is not the only justification for valuing invention. It can be guessed that with the loss of transcendent references (ethical, cosmological, symbolic, or other) a new type of creativity has flourished. A kind of 'art pour l'art'. Once music is drawn back to the domain of the purely sensible, formal criteria become dependent solely on taste. The criterion of beauty became the pleasure it provoked, the emotion, the *tarab.*

Ibn al-Mahdī's anecdote could be the sign of a deep evolution of the status of creation, and a deliberate will to break with the past. Besides, it is significant that these changes were promoted by a prince and not by a simple subject. Therefore, his arguments could presage modern times when Arabic, Persian, or Turkish masters belonging to the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie became free of any dependence on the public or on patrons, and cultivated music for itself and for themselves. Some view al-Mahdī, as a precursor of Romanticism. This is to be argued, because it is possible that his compositions were only of the category of 'songs of the day' described by al-Kātib. But what is certain is that during any period, or at least, from these early times, there have been tensions between at least two trends, which we can label generally as innovation and conservation. Thus, a few centuries later (1375), the aforementioned commentator of al-Fārābī, on the one hand denounced the perversion of musical aims and the loss of traditional references, but on the other hand, criticized musicians for their lack of creativity.

> 'Nowadays, artists follow blindly the routine. They refuse to accept any composition that they have never heard before, or which has nothing comparable to the old repertoire. Even if it is a beautiful, elegant and pleasant melody of the highest degree or a melody able to enhance the effect of poetry which is set to it. But, as a proverb said, one cannot compare angels with blacksmiths.' (*Sharh bar Kitāb al-adwār,* Erlanger, 1938: 548).

Around 1500, a Persian author condemned the decadence in his time in all domains. With regard music, he lamented: 'In our times, firewood and sandalwood are considered identical, the braying of the donkey and the chant of David are considered identical.' It can be noted that these criticisms are of a different sort than al-Fārābī's criticism. They do not address the meaning of music, its aim, its general system, (that is, intervals, modes, and their specific ethos), but simply, decadence of taste and inventions. Here we have a characteristic valid for any tradition, at any time: that is, the temptation of conformism and servile imitation. Besides, many Sufi authors criticize the attitude of their co-religionists.

In spite of all this evidence there still subsists the impression that the modernity in question is only a phase, an aspect of a process of decadence inherent in any cultural practice, and which could even be the condition for its renovation. The fact that from one period to another, there are writers who lash out against corruptions in music suggests that from parallel to modern forms, there existed practices that were in line with tradition. Now, real modernity would have been, rather, a consecration of these corrupted forms. Now, we shall see if such a consecration has actually taken place.

Sensual and Consensual: An Aesthetics of Taste

In order to evaluate better the difference of perspective between Ancients and Moderns, we have to penetrate into the circle of musical performance.

A correct evaluation of aesthetic trends should neither hinge upon scientific or metaphysical writings or texts, nor upon writings designed for guilds of musicians. We should not take into account only the official discourse of scholars, who provide us with a somewhat monochrome picture of Islamic culture. Apart from these writings, artists and amateurs sometimes had a vision of these things completely independent of metaphysical and religious frames. Sufis, artists, and patrons felt free from many aspects of religious law or even overthrew them.

It is not certain that musicians considered these important matters as nature and the effects of modes (*maqām*) and rhythms, the connection between modes and planets, humours, psychological characters, therapeutic virtues, hours of the day, signs of the zodiac, and so on, which are relevant to a hyper-traditional and systematically organised representation of the world. Between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries, several Arabic, Persian and Turkish musical treatises considered these aspects[21]. Yet these writings belonged to the 'popular science' category, not to the really scientific or musicological sciences, and anyway, nowadays, few people are concerned with this view.

Yet, on the contrary, a fine connoisseur such as al-Kātib (12th century) dedicated long pages for the description of musical practice without bothering with speculation. He only established a prescriptive inventory of all procedures providing aesthetic pleasure. Essentially, he said, 'this practice is correct,' or 'this practice is bad.' Therefore, we have one of the essential traits of aesthetics of taste which are reluctant to acknowledge them as such. Even if he is invoking ancients masters and reason, the fact that music appears as a pure matter of taste is a landmark of a change in mentality which could lead to modernity. Thus, the approach of musical performance described by ancient Arabs prefigured values appreciated in the contemporary West: the artist was endowed with some freedom, and must display psychological discernment independently of any reference to a cosmic, metaphysical, or natural order. The public is not in a state of passive veneration in front of the demiurgic production of the artist, or the harmonies of a spiritual concert. He interferes actively in musical performance through exclamations or remarks more or less codified. 'In order to reach its perfection, says al-Kātib, a musical event must rely on a constant interaction between the performer and the listener[22]' (Shiloah 1994: 57). The musical practice of the ancient Arabs thus appears as a celebration of beauty in its more sensible or even sensual form without philosophical justification, without mystical sublimation, and without care for the disapproval of clerics. Regarding the complex musical genres, this kind of performance which is creative, convivial, consensual, communicative, and interactive, has been (re)discovered only recently in the West with jazz and the experience of the Moderns. The welcome that this type of performance has received in Europe, for several decades, readily suggests that it was modern and still is.

On the other hand, the opposite trend, of the liturgic kind related to what philosophers have called 'musicolatry', is always present in the East, especially in the artificial context of concert halls. This is particularly the case for classical genres in Turkey, Central Asia, and even Iran.

Conclusion

The picture sketched above from Arab sources, prefigures modernity but only in certain aspects. Moreover, Ancient Arabian musical practice, as brilliant as it were, always ran a risk of falling into sensuality. The pleasure of the listener was not always aesthetic or Platonic. One of the oldest treatises, the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* 'relates numerous anecdotes at the Umayyad court where music appeared as a vector of scandal, constantly associated with excitation, with drunkenness and sensuality' (Lambert: 32).

Music-lovers escaped from the frame of Islamic tradition, but they felt the weight of guilt in relation to law and morals. The price for the liberation of musical culture was therefore a fall into libertinism. However, this sensuality, which asked no questions about itself, raised the question of music as an art when it fell into the purely sensible, into frivolity. To establish to what extent, it is a true aesthetic of taste, which has happened in Europe, and is only possible with the withdrawal of the metaphysical tradition, it should be understood whether among early Muslims, the notion that was at stake, was that of beauty and good, or that of taste. Both terms existed (*husn* or *jamāl*, and *zawq*); one is related to the divine, the other, to individual experience. Perhaps some flow to one or the other.

It is of course difficult to take sides about this question. It is obvious that Islamic culture has not succeeded in imposing a purely aesthetic vision, that is, liberated, at the same time from metaphysics and mysticism, and from sensuality and vulgarity. This would explain the permanent distrust of the clerics towards musical art. If there had really existed an aesthetic spoiled by sensuality or stuck in conformism, then it perhaps would have prefigured a modernity of a kind comparable to the aesthetics of our seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and if not, then this is none other than the eternal cycle of corruption and restoration. And perhaps, one finds themselves outside of this cycle only with what is called the modern era, precisely the era which started for Iran and the Middle East at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Between libertines, who at times considered music as a sensual pleasure, and Sufis who sublimated their perceptions, the question could be asked in this manner: between sensuality and ecstasy there might have been, at least at certain times and before the so-called modern era, a third way, secular but without libertinism; universal and at the same time, non-objective or without reference to a transcendence such as World order, the good, nature or even the normative objectivity of good taste. If this were the case, nothing would be really new and no one would be really in a schism with tradition, except in these moments of distancing, questioning, doubting, disequilibrium. Yet, at the same time, these moments of distanciation and questioning, freed one from the level of simple imitation to authenticity and creativity. In this perspective, the high and low phases of tradition are nothing but local movements of a pendulum-like oscillations inherent in every tradition, and not of an irreversible historical fact.

Under these conditions, modernity in itself would not be modern, and its sole specificity would be: a) that it covers a large field of cultural and social domains, and b) that it talks about itself and incites talks about itself. It becomes an object of discourse and

reflection. In simple terms, modernity exists only because it is once again consecrated by intellectuals. The dogmatism of tradition versus the arrogance of modernity.

The break with tradition, and modernity would not be excepted at the level of discourse, philosophical thought, and art criticism, which became fixed, obnubilated for only one phase of the process. We would have no other definition of modernity other than it pretends to something. There might be nothing new, no modernity at all, except that one talks about it. But as to tradition, it does not need to talk. And this we shall see in the next lecture.

III - RELIGIOUS AND COGNITIVE STRUCTURES AS FOUNDATIONS OF A MUSICAL TRADITION

The expressions 'Islamic civilization' and 'Muhammadian people' (*umma muhammad*) suggest the existence of a religious structure encompassing masses of cultural data. If we believe that this expression has some significance, we would assume that it is possible to find, in the structure of Islamic religion, a model for many traditions, and particularly for Islamic arts. There are several reasons why to draw parallels between religion and art (especially music) if we agree, along with Pierre Bourdieu (:207, 219) that 'the universe of art is a universe of beliefs', in which the fundamental operations are of a magic order. Moreover, in Islamic culture, music appears, by its nature, linked to the religious sphere; hearing is considered above other senses as it is at the origins of the Revelation itself, and has always been valued through practices related to orality and audition. For instance, the Qur'an is always chanted in artistic forms, and Sufis have made of music the mystical art par excellence; reciprocally, the religious model, through Sufism, has often shaped musical tradition understood as transmission.

Religion is fundamentally 'knowledge' and is not without relation to archaic cognitive structures. Prophetic Speech was verbal before it was written, and religion always preserved something specific to oral culture, even if with hermeneutics, it uses all the techniques of the written thought. Thus, religious tradition draws a bridge between archaicism and modernity, between revelation and inspiration, and crystallises into dogma. In-between, men ask themselves about the meaning of this mutation. These are the themes of this lecture.

I will begin by drawing parallels between the characteristics of religious tradition and of musical tradition. Again, I wish to stress that in my view, musical culture is one of the best ways to understand the phenomenon of Tradition. This is especially the case in music such as in the Islamic world, since among all the arts, music is, these days, perhaps the most living and richest. Anyhow, ultimately, my aim is to analyse universal mechanisms and not describe particular domains of culture.

Before examining the parallels between the organisation of musical tradition (particularly through the Persian example) and the structure of religious tradition, it is worth remembering, how, in the Muslim Orient, the concept of tradition was rendered in its application to musical culture.

In all likelihood, when Western music made its appearance in Muslim civilizations of the middle of the nineteenth century, it brought along the notion of tradition or folklore, from which it wanted to step back because of its particular nature: usage of writing, scientific pretence, promotion of inventiveness and novelty, etc. Previously, no Muslim culture had felt the need to apply the concept of tradition to anything other than the religious field. Arabian concepts, somehow nearest to this notion - which, incidentally, are rather vague and multiform - were all that was borrowed from that field.

Some (in Iran) chose the term *sonnati* (from *sunna*, custom or tradition of the Prophet). Others (in Iraq) that of *taqlīdī,* imitative, in the positive sense, probably inspired by the imitation of a religious model as promoted by Shi'i theology (the *marjā al-taqlīd*, 'the reference to be imitated', is the highest religious authority). Others (Turkey and Central Asia) chose the term *'an'ana* which evokes the passing on of a *hadith* through a chain of transmitters. For example, Z 'who got it from' (*'an*) Y, who got it from X, etc., reports that... This term is a synonym for tradition only in Central Asia (Uzbek, Uighur, Tajik). It expresses the idea of *handing down* from one person to another rather than of an established custom (such as *sonnati* in Persian) or of an attitude (such as *taqlīdī* in Arabic). In that sense, it is more precise, less ambiguous and connotated than other terms recently adopted in Muslim musical cultures.

To translate the idea of traditionality, another word was introduced in Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese musical culture: *asīl*, meaning authentic (*tarab asīl*: 'authentic music'). In theology, *asīl*, or the noun *usūl* ('principles'), is the opposite of *furū'āt* ('accessories'), suggesting that the first cannot vary while the latter may do so. But above all, *asīl* is the opposite of *dākhil* ('imported') and has thus a strong connotation of nationalist ideology, as is the case too in the use of the adjective *asīl* in Persian.

In Iran, during the past decades, the meaning of the word *sonnat* has been diverted and gradually replaced by *asīl*, 'authentic', a concept which has also become fashionable in the West for these last ten or twenty years, to qualify the ethics of post-modernity. Finally, faced with the development of new musical forms which did not really conform to the principles, were neither 'authentic' (*asīl*) nor customary (*sonnati*, *an'anevi*), the adjective 'national' (*melli*) was introduced, also in opposition to *dākhil*. This word, derived from *mellat* (nation), was taken in its western meaning, but this is of a recent usage.

> *'Mellat,* which originally referred to a religious community for its distinction from others (the Islamic community in comparison to Christian or Jewish), firstly with the Ottomans, then even in Iran, had come to refer to the ethnic or

> political nations which had formed since the nineteenth century, in reaction to European meddling, and in imitation of Western nations.' (Richard: 263). At the beginning of the century, again, 'the adjective *melli* [...] created difficulties, paradoxically because of its secular connotations': it included all communities, even non-Muslim (*ibid*.: 262-3).

The deeper reasons and the process which led to adopting the terms *sonnati* and *asil* are not clear, and the contrasts they wanted to establish are not, either. There would have been some justification in choosing the terms 'classic' (*kelāsik*) and 'popular' (*khalqi*), which is what is done elsewhere (Afghanistan, Turkey, etc.) and more and more in Iran. The only term, which is not of religious origins and which, nevertheless, attempts at conveying the notion of tradition, is *khalqi*, used in the Republics of Central Asia. It perfectly translates the adjective popular (*khalq*: the people) and thus seems to have been promoted by communism. And yet, its use does not fit in with that meaning since, for the Türks or Tajiks, *khalqi* applies to folklore as well as to art music: *khalqi klasiki* means an anonymous classical composition.

A. THE RELIGIOUS MODEL

Transmission and Authenticity

In Islam

The *sunna* (*sonnat* in Persian) applies to the religious custom (literally: tradition) handed down by the Prophet. For believers, it is a reference for their spiritual and material behaviour. In its Islamic sense, the tradition of *sunna* is what is transmitted in a continuous line or chain within the inner community: that is, the speeches and the behaviours of the Prophet as reported by Companions, who transmitted them to subsequent generations, who bound them as collections of hadiths which we usually translate as 'traditions'. The concept of authenticity is intimately linked to that of tradition as a process of transmission, as well as content. This concept refers to two sources:

- *The original authority:* the Revelation, the Prophet, what is by essence immutable;
- *The authority of transmission,* as well as that of interpretation. The authenticity of tradition depends on the *validity* of the transmission as much as one of the main tasks of the Sunni traditionalists was to evaluate the validity of the chain of transmission (*isnād*), in order to establish the authenticity of the speeches and the traditions of the Prophet. Filiation as a guarantee of authenticity is also one of the principles of the Sufi tradition: each Sufi branch worships its own genealogy which leads back to Mohammed, to Gabriel (the angel who dictated the Qur'an to the Prophet), and to God.

The founders of musical tradition

The meaning of tradition as *continuity* of a custom, is a weak signification. 'Authenticity', or the traditionality of music, is primarily assured by the founder or founder(s), and then, by the transmitters. In Islam, as in most religions, the source of musical tradition is always a great figure, a genius: Tansen in India, Bārbad in Persia, Marāghi in Turkey or others, even in the recent past. Each tradition has its 'patron saint'. New traditions can follow one another, but they do not oppose one to another. In the same way, a prophet follows another without ever contradicting him on matters of principle (*usūl*). These are the two conditions of change or novelty in tradition, as Ch.-H. de Fouchécour said that in relation to sacred tradition in the Iranian world (: 57) : on the one hand it is necessary to 'preserve a coherence with formerly admitted meanings...' and on the other hand it is necessary 'that the discovery of a new meaning comes from an authority which is not in schism with the anterior authority of the tradition.' He adds: 'these two conditions are fulfilled, for example, in the history of Sufism.' In the same way where Iranian musicians claim musical descent from Bārbad (6th century), Marāghi (14th century), or 'Ali Akbar (19th century), and the Arabs, Persians and Turks claim descent from Fārābī, Muslims, Christians and Jews all claim spiritual descent from Abraham.

The Text

In musical traditions

From this point to the end of my lecture, I shall rely mainly on Iranian references, yet once again, my purpose is to shed light on the essence of tradition, not on the content of a specific music.

The instrumental repertoire which is authoritative, nowadays in Iran, is up to a point the chef d'oeuvre of Mirzā 'Abdollāh (died in 1917). The legitimacy of this master firstly comes from his family origins: he was the son of the 'divine 'Ali Akbar' (died in 1861-2) as Gobineau called him; secondly, it comes from the *consensus of connoisseurs.* But mainly it comes from Mirzā 'Abdollāh who established the Text which carries authority in the somewhat 'new Persian tradition.' This Text, the *radif*, is presented as ancient or even antique, but there is no doubt that it was 'rewritten' and restyled as an idiom fitted to the tastes of the time. Like many canonic or sacred texts, it was not written during the lifetime of the author, but only fifty years later[23].

More than a Text, it is a perfect model which must be preserved, but which at the same time is open to *interpretation*. Each artist is expected to paraphrase and interpret it, in each performance; a master can even create his own variants and transmit them.

This is made possible because its Vulgate has not been definitively fixed, or because, in spite of its canonical status, its 'truth' is only relative. This reminds us of the status of the Gospels: besides the four canonised versions, there are other versions or fragments that come from reliable sources, yet only four have been canonised. In the same way, the consensus of the experts has canonised and promoted Mirzā Abdollāh's version, for some contingent reasons: it was a more or less an unaltered instrumental version which was more widespread than others. Thus, the status of the *radif* as a reference Text, coincides only up to a certain point, to that of the Qur'an in Islam, but its elaboration and promotion is more evocative of late holy Zoroastrian writings, or early Christian Texts.

There is also another important common point with the revelation of the Scriptures: after Mirzā 'Abdollāh, it seems that no one has been empowered to create a new repertoire or *radif*, or even adding a single *gushe* melody to it. It is as if musical revelation had been closed forever, as if a high creative inspiration, the inspiration which creates not only melodies but *models*, had abandoned this tradition[24]. I will give later some reasons for that. One of them is that once the text was established, musicians mainly devoted themselves to its hermeneutics, its interpretation, which demands another level of creativity. Of course, they composed many melodies, but what I call the original Text seems closed. This type of situation is to be found in various classical musical traditions such as the Tajik-Uzbek, the Mughrabi, and more or less, the Uighur.

Interpretation, Hermeneutics and Inspiration

Apart from prophetic references, another important field of activity in the establishment of the religious tradition is interpretation. It is first the *ijtihād*, that is, as defined by Yann Richard, 'the interpretation, in any period, of the application of law by theologians who retain authority' (Richard: 221) in order to define the correct behaviour. The role of the *mujtahid,* the theologian doing the *ijtihād*, is to help the believer in distinguishing [what is correct from what is incorrect]; no more.' Among the Sunni Muslims, juridical interpretation has been closed for centuries, except when new problems arise and when the conditions of life change. But among the Shi'i-s, it remained open, not only in jurisdiction, but even in the field of tradition, or the teachings of the Prophet and the Twelve Imāms. The possibility of constant reinterpretation was gained in Iran after a long doctrinal debate between the Akhbārī (the pure traditionalists or literalists who privileged text over interpretation) and the Usūlī, the principalists or hermeneutists who advocated the solution to new problems, by analogical thinking (*qiyās*). These are two opposing conceptions of Tradition: the first is static and sticks only to the original true

Speech guaranteed by reliable transmitters such as the holy Imams. The second claim is that one must not imitate the dead, and accuse the Akhbārī of being frozen-minded. To the Usūlī, although the Text is closed, the Islamic tradition is not necessarily fixed into dogma, and in order to keep it alive and to live it, one must accommodate it through an 'effort of interpretation' (precisely the meaning of *ijtihād*) the function of which is to ensure the continuity of the renewal. In order to understand the mechanisms of change in the compass of tradition (understood here as a process), we must point out that eventually, in Shi'i Iran, the Usūlī imposed themselves after the eighteenth century, precisely at the threshold of the so-called 'modern period', while the Akhbārī were reduced to a very small minority.

The case of the Akhbāri and Usūlī typifies the principle according to which, after the disappearance of a Master, a real Authority, there are only two possibilities left: - either to stick to a fixed tradition, or to follow it, but at a lower level, the level of exegesis and hermeneutics.

'The originality of renewal, says H. Corbin (1971-2, III: 157), is that each time, one rediscovers origins'. The return to origins is the activity of hermeneutics, the search for inner meaning. The Qur'an is the field of hermeneutics par excellence, and its meditation has generated an immense profusion of writings of the best quality. One usually distinguishes three levels: the literal interpretation (*tafsīr*), the philosophical (*ta'wīl*), the gnostic (*tafhīm*) (Corbin, 1964: 23s). No hermeneutics could ever exhaust the meanings of the Book, which always remains open to the discovery of new meanings. At the ultimate stage, (*tafhīm*: that is, 'to make understand'), the hermeneutics is, as Corbin says, 'an inspiration (*ilhām*) of which God is, at the same time, the object and the end, the source, the organ and the aim' (*ibid.*: 24). In Christianity, one who does hermeneutics must be inspired by the Holy Spirit; in Shi'ism, it was the Twelve Imams who guarded the esoteric meaning of the Revelation; in the Shi'i gnosis, the Imams are not inferior to the Prophet and still provide inspiration to the Theosophers, but by way of spiritual intuition. In this perspective, Tradition in general appears as a structure allowing for a communication with the sacred and a return to origins and to profound meaning in order to renew its creative potentialities.

In the same way, originality, which in Persian is synonymous to authenticity (*esālat, asīl*), and traditionality, depends on the artist's ability to go beyond the Text and reach the very principles from which he gets the creative inspiration that makes possible a renewal. In other words: he makes the Text speak. As master, Kiāni said in a nice comparison: 'the repertoire (*radif*) is not the poem but the poet himself'. Eventually, we must remember

that, generally speaking, in traditional thought or preclassical *episteme*, image and reality are superimposed, the world is covered with signs, and knowledge consists of being able to interpret these signs. This is why hermeneutics is traditional and vice-versa.

The Consensus

In Islam

In the absence of a divine guide, people turn toward a supreme authority *the marja' al-taqlīd,* 'model of imitation', in Shi'ism, or a group of experts, that is the theologians who promulgate decrees (*fatwā*). And in the absence of decision or competence, it is the people, themselves, who decide.

Thus, the Tradition can be related to three different hierarchical levels: the people, a group of experts or (as is the case in shi'ism) the supreme authority. Of course, the latter is also acknowledged by the people, so in a way, Tradition is also the *consensus omnium.* Thus, the concept of tradition is intimately linked to society and consensus. This is found in the definition that Muslims give themselves: *ahl-al sunna wa 'l-jamā'a*: people of the tradition and the community.

However, consensus appears as an immanent force the relation of which to transcendence is not always clear. Moreover, in original imamism as well as Sufism, the Truth is at the antipodes to the mass of ignorant people, and is accessible only to a small elite. Of course, we find the same conflict between learned traditions and popular cultures, or better, between traditional and demagogic cultures.

In musical tradition

The two categories of the religious *sunna* are found in musical culture: the *consensus omnium* and the consensus of the connoisseurs. A musical style, or an artist, can be validated by a great master or a group of masters. But in some cases, it is for the public to validate a musician and his style. The ideal is to have the approval of both experts and the public, as one says: 'an eloquent speech is the one that average people understand and which pleases connoisseurs.' Such is the law of art.

Concretely, it happens however, that experts disagree with people's choice, or even that experts disagree with each other; since there is no supreme authority, everyone can deny the other the competence of judgement. This is what happens, in times of crisis, and confusion, as is the case, for instance, since more than fifty years in Persian music. But during times of stability, it seems that people are able to recognize the real custodians of tradition.

Another analogy is that in many musical cultures, mainly in the Middle East and India, the qualification for being a master is the display of inspiration and creativity. In religion, the comparable level is 'renewal of the exegesis' (*ijtihād*). Artists are creative, they re-interpret the legacy of tradition according to their personal mood and taste. They obey to two complementary forces: - one is transcendent, or even supernatural and close to mystical inspiration - the other is immanent and depends on the time and general conditions. Since they are acknowledged by the public, they forecast the implicit demand for change and give the public what they like. Sometimes their quasi-prophetic vision precedes that of the community and they must wait for their time. They are working for the future: people will understand later. Conversely, he who pretends to put his mark on tradition but whose inspiration is not authentic, may perhaps abuse the public but only for a short time. Time will judge him and fashions will pass. Should I say that these statements are not mere rhetoric but are based on very precise facts and long discussions within Iranian musical circles referring to particular persons.

Now in times of crisis, great traditional artists remain unknown by the public, yet are honoured when dead. There are also those who refuse to transmit their knowledge, generally because they do not find disciples who match their taste. Here also, the spiritual tradition has perhaps shaped cultural schemes: the figure of the unknown, hidden saint such as 'Uways al-Qarānī (seventh century) or the mystics who see themselves as adepts of the invisible prophet Khidr, is specific to Islamic culture and is particularly vivid in Iran.

Principles, Accessories and Orthodoxy

In theology

In spite of its suppleness, the system of interpretation of the sources and the production of *fatwā* (juridical decisions) does not operate at the level of the pillars of faith and basic religious practices. The holy Book, the arcane (*arkān*) and the dogma remain untouchable, yet it is possible to make the Book and the Texts talk, and to interpret them in different ways, and discover an infinity of new meanings and subtleties. The field of action of religious tradition is of accessories (*furū'āt*), not of principles (*usūl*) the themes of which constituting the *invariant* at the core of tradition. One may consider this invariant as a frame, or precise limit, which it is not possible to transgress without leaving tradition, and therefore becoming marginal or excluded from society. Advocating a practice or a dogma which eludes the frame is called innovation (*bid'a*), a term the negative connotation of which can go as far as heresy.

> 'Innovation breaks Tradition. But there is no Tradition without permanent renewal, as much as that the idea of renewal or renaissance is concomitant to that of tradition' (Corbin, 1971-2 IV: 262). 'Spiritual hermeneutics is the source of a perpetual renewal, but the idea of renewal differs from innovation which implies a break or a *coup de force'* (*ibid.* III: 157).

From this, it follows that orthodoxy, or the conformity to basic dogmas, allows for a certain plurality: this is why we find for instance, in Islam, several orthodox schools, trends or faiths.

In music

The concept of orthodoxy is also pertinent to art music (Nettl, 1978: 159). Concerning the possibility of writing a new Text (for example, in Arabian-Andalusian or Central-Asian traditions) opinions diverge and point to a certain division within the community of musicians. Some people believe that it is only possible to keep alive the traditional repertoire, others agree to preserve it but in addition to new forms; others go as far as distorting it at will or even to belittle it (in Iran for example). Such people behave as innovators suspected of heresy or innovationism (*bid'a*), or perhaps as apostates. Yet opinions differ about them because, as many Persian musicians have said, the present problem is that 1) there are no supreme authorities, or great masters, who are at the same time acknowledged by the public and considered as references by *all* experts. 2) the public is ignorant and unable to recognize true masters, or at least, it needs much time to understand who they are. Stars are not unanimously acknowledged and are criticized by experts for different reasons: insufficient qualifications, tendency to banality and demagoguery, difficult character, lack of creativity or lack of respect for the principles, lack of charisma or *inspiration*, etc.

Inspiration

Ultimately, it is inspiration which appears to be the decisive factor for almost all music lovers. The artist must be double-rooted: he finds his inspiration on the one hand, from the basic musical forms of his mother-land, without foreign borrowings, and on the other from a personal communication with transcendence, in a specific state of consciousness called *hāl*, which he is expected to communicate to the public. (Some musicians seriously believe that a good deal of the Persian classical repertoire has been

inspired by spirits. This brings back to ancient times when poets were considered to be possessed by gods or spirits.)

From Speech to Text

For musicians, orality of transmission is a decisive criterion of traditionality. We will see later the profound reason for this. Generally speaking, orality is a guarantee of the initiatic character of knowledge. Anyone can have access to writings, whereas oral knowledge is transmitted only to elected ones. Indian anecdotes suggest that some melodies were held as sacred as sacred books or *mantra*-s. Musicians were ready to pay a fortune for a melody, while others preferred to die than to divulge it (Delvoye: 209-11).

The pre-eminence of orality over literacy and text is another common point between religious and musical traditions. Revelation in Islam was a fundamental 'aural' or auditive phenomenon; thus, hearing is synonymous with spiritual understanding. 'It is hearing that makes religion obligatory, and it is for these reasons that adepts of the *sunna* (the tradition) consider hearing as superior' (Hujwirī, 11th century: 393s). 'Faith comes through audition,' say the Gospels (Romans, 10:17). In spite of the constitution of texts, revealed religions privilege this sort of knowledge: here writing is only the crystallisation of a Speech-act. Gospels, Qur'an, prophetic hadith, early Sufi teachings were all speech transmitted from mouth to ear before being written down.

Mutatis mutandis, it is also what happened to the great Oriental musical vulgates which are the crystallisation of an originally vivid, fluctuating and moving speech. In Iran, for example, the repertoire of a great master is an achieved product coming out from what they call traditional 'matrices' or moulds (*logo*, *ale*), but is only one possible version among others held by other masters. In the same way we have four Gospels all inspired by a unique source, but resulting in diverse perspectives and various materials.

Variants are possible from one school to another, however, when honest artists tried to 'compose' their own canonical repertoire (*radif*), or promoted minor versions, they never acquired the status of a *reference model, of moulds;* they were only copies, paraphrases, reproductions.

Have Things Changed?

From this arises the crucial debate about tradition versus novelty: why this impotence to create new moulds or new models, new canonical repertoires, or why this reluctance to accept new productions at the same level? Do we have here one of the signs of a situation significant of our times and which would be characterised, after Adorno, (following Hegel)

as the end of Art? Or perhaps, this situation is nothing but banal? Since after all, Tradition is an antique thing and we, poor mortals, perceive changes only in a short scale of time, and if we could look at things from above, this state of crisis might appear as an insignificant episode in the continuity of Tradition. It could be that a Tradition is really dynamic and spiritual only by keeping ahead of itself the risk of decay.

Nevertheless, we have reasons to fear that irreversible changes which occurred, could well empty the cultural concept of tradition of all its meaning. Up to a certain point, this is what happened in the West, or at least, as the West appears in the mirror of the East.

But let us have a look at what religious tradition has to say on this matter. It is clear that with Islam, there appears a radical break with the past. Mohammed is said to be the last prophet (though 'the seal of the prophets' seems to mean something else); the prophetic era is officially and definitely closed, and henceforth no other authentic religion (that is religious Law) can appear. Thus, a Tradition leading back to Adam is closed. Yet after the time of prophecies the era of *imāma* (*walāya*) opens with the cycle of the Twelve Imāms and the advent of great Sufi saints. So, for Shi'i mystics and Sufis, communication with the sacred is always possible through the perfect saint or sheikh, or through the Imām whose function is, in this respect, equivalent to that of the Holy Spirit

Should musical creations be closed forever as prophecy and the revelation of the Scriptures? Will there never again be masters able to breathe new life into music? Perhaps the *revelation* (*wahī*) is simply taking the form of *inspiration* (*ilhām*) as in the time of the *walāya* which followed prophecy. Or perhaps, once the Text have been established, the only possibility would be to paraphrase it, or better, its hermeneutics? If we refer to the model of Islam, this would mean that one is, henceforth, unable to create new moulds, but access to the inspirational source still existing through inexhaustible hermeneutics.

Good Old Times as The Lost Horizon of Tradition

But should we really pay attention to the complaints of the Ancients and their nostalgia for good old times? Was it not always more or less so? In remote times Confucius already deplored the corruption of music by lascivious and vulgar melodies. From time to time, Chinese kings cleansed music, as the Islamic Iranian regime has been doing during the 1980s. In the early nineteenth century, the Qājār rulers raised the moral status of court dancing girls, while the masters refined the light dance tunes and songs, in a more artistic and spiritual repertoire. Examples of that sort are numerous in the history of music. Besides, by a strange mechanism, it seems that we do not perceive clearly the value of new production. It is only when dead that masters are canonised; retrospectively, the playing of

X or the singing of Y acquires an emblematic value, it represents old times and feeds nostalgia. As S. Breton (:387-8) said, 'Time is necessary for an existence to be transfigured, for the legend to be constituted. One must wait for death to occur for essence to emerge from contingency and crystallise.'

If the conflict of routine and creation is inherent to Tradition, we may ask again what would be the specificity of modernity. Perhaps precisely, its emphasis on rejection instead of renewal or regeneration, on forgetfulness of all the past and its ambition of sweeping everything away and reach new goals. On the other hand, Tradition, tired from constant renewal, turns itself back to its past, longing for its now withered glory. And from time to time, we herald its decadence or predict its imminent disappearance.

Conformity and Innovation According to Sufi Writings

The structures of religious tradition enhanced above only account for the general, universal and official levels of Islam. But we know that within Islam, Sufis and mystics of different loyalties claim to be custodians of the spiritual, privileged and ultimate religious tradition. Even if often considered as marginal or heretics by clerics, we have to take their views into consideration for the simple reason of the influence they exerted on corporations and guilds which relied on musical transmission.

For the Sufis, the driving principle of the religious tradition or affiliation is not imitation (*taqlīd*), but spiritual enthusiasm (see Hujwirī, *Kashf*, Introduction). Under these conditions, the disciple *does not imitate the master* (*taqlīd*), but follows him (*ittibā'*), which is totally different. According to them, there are two factors which can lead to a break with tradition: one is blind *imitation*, or conformism, the other (as we have seen) is *innovation* (*bid'a*). Imitation, deprived from any understanding of the meaning and value of tradition, is viewed by some authors as a form of innovation. This is explained by the fact that imitation introduces a different type of relation to tradition, completely opposite to enthusiasm, which is the only possible answer to the call of tradition. Their definition of innovation, quoting Hujwirī, is 'everything that is invented and is in contradiction with the truth transmitted by God's messenger in matters of knowledge and action.'

In the domain of art, it is clear that such a definition is not pertinent since there is no supreme authority and truth. There is yet a point where both views converge: which is the origin of the compulsion of innovation (as a break with tradition) and the meaning of imitation as degradation of tradition.

A famous hadith says that 'he who has no master, his master is the Devil'. A Sufi proverb developed this point in these terms: 'Innovation is more appreciated by the Devil

than sin, because one can repent from sin but not from innovation, as Hujwirī said'. Innovation is considered the expression of passions and desire (*havās*). This fits perfectly the opinions of masters with whom I discussed: see above Kiāni saying that Moderns are sincere in a way, but they lie to themselves... Others insist that one must not force change. This is what they think of the innovations of some of their colleagues: they are motivated by vanity or material interests.

And above all, they abhor imitation, in accordance with the principle of creativity which they hold as the *sine qua non* condition for art to become elevated above the condition of craft. Thus, creativity must be distinguished from innovation (in its pejorative meaning *bid'a*)*;* they mean a kind of creativity which does not emanate from the futile *intention* of presenting oneself as an inventor. The emergence of the idea of 'personal style', under the influence of western painting, is the central theme in the magnificent novel by Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red*. What he says about 16th to 17th century miniature painting in Istanbul remains relevant for music nowadays.

> 'This hidden flaw, style, does not appear in an artist on his own initiative but because of his deeper motivations, buried in his memory... These slight discrepancies, these mistakes, these weaknesses... will now, under the massive and universal influence of European painters, earn credibility as a mark of style, of originality' (:674).

Of course, it is obvious that imitation is an obligatory point of passage in the assimilation of traditional forms, and in this sense is not to be condemned. For the Sufis, imitation is justified at the level of 'the apprenticeship of a science under the direction of a master whose authority is necessary for education' (Nwya: 183).

As we can see, mystical thought establishes fine and subtle distinctions and separates the sacred from the cultural levels. However, these levels are still perfectly symmetrical, mainly with regard to the process of change in a way which appears obvious to lucid artists. According to Sufis who see themselves as keepers of quintessential Islam, the mass of believers is only occupied with following their desires, their passions: either they conform to religious tradition through routine (which as we have said is considered to be innovative), or they bring innovations which deviate from the line traced by the Founder. According to Sufis, official clerics, who were seen as typical models of conformism, uphold these deviations.

Under the cross-fire of these two attacks, the famous pillar of *consensus omnium* crumbled in terms which can easily be extrapolated to musical tradition: - on the one hand, the approval of the public and the conformity to classical norms are nothing but routine, imitation and convention; on the other hand, the need for change, or its ratification, can only come from a decay of taste, a natural inclination towards the low, activated by vulgar passions (*havās*). Hence, *fashion* and *traditionalism* are set back-to-back and in no way could the public be qualified to intervene in the evolution of tradition. Under these conditions, the only choice for musical art is to remain detached from the masses and to remain in the hands of initiated artists and music lovers, reproducing the Sufi pattern of sheikh and followers. They cannot take into consideration mass taste without *ipso facto* leaving this circle.

This is indeed the situation described with nostalgia by old Persian masters I have met. Considered from the perspective of our times, it really seems to pertain to another age.

B. COGNITIVE STRUCTURES

Now, we should really try to find out if there is no objective fact which threatens musical tradition. Without minimizing in any way, the pertinence of Islamic belief at the end of the era of prophetic Revelation, I would like to shed light on the question of radical changes in cognitive modes which most civilizations have undergone. This change can be apprehended through the opposition between oral and literate cultures. Within literate cultures, are commonly distinguished the cheirographic, then the mecanographic phases, to which I will add a third one, the mediatic, because even if it is an image, it is still an inscription which addresses the sense of vision.

Musical Tradition as Purely Oral Culture

Oriental musicians often oppose the principle of orality to literacy in terms of opposition of traditional and non-traditional. It is mainly the issue of notation which divided the tenets of a kind of modernism from those of tradition. This issue deserves to be developed since it pertains directly to the fundamental structures of the sacred and sheds a historical light much more powerfully than factual data.

A strong argument for the orality of musical transmission is given in the *Resāle-ye Amirkhān-e Gorji* (1697[25]): 'Music is the most difficult of all the sciences, because, except for the name of frets, (on the lute, *parde*) it cannot be written' (:42). In fact, Arabs, Turks and Persians were not much interested in musical scores before the twentieth century[26]. Although theoreticians transcribed some melodic fragments as early as the thirteenth

century, it was not in order to use these notations but just to provide some examples. Nowadays no Persian musician denies the advantage of notation, but they never use it as a pedagogic device and consider direct imitation as far superior.

Oral cultures, as W.J. Ong demonstrated (:41), are in essence conservative and traditionalist; actually, traditional music is much more relevant to orality than to literacy. This cleavage between oral culture and 'chirographic' (i.e. manuscript) or 'typographic' (i.e. printed material) culture remarkably analysed by Ong is a great help for our understanding of musical traditions and particularly the reasons why Oriental musicians, among others, remain faithful to this mode of thought and expression.

We have two radically different cognitive modes here, with their own laws and specificities. To summarise, we can say that oral thinking or expression is unifying, participatory, situational and antagonistic, conservative, synthetic, aggregative and additive, redundant, aural, etc., whereas written thought or expression is distancing, reflexive, abstract, analytic, concise, visual, etc.

The main traits which distinguish *musical discourse* from literary or poetic text also correspond to the opposition of the oral versus the written.

Firstly, there is redundancy: you will never find a poem which would repeat a phrase or a word as often as a musical composition does. The majority of musical forms are extremely redundant or repetitive, particularly in popular music which is produced in an oral context.

Another characteristic is the presence-making force of orality: it puts into presence, face to face, it is participatory and unifies the subject and the object. Musical practices provide a clear illustration of this principle. Music, especially traditional music, exists only in and through performance realized 'here and now' in the immediate present, as well as in the presence of a public united in the activity of audition and intervene in its unfolding. Therefore, performance becomes a unique and singular event, independently of the recurrent elements which relate its content to all past and future performances. It is in this fact, rather than in the renewal of the repertoire, that the originality and fundamental creativity of oral practices resides, in particular, in narrative and musical performances. The point is, as Ong puts it, 'not in making up new stories but in managing a particular interaction with this audience at this time - at every telling, the story has to be introduced uniquely into a unique situation, for in oral cultures, an audience must be brought to respond, often vigorously.' (Ong: 41-42). This is generally what one expects from a musical performance, at least in Islamic culture.

From this, it follows that orality induces a direct mode of knowledge, that is, a participatory, face-to-face, or presential one, unifying the knowing and the known in what Islamic gnostics call 'presential knowledge' (*'ilm-i huzūri*), as opposed to the distanced or 'objective' knowledge, the latter being promoted by literary or oratorical techniques (*qawl* opposed to *hāl*). "Writing separates the knower from the known and thus, sets up conditions for objectivity in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing (*ibid*.: 46). To the contrary orality achieves 'empathetic, communal identification with the known.' (*ibid.:* 45). In spite of the ambiguity of some of his positions, Plato had already outlined the insufficiency of written texts in the transmission of knowledge:

> 'So, the man who thinks that he has left behind him a science in writing, and in his turn the man who receives it from him in the belief that anything clear and certain will result from what is written down, will be full of simplicity and would be really ignorant of Ammon's prophetic utterance, in thinking that written words were anything more than reminders to the man who knows the subjects to which the things written relates.' (*Phaedrus,* 275 c)

This principle of unity has been prescribed by Dariush Safvat, an important representative of Persian musical tradition whose ideas are perfectly in line with Sufi thought. 'As long as the complete union between the agent, the instrument and the action is not realized, art does not reach its Perfection' (1984: 47). The same principle is expressed in Indian tradition: 'True knowledge of an object is obtained only when the knower and the known, the contemplator and the contemplated, unite in a transcendent dimension'. (Coomaraswamy: 6-7) (Which is, he adds, the principle of devotion.)

The orator or the musician, stands in front of the listener, whereas the writer writes alone and the reader reads alone. Transmission is also achieved through a personal relation with the Other, in a quasi-physical contact, as suggested by the Persian formulas, from 'hand to hand' and 'from heart to heart (*sine be sine,* or from memory to memory).'

The *physical* dimension is very important in oral expression and apprenticeship. According to W.J. Ong, 'the oral word, as we have noted, never exists in a simply verbal context as a written word does. Spoken words are always modifications of a total, existential situation which always engages the body.' (*ibid.*: 67). In the same way, a great many musical forms arise form gesture or movement and are inseparable from them: it is not the mind which sends its order to the hand which executes them, it is the hand itself which takes the initiative. Here we have an illustration of the principle of the pre-eminence of the concrete

over the abstract. The hand of the artist is not a tool subjected to thought: the hand 'thinks'. We sense here the importance of the master's presence in musical transmission of which we will talk later.

Among the other cognitive aspects of orality, there is its rooting in the concrete, which goes together with its unifying character. Abstract thought separates, distances, isolates; oral thought is linked to the present, to the world, to a situation, to the human. It does not care much about definitions, nomenclatures, data isolated from context (Ong: 43). This reminds us of Persian music, which in spite of its high sophistication and complexity, does not care much about theory and representation. It is entirely concentrated on practice, on instrumental and vocal technique with the aim of producing an effect and refining its expression. The fact that it privileges above all the affects, the aesthetic emotional *hāl*, keeps it at a distance from theoretical concerns. As they often say: it does not matter what you play, it is the way you play which is important.

The Shift from the Oral to the Written

Of course, in spite of all the typical qualities of orality that I have mentioned, Islamic art music is not, as we can imagine, a pure product of oral thought. It flourished among literati and they sang a poetry which was always written but largely memorised [on the stable type of 'memory of the written' and not on the proper mode of 'oral memory' as we find among popular bards or story teller]. The canonical repertoires seemed to have gradually crystallised into precise and less redundant Texts, transmitted in the same mode as the memory of the written, that is, by repetition. It seems improbable that Persian masters of the early nineteenth century had possessed such fixed versions as we have now. Their repertory probably followed other rules of organisation more relevant to orality as we find them with minstrel music. Perhaps the changes occurring in the process of transmission have contributed to this crystallisation: art music was no longer restricted to family circles or guilds. It was taught in 'classes' where a close relationship between master and disciple turned into the banal relation of teacher to pupil. Its transmission became less a matter of impregnation than of pedagogy through lessons aimed at students belonging to the intelligentsia of a newly typographic oriented culture.

The slow shift from orality to literacy, with its cheirographic and typographic stages, followed by the mutation which came from the magnetic memory of cassettes and video, is to me, the more decisive historical fact in the destiny of traditions. This is precisely the case for music, which has profound affinities for the typical structure of orality.

This shift is part of a general process of evolution of mankind's mentality. J. Jaynes thinks that reflexive consciousness is a recent acquisition which goes back only a few

millennia. From his demonstration, carefully documented by data provided by neurology and history of antiquity, it appears that in ancient times cognitive modes such as mystical hearing, by the medium of trances, supernatural inspiration, clairaudience and generally speaking, modified states of consciousness were largely valued and promoted by high cultures. But these were gradually discarded or came finally under suspicion and relegated to a marginal place. Conversely, what we call consciousness, has progressively taken over the mental life of humankind during our era. If this view is correct, then music and poetry, as they are cultivated in the context of tradition, would be in this respect, remnants of *archaic practices*. I must say that Western classical musicians are very far from even imagining in what way these so-called archaic practices may be different from their own.

From all that has been said above, about the specificity of oral thought, it appears that the religious and the sacred sphere, as an individual or as a collective experience, a form of thought, sensibility and behaviour, are also a bastion of orality and of archaic brain activity. It is particularly the case in Islam, which is based on an oral Revelation, that has been kept alive by chanting more than by writing. If religious and mystical practices are so often accompanied by music, if music is pregnant with religious themes or symbolism, it is perhaps also because of these affinities. Jayne's model of evolution accounts for the fact that in Islam, prophecy is definitively closed, so that the Revelation of the Qur'an, that is, oral transcendental Speech, perceived, in an ecstatic state of consciousness, marks the end of an Age. Henceforth, the divine does not talk anymore, clear-audience is not any more the royal path to true knowledge. Other intellectual paths are open which will lead to modernity, yet the vestiges and nostalgia of this golden age and of these archaic modes of being, subsist with the musical experience.

I will not go further in this domain, the access of which seems to become more and more hermetic to the modern mind, and I will only insist on the fact that a similar evolution is found in the shift from orality to literacy. The cultural choice which implies this shift is rooted in the biological, because it corresponds to the functional separation of the two cerebral hemispheres: the right one (dominant), holographic and intuitive, and the left one (subdominant), analytic and discursive.

> 'The self-imprisonment of knowledge which relies only on the eye... makes it difficult to open the perception doors of the "unconscious self." Historically, the dominance of the left hemisphere has obliterated this process of opening. The shift from speech language to the written language led to the supremacy of the eye, musically frozen into scores, extraverted into the visual. According to

> Kamper, the usurpation of the eye has extended its control over the contemplation of the listener' (Baumann: 133).

In M.P. Baumann's view, the state of consciousness referred to - which may also be attained through music, cannot be delimited by verbal discourse and is relegated to the mystical or metaphysical domain (*ibid.*). In this way, in a period where discursive and analytic thoughts dominate, music would remain an archaic art, particularly in its traditional forms where it is more often used as a means of transforming the state of consciousness. Yet even for traditional music, there is always the risks that the eye appropriates music and reduces it to an object of intellectual observation, which at the ultimate stage is even possible without sound, relying entirely on written scores. This is what I call music for the eyes, itself the daughter of Technique. Should I say that this is actually the idea shared up to a certain extent by Orientals looking at Western art music.

At the same time the eye extends its empire and submerges the unconscious (or super conscious) self, writing, as Ong wrote it, is consciousness-raising (Ong: 179). Its structure 'intensifies the sense of self' (*ibid*.: 179). He said (:178), that the evolution of consciousness in the modern world is marked by distanciation and reflexivity which is expressed in literature (and perhaps in other arts) by introspection and personal crisis. And these as we have seen in our previous lectures, are landmarks for modernity.

The New Conditions of Transmission

If schisms and profound restructurations have affected religious tradition, this could be the case, *a fortiori,* for the intermediary domain of art. There is much evidence that this type of schism is happening nowadays in art music for many cultures. Among the objective factors susceptible in provoking a radical break, there is, as we said, the fact that musical production does not disappear, but remains under the form of notation or better, with recordings and video films widely propagated and readily available. At the same time, direct transmission, which is the fundamental engine of tradition, with its oral pedagogy and its intimate master/disciple relationship tends to disappear to the profit of autodidacticism, or depersonalised and superficial study through books, CDs or the Internet. In the same manner, the convivial relationship between the interpreter and his public tends to be replaced by solitary hearing of recordings laboriously edited in studios. In our civilization of the written and of archivisation of information, industrial music no longer seeks to establish interpersonal relationships. It is apprehended from the outside, it is reified and

deprived of its human and ethical context before being delivered to the consumer. More seriously, perhaps, it no longer has any relation to transcendence: even in the Orient, some artists would rid it of inspiration. As Ostād Nāser Farhangfar[27] said: 'Now they are coming with a video camera, they take shots and say: the drum (*zarb*) is this. I have taken pains, for forty years, to be able to play this *zarb*, but they do not care at all about that.' Or as Ostād Mohammad Musavi said[28]:

> 'What does it mean, a pupil who comes to me and says: "I only want to learn the technique of the ney (the reed flute)? Are we just like synthesizers or computers on whom, by pushing a knob you can play the sound of such or another instrument? Music without emotion, *hāl*, is like this."'

The Ransom of Technological Modernity

Anyhow, the fact is that a qualitative change has occurred and that music has been affected by it. Conditions of life have changed more radically in one century than in 2000 years. Therefore, music cannot be the same. Yet Mohammad Musavi, who is not a typical traditionalist acknowledges:

> 'In these times (a century ago) all masters were entirely absorbed by music; they had no sorrows. They could play ten hours a day. Now we have too many sorrows and problems; we cannot play like this, we have *no time* anymore. Besides, we cannot deal with their style now: firstly, because the taste of the people is different now, and artists are obliged to satisfy the public; secondly, because musicians have no more patience. It takes much more time to learn this old style.'

Present-day musicians are in a rush to get a result. They are pushed by material motivation and assisted by all the resources of technology, they are seeking efficiency, a modern notion in fact. To this is added the superficiality of human relationships: there are no masters, there are no disciples, but only teachers and pupils.

> 'In this affair, they have lost the way, they do not know what to do. Either their teachers were not good [i.e. they have not been well educated], or they did not follow the way of their masters. He who finds this traditional path must not

> abandon it in the middle. 'They' come a couple of times, they learn here, and after a while they take their own pupils instead of sending them to me.'

When asked why musicians are not anymore 'going to depths', Farhangfar answers:

> 'Because in reality, "the world bazaar" has become extended. Before, it wasn't the same; pupils endured all sorts of pains before they found something. They were not given these things with such ease...Then, it was different; the networks of relations were more restricted; It was not possible for just anyone to enter into the circle of the Other. But once he was close to someone, he became like a prisoner, a disciple. These days, relationships between master and disciple have disappeared; not only in music, but in all other domains as well. It is probably the same in the West. In the past, Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci had disciples.'

This topic of 'master and disciple' will be debated in the final lecture.

Conclusion: *A Dynamic Model of Tradition*

If we take into account the lessons of the history of religions, and more specifically those which bear a relation to our cultural field, we are in a position to draw a three-fold scheme. Tradition goes through three phases resulting in its natural death, and must be set in train again when the process is over.

1. opening of the system: inspiration, live speech. Charismatic person. (authority >> allegiance, imitation).

2. transmission (preservation). Masters, disciples, schools.

>> crystallisation in the form of Text, canonisation,

line of conduct, method >> reinterpretation, hermeneutics (inspired), gloss, paraphrase, rewriting and adaptations.

3. Closing of the system. Hierarchy, dogmatism.

>> exhaustion of reinterpretation, academism, technicisation, routine and blind imitation, end of inspiration.

When tradition is in a state of stability (stage 2), changes occur within sameness: renewal is achieved through ritual forms, through a constant coming back to ontological origins.

On the verge of disappearance, which can be the outcome of natural degeneration, what remains is empty formalism, which often consists in overlooking the origin, losing the original meaning; that is, automatism, mechanical repetition, technical exhaustion, inertia, resting on one's laurels, etc. In order for tradition to regenerate itself, it needs a return to the sources under the impulse of a new inspiration; (an instance of this renewal is found in thee figure of the 'prophet of recalling' such as Zarathustra). Another likely occurrence is that tradition is superseded - though not destroyed - by new inspiration or new tradition which integrates a number of elements on the former; (for example Christianity after Judaism). But tradition might as well disappear or be confined to a marginal role as a consequence of the advent of a new or foreign tradition, acting as a complete departure from the former mainstream; (for example, Islam prevailing over paganism). We might notice, in this perspective, some ancient forms being given new contents (for example pagan or Mithraicism patterns in Christianity).

IV - A PHENOMENOLOGY OF TRANSMISSION: *THE RELATION OF MASTER TO DISCIPLE A BASIS FOR TRADITION*

Something is Going On. Something is Passing On

In the course of our previous lectures, we began approaching the object of tradition and the system of transmission in various ways, chiefly from an aesthetic and religious approach. Raising the question of tradition essence as opposed to modernity, I attempted at enlightening specific contemporary context features taking in account that on the grand scale, modernity seems to have another meaning than it used to have in the past, and that therefore, tradition is bound to find new outlets. On more general grounds, the major historical trend in lifestyles is the *slow shift from orality to literacy,* with all its far-reaching consequences with regard the content of transmission. Major religious, spiritual, philosophical, literary, artistic and of course music were originally oral in tradition. It is a Speech which becomes a Text, a gesture which becomes a rite, and tends to be deprived of something of fabulous importance in this process: we might call this 'something' *presence* or unifying experience. The duty of tradition inheritors through hermeneutics, is to reach its original never absolutely unveiled meaning, and to manage a renewal prospects derived from this hermeneutical mission. Without any interpretative effort going back to its earliest roots, tradition would likely become a dead tree unable to yield fruit any longer and should be felled. There are certain circumstances, however, when it is still possible to single out a shoot to graft onto a younger tree: it may produce fruit again. This is splendidly displayed in religious and musical spheres.

The unavoidable process by which written cognitive processes prevail over their orality, reaches its peak with the advent of the printing, and later on with sound recording and digital images. With music, it was observed that the Orient was reluctant in accepting a notation system. However, traditional transmission was at risk because of reel-to-reel recordings. At the same time, massive dissemination of music (mainly industrial) of all origins, by the media brought fundamental changes in the relations of people to their traditional music. It had always been deeply territorialized and remained in close connection to *habitus* and habits, customs and rites. Another consequence was the demagogic usage which was made with these technical achievements. As a consequence, the highest traditions, the most difficult and demanding in matters of quality, were discarded and replaced by melodies 'of the time', often alien, and thus lacking roots in

people's views. What is even more important is that upholders of these elaborate traditions requiring specific education which cannot be integrated by proximity to a traditional environment, tend to use the modern media to learn and to teach.

In the last lecture, we have insisted that a direct and oral transmission of tradition deeply diverges from transmission through the medium of written cognitive processes. It goes without saying. You might read all the books and watch all the films you want about India, you will never manage to get the feeling and the taste if the specific flavours of the country unlike some having spent years among Indians. The same thing goes with spirituality, art and traditional sciences. Books and recordings are not enough. A master is needed. As a consequence, Sufism became the most extreme instance of religious tradition, whereas theologians and doctors of Islamic law got caught in scholarly speculations and often bowed to the temptation of political power.

The traditional man, and more specifically the one in charge of a profound knowledge, is at the centre of a structure of relations, communications, interactions and bindings where the relationship between master and disciple acts as a focus. 'The one who has no master, his deeds have no founding. In the way to the Intelligible, there is no better help than a master' (Tajik proverb). Many features of 'traditionality' derive from the principle of this relationship.

Referring to the masters I met, and to what is akin to mystical transmission—where the origin and transmission of tradition in its purest form is conspicuous—I shall now sketch a phenomenological approach to traditional transmission.

Chain of Interaction

There is no tradition without a deliberate and conscious act of transmission and reception. The traditional individual is firstly and foremost the one who is entrusted with a gift, something that is transmitted, and who takes up the implications of such a receiving position; this thing given is not so much something you have or possess as it is a good or a value - which is bound to be transmitted again sooner or later; the acceptance of this value, as a knowledge as well as an experience, leads to wisdom, which is the same thing, but in the sphere of *being* and not *having*. The acceptance of the value of the given thing amounts to a moral obligation commensurate with this value. You free yourself from this obligation by preserving and achieving what has been given in trust.

Receiving the gift entails a *debt* which binds together the one who receives and the one who gives. Thus, chains of transmissions develop (*silsila*) (with Sufism, with Indian

music schools, etc.). The one who gives is called the master; the one who begs and receives is the disciple.

Whatever the compensation with which the master is granted as a way of response, what he gave cannot be given back, for only something similar could make for it, and this, he received himself when he was a disciple. Now, the disciple, by definition, does not have anything similar to offer (if this were not the case, he would not be a disciple); he could offer anything but gratitude through the complete achievement (realization) of the gift with which he was granted. The link between master and disciple is therefore always a moral binding contract between two persons. When the disciple achieves the given thing, he becomes, at least virtually, a master. If he transmits or spreads the trust in turn, he completes his mastery and re-actualises the legacy with which he was gratified. He can be referred as a master, but at the same time he is grateful to the master, who remains his master, and more profoundly, to the whole chain of transmission.

The word 'master' must be understood in its relative meaning. Though the function of master exists, nobody can be said to be free from any obligation, everyone feels indebted with regard to the training his master provided. Thus, what is given *does not belong* to the master; the master is not the author of what he gives, for what he gives was formerly given to him. The content of tradition always transcends the person in charge of the deposit. No one can claim to have reached the ultimate goal, to have integrated the core of the deposit; you never have the last word to what it leads. In this respect, M. Kiāni, says that: 'in Iranian arts [...] man is always in the state of a pupil'. In order for something to be transmitted, the master as well as the disciple have to *give way*.

Eventually, the master, in turn, needs the disciple: you do not think alone; it is the presence and the request of the other who fosters Speech, words or music. The audience brings about thought; it acts as an incentive for the universalisation of this thought. It is in front of pupils and as a response to their request that the Ancients elaborated the great repertoires.

In the same way, the word 'object' of transmission is to be understood in a relative sense. The point is not to be the bulwark of a repertoire or a Text, but to keep music and Speech alive. Here, what is essential is that Tradition, 'transmitting the preserved object, should bring about renewals, that is, not fashionable ideologies of the time, but new *witnesses'* (Corbin, 1971-2: I, 37). At an ultimate level, some traditions tend to abolish Speech, so as to make of silence and void the only sources of authenticity. The sense of Tradition is not that the master should 'hand the torch' to the disciple, but that he should set alight the torch of the disciple.

The Master as a Model

Many issues discussed here could be emphasised and sustained by appropriate examples. We must remember, mainly, that Tradition is transmission (*traditio*) within the sphere of a two-person relationship: master and disciple.

Let us now come back to the religious and gnostic perspective of previous analyses, which were considered as the epitome of traditional structures. The knowledge which is transmitted is also the knowledge of oneself. The master and disciple relationship plays a fundamental role in this respect A hadith has: 'the one who has no master has Satan as a master.' This implies that the animal nature of man is bound to overcome his spiritual nature and to leave him unconscious. The positive law of religion, as we observed, is clearly a definition of the *restraints* against this animalistic nature. Yet, according to this hadith, religious Law is not enough to restrain this animalistic nature, and transcend it even less. One needs a master for this.

The other aspect of this relationship is the development of spiritual potential virtues, which are to be paralleled with the divine attributes which constitute true humanity. This might be the highest aim of Tradition. Even when transmission is achieved, despite the physical absence of the master, he is there, always invisible. This seems to be the touchstone of Tradition, at least in the sense applicable to cultural fields we have considered so far.

Some may argue that traditions, as well as culture, are preserved in the course of time by the simple existence of people taking them up and living in their circles. It would not be necessary to refer to a master-disciple relationship in this view, or only to its characteristic of being an epitome of the structures of tradition. Indeed, religious Islamic structure does without this sort of relationship: transmission is achieved through the family and environment, and that there are religious authorities, and specially qualified individuals, does not imply personal relations between these people and believers (except for theologians). It could be said, in this perspective, that the major part of music is obviously transmitted by impregnation.

Again, the answer to this criticism, lies in the hierarchical representation of the world and knowledge. As well as man, worlds and intermediary worlds, Culture is not unidimensional; it has levels of knowledge corresponding to cognitive levels. According to Sufis and gnostics, abiding by religious law (*shar'*), is only the elementary level of knowledge which paves the way for another level, the Path (*tariqa*) and Knowledge (*ma'rifa*), the ultimate goal being Truth (*haqiqa*),whereas the first level only gives access to paradise. The Book, Laws, written commandments and teachings, can be transmitted as they are, as things or objects; ordinary people have access to them - and are in a position to

alter their content or make it serve their own purposes - but their hidden meaning, their subtleties, and above all the explanation of the way to apply them properly are part of an initiatic transmission.

This knowledge makes mastery and requires a master to be integrated, except in some specific and very rare cases - this point is worth noting - where knowledge is granted through *inspiration*, even though, there again, the cultural environment plays its part. The objection might be found whereby these are gnostic views; but this is too easy to answer. The conventional artists, musicians, poets (particularly learned artists) held similar views until recent times, because it seemed that official Islamism has led to the erasing of Sufi thought within intellectual and artistic circles. It is obvious, as a matter of fact, that the popular background, or the 'non-professional', requires a natural familiarity with the cultural environment, whereas art or minstrel music, which calls for a higher degree of qualification, is transmitted through a master-disciple relationship which constantly refers to a founding authority.

Without a master, there are, of course, many features which can be transmitted through education or by simple contact, but the level of knowledge with which we are concerned requires genuine teaching.

The highly initiatic outlook of traditions cannot be put down to their technical complexity, or to an exclusive concern for being kept secret in order to take the better of them. It is more likely that concern should be for the preservation of a sense, a truth, a value, and to the aura of respect in which it is wrapped. There is nothing such as a secret by nature: there is secrecy as long as one cannot understand it. Initiatic secrets often seem to amount to almost nothing: a few words, images, songs, a lineage/the ancestors... The essential point of teaching is *to prevent the meaning from vulgarisation and banalisation,* from decay through widespread diffusion, from being forgotten. When society has lost the concern for truth, the focus of tradition tends to become more and more exclusive. With regards music, to be traditional is to follow a teaching, and make allegiance for a certain period of time to a certain number of masters along a chain of transmission, a lineage (*silsila, isnād, haft posht,* or *gharānā* in India). Of course, you have to model your behaviour on an eminent pattern, but you cannot be content with this, for in a time where the recordings (or even the video recordings) of great masters are available, the actual teachings of a master would seem superfluous. Now this is a wrong idea (see the harsh words of Farhangfar or Musavi directed at impatient pupils).

If we assume that 'only the same is able to know the same', then the object of knowledge cannot be approached as such, *ab extra.* You have to learn this from a person

who already managed to integrate the object of transmission, a master who is not only the 'owner' of a science or knowledge but, if we may say so, a 'knowing-subject'. In other words, as long as the disciple is in face of the master, he does not directly take possession of the object of knowledge, but rather takes as model the behaviour of his master as a 'knowing-subject'. With this mimetic desire, he does not only learn the core of the teachings, but he, himself, creates something, through the imitation of moods, gestures and airs of the master. It is obvious that the zealous pupil has always a model in mind while playing music. Beyond the model we have the figure of the master, as the source which produces musical (and psychological) patterns on which to be modelled. The son imitates his father; so, the disciple imitates the master. He tries to integrate his dispositions, postures and even his psychological characteristic. My late colleague G. Rouget provided a heuristic interpretation of opera as a rite of possession by roles; I shall in turn apply this explanation to traditional transmission:

At the ultimate stage, the pupil is up to a point 'possessed' by the spirit of the master when he plays his instrument and sings: there is something like a mimetic fusion. Many musicians in many cultures talk about this phenomenon. This is to be paralleled with modified states of consciousness to which I have referred before: inspiration and contact with spirits. In any case, it is a well-known fact that possession is often linked with the spirits of ancestors. Other reasons accounting for the necessity of a personal and individual reception, have been put forward by contemporary masters (Safvat, 1984: 105-6). According to them, if we assume that music is the expression of the inner disposition of the performer, it seems obvious that *the imitation of form entails the imitation of content* and that the pupil is bound to integrate steadily the traits of his master. On the basis of such a principle, Safvat says (*ibid.*), the pupil must choose his master with great circumspection; conversely, the master is in a position to dismiss any pupil who does not have the appropriate characteristics, which are often more important than musical ability. The reasons for this are obvious: the object of transmission being the Word of true authority, the pupil, as a musician, is always part of the audience, and the master is the one who speaks, and this remains true if we overlook the authority granted to the master in the process of transmission. Sufis are known for saying that "speaking is a kind of vanity, whereas listening is a kind of *humility*" (Hujwirī: 396). ('to obey' is derived from the Latin verb *ob-audire,* which means 'listening'.) The oral teaching of a master is thus a matter of learning humility, learning to submit (*nisti*, humility), one of the cardinal virtues of musicians quoted by D. Safvat, (1984: 106). His ascendancy over the pupil does not allow the master to behave like a tyrant as long as it is balanced by ethics.

Respect for the Master

This accounts for the *respect* for the master, of the elder and ancients, as an instrumental element in the preservation of traditional inheritance. Sufism or mystical gnosis (*'irfān*), which typifies the structure of traditional transmission, can be described in its integrality as the relationship between master and disciple. The disciple must abandon himself to the hands of the master 'as the corpse in the hands of the person who washes the dead', as the phrase goes. Whatever the level he reaches afterwards, his gratitude to his master is proportionate to the debt - that is, the knowledge with which the master has provided him. For knowledge is something like a rebirth. Conversely, the greatest offence in the initiatic and spiritual circle is of ingratitude insofar as it touches upon the matter of creation: the master eventually dismisses his pupil, if it happens. More generally, all forms of ingratitude from teacher, father or professor, are considered as evil in the traditional frame of mind. This is a very ancient trait: among the Persians, gratitude was viewed as the highest virtue, and ingratitude as the most abominable. It appears clearly that the virtue of gratitude is one of the essential components of a steady and longstanding traditional transmission.

This deference cannot be described as a life-long state of dependence or alienation. There is a time when teaching is over, when nothing can be transmitted anymore, because the master has given all he could, or because the disciple is not likely to go further on and to benefit from more teaching. At this point, the master withdraws and in turn, emancipates the disciple, sends him back whence he came, sets him free to develop his own capacity, by himself. Only when the master is exceptionally powerful, when his art or spiritual science has no limits, does the pupil remain bound to the master for his whole life.

Tradition as a Way of Life

In musical tradition, beyond the heritage, the repertoire, which is by definition subjected to variations and shifts, something is thus transmitted, which is not of the order of *having* but of *being*. This set of things makes a good education (*adab)*, not only in the common sense of the expression - when talking of 'good manners'- , but also in the most inclusive and deep sense of moral virtues and straight behaviour. The pre-eminence of being, over having, is conspicuous in that most often the traditional work of art does not belong to the artist who created it (if it is truly the work of an individual). The artist rarely views himself as the author of a singular work of art, even if it is a success, and he is mostly right. *Adab* or ethics (*akhlāq*) prevent him from stepping on the stage with his own name, and at any rate his talent is obvious.

The ephemeral nature of musical creations was another incentive for traditional masters of music to remain modest. It was a difficult thing to claim one's moral rights or to make a profit from one's art for a long time in the traditional context; the patron paid tribute to a certain number of artists, but this was something of which one could not count. The status of music as opposed to other arts is in this view fundamentally archaic, for all poets used to sign their pieces of poetry (*ghazal*) inserting their name or pen name, in the last verse, and so did the craftsmen or painters of miniatures (from the seventeenth century onwards). The anonymity of composers is not the rule in Islamic cultures and depends on times. On the other hand, the inclination towards anonymity and discretion specific to some Iranian masters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be understood as an important change in the status of musicians and in the symbolic function of music with Sufi ethics.

The absence of a concrete object of transmission, of an object of knowledge as a book or a set of notations (or even recordings), and more generally the principle of 'aurality', implies a deep relation from one person to another. What is transmitted, in Tradition, is not as much 'an object of knowledge', as it is a *knowing-subject.* It is in this perspective that we should understand what is often said in Iran: 'you do not have anything like a traditional music, you only have traditional musicians'. The transmission which takes place through music is of a certain 'spirit', a specific view of the world (*jahān bini*) which is closely related to a subject, a genuine posture in face of the world, and eventually 'an inner vision' (*darun bini*) or 'self-knowledge' (*ma'refat-e wujūdī,*), which is not a threat against one's freedom, and not a painful act of artificial self-discipline. The submission to the master, the erasing of the self, the confident reliance (*tawakkul*), which reaches its peak in an initiatic transmission, must not be considered as slavery, that is, the abdication of one's will and freedom, but rather as different steps in the path leading to *the mastery of the ego* which is the key to genuine freedom and the access to spontaneity and creative inspiration. It would be a complete misunderstanding to view this type of relation as an archaic or feudal form of alienation to authority, or a sort of interactive dependence, such as we have in the occidental master-and-slave Hegelian scheme. It is rather a matter of father-and-son relationship. 'The master is much more inestimable than a father as an Uzbek proverb says (*ustaz ātangdan ulugh*).

As for the content of transmission, all the musicians I interviewed said about the same thing: when he reaches a certain stage, the pupil is free to act as he pleases. At the same time, he naturally develops an appropriate taste which will guide the creative effort in order to avoid gaping departures from the continuity of tradition, but this is in a sense secondary.

For what really prevents the pupil from giving way to the likely temptation of the innovations that a certain modernity magnifies is more the preservation of *adab,* earnestness and authenticity, than the respect of the ancient as such. Allegiance to the master, as it is understood in tradition, nurtures this set of standards and these genuine ethics, as well as this complex view of the world, all of which are as important in Sufi initiation as they are in profane culture.

The Indian Example

Among all musical traditions, it is the Indian which has placed the strongest emphasis outlook on the initiatic teaching, through music schools or musical lineage called *gharānā*. There again, the initiatic aspect of the transmission and the mystery in which it is wrapped, probably of relatively recent origin, and might be the outcome of the spreading of Sufi brotherhoods in India, or Shi'i circles to which a certain number of lineages belonged. It seems reasonable to suppose that types of transmission varied with History as well as with cultures and the object of transmission. The Sufi or gnostic Islamic pattern might be the origin of the system of the *gharānā.* It is quite easy to pinpoint a certain number of instances of the ideas we have been developing so far. We shall deliberately overlook the mystical and transcendental implications of transmission, which have been often overestimated, and therefore we shall address to more concrete features in order to provide a certain amount of qualification. Even 'progressive' masters, promoting unsettling innovations, lay stress on the importance of allegiance to the master and the *gharānā*.

In this manner, 'while Ravi Shankar did not hesitate in modernising his pedagogical methods, he kept a strict orthodox attitude in the relationship of students and teachers. He insisted (as musicians of the 'old school') on performing the *gandā bandhan* ceremony' (Slawek: 162), through which the pupil makes allegiance to the master and the *gharānā*. In his view, the musician in the *gharānā* is not simply someone who plays with the corresponding style, he is more profoundly the one who has received an initiatic and elitist teaching (*khās talim*) through a disciple-*guru* relationship. Ravi Shankar said that the one who benefits from such teaching 'becomes sturdy like a strong oak that will not budge under the influence of other styles' (*idem*: 174). To the contrary, those who follow a path other than initiation, such as those who try to learn with recordings, might become virtuosos, but they will always lack the knowledge linked with the preservation of tradition (*idem*: 174). What is at stake is not only to *preserve*, but to *be qualified to transform things:* 'Knowing the rule and breaking it is acceptable, but breaking it in ignorance harms the tradition' (*idem*: 175). A Tajik verse says: 'The one who sets up to work at anything

without a master will not go far. Grasp firmly the master's clothes and be happy. Be at his service and become in turn a master[29].' The high degree of professionalism and of science to which classical musicians have raised, in parts account for this state of affairs: the sense of rivalry between various schools brings about the sense of secrecy. The idea is to preserve the secret formula which makes the originality of a style. Ravi Shankar, despite his addressing to a wide audience and his many concessions to Westernisation and modernity at large, provides for his most advanced pupils some teachings that must be kept secret.

One of the great marks of traditionality which is often mentioned is *purity,* the transparency of the origin. This noble principle, as much as authenticity to which it is closely related, must be subjected to a critical examination: we have seen that in Iran it brought about musical autarcy. One of the alleged reasons for the initiatic aspect of the transmission was the concern for purity of deposit. If we want to understand this thoroughly, we must cast a view upon the system of the *gharānā*. Given the density of musical life and the great variety of human groups, purity in India must be preserved, not at the level of the 'musical tradition' in its whole, but within the limits of each of the numerous and various *gharānā* or 'specific musical traditions, or schools'. At the beginning, the *gharānā* has 'a pure and specific style' (*idem*: 173 s). Here, authenticity is obviously linked to purity and specificity. On this basis, changes naturally occur through the instrument of creative artists, and accumulate until the differences are so clear compared with the original style with which the changes are reckoned and an officialised *gharānā* is established, with a proper name. With this process, it is possible to imitate others, 'but with the condition of preserving the purity of the style' (*ibid.*). This accounts for the imperative of knowing exactly what one is doing in these traditions. For instance, each of the upholders of two antagonist schools must beware neither to be influenced by the style of the other, nor to influence the other's style. To the contrary, each of them is careful not to do anything that might be said to have some resemblance to what the other does (*idem*: 174). This reminds me about Bourdieu's principle of distinction with regard tastes; in French, an expression such as to have '*des goûts distingués'*, points clearly to taste as a faculty of distinction, to a dislike for blending, hybridisation, confusion of classifications.

It is clear enough that the acceptance of a *gharānā* and a master cannot be considered as an act of abdication resulting in restraints from the disciple's spontaneity. The great master does not produce clones modelled on the same pattern, but is able to teach to individuals of all kinds. This principle, commonly held by Sufis, is also mentioned by some masters of music. Allaudin Khān, one of the leading figures among them, trained masters

whose styles were of a great variety. 'Nikhil Banerjee used to say that his originality came from the seed his *guru* had given him': Allaudin Khān had told him the day they met that he would develop a style truly different from his other pupils', so that we now refer to the 'Nikhil Banerjee style' (*idem*: 171).

The Consensus of the Master

The Indian example, setting the role of unique *gurus* and linear lineages at the foreground, is nothing but a form of tradition integration among many others. The consensus can be that of the people or the audience as well, provided that they conform to Tradition (or to Islamic tradition, on religious grounds). Now, if the master really withdraws, in accordance with the principle of tradition, he cannot take the responsibility of deciding if his disciple has achieved mastery. The first-person commitment always imply the menace of a sort of tyranny or despotism. In the classical tradition of Central Asia (Shash-maqām), we find a rite which symbolically discards this likely temptation; here 'us' replaces 'I', thus paying tribute to the community that keeps tradition alive. The pupil tours with his master, never plays music in his presence without his agreement, devotes him all his earnings. When he reaches a certain degree of maturity, the master introduces him to a society of masters. The pupil displays his ability and art, and if a consensus emerges, after reading the first *surah* of the Qur'an (*Fātiha*), the master sends him free. Through this ceremony, the disciple at the same time enjoys his freedom and has access to the small circle of the elite which is the bastion of tradition. Then he goes, on his own, and trains pupils himself.

The Stolen Tradition

We have understood why familiarisation with familial or social environment cannot make for the teaching of a master when it comes to professional and highly elaborated music. However, there are some cultures where intermediary stages exist and where initiation is achieved through familiarisation with a group of connoisseurs and musicians. An example is with the cafes of Baghdad were the amateurs of Maqām al-irāqī would meet and listen to music (Hassan, 2001). A young man who is eager to learn singing starts by getting familiar with these circles imitating parts of the Maqām repertoire he can hear. After some years, his continuous presence proved he really wanted to study music. Then it happened that one of the singers he used to listen asked him, unexpectedly, if he had learned anything from them. Then, the young man sang a *maqām*, and provided he

showed good abilities and appropriate passion for music, and that his behaviour was in keeping with the traditional *adab*, respectful and modest, he might have become a disciple.

What is most interesting is that the young musician had chosen his master, or his model, from the beginning, imitating him secretly, as well as he could. When he was eventually asked to sing, he sang in his master's style making it clear to all whose master he intended to become the disciple. The chosen master was both flattered to be selected among others and irritated to be more or less faithfully imitated by a novice. In most cases the novice's respect and deference took the best of it, but the master might also have been contented with emboldening the young musician, without having taken him as a pupil. There were indeed a number of masters who did not have any disciple, but many followers. Hence expressions such as: 'X took the art of the *Maqām* of Y', meaning that he had not 'received' it, but managed to possess it somehow (Hassan, *ibid*.).

Apart from enhancing the figure of the master, subjected to deeply rooted respect and filial dedication (when the pupil is accepted as such), the process of transmission typifies the shift from the *average* level of apprenticeship (quite open) to the advanced *level* (more restricted) at which the master/disciple relationship is established. If there are cultures or musical genres where such a relationship does not appear clearly, it is probably: - either a minor tradition where the neophyte is trained within a circle of experts (possibly constituted as a corporation) who end up endorsing his competence by a consensus, - or a declining state of a great tradition. This is frequent in the Orient and often parallels the spread of conservatories. It also happens that the pupil who has been rejected by the master steals a tradition, or part of it. According to some, Mirzā 'Abdollāh and his brother Hosein-qoli, major figure of the Persian musical tradition, did not possessed a complete *radif* because, their father 'Ali Akbar passed out prematurely (in 1861-2) so that they had to listen secretly to their uncle and step-father Āqā Gholām Hosein in order to recollect elements of the repertoire. The words used to belittle this *radif* are rather harsh: 'the behind-the-door *radif* (*radif-e posht-e dari).*

As a conclusion, it might be worthwhile using the conflicting views of two artists I happened to meet as a testing-ground for my ideas upon tradition. The importance of the relation master/disciple appeared to me *a contrario* in a discussion with Z. who is considered to be the major proponent of modernity and speaks for innovation. He has a thorough technical knowledge of musical tradition, but despite his skill he was never considered as an epitome of tradition. His control of Western notation techniques is very good, to the point that he is able to compose pieces in the contemporary 'classical' vein.

His ideological bias is fully foreign, and we might say opposed, to the traditional spirit and ethos: he is a materialist, and aims at a complete departure from the ethos and spirit of Persian music. His mastery of the repertoire, his virtuosity and technical skills associated with a frankness of speech, have given him a certain authority and have made him a figurehead of the modern movement. Quite surprisingly, when asked about the changes the tradition underwent, he chiefly speaks about himself and directs his criticisms at his former masters (or rather professors, as he puts it) and firmly opposes their pedagogic principles. I will not say more about his case and will only derive a conclusion from these sketches: this artist did not learn with a master in the traditional manner; he learned music in Conservatories. He used, skilfully, Western music writing and studio techniques, but did not integrate the traditional state of mind; therefore, a fair number of musicians among masters as well as the audience, disapproved of his interpretations and style, which set him within the romantic sphere of the 'subversive artist'. Having said this, apart from his 'traditional' interpretations, he composed original contemporary works and film music using Western notation and recording techniques. This accounts for his many supporters.

After a lengthy interview with the 'modern artist', I collected the main ideas and explained them to master Majid Kiāni, famous for his attachment to traditional principles upon which he has been reflecting in a very lucid and thorough way. While Z insisted on the necessity to transmit a technical knowledge (the syntax or grammar of music), Kiāni emphasised his concern for an ethical basis and for the oral nature of transmission. At this juncture we come across the Heideggerian reflection upon technical language as opposed to traditional language.

I will just quote a few of his statements emphasising the importance of the master/disciple relationship for the maintenance of tradition. It shows that this issue transcends the whole question of tradition, with its changes, its breaks, its decay, its sociological or political implications, and eventually its shift to modernity.

The Silent Speech (?) of the Master and Ethical Training

Jean During: *Many upholders of modernity are very critical about the notion of imitation implied by tradition, arguing that tradition does not intend to 'get people to understand.'*

Majid Kiāni: On the contrary, masters from ancient times got people to understand very well, but not through words. This music is linked with ethics (*akhlāq*). This does not mean only 'being polite', but 'opening the mind', the thought. Through his behaviour and true humanity (*ensāniyyat*), a good master teaches *ethics* above all, and this does not imply words. Why speak? You do not need this to learn; do people speak in India when it comes to learning music? It is clear enough that this is typical of Occidental music, where you always have to speak.

I have been thinking a lot upon this: the old system is perfectly right. The problem is that nowadays, and especially since the 'renewal' that coincided with Colonel Vaziri (i.e. in the 1930s), you have to discuss and provide arguments, in order to convince pupils for instance. Now that the problem is settled and that a comeback to tradition has occurred, it is no more worth speaking: you do your job, and music is transmitted[30]. In the oral teaching, you are in line with nature: the child first learns to utter words. In the Orient, many things are to be understood in the 'perspective of a view of the self and the world. This is quite difficult to explain [...] you often come across masters who do not have anything to say or are content with saying: 'this is not the right way'. When Davāmi was asked if someone's singing was good, he answered 'no', and that was all, there were no further explanations.

Jean During: *Everyone is able to learn to speak, but the day you want to write, you have to learn grammar, and this is why some masters like Dariush Safvate, both teaches melodies and also teaches the rules.*

Majid Kiāni: My master 'Abdollāh Davāmi never talked: you could learn just by watching him. Habib Somā'i is dead now, but his old records still speak to me; despite the noise of the recording, they tell me, 'no, it is rather like this or like that'. It is just like when people who worship Christ bear the stigmata. If you really focus on the poems of Hāfez, you get to the point where they speak to you and give you lessons. This is what I call 'a view of the world', an 'inner vision'. In the same way, the master tells everything without uttering a word; *you learn with the other senses.* B. used to say that the pupil must be in constant touch with his master. Every day he learns

> something from his master. How do you think 'Ali Akbar Khān, [the famous Indian musician] learnt his art? He spent twenty years with his master [who was his father].
> Jean During: *Some say that this method is not adequate nowadays: people want to learn quickly, and therefore are eager to understand.*
> Majid Kiāni: In the East, many things must be related to the view of oneself and the view of the world. This is quite difficult to explain [...] Materialism rejects both this view of the world and metaphysics as well. It is obvious that the proponents of materialism are likely to discard tradition. In their view, it goes without saying that such a method is outdated; they say: 'what does introspection, what does your deepest self has to do with it'?

As we can see, this master knows about the Occident and modernity as well, and we might say that he grasped their fundamental meaning. It must be noted that as a result of the traditional concern for going against the routine, the majority of people who have assimilated the meaning of tradition (without simply perpetuating tradition through habit), as far as I can judge, are people who have assumed an intellectual distance vis à vis their culture of origin. In these times of confusion, there can only be two manners of distancing: - either a cultural uprooting, an intellectual expatriation (the integration of Western culture and the process of modernity) - or a spiritual uprooting (mystic gnosis, Sufism, allegiance to a master) - or even both. In these times when tradition is threatened, one cannot rest upon the ground of habit, familial or national cultural environment. The danger must be viewed as such. This requires an increased awareness of real problems: one has to acquire a two-fold perspective, a two-fold culture.

CONCLUSION

Tradition in Modernity or the Archivisation of Knowledge

The notion of tradition that runs along these lectures always stands against the background of modernity: firstly, in the perspective of constant changes *inside* the system ('changes in sameness'), and secondly, in the more fundamental sense of *change of the system itself,* or change of 'the world itself', as seems to have happened in the West. This double-sided structure, which goes along with a diachronic approach, is something with which Western people are quite familiar, but it is doubtful that Orientals (as they call themselves) should consider it to be so clear-cut. They are indeed prone to believing that in many civilizations, from antiquity onwards, various views of the world and very dissimilar aesthetics have existed together.

Conversely, in the Western world of today, there subsist still seemingly invincible bastions of tradition, which make the so-called 'predominance of modernity' questionable. It is all too easy to observe that paradoxically enough the societies which most forcefully claim their modernity are also those where the past is an object of veneration, whereas the most traditional societies appear to be living somewhat unconsciously in the 'here and now'.

The most dramatic illustration of this is the process which resulted, in the West, in an extreme extension of space and time: *the archivisation of knowledge.* No civilization has ever stored so much information from past and present events, concerning its own societies *as well as* those of other civilizations. No civilization has ever been so eager to write down, store, settle inventories of everything relating to the past, to preserve every ruin, track or scrap of the past; no civilization has ever showed so deep a concern for the preservation of things past. What is the meaning of this? Such an inventory is presented as the wealth of our culture and testifies of our capacity to know everything around us, but the capacity to integrate this mass of data in a global sense arises only for a minority, even among intellectuals and scholars. For others, the greater part of contemporary culture is reduced to having access to information in order to satisfy 'the natural curiosity of modern man.' In addition to the desire to control and dominate, the phenomenon could be put down to 'the fear of loss': what has been must be protected against oblivion, even though it is emptied of its meaning and separated from its context. This is a sign of the times, a symptom of modernity at large: what we expect from it is nothing but technical

achievements (which cuts both ways), but we are not ready to give up what there was for what there is, and even less for what is to be. The belief that the present is worth the past, that the here-now is worth the there-then, is no longer valid. There was a time when people used to build a cathedral on the ruins of a temple, C. Castoriadis observes; but nowadays, except for modern 'enlightened despotism', we build a museum around the ruins. The Occident, lacking self-confidence, sets up to make an inventory of the world, past and present, allegedly a 'memory' of Humanity, the Conservatory of the World, and ultimately, gradually re-appropriates the past and demands that it justifies itself. Luc Ferry writes that if the sphere of aesthetics is chiefly the place where occurs the 'subjectivation of the world' - a typical trait of the modern world - it is true however that through the medium of a process of self-regulation the most famous literary works are the safeguards of objectivity: history and scientific vulgarisation (science being the leading branch in the intellectual field).

And so We End with Music

But let us come back to music. The archivisation and mediatization which are themselves the outcome of writing and recording techniques (ranging from creation to mass production and diffusion, have far-reaching and varied consequences: reification, canonisation, an increasing division of functions (alienation of the interpreter, promotion of the composer), technicisation, automatisation, intellectualisation, mediatization of transmission, increasing speed and the irresistible nature of change, and so forth. Now, a counter-weapon against this 'reification' of works of art (as a consequence of the technique of notation and recording) is found in the Western classical musical domain in the typical *concern for innovation* and the impossibility of any recurrence.

At the opposite of this concern for renewal and 'originality' (synonymous with 'authenticity' and 'personality'), to the repeal of the laws of traditional art, is the archivisation, and often the fossilisation or mummification of ancient works of art, with all the consequences we have mentioned. On the one hand, everything changes, or to be more accurate, has to change to be in accordance with the myth of the advance of History (the myth of progress in art having been somewhat discarded), on the other hand everything is to be preserved, stocked, stored, saved from a likely oblivion - thus the stress on the unforgettable nature of the things preserved - and not be altered in any way. Myriads of devoted representatives of musical craftsmanship continuously struggle for the maintenance of the heritage, they dust it off periodically, enhance its value, restore it or even 'de-restore' it in order to give it back its authentic outlook, and of course render it

public through the instrument of prestigious 'anthologies', honourable 'renovations', brilliant re-visitings. Such is the paradox of modernity: most artistic activities seem to be more 'traditional' than, say, Asian art music is, in the sense that works of art, created a number of centuries ago, are reproduced, cared for with a somewhat maniacal concern for authenticity.

In the West, except for the small group of the elect revolving around contemporary "classical" composers and benefiting from official patronising and subsidies, the public naturally turns back to the past, to traditions, (even if the only way is sometimes to borrow the tradition of neighbouring cultures). Giving a new life to the music of those times which are now foreign to us cannot be achieved without the prestige of the interpreters (whose notoriety here again undoubtedly prevails over contemporary composers). The mystic aura of great figures of the past such as Mozart or Beethoven, the nostalgia for better times when inspiration came down from above, when music found its source in the heart of man, directly spoke to the heart of the listener and *could be sung or whistled,* all this is of tremendous importance and is without doubt instrumental in the preservation of what used to be a tradition. For it is likely that this music was in its time 'traditional', as long as the writing technique was not yet its essential principle, as long as the transmission was direct, oral, as long as composers were at the same time brilliant improvisers, finding some inspiration in popular culture (as do Arab or Persian composers), as long as *their melodic language was shared by the public* (the people used to whistle the melodies from Mozart or Rossini's operas, whereas nobody whistles or hums after a concert of 'contemporary classical music'), as long as music still had close connections with the sacred, and eventually as long as people lived in the present without continuously looking backwards to the past.

If this music is still popular to a certain extent, it may be because it conveys the sense of the spirit of the past, this spirit being fundamentally different from ours in the sense that it was purely and authentically 'present', as opposed to modernity as the rejection-preservation (which amounts to the same) of the past.

An extreme instance of the general mood of the audience is the marvellous success of *Tous les matins du monde* (1991), a beautiful film extolling the traditional standards of seventeenth century French masters of music. Apart from the quality of the music, the film-goers were fascinated by the striking and archetypal portraits of the master and the pupil, as well as by the magnification of Music as a spiritual powerful entity. This tends to prove that the standards of Tradition have not been watered down by the rising tide of modernity.

We have only mentioned classical music as a form of 'conventional and routine' tradition. As for the 'creative tradition', outside of non-European cultures, a number of traditional characteristics can be found, in my opinion, in certain forms of rock, jazz, pop or DJ music, not to mention, of course, very localised regional practices, which can reach a high level of professionalism.

The notion of modernity, when all is said and done, appears to be itself a moment in the historical process. With the so-called advent of post-modernity and post-history, modernity sounds somewhat old-fashioned; yet, the idea that neutralising the anti-traditional trend implies dismissing history and going back to the sources of Tradition, remains highly doubtful.

The questions which arise now are indeed the same:

Is what we call modernity *a philosophy of loss* (as some philosophers put it)? Is it a moral and aesthetic decay which in the Ancient's view should be considered on an equal basis with downright anti-traditionalism? Were the Ancients better than us? Cannot we be good, true, authentic, without verging on fundamentalism? Do these questions have the same meaning when speaking of art or concepts? Is Art a thing of the past (Hegel)? Is music an archaic art, as suggested in the previous lecture? Is post-modernity able to integrate and supersede tradition and modernity without denying their specificity? Is it merely a happy medium or the first steps to a genuine and 'authentic' renewal or revival?

That these questions raise intractable problems is indicative of the end of the great unifying ideologies in the West: it is not clear yet according to which 'super-structure' new traditions should emerge, in spite of the so-called New Age (soon caught in the toils of the marketing structure) and the much heralded third millennium, which should be a 'religious' one - or not be at all (as André Malraux said). Unless this notion of religiosity too is renewed.

APPENDIX

TOWARDS A MODEL FOR TRADITION

I. THE SENSE OF TRADITION IN THE MUSICAL ORIENT

Process and content

In any approach to tradition, it is first necessary to distinguish at least:

a) tradition as a *process* (the fact and manner of transmitting, *tradere*);

b) tradition as *content* and norm (what is transmitted).

We rely here on the particular case of music in order to provide solid references, but the meaning of tradition is the same regardless of the cultural field under consideration. In terms of transmission, in Eastern cultures (but probably also Western and others), the semantic field of the word 'tradition' or 'traditional' appears as a network of closely interlinked typical features. These include the following.

Values

Tradition is neither a banal phenomenon of transmission or an object which is transmitted. It is linked with implicit or explicit 'values' and meanings such as the past, antiquity, orality, master/disciple relationship, veneration of the founders. That tradition is granted a special value is explained by the nature of the process through which it is transmitted - a process which is, by definition, *a social one*.

Custom *versus* tradition

One must therefore distinguish between two levels of tradition, a formal and conventional one, which we might call *habit* or *custom*, and another, deeper, more permanent level, which is that of tradition proper. This deeper level is akin to an intimate experience, which is beyond words, and can be described as an intellectual, emotional or spiritual experience.

Acquisition by impregnation or by apprenticeship

As a transmission process, we can also single out the difference between

a) a natural transmission through contact with the environment, through familial education on the one hand, and

b) transmission through teaching or initiation, on the other hand. Tradition understood as a natural process can be compared to a *mother tongue*, but at a higher level

we can call it *father tongue*, because it requires an effort, the knowledge of the law and very different kinds of relationships. Of course, in order to be totally integrated, tradition must become something such as a second nature and is not so foreign to a mother tongue in this sense. (I am referring especially to music.) If this were not the case, tradition would remain a simple imitation. Conversely, if it did not go further than the mother tongue, would it be anything else than custom?

Ethics and Authority

As long as it implies *standards*, quality, depth, etc., tradition goes beyond the horizon of the products of custom. It must be learned in some other way than mere contact with the environment. It is therefore in the hands of specialists who are granted the authority of transmission. The validity of transmission depends not only upon qualification, but on morality as well. The guardian of standards must himself act up to these standards. This morality, backed by qualification, allows him to develop new patterns in line with the traditional content, or to support changes, but always with regard to the principles of tradition.

Authenticity and roots

In the East, one carefully distinguishes tradition as custom and as authenticity, so that eventually the label 'traditional' is frequently replaced by 'authentic'. Attributes of antiquity and authenticity are translated by the image of roots, which evokes the foundations, seniority, longevity, but also depth, interiority, the hidden part, and finally earth, territory, homeland. Most traditions have privileged the relationship with nature, territory and nation. There is a local authenticity, an authenticity of the historical origin and an authenticity of the group (ethnicity, family, nation), and finally an authenticity of the subject.

Quality, Experience

Roots are what grows under the surface. At the individual level, they also connote interiority, feelings, or even mystical experience. Authenticity is related to quality, to specific taste (which refers to an intimate and unspeakable experience) and to ethics.

In every branch of traditional culture it is referred by means of a specific set of designations, a distinctive sense or meaning. As regards music and mysticism: *hāl, kayfiyya*, *tarab*, *dard*, etc., designate an experience which gives their meaning to these traditions.

Authenticity versus Imitation.

It is 'quality' which confers 'authenticity.' Conversely, one can deduce that invention, originality is an essential condition of authenticity.

'Authenticity' is not compatible with mere imitation (*taqlīd*). What we have here is a very significant dialectical opposition; despite the fact that transmission requires imitation, *traditional*, in its meaning of *authentic* (*asīl*), is opposed to be imitative (*taqlīdī*). It is 'quality' that makes 'authenticity'. Opposite to authenticity, and therefore opposite to tradition, is imitation (*taqlīdī*), the ephemeral aspect, the surface and superfluousness of aesthetic experience, the lack of territorial roots (for example cosmopolitanism), syncretism, etc.

Tradition, Creativity, Change.

If authenticity is synonymous with tradition, we end up with the following paradox: unlike routine, tradition thus combines possibilities of change. Then the question is: what changes, what remains unchanged and what are the significant criteria of change? In musical cultures, two levels are recognised:

1) matrices, frame, main line, or pillars, principles (*usūl*), a term which must be connected to *asīl*, 'authentic'.
2) the products derived from it (interpretation, compositions, improvisations).
Change is not due to the entropy, to the accumulation of contingent failure in transmission, it is required by tradition, to a degree or another.

In the case of music, to internalise the repertoire and give it life, the artist must adapt it to his personality, to his nature and to the audience. That is the first level, the restricted circle of performance. In the next stage, it does not only adapt to the moment, but to the times, not just to the audience, but to the whole public. The demands of creativity also come from the need to adapt to the *Zeitgeist*. But changes should not 'break up the frame', the basic structures, the principles. Thus, there always remains a fixed center in tradition. The masters and the public of amateurs accept changes to a certain point only. When too big, changes become unacceptable according to traditional criteria. That music cannot be qualified as authentic or traditional any more, even if it finds its place in the culture.

Evaluation of Changes

An assessment of changes in a musical tradition should take into account a set of criteria and limits which can be organised according to the following levels.

1) process of transmission. This aspect corresponds to the strong meaning of tradition. For example, in decreasing order of intensity:

a) from master to disciple (initiation, filiation),

b) in a family (heredity, genealogy), in one or more schools,

c) by impregnation in the milieu,

d) by oneself, with texts, notations, recordings.

2) content and form. *e.g*. intervals, modes, melodic profile, ornaments, rhythm, timbres, ethos, etc.;

3) means of production. For example: instruments and type of orchestral or vocal group, amplification, studio technology, etc.;

4) conditions of performance and listening. *e.g*. natural or artificial environment, mental or written composition, recording session or concert, public or broadcast performance, Western-type concert or private performance, duration limits of the performance, etc.;

5) social and cultural context. For example: social status of the musician, type of patronage, oral or typographical environment, rural, tribal or urban milieu, ritual circumstances - whether customary or not - , degree of intimacy with the public, functionality of the music, spontaneity of performance, relation to nature, etc.;

6) meaning and values: knowledge, symbolism, ethics, ethos, feelings, etc.

II. GENERAL CRITERIA AND LEVELS OF TRADITION

Some traits described in Chapter II are summarised here, adding others to provide a more general view.

The traditional discourse projects a complex structure on the world: verticality and transcendence, horizontality and immanence, projection and retrojection, stability and motion, earth and sky, individual and community, subject and environment, continuity and rupture. Before being a content, Tradition is a process of transmission, so a model of tradition can only be dynamic and dialectic so as to incorporate the possibility of continuous transformation. This transformation does not take place only in contingent changes, but also in the transition between different levels, different degrees of intensity, sometimes leading to conflicting or contradictory forms.

Any Tradition, is Located in a 'World'

Potent meaning: it adheres to a sense, to a truth; it conforms to norms, rules or laws; loaded with symbols, it is related to the metaphysical or supersensitive world.

Secondary meaning: mythicisation, occultism, mystification, ritualization.

Antagonistic: In this respect, the opposite of tradition, it is the loss of references. 'Withdrawal or loss of the world' (Weltlosigkeit) 'disenchantment of the world', scepticism, agnosticism, relativism, or even rebellion and descent into the sensible world.

Secondary meaning

• The immediate world of Tradition is also Nature, as a manifestation of the Sacred. Aesthetic and symbolic relationship with nature, the land of the ancestors, the Native. Respect for nature (ecology)

Secondary meaning: the Native becomes the geopolitical nation.

Antagonistic: modernity sets out to 'conquer nature', desecrated by science and industry. Art moves away from Nature as a source of imitation, and produces its own autonomous forms.

Tradition Implies an Existential Attitude, Conducts and Ethics which Define a 'Community of Meaning'.

Potent meaning: deletion of ego, moral improvement.

Ordinary meaning: it unites a society and establishes a consensus.

Secondary meaning: ethnic or political community, social coercion, gregarious instinct.

Antagonistic: refusal of consensus, isolation of the subject, from which ensues revolt, rebellion, marginality, individualism, amorality, scandal.

Tradition also Implies Cultural Traits. Adherence to a Truth, Compliance with Standards and Legislation (see 'World'). Memory, Founding Authority, Seniority.

Potent meaning: Gnosis, esoteric science.

Secondary meaning: dogmatism, superstition. Cult of personality. Imitation submission.

Antagonistic: scepticism, agnosticism, relativism, revolt.

As it is Linked to the Revelation of Meaning, Tradition Relies upon a Personal Experience and Awareness.

Potent meaning: experience of the sacred, moral improvement, erasing of the ego, spiritual states (inspiration, ecstasy, aesthetic rapture), initiation and inspiration.

Secondary meaning: ritualization, emotions, collective rejoicings or mourning.

Antagonistic: mass culture, consumerism, technology, descent into the sensitive.

It follows that Tradition has its own *Modes of Representation and Knowledge.*

It favours unifying, holistic, non-critical, concrete, oral or even non-verbal knowledge; it is not interested in the fragmentary, in the singular, the particular, the factual, the detail, the theory. Pre-eminence of presence over non-presence, of the non-verbal over speech, privilege of speech over the written, of orality over writing, of hermeneutics over text, of being over-possessing and over-knowledgeable of practice over theory, of operative over speculative, of experience over concept.

Potent meaning: Transmission of an 'effect' (*asar, baraka,* 'effect of breath', of speech, charisma, etc.). Mimetism.

Secondary meaning: perpetuation of the culture through impregnation; imitation

Antagonistic, abstraction, writing, critical thought.

Transmission from Person to Person

Teacher to student relation, dual recognition (the master approves the student who, in turn, reveres his master.)

Potent meaning: 'Erasing of the ego'. In mysticism, 'annihilation in the master' (*fanā fī'l shaykh*), but followed by 'super-existence' 'rebirth' (*baqā*) 'Music of the father'.

Secondary meaning: Culture, teaching and education, sociability, impregnation through an environment. 'Music of the mother'. Hereditary affiliations, genealogy, pedigree. Ethnicity, race, nation. Ancestor-worship, hagiography.

Antagonistic: Autodidacticissm. Cosmopolitanism. Demagoguery, syncretism.

Establishes a Special Kind of *Temporality*

As a result of the relationship master/disciple, it follows that the present always winds itself around the past, but that the past aims far, toward the future. The link is that of filiation, not of a discontinuous succession of moments. So, there is meaning and direction (action and retroaction).

Sacred ≠ profane time. Vertical ≠ horizontal time

Potent meaning: rites and myths, hiero-history. Restorations and renewals.

Secondary meaning: ritualism, routine, traditionalism, stagnation, submission. Invention of traditions, mythologising.

Antagonistic: modernism, secularism, postmodernism.

V - A CASE STUDY

In addition to these four lectures, we present here a case study that significantly illustrates our modelling of Tradition, with its double polarity of content and mode of transmission.

We are dealing here with a rare, almost secret or jealously guarded repertoire, whose purely oral transmission has taken place within an intimate relationship between a master and a disciple and, moreover, through a connection with a superhuman plane, which entails an ethical commitment. In the long run, this tradition of singing has not only been perpetuated - engraved in media for lack of qualified keepers - but, thanks to spiritual inspiration, has also blossomed into a corpus that is both new and attuned to the past.

The testimony of song master Hātam ʻAsgari Farāhāni includes all the key concepts of a high tradition: the intrinsic value of the content or song material as well as the human qualities of the container or keeper, in other words, the authenticity of the object (its quality, effect, and sacredness) and the authenticity of the subject (sincerity, disinterestedness, humility).

The environment where this art is cultivated is, firstly, that of the amateurs and professionals of Farāhān, a fertile ground for classical and religious singing and, secondly, the restricted circle of Sufis with whom the master and disciple who sing for them are affiliated.

As there is no spirituality without ethics, the discourse of ʻAsgari emphasises the moral imperative of traditional transmission. One must be worthy of receiving knowledge and integrate not only the form but also the spirit of the musical legacy. Learning this music is an initiatory journey, one that requires self-improvement (concentration, moral integrity); leads to self-control and the mastery of art and its power; and activates creativity, that is, devising new melodies with canonical value greater than of current compositions.

We will find in these pages the salient features that, in our opinion, define a tradition in the strongest sense. First of all, it constitutes a musical ‘world’ of its own, situated below or above the surface of the present musical culture, which is reminiscent of the apparent/hidden, *zāhir/batin,* polarity of metaphysics and of Sufism. ʻAsgari proposes an esoteric reading of a vocal art that is charged with power (*barakat, asar*) and is thus protected by secrecy. The certainty of his having grasped the meaning of this art is sealed by the connection he maintains through dreams with masters of the past (including his own) who inspire him with new melodies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Musicians and Shamans

Affinities between music and mysticism are evident in many traditions, especially in the cultures of the Middle East and India. These affinities are due, on one hand, to the function as of music to create unity among participants, to dramatise rites, to highlight sacred texts, to regulate dances, etc., and, on the other hand, to structural affinities: such as mysticism, music is a high science and powerful art that requires initiatory training and, preferably, hereditary filiation. It is the power of music that marginalises musicians and provokes the condemnation of certain Muslim clerics who hold under the same suspicion musical practices and the discourse and charisma of mystics.

For some, the art of music is like a spiritual path, a path capable of bringing about a moral transformation and of establishing communication with transcendence. In traditional arts, the moral imperative is the rule and is often one of the conditions of authenticity. Even today, the bards of Inner Asia still generally consider themselves invested with a moral mission, which they fulfil through the sapient poems that make up a good part of their repertoire. And beyond morals and ethics, traditional music is authenticated by a paranormal experience: an initiatory or vocational dream, entering into special states of consciousness, inspiration sometimes attributed to contact with the spirits or souls of the Ancients, etc. All these motifs appear in many different ways depending on the culture or society, and anyone can revitalise or refresh them.

The Double, but not Dualistic, Structure of the World

There is reason to believe that Iranian culture is one that has preserved a high idea of Tradition, thanks to which it has always been able to make changes while preserving its identity over the centuries. This sense of history and roots goes hand in hand with a dichotomous vision of the world, wherein the apparent and the hidden are sundered. This double vision is especially characteristic of mystics and proffers a different set of values than the univocal perspective from which the common man, including the *ulemas*, contemplates the world. Without elaborating on this point, we should remember that, for the traditional man, true history is made in the cracks of the surface of identifiable events. Tradition is a continuum: before any origin there is an 'already there'. Before (or below) any historical event there is a meaning that gives the event its 'historicity'. Above horizontal time (*āfāqī*) there is vertical time (*anfusī*). This primordial doubling is reproduced between the two infinities: whatever the level considered, there is always something hidden beneath the surface. And this hidden thing, this hollow, is precisely what creates meaning:

This *Weltanschauung* gradually reveals itself in its remarkable coherence as one penetrates the thinking, representations and behaviours of the proponents of the tradition. In the preceding pages, a critical panorama of it has been drawn from the particularly representative viewpoint of the masters of traditional music from Iran and Inner Asia. Our aim is neither to go back over this data or the resulting modelling of tradition, nor over the relationships between music and mysticism[31], but to proceed this time from the particular to the general through an exemplary case and a discourse of great richness, which synthesise and sublimate the essential values of Tradition as a process of individual becoming.

2. THE JOURNEY OF A SINGING MASTER

Everyone sings, but not this song that I sing
Everyone sees, but not the way that I see[32] *(Sa'di)*

In the Shadow of the Dervishes

It was only after twelve years of frequenting musical circles of the Persian tradition that I heard of Hātam 'Asgari-Farāhāni as someone who had a precious vocal repertoire. Thanks to the *ney* master Mohammad Musavi, I was able to meet him in the house of the poet Amiri Firuzkuhi in 1983. He sang for a long time (Homāyun, Shushtari and Kord modes), accompanied by Musavi's *ney* and sometimes by discreet percussion that the poet produced by tapping on a matchbox. It was a long time later that I understood that he had done me a great favour by letting himself be recorded. Indeed, he told me: "Until the last few years, I never gave anyone recordings of my repertoire. Until the day I recorded something for you, I had never let any recordings of me circulate."

'Asgari was in his fifties[33], and his agreeable, relaxed demeanour revealed something strict and rigorous. He had a very extensive repertoire, the parts of which he arranged with masterful ease, and an astonishing variety of short, measured songs that he could slip into any of the two hundred *gushe-s* of the canonical repertoire (*radif*). These songs were very engaging, all the more so because he sang them with fervour, as Sufi singers do. This was his most obvious strength. It was also known that he only sang at dervish meetings, did not frequent music-lovers' salons, and did not have any students.

He had been a close disciple of the legendary Āqā Ziā ol-Zākerin, a singer who exerted great influence on some of the masters of the period without ever taking a step towards the public himself. 'Asgari had accompanied Āqā Ziā throughout the end of his life and had collected from him all he could. One could suppose that 'Asgari had preferred not to embark on

a musical career because his voice was less brilliant than that of the most famous singers or because of his involvement in Sufism. The truth was actually more complex.

Tradition in Question

When I found 'Asgari again in 1989, he was surrounded by a dozen of his students. As I was astonished at what he was now accepting from the students, he replied with an air of understanding, 'They have given me authorisation now.' As he was pointing his finger to the sky at the same time, I thought he was referring to his *pir*, his sheikh, or some authority of the Sufi congregation with which he was affiliated. There were at that time three or four persons who were reliable sources of teachings in the canonical vocal repertoire (*radif*), so, a priori, one more transmitter did not constitute a circumstance that would have required 'authorisation' from some high authority. However, as he explained then, his repertoire was different, starting with its scope. While the best masters know little more than two hundred melodic types (*gushe*), his *radif*, he said, included at least eight hundred. He cited *gushe* names that are unknown or that exist only in ancient writings. Later it became clear that his repertoire was not only considerable but of great originality and real value. In the opinion of connoisseurs, his way of singing was reminiscent of the 'ancient' style of some singers of the 1940s[34], but with certain peculiarities, such as an underlying rhythmic tempo in the *āvāz* (which in principle are not measured), the possibility of singing verses for songs that are considered solely instrumental (*reng, zang*-e *shotor*), the abundance of short, measured songs (*āvāz-e zarbi*), and finally, a curious way of emphasising the singing with gestures of both hands that were no longer seen at that time.

In 1992, 'Asgari took another step forward by recording the *dastgāh* Navā, accompanied on the *setār* by Dariush Safvat, who had long shown confidence in him. He fulfilled his claims by recording no fewer than 115 *gushe* in this mode, whereas the best instrumental versions do not exceed forty and the vocal *radif* about twenty[35]. The controversy that followed the publication of these recordings concerned the credibility of his undertaking (he was accused of having invented *gushe-s*) and its provocativeness, which implicitly relativised the value of the *radif*s in use and called into question the history of Persian music. To detractors who suspected the master of being a forger - in the sense that the *gushe* were arrangements of his own making, without originality (*esālat*) or antiquity - it was enough to respond that they only had to try to do the same. It should be noted that, for complex reasons related to the nature of the tradition (reasons too long to analyse here), even the most creative musicians are not capable of creating new *gushe*, or at least are not

empowered by the system to do so. The canonical repertoire (*radif*) was thus completed at the beginning of the century and closed more recently by a kind of consensus that ʻAsgari seemed to break.

Notwithstanding the discovery of such a considerable repertoire or, what is more, the existence of such powerful schools and traditions beneath the surface of public musical life, what catches the attention here is the vigour of the positions and the clarity of the traditional discourse that makes music the counterpoint to moral and spiritual values or, viewed the other way around, that gives the esoteric dimension the form of musical teaching. However, an objective approach cannot sidestep the question of the authenticity of this discourse and the facts it evokes, which will be examined at the end of this chapter. The fact remains that Hātam ʻAsgari is, in his own way, an important master, atypical by today's standards, but in fact very representative of this discreet current in which music and traditional values have been forged, far from the stage, over the centuries. It is from this angle that we will present it here, through his own words[36].

3. TRADITION AND MORAL LIFE (From Hatam ʻAsgari's Words)

An Exceptional Training

In Iran, Farāhān[37] is one of the most preserved regions (*dastnakhordetarin*) and a great centre of traditional music. Elsewhere, too, there were singers (for example, in Kashan), but in Farāhān people were more passionate, and since they lived in small towns, their only distraction was to gather in the evening to sing verses and recite or chant Ferdowsi's Shahnāme. Instruments were scarce, but it was customary for everyone to be able to sing.

My father used to sing in *ta'zie* religious dramas, but he did not want me to become a singer and would not let me learn music [...]. At the same time, I always heard him say, 'What a pity that this tradition is being lost.' [One of the singers around us was Nakisā[38].] I finally confided in him to intercede with my father and teach me music. At first, he said to me, 'No, if you go down that road you will be drowned (*gharq*),' because he himself had had problems[39]... but in the end he accepted me as a student.

I worked with Nakisā for about seven years. Every time he opened his mouth, I immediately reproduced what he had sung. When I was eighteen or twenty years old, he told me, 'I have nothing more to teach you, you must look for another master. [...] I know someone; if you can convince him to accept you, your problem will be solved. He's a man with a very special character called Ziā ol-Zākerin. As a dervish of the Ne'matollāhi Gonābādi brotherhood, he goes every Friday to Sheikh ʻAbdollāh's house.'

> Thus, in 1951 I came to settle in Tehran and I went several Fridays in a row to this meeting of dervishes. Towards the end of the meeting, the sheikh would usually ask, 'Is there anyone who could sing something?' One day, among the names of the singers present was mentioned that of Āqā Ziā oz-Zākerin[40]. It was he whom the sheikh asked to sing. He began the *darāmad* of the Shur mode, and sang without a break for nearly forty-five minutes. He aroused such emotion (*hāl*) that I was completely overwhelmed. When the singing stopped, the session ended and the participants dispersed.
>
> Āqā Ziā put on his cloak and went down the street quietly humming, while I followed him. I explained to him that my father was a singer, that I had learned this art, but that his (Āqā Ziā's) way of singing had overwhelmed me and that I wanted him to accept me as a student. But he rebuffed me: 'You can see that I am old and that I have no desire to have pupils. Go back to your business.' I insisted and made this proposal to him: 'At least give me permission to fetch you on the days you go to the dervish meetings. Well,' he said, 'We'll see.'

Before continuing 'Asgari's narration, let us look more closely at who this person is. The only precise, albeit succinct, source is an important work written before 1970 by H. Mashhun[41], a scholar who closely followed the musical life of his time. In the chapter on religious singers (*roze-khān*), the author devotes a few lines to two little-known singers, Seyyed Bāqer Jandaqi and Sheikh Tāher Khorāsāni[42] nicknamed Ziā oz-zākerin.

> 'These two esteemed [persons] have honoured the art [of singing] with perfection and science (*āgāh*), as people who have taste and are cultured, religious, kind and simple (*bi takalof*). Ziā oz-Zākerin knew the canonical repertoire (*radif-e dastgāh*) as well as many ancient Iranian melodies (*lahn*) that today [the 1960s] are unknown to most experts. I myself benefited greatly from the immense knowledge of Ziā oz-Zākerin, which he generously made available to friends of art. In addition to playing drum (*zarb*), he knew the [classical] songs (*tasnif*) of his time and the [correct] way to sing them.'

These few remarks are enough to sketch Āqā Ziā's personality. Apart from the title of sheikh, the nickname given to him, probably in the Sufi milieu, corresponds to high rank: 'Light (*ziā*) of the meditators' (those who practice *zekr/dhikr*) suggests that his singing enlightened the meditative sessions of the dervishes practising silent *dhikr*.

> [...] For two or three months we regularly went to meetings together. Sometimes he sang, sometimes he didn't. And finally, very slowly, he accepted me and let me come to his house.

This period lasted eight years. I never dared to ask him to work: either he showed me something or he showed me nothing. When he gave me a lesson, if I hadn't learned the melody the first time, he would send me away. It was inconceivable that he would repeat what he showed me. After these eight years I thought I knew everything he knew. But one day he told me to come the next day with cakes. When I arrived, there was an old man with him whom I had never seen before. In front of this witness, he said, 'Blessed be you, for today you are entering the 'school of music.' You have been coming here for eight years, but now it is clear to me that you are capable [*be dard mikhori*, 'you are good at something'], and, as of today, I accept you as my official disciple. 'I was stunned, because I had imagined myself as his disciple for a long time. I did not dare to retort "but then what was I during these eight years?" He said to me: "Share the cakes[43], from now on we will work."'

'Of course, until then I had often gone to his house, where I met all the singers who came to visit him, but from then on, I went every day to his house, and wherever he went, I accompanied him. It was then that I realized that he was right and I discovered what music was all about. I also understood that the world was not what people think it is, that it was different and that there was something else. Those next four years I spent with him, it was really something else. [...] Even now, when I hear the names of my two masters, I am overcome, and I cannot listen to a recording of Nakisā without tears coming to my eyes.'

A Sacred Repository

Āqā Ziā had two sons, one of whom was a good singer, but he said that the tradition could not be passed on to him. He said "he did not suck his mother's milk[44]. As soon as he knows something, he goes and gives it to Q. or to whomever[45]. He listened too much to Q. and the other famous singers of the time, that's why I can't rely on him, but as I put you to the test, now I can pass on what I have." He even forbade me to reveal certain melodies to his own children after his death. Spiritual filiation takes precedence over kinship.

[...] I told him one day, 'Poor S. would so like to collect a melody from you and you show him nothing.' He replied, 'There is a great difference. You want to learn and I want to train you for the future, but the others, it is because of them that the young people of tomorrow will believe that music is made to pass the time while smoking opium[46]' [...].

The old masters did not confide the secrets of music to just anyone. They first wanted to see why the student came to them, what was his purpose and intention in learning music, what he intended to do afterwards, etc. They also wanted to know what the student's goals were, what he was going to do afterwards. Until they got to know him well, they would teach him nothing but the basics. It's true that our music disappeared because we didn't disclose it, but

there were good reasons for that. [...] There are no records of Āqā Ziā and he never let himself be recorded, although there were tape recorders at the time[47].

That's what art is all about. So, it is not good to give it to just anyone. It's like giving a weapon to a drunk man. I don't know how it happens elsewhere, but in our country it's like that. [...] Some people think that I am stingy or jealous, but not at all; maybe I am wrong, but I somehow fear that they will fall into hypocrisy (*riā*), pride, flattery (*khod namā'i*), and ostentation. People today are like that, that is why I have no disciple.

Singing for God or for Oneself

In the past, there were many musicians driven by ostentation. Among them, some played for the sultans, but on the whole, all of them did not. Some of their recordings had been distributed at the beginning of the century. Among them was Seyyed Ahmad Khān, Nāyeb as-Saltāne. My masters considered they were commercial singers (*bāzāri*). There was also 'X' who was very well-known and still appreciated today, but he cannot be considered as one of our traditional singers. There it is. [...] There were two groups of singers. Some were invited for a fee and sang at the request of the public[48], and some sang for God (*be qasd-e khodā*) and for Imām Hosein. The manner in which they learnt was different: they sang for God and for art. For them, music was a matter of devotion ('*ebādat*), It was not courtly art for the benefit of a Sultan. This is why not all were considered worthy of receiving it [music].

Some came to learn singing, and then perform light songs (*motrebi*[49]), others aspired for the court, while others learned for themselves. The latter were different, and it was they who elevated music to the level of a science. They didn't want to be bound by professional obligations; they worked for pure music and they were able to do amazing things. For example, Āqā Ziā used to go up to the pulpit at the mosque with a drum (*zarb*) or with a lute (*tār*)! If he allowed himself to do so, it was because he completely fascinated the listeners, he mesmerised them, otherwise it would have been unthinkable.

When I speak of devotion ('*ebādat*), it is not just any kind of devotion. The prophets, too, like David, used music, and it is said that Zoroaster reached his goal through music. [...] Our music had particular forms, but unfortunately, they were lost. We didn't reveal everything because there were profiteers. Even today I don't reveal these things, I don't tell the whole truth in this area. [...]

The Safavids came to power for they were mystics. Then they changed course. They imitated Western forms, gathered musicians, dancers and entertainers at the palace of Āliqāpu (Ispahan), opening the doors to guests. However, the masters became angry, and all but the

purest stayed away. There is nothing wrong playing for the court, but which court and which listeners? Impure, uninitiated ears (*nāmahram*) must not hear.

[On another occasion, ʻAsgari said that, after Shah ʻAbbās (died in 1629), the rulers were libertines and debauched one the one hand and hypocrites who persecuted the musicians on the other. This is why masters remained in the shadows while vocal art was taken over by professional *ta'zie* singers and religious cantors (*maddāh, nowhe sarā'i*). This view is generally accepted.]

Two Edges of a Sword

The voice must be attractive to the listener. One day, when we were in Hasan Mashhun's garden, with Āqā Ziā. He asked me to sing. All the nightingales and sparrows sang along with me at the top of their voices. When he made me stop, the nightingales stopped, immediately, and when I started again, they started again. If a sick person wanted to be cured, he must first like my voice for the music to work. If he liked it, he would enter in my sphere of influence and little by little, I would heal him. It is the same with mysticism (*ʻerfān*); one cannot do anything if you do not feel sympathy towards the sheikh.

This is why music is dangerous. Because, in this way, you might deceive people, affect families. [...] There are seven degrees in music. One is the power to subjugate others. I can make a person fall in love with me, say 'yes' to everything I say, or carry out my orders. It is dangerous: I could ask a woman to divorce for me, and she would do so. There are modal melodies (*parde*) which make you lose consciousness, others which make you sleep, others which induce problems (*gereftār*) or make you fall in love[50]. [...] This is why it is not right to give this art to everyone: they take it, then abuse people with it, break up other people's homes, do bad deeds, destroy themselves. Āqā Ziā said: "Music, like the sword of ʻAli, has two edges: on the one hand it destroys your fellow men, and on the other hand it destroys you. We know which melodies produce which effect, but they do not know, they sing and play them, and then they fall into difficulties, traps, nets.'

You need protection. My master Nakisā sang until the age of one hundred and if he were protected, it was because he engaged in mysticism, as a dervish of the order Ne'matollāhi Safi ʻAli Shāhi. Of course, these principles should not be generalised to all music, and what I am talking about is this traditional art which can take you very far.

4. ESOTERIC AND INITIATORY DIMENSION
(*According to Hatam 'Asgari*)

Degrees of Knowledge

> Āqā Ziā [...] had lived for years in Najaf [51] and had a very strong faith. He did not have a particular rank in the Sufi organisation, because men like him are not interested in official ranks and do not want to be sheikhs[52]. [...]

'Asgari then demonstrates the analogy between the spiritual path and path to music, and between their different levels of knowledge. The musical path has three stages or cycles that parallel the spiritual path (*tariqat, ma'refat, haqiqat*) and three ranks: disciple, sheikh, and pole (*qotb*), which correspond to perfection and union with the divine. At the level of union, the subject is fully immersed in music and sees nothing else. Union is also expressed by unity, the fusion of all differences, and the possibility of demonstrating the unity of all singular melodies by moving freely from one to another, interlocking them, shaping them.

> After the rank of sheikh, comes the third rank, that of pole (*qotb*[53]). In music, this corresponds to the total mastery (*ehāte*) of all *gushe*, so that they become like wax in the fingers. As I showed earlier, for beginners, all the overtures (*darāmad*) of each *dastgāh* (Segāh, Navā, Shur, etc.) are quite distinct, but at the higher level, they can all be sung with no breaks. This is the principle of 'unity of Being' applied in music. It becomes possible to flow through several modes in a single breath.

From a technical point of view, this ability is a sign of rare mastery. Asgari demonstrates this: he goes from Mahur, to Afshāri, then Tork, then Esfahān, sliding from two notes to two notes, before returning to Mahur. On hearing the master sing, one of the guests present, himself a connoisseur and fine performer, commented: "Any instrument player would be paralysed trying to follow him. 'Asgari is like a Zen monk walking around the city, completely absorbed in himself, never distracted by anything else. During all of his life he has been immersed in music.'

The Voice of the Spirits

Such as with mystical union, the stage of musical union is achieved through connection with a Source that passes through the spirit world.

> 'Sometimes at night, Āqā Ziā comes into my dreams with two or three other musicians I don't know but who are like my masters. When I wake up, I can't remember ever having met

them anywhere before, but in the dream, it is clear that they are my masters: it is as if I have been with them for years and I am always in the position of the student learning melodies or asking questions which they answer. These singers are very different from today's artists. They are dressed the old-fashioned way, their features are perfectly precise, and the expression on their faces shows that they are so absorbed in the music that nothing can disturb their concentration.

[...] When I ask myself a question on a particular point, or discuss it during the day, then in the evening, when they come, they answer it. Sometimes I ask them about a particular mode or *gushe*, about the age of a melody, about the way it was sung in the past, about the meaning of a technical term such as *zarbi-e kār-e 'amal*, etc. I also ask them about the way a melody was sung in the past. About 50 or 60 gushe that I've added to the repertoire, they're the ones who sang them to me in my dreams.

It's something else in me that asks the questions. I'm completely absorbed, I can't see anything else. [...] When I'm with them, all I think about is that they teach me a tune and I learn it... I learn, and later, when I wake up, I immediately record everything I've heard [...] When they're about to come, there's a commotion in the house, there are footsteps, doors slamming, etc., as if people were walking around. My wife hears them coming [...]'.

[In support of her claims, 'Asgari's wife testifies:]
'The first time I saw him in this situation, he looked normal and he was singing loudly, so I thought he was awake. He sighed, took a deep breath, turning from side to side like a sleeper, and his sleep continued normally. I couldn't believe it. The first time, the truth is, I was scared. When he dreams, even when he is lying on his side, his voice is very beautiful, much purer than when he is awake. He doesn't just sing, he also talks, asks questions, and answers.'

['Asgari continues:] 'There is no place or condition that is more conducive to these communications; it depends on my own state, I have to find that state myself, it has to come from my being. If over the course of a week I have committed some deviation (I am not talking about something immoral or contrary to religious law), no matter how hard I try, 'they' do not come to visit me in my sleep. Or if they do come, they tell me: you have done this and that which is contrary to the principles we have taught you.

These phenomena can also occur while I am awake, but not in the same way as during sleep. I have to be alone, in a quiet corner, but it can also happen in the street. In these cases, 'they' simply hum in my ear. Or I walk around singing something softly and they come and correct me by whispering in my ear. Sometimes I am at work, at the office, and they come to

teach me a tune. In any case, after that, I record with a tape recorder that I always carry with me. I don't hide the fact that many of the melodies in my repertoire come from the people I see in my dreams. [...]'

Thinking of Nothing Else

'You can't tell this kind of thing to just anyone, and I haven't found a very reliable disciple yet, except this young man, Sh. M. He has proven himself during the years of preparation but if he deviates, I'll break up with him. It can be moral deviation, as happens to everyone, and to some extent such deviations are forgivable. But it can also happen that the student is influenced by current fashions (sometimes without being aware), develops his own style, and begins to imitate other singers. This is the most dangerous situation. It happened to him once, and I threatened to end it all. If you come out of the preliminary cycle pure and purified, then you can truly embark upon the music phase.

This student has a strong mental connection with me, and everything I sing, he grasps it and learns it immediately, instantly[54]. My master used to say to me, 'When you come to work with me, you have to put aside all your concerns, put them in a handkerchief, and leave them on the doorstep.' It's a form of concentration. They used to teach that. [...] I, too, when I went to his house, I was completely absorbed, immersed, I saw nothing else, and my ears heard nothing else. This is not a natural faculty and it doesn't work with just anyone.

[...] Singing has many virtues: it develops memory, mind control (*fekr*) and concentration. That's why I can control my thoughts, my perceptions, and my body. This music prolongs life: Āqā Ziā lived 108 years, his father - according to him -105 years (and I believe him because he never exaggerated), and Nakisā lived 94 years[55]. If you want to stay healthy, you have to sing. Everyone should sing. I have never taken medicine, I have never gone to see a doctor.'

5. A CRITICAL APPROACH

Given the distinguished qualifications of the master, his testimony raises many questions which must be taken into consideration, at least in the cultural context of the musical tradition.

But firstly, a few methodological remarks are in order. In spite of their marvellous aspects, the phenomena of empathy with patients, clairaudience, and contact with spirits should neither fascinate us nor be apprehended with the 'wary objectivity' of the scientific method. For the question is neither that of the reality or fiction of the world they reveal,

nor that of the superiority of that which is deep or hidden (*bāten*) over the superficial and the apparent (*zāher*), nor that of the legitimacy of the experience or its fruits. Admitting the existence of an invisible world does not give more weight or meaning to the experience by which it is apprehended, just as questioning it does not take anything away from the meanings and values associated with this experience.

We begin by trying to show how the master's speech works. However, if we were content to show the internal coherence of the experience and its verbal expression, we would miss its truth and we would evacuate the fundamental question of authenticity. Between two forms of confinement - one in the naive question of 'reality' as posed by factual history, the other in the structure of discourse - the value of this testimony appears in the relations between different planes: their points of contact, their creases, and their disjunctures.

History as Narrative

Even when considered at this first level, in its factuality, 'Asgari's discourse already raises interesting problems. Methodically, he deconstructs the history of Persian art music to the point where our vision becomes blurred. Does he simply hide reality by covering entire sections of history with a fantastic 'mythological' fresco in a context of initiatory processes, gnosis, secrets, and charisma? Or, on the contrary, does he show us 'reality' by relativising 'official' history as though it were fiction or mythology, with its procession of public figures, its institutions, and the broadcasting of its mediatised productions?

In the master's version, the portraits in the Gallery of the Immortals fissure, the statues sway on their pedestals, the decor fades, the lights dim. The founding father (the divine 'Ali Akbar, as Gobineau called him) becomes a self-taught man 'with a Turkish accent'; the great Abol-Hasan Sabā, a dilettante; Gholām Hosein Banān, a lounge-club crooner; 'Abdollāh Davāmi (a link in the chain of transmission in the second half of the century), an honest interpreter of songs (the *tasnif*s); Sa'id Hormozi, a beginner; Nur 'Ali Borumand (who saved the *radif* of Mirzā 'Abdollāh), an ordinary musician; the *radif* of Mirzā (the jewel of instrumental music), a 'repertoire stolen by listening at doors' (*radif-e posht-e dari*); and the so-called 'Davāmi's *radif,'* an elementary repertoire. We will limit the hecatomb to these few individuals already belonging to History (though they have the privilege of having been mentioned by 'Asgari, which at least makes them exist). But to which register of History do they belong? To the register of court chronicles, social events, kind-hearted biographies, and post-mortem celebrations, or to the register of conservatories, records, radio, and television? Behind the names, it is the institution,

culture, society, modernity, the system that ʻAsgari challenges. He holds no grudges against anyone in particular and, despite the acidity of his remarks, he only wants to set things straight and put everyone in his place, without rancour or jealousy.

Between the official story and ʻAsgari's version, which is real and which is fiction? It is probably both, but all in all, isn't ʻAsgari's version much more compelling and convincing? Isn't the subversive charge of this ʻsecret historyʻ more stimulating for the mind than the vulgate that has been written, copied, and recited for decades in accordance with the oriental tendency to label, essentialise, and typologise individuals and events? Moreover, doesn't history deceive even more by consecrating artists post mortem when those same artists were ignored in their lifetime? Doesn't this propensity to celebrate the Ancients come, as one musician candidly said, from the fact that "we too want to be respected after our death"? The power of the master's words is not only to denounce this hypocrisy, but also to define an autonomous space for music and prevent it from getting lost in the steppes of the sensible plane where censors hunt it down. He gives legitimacy to this art for its usefulness (therapeutic and moral applications) and its veracity (drawn from his testimony), and, in short, delivers a vibrant reminder of the meaning of tradition with its structuring of the world, its values, its symbols, and its anchorage in an intimate experience (the body, the *hāl*, the love of the master, passion, dreams, or the parallel world).

The Secret History

But this critical look at the official version of the history of music, which the master forces upon us, can just as easily be turned against him and his discourse. For what does it matter for us to know (from Asgari's talk) that Karbalā'i Āqā, an unknown gentleman farmer from Farāhān, held the magical secrets of singing at the beginning of the twentieth century, or that he considered no one worthy to pass them on to, or that he only favoured the wind and the mountains with his songs? If death - which, it seems, bypasses singers - had sought out ʻAsgari before the invisible masters allowed him to leave their cenacle, we would know nothing of these events, of this high science and its keepers, and in a way, nothing like this would have ever existed. Could it be that the disappearance of a thousand-year-old tradition depends on two or three temperamental singers who chose to remain silent? Didn't it continue without them, and brilliantly, for more than half a century? And besides, what does ʻAsgari really bring? An original style, because it was forgotten by all, and a repertoire of g*ushe*s of which, at the time of our meeting, only one of his students was able to sing correctly some fragments at the 'elementary level.' He doesn't fill concert halls, and only stages events for a few people to whom he confides, or who have faith in him. Neither

is his speech new, for it affirms everything we known or imagine about the tradition, with all its clichés and truisms.

There is no lack of doubts and reservations. But let there be no mistake: our intention here is not to subject a respectable artist to the Inquisition, nor even to draw his faithful portrait with his shades/shadows and ambiguities, but rather to ask a general question about the nature and exemplarity of an experience, a process, and their interpretation. The case of ʻAsgari is similar to that of all mystics, and it touches on the true meaning of tradition as well as the basis of authority and how it is put into practice. And if we delve into the recesses of ʻAsgari's personality, it is because it is rare to have such personal testimonies and such precise and actual/contemporary facts about this kind of unique individual and his context. It is from this perspective that we must consider the following questions.

Thus, the sceptic, standing at a distance from the system, will suspect that the master has positioned himself skilfully by taking advantage not only of his strong points (his milieu, his musical and Sufi affiliations, the extent of his repertoire), but also of his weaknesses. For example, his absence from the professional scene would plead for the purity of his motives (enlightened amateurism being traditionally more valued than professionalism); finally, the reticence of his colleagues reflects their fear of this new authority that challenges their position. Moreover, in these troubled times for Persian music, the criteria of reference are distorted; consensus is now reached from the bottom up, through the *vulgum pecus*, and prominent artists denigrate each other.

The Word of the Witness

In terms of credibility, there is nothing in ʻAsgari's discourse that withstands critical examination. But one can adopt the opposite point of view as well, for there are no objective reasons to deny what the master claims. In this zone of unverifiability, it only appears that in the relationship between disciple and master, trust in the other and faith in his knowledge are the very conditions of transmission, and it is perhaps to convey this message that the master wishes to express himself.

Apart from public recognition (whether well-founded or questionable), what is the difference between a master and a good musician? Breadth of knowledge is part of it, but that is not enough; there must also be discourse and representations of this knowledge that produce or affirm values. There is no need to expect this discourse to be original, since the values themselves are ancient; it must only actualise them. In this sense, what makes a master is the strength of his conviction (even if it is innocent or naive) in what he

safeguards, and that he communicates this conviction and his sense of values to people who believe in him. Authority does not need to be exercised on a large scale, and, in the end, all that is needed is a disciple. As ʻAsgari remarks, without him, the very name of Āqā Ziā would have been forgotten, but thanks to him, Āqā Ziā may well endure through his (ʻAsgari's) repertoire for a long time. The disciple does not confer mastery, but he 'makes' the master by encouraging him to manifest and configure himself. The question of authority is a question of the system of transmission outside of which it is difficult to make a judgement. The system can function by itself, without necessarily having a charismatic figure at its head, and, moreover, an inspired genius or mystic is not obliged to put himself on display (as was, for example, the case for Hāfez). In this sense, the master can simply be a witness who vigorously recalls the principles and values of the system in order to save a musical legacy from anaemia and amnesia.

The Status of Inspiration

Of all that ʻAsgari brings, that he represents an exceptional case of inspiration or clairaudience does not tip the balance more in his favour than to his disadvantage. If one wants to see in it an argument against the authenticity (*esālat*) of his *radif*, it remains that the melodies he 'receives' are in the same vein as those which he had the privilege of collecting from his masters. Conversely, the fact that they are 'revealed' does not give them any additional authenticity. Indeed, on the one hand, as the sage says, 'the water takes on the colour of its container,' i.e., the receiver captures or decodes the melodies according to what he knows about the art of music; on the other hand, the spirits themselves are not 'celestial angels' but ancient Persian masters (for the spirits must speak a musical idiom understandable to the person they inspire).

It is on the basis of these arguments that some Sufis and artists, well aware of the case of ʻAsgari, do not value the repertoire of the spirits more than that of good old tradition. They are not particularly surprised by this type of communication with the invisible (others say with the unconscious or superego) as it is true that it constitutes the vertical axis of their musical tradition. Indeed, according to some, the archetypal melodies of the repertoire could have no other origin than this kind of contact with spirits (muses, genius, djinns, angels, *pari*-s).

Under these conditions, the authenticity of these melodies comes rather from the fact that ʻAsgari did not try to 'compose' or to introduce anything new, nor did he try to make himself known throughout the first half of his life. As always in Tradition, here, authenticity is guaranteed by the integrity of the transmitter: moral rectitude,

disinterestedness, fidelity to norms, 'passive' receptivity, and sincerity. Communication with the hidden world (*gheyb*) comes as a bonus.

Psychological or Spiritualist Reduction

The nature of this communication can be discussed at many levels. Firstly, it is in perfect agreement with the views of the Gnostics: the souls of ancient masters make contact with the singer's spirit; they are wrapped in their ethereal body (an 'analogue' (*mesāl*) of the one they once had on earth). This is why they manifest themselves in a very concrete way: not only do they sing, but they can be heard coming, as confirmed by 'Asgari's wife, a daily witness of poltergeist phenomena. Such encounters take place in the intermediate world (*'ālam-e mesāl, barzakh*), that of 'autonomous forms,' which seems normal when it comes to music, which is itself immaterial by nature. Access to this intermediate world is easier in dreams, but it is not so far away that it implies a total withdrawal from oneself. Thus, the experience is intense and the subject enters into a special state, although sometimes the voices of the spirits can be heard clearly in the waking state. The condition of purity or impeccability that the spirits require of the receiver indicates that this is a spiritual experience and not simply mediumistic or a matter of hallucination. In fact, the authenticity of the phenomenon is not in its rarity or in what results from it (the extension of the repertoire), but in its intensity and in the weight of the meanings that emerge from it. If the world in which these scenes take place is qualified as spiritual (*ma'navi*), it is in reference to the primary meaning of the term, because it is the world of meaning (*ma'nā*, 'the intelligible'); it is by experiencing this intermediate world that events acquire meaning.

It is obviously possible to attribute this experience to psychic modalities by invoking 'unconscious' mechanisms - as suggested by someone during the discussion - but in this case, too, an objective analysis must take into account certain factors which make sense. First of all, 'Asgari had extremely deep affective bonds with his spiritual father. Secondly, he had rigorous training at all levels of being: perceptive, mental, social, moral, religious, etc. It does not matter that 'the souls of the masters' represent the superego of the subject, with all its demands; neither does it matter whether this transcendence is within him or outside him, or whether it has a mental (*zehni*) or objective (*khāreji*) existence. (Indeed, some metaphysicians have objected, while not denying its reality, that the very existence of the imaginal world could be only of the mental type). What matters is that the subject communicates with this transcendent entity. Psychological reduction, however reasonable it may be, cannot sidestep the question of the values that are asserted in this experience and communicated in the discourse that it provokes, and which are not the result of a specific

cognitive process or a simple case of dream-like perceptions. To sustain this argument, it is still necessary to recognize that under the strict guardianship of moral values, customs, and wisdom, master 'Asgari simmers with an all-consuming passion that dominates his life, even in his sleep.

In spite of its limits, psychological reduction is no less valid than spiritualist inflation, which focuses on the supernatural character of the phenomenon. Neither Oriental Gnostics value the effects of ecstasy nor unveilings any more than those of diffuse inspiration, nor do they value the *hāl* above the *maqām*. To the contrary, if the voice of the spirits is to be taken into consideration, it is because it touches a man who embodies musical science; in return, as he has considerably developed his capacities of acquisition (concentration and memorisation), his inspirations authenticate the transcendence of his cognitive faculties. Moreover, they corroborate his moral authenticity and testify to the intensity of his emotional life, particularly in his attachment to his masters. It is in this interaction that phenomena of this order should be considered.

The Weight of Secrecy and the Masters of the Shadows

These phenomena are common not only among mystics but also among musicians, especially in archaic societies. Shamans, such as bards and poets in Asia, often have powerful dreams, and the songs of the American Indians are received as dreams or visions[56]. In this light, the case of 'Asgari presents only one particularity: a certain anachronism between his living conditions and his personal and symbolic world, in other words, a certain discrepancy between this mode of reception and the free, 'artistic' quality he claims for his music.

Discrepancies, paradoxes, and ambiguities touch upon many aspects of his life. One of the most significant is related to the aura of mystery which surrounded his music. Thus, he kept his repertoire secret for years and was reluctant to teach it to those who were not worthy of it, but he ended up delivering a good part of it to the public, through recordings. Years after we met, he recorded several CDs[57]. In so doing, he fulfilled his duty to pass on his knowledge, or at least the substance of that knowledge.

If, in general, masters are reluctant to share their knowledge, it is above all because they are careful to preserve the sense of values much more than the knowledge itself. However, the media dissemination of knowledge and art is accompanied by a devaluation: what was acquired by years of patient asceticism is now delivered to the general public in one go and in reproducible form. Under these conditions, the publication of a cassette album entitled '*Complete Radif of Persian Music*[58]' at least had the advantage of making this repertoire official and underscoring its value. A few years after the long interview from

which these pages are taken, ʻAsgari published his *Dastgāh-e Navā*, and shortly after that a *Māhur* that extends over six cassettes. This work was, in a way, consecrated by a hundred-page presentation written by the eminent musicologist and musician Dariush Safvat (1928-2013). Years went by, during which ʻAsgari continued his recordings, which were eventually released on CD between 2014 and 2020.

ʻAsgari's insistence on the power of certain songs (which can attract misfortune) suggests that he held powers (such as healing people through singing), which he developed through his long musical asceticism. In Amerindian traditions, songs received in dreams are credited with power which the recipient is careful not to squander by divulging, not so much the melody itself, but the dance and the meanings which they accompany. Singing other people's personal melodies without their permission can lead to social sanctions[59]. The requirement of secrecy is also the condition for the effectiveness of the personal *zekr/dhikr* that the Sufi receives from his sheikh and which he must never reveal (although it is usually a classical formula).

The sense of secrecy is a principle of religious faith, especially in Shi'i gnosis, and there is reason to believe that it applies to other fields, especially with initiatory disciplines such as science, art, or music. Thus, Hātam ʻAsgari and, even more so, the lineage of singers from which he comes actualise the figure of the master, who, though hidden, exerts a decisive influence on men and the course of events. It is not, as calling into question the musical panorama which might lead one to believe, that they are writing a parallel history unjustly relegated to footnotes in the great book of History. They participate in it, as scriptwriters of cultural history wherein sometimes the actors know who the authors are and sometimes forget, in which case a voice arises to remind them.

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GLOSSARY

adab: good education, politeness.
'ālam al-mithāl/mesāl: 'imaginal' world
an'ana: traditional (in Central Asia)
asil, esālat: authentic, authenticity
āvāz: 1.) melodic type 2.) non measured song
barzakh: intermediary world, analogic world
bāten /bātin: the hidden, the inner, the spiritual dimension or esotericism
dastgāh: mode or modal system of traditional Iranian music. The development of a *maqām* along with other melodic modal sections forms a *dastgāh*
dervish: mystic affiliated with a spiritual community
'erfān/ 'irfān: mystical Gnosis, spirituality
esālat: authenticity
gushe: melodic type
hāl: 1) State of grace or ravishment, type of ecstasy. 2) Any psychological or affective state tied to aesthetic sensibility. 3) The ethos of a melody or a mode
haqiqa: Truth; the step of Truth above *ma'rifa* and *tariqa*
maqām: 1) musical mode. 2) mystic station
ma'rifa: spiritual knowledge, degree of mysticism between *tariqa* and *haqiqa*
mellat: nation, large religious community
Qājār dynasty: (1794-1925)
radif: canonic repertoire; structured and ordered corpus of modes and melodic types of the classical Persian tradition
Safavi dynasty: (1501-1725)
samā': spiritual musical audition, often combined with *zekr*
setār: long-necked lute with four strings, from the learned Persian tradition
shar', shari'a: religious law, exotericism
sheikh: spiritual authority, master
sonnati: traditional. *Sonnat*: a tradition, a custom
Sufi: Muslim mystic
tarab: emotional state induced by music, song, or even poetry
taqsīm: the art of improvisation in modal structures
tasnif: Persian classical song
wird: litany, litany ritual

zāher/zāhir: appearance, exterior; the literal dimension or exotericism opposed to *bātin*

zawq/dhawq: taste, direct experience

zekr/dhikr: 1) recollection; 2) verbal recollection technique; 3) sung or scanned repetitive litany; ‘) devotional ritual with song, music and litanies

NOTES

1 Heidegger, Martin, *Être et Temps*: 47 § 6.

2 *Biā tā gol barafshānim o mey dar sāghar andazim / falakrā saqf beshkāfim o tarh-e now arandazim.*

3 A master of the *santur* (b. 1941) well know for his unconditional commitment to the preservation of the old style. Our research on the meaning of tradition has been enriched by several hours of discussions with him, as well as with other musicians such as Naser Farhangfar (d. 1997) and Mohammad Musavi (b. 1947).

4 In Corbin, 1979:159.

5 In the Arabian culture, one distinguishes also three levels in the vocal art: the *mughannī* (simple singer), the *mutrib* (professionnal), and the *munshid* (master). In modern Iran *ghinā* refers to entertainment music.

6 All the interviews quoted here have been made by the author in the year 1990.

7 About the relationship between nationalism, identity, and music, see During 1999 and 2011.

8 Sohravardi, trad. Corbin (1976: 404-405).

9 According to the 19th c. musicologist Eduard Hanslick: 'It is easy to get intoxicated when one is weak, but the true aesthetic way of listening is in itself an art' (:141).

10 These views are perfectly in line with those of E. Hanslick: "the faculty by which we receive the impression of the Beauty is not the feeling one, but imagination, the active state of pure contemplation" (:62-63).

11 Caron & Safvate (:234).

12 Though there are still relevant for the tenants of the Kashmiri Sufyana Kalam.

13 Cantemir's compilation of the ottoman repertoire (c.1700) contains 355 instrumental pieces, no song.

14 Caron & Safvate (:217). The tale is probably exaggerated, but it serves to illustrate an attitude that was valued.

15 This attitude, which stems from an ethic specific to Tradition, has precedents from long before the modern era, but particular cases are difficult to identify, except for a few witness accounts, such as that of Gobineau and a chronicle from the early 1800s (Mohammadi, 2013).

16 Khāleqi (:265 s), Nettl (1970:89), Battesti (:317).

17 A. Ikramov, cit Sultanova, R., Politics and Music after the Great Revolution: the Situa 1930s, *ACASIA* VII, 1/1993 (:4).

18 See also During, 2004.

19 *Essais et Conférences* (:45).

20 Almost all the available ancient sources of the canonic repertoire have been digitalised and published in CD, mainly by the label *Mahoor*.

21 See Neubauer, 1990.

22 Shiloah (:51-58). The author expresses the ideas found in ancient treatises.

23 For the history of its notation, see During 2019. Nevertheless, notations were made soon after his death, but were not utilized and published until 1962.

24 Asked about the possibility to invent new modes (*dastgāh*, *āvāz*), master Mortezā Neydāvud (d. 1990) clearly answered: "No, it is absolutely impossible... nobody can add an *āvāz*. The modal system is closed, it is complete and perfect" (Behruzi: 76).

25 Manuscript 2211, Ketābkhāne-ye majles, Tehran.

26 The the famous Ottoman collections were transcribed by a Polish (Bobowsky, alias 'Ali Ufki, mid 17th) then a Moldavian prince (Cantemir, c. 1700), then in the 19th c. by an Armenian (Humbarsum). Eventually also by a Turk (Kevsari, c. 1725).

27 A great *tombak* (drum) player who owned a very personal style. (1947 -1997.)

28 A famous *ney* player, born in 1946.

29 Tajik verses: *Har ke kard bi ostād derāzi kār, kār o bār nadārad e'tebār. Dāmān-e ostād begir o shād bāshad, khizmat-e u kon o ostad shô.*)

30 Kiāni refers to the 1945-1975 period, when the ancient forms where on the verge of being totally sweeped out. The revolution on the contrary rehabilitated traditional forms. In this sense, discussion is not on the agenda.

31 These two questions were dealt with in our previous works (1989 and 1994).

32 *Hame khānand, na in naqsh ke man mikhānam / Hame binand, na in sān ke man mibinam* (Sa'di).

33 Asgari was born in 1933 and was still teaching and singing in 2021. According to the chronological references he gives, his master died around 1965 at the age of 108, so he was born in 1857. This figure seems exaggerated if we take into account other data, so it is more prudent to bring forward the approximate dates to 1865-1965. Note that in Muslim lunar computation, 100 years is equal to 96 years in solar computation.

34 Like Gholām-Hosein Banān (1911-1985) in his early days or Soleymān Amir-Qāsemi (1884-1976), with whom he had also learned elements of the repertoire with this master.

35 The names of these *gushe* reflect mystical experiences or "stations" (*maqām*, precisely). For instance: *Hasti o nisti* (being and non-being, pride and erasure), *Parde-ye mastān* (the melody of the ecstatics), *Jostoju* (research), *Qalandar* (dervish), *Gerye va khande* (tears and laughter), *Khāmushi* (extinction), *Vesāl* (union), *Tanhā'i* (loneliness), *Tajalli* (theophany), *Bi khabari* (nescience), etc.

36 My comments and remarks are based on about five hours of interviews and music lessons, conducted in 1994 in Tehran. Some parts of 'Asgari's discourse about music therapy, symbolism of the āvāz, and criticism of well-known musicians considered to embody the Persian tradition have been left out. A more complete version of this interview has been published in Russian: DURING, Jean. 2019 "Голос духов скрытое и музыка курс мастер Хатам Асгари", in *Музыка в контексте ислама: традиции Ирана.* Т.М. Джани-заде**,** Единство красоты. Ислам и музыка. Moscou:Sadra. The most extensive version was previously published in Persian and in French (During 2016).

37 In the center west of Iran.

38 Hosein-'Ali Nakisā (1882-1976) studied with his father, became a singer of *ta'zie* (religious dramas), and later recorded a few records with 'Ali Akbar Shahnazi (*tār*)] and Mortezā Neydāvud (*tār*).

39 Like other artists of his generation, he had been ensnared by opium.

40 He was then nearly 90 years old.

41 Mashhun, vol I. 1994: 398-9. His "History of Iranian Music", which became a reference, was published long after his death in 1980. Āqā Ziā is also mentionned by Caron and Safvate (1966) under the name Rasā'i among the most importantmasters.

42 The fact that his name is Khorasāni also suggests that he may have inherited a repertoire from eastern Iran that is little known in the western provinces, where many more singers come from.

43 To our knowledge, obedience to a master is not officially marked in Persian music. However, among the Baluchs (and the Indians), it is the object of a small ritual (*band*, "attachment") with invocations, flowers, and sharing of cakes.

44 Mother's milk is said to transmit faith and spirituality.

45 A much-appreciated singer.

46 This was often the case at one time.

47 'Asgari cites the case of B. who acquired a solid base with Āqā Ziā, but who took the easy way out and enjoyed great media success.

48 It is this kind of artist that 'Asgari accuses of having contaminated the classical chant that was upheld by religious and Sufi singers (*cf. Radif-e Jāme'...*p. 12).

49 He states, however, that he has nothing against the use of music in celebrations and weddings.

50 On the effect of melodies, he specifies that all the elements intervene: the poem, the timbre of the voice, the melody, the mode, and the form. Among the properties of music, he also cites its therapeutic virtues.

51 A very important holy place in Iraq.

52 He is nevertheless mentioned with the title of Sheikh by H. Mashhun.

53 It should be noted that the Pole does not need to manifest himself and can remain in the shadows, while assuming his spiritual mission.

54 I was able to verify this fact. When the teacher sings, the student is so concentrated that his face sometimes reddens. He just listens and does not sing after the teacher, who, for his part, sings the melody only once. It is only at the next session that the student will repeat what he has learned and that the master may correct him.

55 Several other 20th-century masters have also reached a canonical age. There is a short documentary film that shows Eqbāl SoltānĀzar singing quite well at the age of hundred. In addition, 'Asgari occasionally practices singing for therapeutic purposes, an art to which, according to him, only Āqā Ziā and a singer from his native region held the key.

56 Several cases are reported by Theodore Levin (:188-192). In Sufism, too, initiatory transmission by purely spiritual means (dream or vision) is allowed. Asgari's interpretation and his experience of the musical tradition reflect this Sufi culture which he received in parallel.

57 —1992. *Radif-ef Āvāzi be revāyet-e Hātam 'Asgari Farāhāni,* Tehran: Sorush. 4 cassettes. (Dastgāh-e Navā, with Dariush Safvat, *setār*, with a 100 pages booklet by Dariush Safvat.) Tehran: Sorush. Re-edition: *Vocal Radif, Dastgāh-e Navā,* Tehran: Mahoor Institute, 2014, 2015.
— *Radif-e āvāzi-e Mâhur, be revâyat-e Hātam 'Asgari Farāhāni, hamrāh bā setār-e Dâryush Safvat.* (Vocal Model repertory of Māhur, version of Hātam Asgari, accompanied on the *setār* by Daryush Safvat.) 6 cassettes with a 100 pages booklet by Dariush Safvat. Tehran: University of Honar.
—2015. *Vocal Radif. Dastgāh-e Chāhārgāh*, Tehran: Mahoor Institute. ('Asgari Farāhāni, vocal, Bahman Kāzemi, *setār*.)
—2017. *Vocal Radif (Hātam 'Asgari Farāhāni). Homāyun – Chakāvak.* Tehran: Mahoor Institute. (Asgari Farāhāni, vocal, Morād Malekmansur, *setār*.)
—2020. *Vocal Radif, Āvāz-e Afshāri & Bayāt-e Tork.* Tehran: Mahoor Institute. ('Asgari *Farāhāni*, vocal; Gholām-Hosein Bigjekhāni, tār.)

58 The title implies that the other *radif*s were incomplete.

59 On these aspects, see for example N. Reuther.

The word 'tradition' is so common that its meaning seems self-evident. Without a precise definition and without considering the relevance of its use, it may refer to any practice, custom, or habit in any given culture.
Irrespective of its content or its object, Tradition is an ideal representation as well as a real process of transmission. It must be dynamic and dialectic in order to incorporate the possibility of continuous transformation. In that sense, Tradition is always present and always modern, while conversely, modernity quickly becomes old. What then distinguishes Tradition from modernity? These general questions and paradoxes of Tradition are broached here in the context of the history of Iranian culture with a focus on music which holds a privileged place as a phenomenon of transmission and reception of knowledge, values and meaning. In four lectures given at Dartmouth College in 1994, the author explores the question of the traditionality of tradition, as well as its foundations in Islamic culture, especially in the arts and music. As a supplement, the author presents an exceptional 'case study' which illustrates his model of the tradition in a very concrete way through the testimony of an important transmitter of the Persian vocal art.

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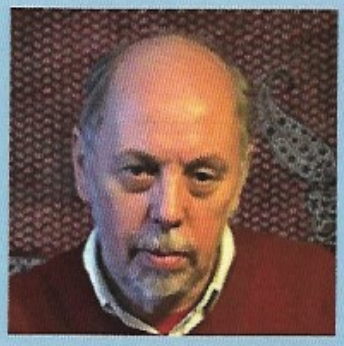

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