

Recorded by Paul Bowles.

At Tahala, Morocco.

September 21, 1959.

Music of the Beni Ouaraine Tribe. (Middle Atlas)

Performers: Cheikh Ayyad ou Haddou and Ensemble.

1. Ferhane bi'l Moghreb Deba (3 male voices, 4 female voices, bendir)
2. Sarout el Moghreb Siyid el Khamiss (3 male voices, 4 female, bendir)
3. Ajbouni el Ayyoun (3 male voices, 4 female voices, bendir)

As has been remarked earlier, the men have a tendency to place their voices extremely high, certainly higher than comfort allows. The Beni Ouaraine are excessive in this respect: it is impossible to tell the difference between the men and the women, and it is one of the salient characteristics of their music that their mastery over certain limited but subtle aspects of voice control is absolute.

The singing of the Beni Ouaraine came as a surprise to me, inasmuch as I had never heard anything resembling it in Morocco, or, for that matter, anywhere in North Africa. The men sat together along one side of the room, the Cheikh holding the bendir, while the women were grouped facing them along the contiguous wall. I was not expecting to see so ~~many~~ many singers, since the katib had told me there would be three "people". Then I remembered that women are not people, and when the time came to pay the musicians I said to the Cheikh: "Three people. Right?" He agreed, and I paid only for three musicians instead of seven. Unfortunately it did not always work in the same advantageous fashion; generally the women have to be paid the same as the men.

In number 1, the men and women sang simultaneously; in number 2 they alternated, and again in number 3 they sang together.

25B

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Music of the Beni Ouaraine Tribe. (Middle Atlas)

Performers: Cheikh Ayyad ou Haddou and Ensemble.

1. Aili ya Mali (3 men's voices, 4 women's voices, brass tray struck with two teaspoons)
2. Habbit Entou (3 men's voices, bendir)
3. Ouakha dial Kheir (4 women's voices, bendir)

Whether one accords or denies esthetic value to Aili ya Mali, by any standards it is an extraordinary musical phenomenon. When I heard it through the headphones during the recording I was unaware of both its construction and its sound; it was not until I got back to Taza that night and played it that I was struck by the fact that it was completely unlike anything I had ever heard. (For a brief instant I was convinced that somehow I was listening to the tape running backwards; then I recognized the words of the repeated refrain: "Chouf! Chni hiya?"(*) and realized that mechanically all was going along as usual.) ~~which is a very common device~~ The device of using a brass tea-tray as a percussive instrument is not uncommon. (In tape number 4A a tray was struck with two small tea-glasses; this group in 4A was also from the Middle Atlas.)

(*) "Chouf! Chni hiya?" = "Look! What is it?"

Number 3, Ouakha dial Kheir, is another remarkable example of perfection in unison singing. The women sat like statues throughout the session, and did not vary their attitude of immobility even when performing this relatively vehement song.