

Recorded and notes by Dr. Amnon Shiloah, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4204

Beduin Music of Southern Sinai



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SIDE 1

- BAND 1. HUDJAINI, caravan song 1:40
(Tarabin tribe)
- BAND 2. Water Drawing Song 2:05
(Mzina tribe)
- Band 3. HAFLA, "aBeduin evening" 5:48
coffee grinding, Dahhiya dance,
poem's declamation
- Band 4. Flute Solo (Wadi Firan) 1:40
- Band 5. MAKRUNA (double clarinet) 1:55
(Tarabin tribe)
- Band 6. Three SIMSIMIYYA tunes - 5str. lyre 4:25
- Band 7. Fisherman Son 2:00
Abu Rodeis

SIDE 2

- Band 1. YAMANIA Song, al-Tur 5:00
- Band 2. YAMANIA Song, al-Tur 3:00
- Band 3. YA KHAZARANE, Love Song 2:10
- Band 4. 'Aia DAL'UNA, al-Tur 2:06
(Palestine folk song)
- Band 5. "Here Is The Gazelle" 2:15
Love Song
- Band 6. "The Rich and the Poor" 3:26
- Band 7. Complaint-Epic Song 2:42
al-Tur
- Band 8. Fishesren Dance 2:44
al-Tur

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the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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Beduin Music of Southern Sinai

The Beduin of Southern Sinai are scattered over the area between the bay of Elat to the east, the Suez Canal to the west and the Tiah and Egma cliffs to the north. Within these boundaries, containing a surface of 17000 km², live nine Beduin tribes, representing about eight thousand individuals. A tribe is constituted by a group of people linked by family kinship ties and ruled by a sheikh who functions as their leader and enjoys the highest authority in all respects. Little evidence exists concerning these tribes, which differ in their histories, their origins and their economy; nevertheless, they share the same social structure and social institutions. Their annals are based on oral tradition and legends, perpetuated in highly developed poetic narrative forms. It seems that the first large-scale migrations date back to the fourteenth century; the tribes arrived essentially from the northern part of the Arabian peninsula which they had reached via the Sudan, Upper Egypt, North Africa and Syria. One of these tribes, the Djabalia, is said to have had a different origin. Its members attribute their ancestry to a group of Christians brought by the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century to serve the monastery of Santa Catherina. Their descendents are still attached to the monastery's service and have long since embraced Islam.

The Beduin of Southern Sinai still form a traditional, tribal, semi-nomad society. Their migration is seasonal, and is confined within the territory of each tribe as is also their domination over economic resources.

Slow transformations have gradually taken place in the social sphere in recent years as a result of the discovery and development of mineral deposits and the establishment of tourist centers in the area. More and more Beduin are turning into hired workers and the proportion of the population that still raises camels and sheep and cultivates dates and vegetables is steadily diminishing.

II

The music and poetry practiced in the Beduin encampment of the Sinai peninsula and other places probably contain the most archaic features of Near

Eastern folk music to survive. Songs dances and the recitation of poetry mark every rejoicing and the evening of social gathering. The oldest strata of the Beduin repertory are to be found in some functional expressions such as the song for watering animals (side 1, band 2), the caravan and camel songs which are said to break the infinite silence of the desert and encourage the lonely traveller and his mount (side 1 band 1), songs of fertilizing the date palm and tunes played by young shepherdesses on the flute (side 1, band 4). Family rejoicings, which may comprise the collective circumcision of several young boys, weddings, pilgrimages to local and pan-tribal saints and the evenings of social gatherings are occasions where the recitation of poems and the dancing of the dahḥīya are the main elements.

Words and rhetorical speech are the principal means through which the Beduin expresses his feelings, his imagination and his rich interior world. Ornate and eloquent speech has an immediate impact on the Beduin and causes him great excitement. In the sophisticated Beduin poetry of the kaṣīda type one can find a great variety of symbols, images and values. Almost every tribe has a poet of its own who is like a walking book of memories. The poems are usually connected with a story told by way of introduction to the recitation. The audience participates by repeating the rhyme of each line (side 1, band 3, item 3). Sometimes, the poems are sung to the accompaniment of the one-stringed fiddle, the rabāba. Unfortunately this instrument has disappeared from Southern Sinai. Another poetical genre is the bid'a (literally improvisation), which is related to the dahḥīya dance and its variations the marbū'a and the radīḥ. Verses are invented while the dance is in progress. The subjects are light and the imagery employed is highly conventional, the creative process being rather similar to that of the rural Near Eastern poet-musicians.

The dahḥīya dance is accompanied by sung verses performed by the poet-musician and interrupted by the response of the dancers who clap their hands in a continuous uniform rhythm. The melody is fairly simple and varies very little from performance to performance, while the text is always freshly in-

vented, using material from a rich store of stylistic loci communes. In dancing, the men stand up at a given moment and, forming a row, repeat the word dahḥīya until they are ready and feel inspired to start. Then the poet-musician faces the line and starts singing verses in a muffled voice with a pronounced nasal timbre. The dancers, continually intoning responses and clapping their hands, take small steps forwards and backwards, keeping their feet close to the ground. This dance, which takes place in total darkness, reaches its climax at the appearance of an unmarried woman, clad entirely in black, brandishing a sword in her right hand. She takes larte steps and jumps, while waving her sword, and the dancers alternatively move toward her and retreat, driven back by the sword. Although this young woman is supposedly anonymous all the participants know who she is, but ignore her identity to protect her honour. The same dance is also known among some tribes in Irak, but here the young girl is unveiled and, in return for agreeing to join the dance, has verses improvised in her honour by the poet. Usually, however, the women celebrate all festivities separately and have their own repertory.

The marbū'a is a variation of the dahḥīya. The radīḥ another dance song, is physically as well as musically antiphonal, for the line of participants divides into two sections while performing the verses. This form of dance-song occurs in Yemen and perhaps throughout the Arabian peninsula.

It is worthwhile noting that no musical instruments, not even a drum, are used in these events. The only instruments current among the Sinai Beduin are the flute and the reed-pipe, 'uffāṭa and maḥrūna (side 1, band 4, 5). The popular lyre, the simsimiyya, is connected rather with a particular group living mainly on fishing and possessing a distinct repertory. Some members of this group have deviated from the traditional Beduin way of life.

III

The musical repertory of the fishermen group is heterogenous and partly eclectic. It is composed of old songs and dances originating in the Arabian peninsula and Yemen, commonly called Yamania; and of Egyptian and other Near-Eastern folk songs and dances and popular hits heard on the radio. All these have undergone certain transformations characterized by a beautiful complex of responsorial forms, rhythmical richness, dance and mime. Almost the entire repertory is accompanied by the simsimiyya (a five-stringed lyre) which is a popular instrument

along the coasts of the Red Sea. Instead of a drum a metal or plastic jerrican is used, usually doubled by intensive hand-clapping. Nowadays, the simsimiyya has a small rectangular oil can as a sound box, two lateral arms, yoke and pegs of pieces of rough wood, and strings of electric wire. The five open strings produce five different diatonic sounds with minor or major or neutral third; the tuning is changed in function of the song's scale. The instrument is supported against the left hip; the fingers of the left hand are held throughout on the strings and are pulled whenever the corresponding strings are plucked with the plectrum. The technique is nearly always characterized by a strong rhythmical aspect. Although this instrument is sporadically played in different parts of Sinai, it seems that it is chiefly linked to the fishermen and their particular repertory.

The Yamania songs accompanied by the simsimiyya are said to have an extraordinary power; they are connected with the practice of exorcism.

The dances practiced by the fishermen are mostly solo, and very much influenced by rural and semi-urban cultures. The dancer holds a stick or a handkerchief and has recourse to the gestures of the belly-dance. Authentic group dances are accompanied only by voice and hand-clapping.

IV

The fifteen items in this selection constitute a small part of about twenty hours of recordings made on the occasion of two expeditions to the Sinai peninsula in 1968 and 1971. Both were headed by A. Shiloah. The first was organized by the National Sound Archives and the Jewish Musical Research Centre of the Hebrew University; it included E. Gerson-Kiwi, A. Herzog, A. Hovav and the technician I. Weinberg. The second was organized by the above institutions and the Folklore Research Centre; in addition to the author, it comprised the folklorists and ethnographers D. Noy, I. Ben-Ami, O. Goldberg and C. Bayley. All the recordings are deposited at the National Sound Archive.

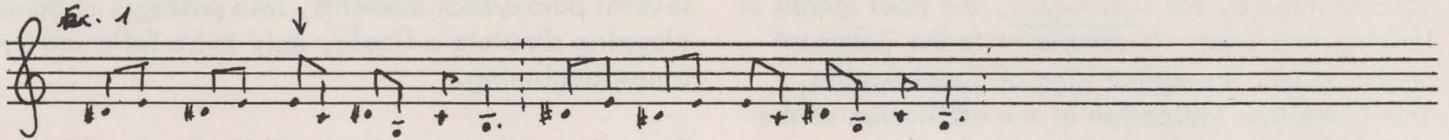
This selection aims at giving some insight into the most important aspect of the musical repertory of the Southern Sinai Beduin, from the functional archaic songs and dances to the transformed hits and popular tunes of the fishermen.

Side A

Band 1. Hudjaini, caravan song, Tarabin tribe, 31, 3. 71

The hudjaini (from hudjayn, a young, strong camel) is a solo song of narrative and nostalgic character.

As the name implies, the song belongs to the genre of camel and caravan songs known before the advent of Islam as *hida* and considered by later chroniclers as the first musical genre created in the desert. The melody moves within a narrow range of a fourth limited respectively by ascending and descending minor seconds (see ex. 1).



Band 6. Three *simsimiyya* tunes, al-Tur
30.3.71

The *simsimiyya* (a five-stringed lyre) usually participates in the accompaniment of songs and dances. Occasionally it is used for independent pieces or preludes and interludes. I have here combined ex-

cerpts of three different tunes from the instrumental repertory; all of them evolve naturally within a range of a fifth and are accompanied by lively drumming on a jerrican. Excerpts one and two use a minor third, the last a major third (ex. 2, 3).

Ex. 2

Ex. 3

Ex. 4

Band 7. A fisherman song, Abu Rodeis, 29.8.68
This song is composed of short and simple melodic formule repeated antiphonally by two groups accompanying themselves by hand-clapping and drum-

ming on a jerrican. From time to time the participants perform passages of hand-clapping without singing; the song concludes in this manner (ex.4).

Ex. 4

Side B

Band 1. A Yamania song, al-Tur, 30.3.71

This song, like side B, nos. 2 and 7, belongs to the repertory of the Arabian peninsula and Yemen.

They are performed by an old singer who accompanies himself on the simsimiyya, while the group participates by intoning refrains, clapping hands and drumming. The text is composed of isolated lines, some of which are repeated several times by the soloist and by the group. The refrain consists of meaningless words or vocables: dana dana ya dani, ya dani dana dana. This is typical of folk songs of this genre in the Arabian peninsula and south Yemen. Hence, they are called Yamania by the fishermen and are distinguished from the other songs which are mainly Egyptian in origin. The Yamania songs are also connected with the practice of exorcism.

Band 2. A Yamania song, al-Tur, 30.3.71

This second Yamania, using a different tune, marked by an insistant rhythm, displays the same characteristics as the former. In this particular performance, the group had recourse to novelty by adding the sound of spoons and empty bottles to the accompaniment. This innovation was spontaneously adopted.

Band 3. Ya khazarane, a love song, al-Tur, 30.3.71

In this song the beloved woman is compared to a stick (khazarāne). A few lines, not inter-related, are repeated many times by the soloist. The group intones the refrain consisting of the first line of the song, with agitated hand-clapping and excited shouts. The song ends with solo hand-clapping as in Side A, band 7. This song as well as Side B, no. 5 and no.6 are of Egyptian origin.

Band 4. 'Alā dal'ūna, al-Tur, 30.3.71

This is a very popular folk song of the Syro-Lebanese region. It is in fact a genre of strophic song whose common denominator is the use of a refrain which begins with the words 'alā dal'ūna; 'alā dal'ūna; this refrain may derive from an old non-strophic social or group song (see ex. 5).

Here the fishermen use the borrowed refrain almost in its original form, but improvise the text of the stanzas. Performed in the same style as their other songs it becomes entirely part of the group's repertory.

Band 5. A love song, al-Tur, 30.3.71

This song has the same characteristics as Ya Khazarane (Side B, band 3) with many stimulating calls and interjections.

Band 6. The poor and the rich, al-Tur, 30.3.71

While this strophic song belongs to the same genre as the two foregoing, we have here a more sophisticated and coherent text where the author humorously contrasts the lives of the poor and the rich.

The Rich is glad o Emir,
And all the worries are the Poor's.

1. The Rich eats beans and butter for breakfast
While the Poor feasts on beans that a donkey
would not eat.

2. The Rich lives in abundance
One day meat and one day potatoes.
The Poor lives oppressed,
One year salt and one year grains.

The Rich is glad...

3. The Rich lives in an elegant street
And has a radio and glittering light.
The Poor dwells in a ruin
With giant ghosts.

The Rich is glad...

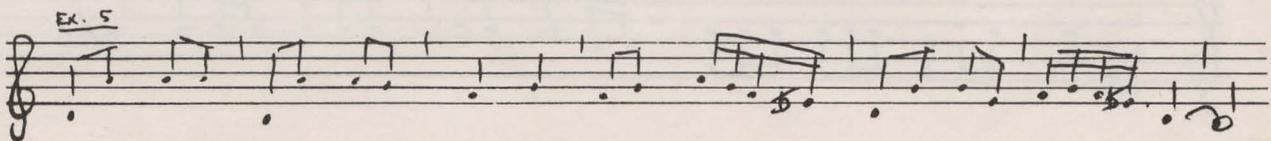
4. The Rich when he sighs twice
Two doctors at once appear at his side
While the Poor when he sighs twice,
At his side at once appears the Angel of Death.

The Rich is glad...

5. The Rich dies in grace
And to his funeral go crowds,
And the Poor when he dies makes his family
glad—

For there is one less to be fed.

The Rich is glad...



The melody is almost identical with a famous hit which swept the world two decades ago. Known as "Mustafa" or "Cherie je t'aime" this song was itself probably based on a popular Egyptian tune.

Band 7. A complaint, al-Tur, 30.3.71

In this song, which belongs to the Yamania genre, accompanied by the simsimiyya, the poet speaks of longing to present his complaint to the judgment of ibn Sa'ud, the former king of Saudi Arabia. This is another indication of the affiliation of the Yamania songs to the Arabian peninsula.

Band 8. A fisherman dance, al-Tur, 30.3.71

The group's passion and natural feeling for rhythm here reaches its zenith. The leader of the dance,

who is at one and the same time the poet improvising the text, the performer of the song and the miming dancer, becomes extremely excited a state that expresses itself at its highest pitch by a deformation of his voice. The short lines energetically enunciated by the soloist and similarly repeated by the group create a very rousing atmosphere. At several paroxysmal moments, solo passages of hand-clapping simulate a finale, only to be followed by a new beginning.

Recording and notes: Amnon Shiloah, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

Master tape prepared in the electronic studio of the Hebrew University by Y. Silas.