



# THE YEMENI SOURCES OF POETRY AND MUSIC IN THE SAWT OF THE GULF: THE ROLE OF THE ARABIAN DIASPORA IN INDIA

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**Jean Lambert**

**THE YEMENI SOURCES OF POETRY AND MUSIC  
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Since several years, research began to be seriously involved in the historical relations between the music of the Gulf and the Yemeni music. For the lyrics, we can trace these relations back to the beginnings of the diffusion in the Gulf of the *humaynî* poetry, a half dialectal literary genre, at a period which still must be specified, between the 17th and 19th century. However, this influence on the poets and the musicians of the Gulf was continuous until the 20th century. This was more particularly true between Hadramawt, and the cities of Kuwait and Manama. For the music, it is difficult to be as precise as for the poetry, but we can make the hypothesis that music and poetry, at certain times, circulated in concomitant ways, even if it was with some temporal or spatial gaps. It is at least the hypothesis which is made by several musicologists and musicians of the Gulf and the Peninsula as the Saudi Târeq 'Abd al-Hakîm<sup>1</sup> and authors as Khâlid al-Qâsimî and Nizâr Ghânim (1993). My purpose here is to gather some historical and social facts which can explain or clarify these early contacts between the Yemeni music and the Gulf.

Obviously these relations must be put in a diachronic prospect, because they are the result of ancient and direct or indirect contacts which took place for at least three centuries. Yet, the first publications mentioning them gave rise, among a rather wide public, to a series of frictions and misunderstandings: some influences were probably exaggerated, while for some Yemenite authors, Yemenite melodies were "plundered" by the musicians of the Gulf. These perceptions which are sometimes understandable, must be put in perspective, because they are especially dictated by contemporary identity concerns, for several reasons: because the uneven economic development of the Yemen and the Gulf, as well as the unequal development of the media in this region at the end of the 20th century; for several decades, the existence of a massive emigration of workers from the Yemen to the Gulf, accompanied by the migration of many Yemeni musicians<sup>2</sup>; the rise of the local nationalisms, in particular the small young states in the Gulf which were in search of identity constructions.

In a first article (Lambert 2001), I had begun to explore this question in a limited way. In the present article<sup>3</sup>, I wish to deepen my questioning in particular by a more precise description of the exchanges which took place in the past three centuries, by specifying certain factual aspects and some methodological points. I'll let to other publications the question of the instruments (Lambert 2019) and the formal analysis of concrete musical borrowings (Lambert 2020). I'll try to show that during this historical period, the numerous similarities (in poetry, melodies, instruments) only seem strange to us because we forgot the actual routes of their circulations and the social mechanisms of their distribution. What is particularly difficult to understand about these courses is that they passed largely out Yemen and the Gulf, by the Hadrami and Arabic emigration in India and later in Indonesia. Thus, this requires from us to return to these socio-economic and historic facts.

**The historical context of the Arabic and Yemenite diaspora in India**

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1 'Abd al-Ilâh al-Taqî, *Al-'Arabî al-Jadîd* (2015) : <https://yemen-press.com/news44144.html>

2 For example in Kuwait, many Yemeni musicians have their own public, and they publish their recordings in local companies. See the catalogue of cassettes of Romco company: Mohammed Jum'a Khân, Abû Bakr Sâlim Bâ -l-Faqîh, Karâma Mursâl and many others.

3 I want to address here special thanks to Mubarak al-'Ammârî for his wide knowledge of references about poetry and music in South of Arabia. I am also very much thankful to Ahmed al-Salhi for sharing with me comparative material from Kuwait. I thank Pierre D'Hérouville for his insights about Yemenite musical migrations to Indonesia, and Michael Kinnear for his sharing early references on Arabian music in India. I have even more special thoughts to Dr Nizar Ghanem who was the first one who attracted my attention on this subject.

Recently, new historic studies on the Arab emigration and in particular the Hadramis in South and Southeast Asia provided us new materials and perspectives (Enseng Ho 2009). The Hadramis' presence was documented very early in India. They were employed by the Moghol and post-Moghol sultans, as servicemen, merchants, administrators and religious guides. Arabs were very much welcomed, because, besides a military role and a religious role, they contributed to strengthen the Muslim population at the demand of the Sultans. We begin to better know these mechanisms thanks to the links made between Indian, Arab, Persian, Portuguese<sup>4</sup> sources by the new historians who are followers of "the global history" as, for instance, Sangit Subramanian. For their part, some Yemeni researchers had began to be interested in these questions since a long time, but their works had gone relatively unnoticed until now. It will be referred here to some of the most accessible sources, without pretending to exhaustivity.

Since the 16th century at least, Yemeni mercenaries and other Arabs were already in the service of the Muslim sultanates of India, in particular in Gujerat and in Deccan. For example under sultan Babur Shah (1526-1537)<sup>5</sup>, there are 10 000 mercenaries in the army of this sovereign, for the most part from Yâfi ' and of Mahra (Khalidi, 1997, 69.). At the beginning of the 18th century, prince Nizam of Hayderabad massively called on to Hadrami soldiers (Khalidi on 1997, 69).

About the religious staff, the historian Badr Ja'far ben 'Aqîl mentions a *sayyid* called Bâ Faqîh who played an eminent role at the Sultan of Bijapur's court (at present Karnataka) in the 16th century, and several other learned members of a religious order, very often *sayyid*, which were advisers to the sultan of Gujerat Muzaffar Shah II (around 1520) ('Aqîl idem), and still an other one in the 17th century ('Aqîl n.d ., 262)<sup>6</sup>.

At the end of the 16th century, the city of Surat (in Gujerat), "the blessed harbour" for the Muslims (*bandar mubâarak*), became the main port of transit of the Indian pilgrims towards Mekka, and one of the biggest ports in the world. It was also linked al-Mokhâ, the Yemeni port, at the time of coffee trade (Willis 2009, 23). A Indian map from the end of the 17th century describes Surat city with its institutions (Lahiri on 2012, 106-108), among which are represented the rich buildings of a Yemeni Sufi brotherhood<sup>7</sup>, 'Aydarûsî<sup>8</sup>. Sangit Subramanian comments that their central position in the city shows the political and economic importance of this brotherhood<sup>9</sup>.



Fig. 1: A map of Surat, 18<sup>th</sup> century (on silk)  
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4 For example, at the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa made a very detailed description of India and Indonesia.

5 Apparently, Khalidi mistakes Babûr for Bahadûr : this later will be sultan from 1707 to 1712.

6 This non dated article was probably published in the 1990's, in a Yemenite journal. The author is a well known historian and archeologist.

7 The details of this buildings, a mosque in Moghol style and a building with three domes in the Yemeni islamic style (born during the Rasulid time in Yemen, 14th century) are partially visible in Lahiri's publication (2012, 107), and much more clear in Singh's publication (1986).

8 This name refers to the cult of the shrine of the sufi Abû Bakr al-'Aydarûs (16th century), who is also present in Aden, where it is Aden's main santan (and a poet, but not to be mistaken with the poet 'Abd al-Rahmân al-'Aydarûs). In Aden, the beautiful wooden gate of the shrine had been offered by a rich Indian merchant and is reputed to have crossed the Ocean miraculously (visit to Aden, 1990's).

9 Inaugural lecture, Collège de France, on 2014-2015 (07/12, 48'15-51'00)

<http://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/l-eloge-du-savoir/saisons/saison-2014-2015?p=10>

Other cities of the west coast of India appear in the testimonies on the presence of the Arabs: according to a later Indian source (Philott 1906-1907), the poet Yahyâ 'Umar, a Yemeni from Yâfi', who was also a soldier, is said to have been living in the cities of Baroda (Vadodara, "cultural capital" of Gujerat), Calicut (further south, in Kerala), Madras (Tamil Nadu, on the southeast coast of India) between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During a more recent period, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Bombay (Maharashtra state, and the biggest Indian metropolis), established in 1668 by the British, gradually supplanted Surat, and became a focal point for the Arabic poets and musicians of the Peninsula and the Gulf ('Aqîl n.d.).

Thus, numerous and important Muslim communities specifically of Arabic origin were constituted on the whole west coast of India, from Gujerat until Hayderabad. Until today, these communities preserved their identities and their collective memory, if not the Arabic language<sup>10</sup>. It is thus obvious that these relations, if they are better documented for the most recent period, represent the continuation of a long interaction going back to several centuries, and which depended largely on the socio-economic and political evolution of the cities of Western India.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is most necessary to take into account the role of the British Empire, whose presence engendered for the Arabic communities two contradictory trends: on one hand, the British domination on India (at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) obviously provoked a secondary migration of the Yemenis and the other Arabs from India towards Indonesia, because their geographical, economical and political spaces tended to be reduced (Hartwig 1997, 43). On another hand, the British domination being stabilized in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, offered a new common frame for Aden, Hadramawt, Kuwait, Bahrain and India (Willis 2009). Numerous Arabs, from the Yemen and the Gulf, were encouraged to trade in every corner of this "*mare nostrum*" that was Indian Ocean for the British Vice-Royalty. Between 1800 and 1840, there was also a particular role for merchants from Oman (Benjamin 1976). But at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Aden was a real "El Dorado" for the musicians of the Gulf.

As it was proposed by Clarence-Smith (on 1997, 3 and sq) and S.F. Alatas (on 1997, 19-34, more about Indonesia), we can and we must speak about a "diaspora" to characterize the communities of Yemenites who settled permanently in South and South East Asia and often well integrated in their host countries, but who maintain narrow links with the mother-homeland. This particular the case of Hadramis in India and Indonesia. We know for instance that the Kathîrî and Qu'aytî Sultans who reigned in Hadramawt from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were descendants of emigrant families from Yâfi' who had previously established real dynasties of notables and military leaders in India at least a century before, in particular in Baroda (Khalidi 1997, 70) and Hayderabad (idem, 75). Having not anymore a major role to play in India, these two families were encouraged by the British to reinvest the politics of their country of origin, what also served the interests of the latter in South Arabia (Hartwig 1997, 37-50). Those who could preserve their links with the mother-homeland were especially the wealthiest and the most educated.

Besides the preservation of the religious and mystic links, for example the cult of the al-'Aydarûs saint already mentioned, as well as the 'Alawîyya brotherhood based in Tarim, these Arabic communities were used to form marital ties and commercial alliances, not only between Yemenis, but also with other Arabs, which tended to make Arabic cultural features circulate in a transverse way. We notice in particular that mergers between Hadramis and other Arabs in the emigration were favoured (at least from the 18<sup>th</sup> century) by the attitude of the British colonial administration which confused all the "Arabs" in the same category (Clarence-Smith on 1997, 8). It is thus necessary to speak about an "Arabic diaspora" as much as about a "Yemenite diaspora", which obviously, complicates the picture. But such a use of the concept of diaspora allows us to understand how and by which channels, up to there, unnoticed cultural features were able to spread in such easy ways during several centuries between the Gulf and Yemen, specially Hadramawt.

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10 "Arabs in India" : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabs\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabs_in_India)

This brief description of the Arabian and Yemenite diaspora in India should be deepened by and with specialized historians<sup>11</sup>; but for the time being, it will be enough to introduce our description of the poetical and musical trends which took place in the same context. In the frame of such a political and cultural presence of the Arabs in India, it would be difficult to imagine that there was no intense musical activity as well, at least in a merely religious and vocal way. Indeed, poets and musicians from Hadramawt and the Gulf circulated intensely in this universe of Indian Ocean as a commercial system, and sometimes as a political system. But before approaching directly the musical facts, let us summarize at first our knowledge of the poetry sung in the Yemen and in the Gulf during this whole period.

### **The Yemenite poetry sung in the Gulf and in India between the 17th and 20th century**

To study the music of the Gulf, as that of the Yemen, we have very little written sources. The oral tradition allows to go back only till the end of the 19th century, rarely more. On the other hand, the poetry which was and is still sung on these melodies brings us much more of informations which can spatter on our historical knowledge of the music. The publication of the book of Mubârak al-'Ammârî in three volumes (1991-1996), dealing with the musician Muhammad b. Fâris, presented an important anthology of the poems practised in the *sawt*. This brought much progress in this domain (Lambert 2001). It's time to resume these first analyses and to deepen them, in particular in the light of the recent attempts to write a global history.

'Ammârî's anthology showed us in particular the extent of the influence of the Yemeni poetry in the *sawt* sung in Bahrain. His corpus containing about 600 poems sung in particular by the Bahreini Mohammed ben Fâris, but also by the other "pioneers" of the *sawt*, is rather representative. A quick statistical study of the book indicates us that three fifths of the poems approximately are in classic Arabic (approximately 325 poems)<sup>12</sup>; when the two other fifths of the corpus (approximately 250) are represented by texts in dialectal poetry, in great majority of the Yemeni *humaynî* type (approximately 240), and a small minority of *zuhayrî* (Iraqi) type. The best represented poet is Yahyâ 'Umar (1655-1725), native of Yâfi' (Yemen) (34 poems), and who represents undoubtedly a milestone in this cultural history. The other poets are for the greater part native of Hadramawt or Yâfi': 'Abd al-Rahmân Mustafâ al-'Aydârûs (30 poems), Khû 'Alawî, al-Wâhidî, Ibn Shamlân, Bâ Nabû', 'Abd Allâh Muhammad Bâ Hasan, as well as about forty anonymous authors.

How these poetic texts were scattered from Yemen to the Gulf? It is difficult to ascertain that they began to spread at an early time, when their authors were still alive. Given the general flow we already mentionned, it seems that very often, these poets themselves followed the merchants, the sufis and the mercenaries in the diaspora, when they did not exercise themselves these activities... But what was the concrete course of the texts? How did these political, commercial and maritime flow contribute to there broadcasting, by which actors and at which dates?

Here still, the article of Badr Ja'far b. 'Aqîl, (s. d.) is illuminating, and it allows us in particular to make interesting cross-cutting with al-'Ammârî's work. To start with, we notice in these two sources that the direct literary influence of Sanaa is much lesser than that of Hadramawt and Yâfi', which were the two main springs of the Yemeni emigration in India and in Indonesia during this whole period<sup>13</sup>. If we examine more precisely the biographies of these main actors, we notice that the Yemeni poets who are represented in 'Ammârî's corpus either emigrated to India, or travelled in the Gulf during this crucial period going from the end of the 17th century to the beginning of the

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11 No doubt for example that some historical accounts by Hadramis of their stay in India exist in the manuscripts which I was not able to consult;

12 Among which many mediaeval authors like al-Mutanabbî, Abû Nuwâs and Bahâ' al-Dîn Zuhayr, but also some Yemeni authors (in classical Arabic) like 'Abd al-Rahmân Mustafâ al-'Aydârûs.

13 The great poets from Sanaa, from the 16th to the 20th century like Muhammad Sharaf-al-Dîn, 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Anîsi, Ahmed al-Qâra are not know for having travelled out of Yemen.

20th century<sup>14</sup>.

It is in particular the case of the poet and musician Yahyâ 'Umar, been born around 1655, died around 1725 (Bû Mahdî, 1993, 17)<sup>15</sup>. This native of Yâfi' seems to have lived for a long time in India, probably as a mercenary, in Baroda, Calicut and Madras (Philott 1906-1907, 668). According an oral tradition, he was a singer and a player of the *qanbûs*, the four stringed lute which was already known in the Yemen (idem); we shall come back to this subject later. According to certain sources, Yahyâ 'Umar may have come back to Yemen after a long absence (Bû Mahdî 1993, 13-17), or according to others, may have died in India. In his poetical work, we find several poems sung in Hedjaz at the end of the 19th century, which testifies of an even wider diffusion westward (Gavin 1988). The abundant poetic work of Yahyâ 'Umar wears the brand of India, by his descriptions of the beautiful Indian women, the mention of several place names and the use of certain urdu words. In a poem, he also mentions the navigation and his passage by Bahrain ('Aqîl n.d.). According to the two main collections (Bû Mahdî 1993 and Khallâqî 2005), Yahyâ 'Umar's poetic work seems itself to carry the trace of the migration process: the part of his repertoire which is sung in the Gulf is almost completely different from the one which is known in Yemen<sup>16</sup>.

Another poet, the *sayyid* Zayn 'Abd Allâh al-Haddâd (1693-1744)<sup>17</sup>, a native of Hadramawt, better known under the name of Khû 'Alwî (R.B. Serjeant, 1951, 63), travelled in Iraq and in Oman, and is buried in the Emirates (Thânî 2007, in particular 163-165; 'Ammârî, 1991-1996). So it is likely that his poetry spread in the Gulf in his lifetime<sup>18</sup>. As we are going to see it farther, Khû 'Alwî is also known, in the Yemen, as a singer and player of *qanbûs*.

As for 'Abd al-Rahmân Mustafa al-'Aydarûs (1694-1749)<sup>19</sup>, a poet native from Tarîm and author of two important collections ('Ammârî, 1991, 89-122), he is known to have travelled in India, in Turkey and in Greece ('Aqîl, s.d., 276 and note 55). These last two poets (Khû 'Alwî and al-'Aydarûs) were members of descendants' families of the Prophet, *ashrâf* (or *sayyid*) and closely linked to the 'Alawiyya brotherhood, which spread out in the whole Indian Ocean, in particular in Indonesia.

At more recent dates, we also find poets from Yâfi' and Hadramawt:

- 'Alî b. Shamlân, Hadramawt, 18th or 19th century? ('Ammârî 1991, 273)<sup>20</sup>;
- Ahmad Sa'îd al-Wâhidî, from the region of Shabwa (north east of Yâfi'), probably 19th

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14 Among the Yemeni dialectal poems mentioned in 'Ammârî's corpus, some go back to an older period : Abû Bakr al-'Aydarûs (15th century, the same who became the Aden's protector saint and whose brotherhood was implanted in Surat) and Muhammad Sharaf al-Dîn (16th century), but these authors are represented only by a few poems.

15 It is advisable to stay cautious about these dates which are not well defined (Khallâqî 2005, 30).

16 It is striking to discover that the collection published by Bû Mahdî, which is composed of around 50 poems shares only half a dozen with the 34 sung in the *sawt* and collected by 'Ammârî. From its part, Khallâqî's collection (2005) still adds a few more unpublished poems, based on a manuscript found in Yemen. Nevertheless, the literary style seems very similar in all these sources, and one finds many poems with the common introduction formula : "Yahyâ 'Umar said...". This situation suggests that two different parts of his work could have been composed according to two different periods of his life, or would have followed two different courses of diffusion : maybe a part composed abroad, in the diaspora, and another part composed in Yemen (before his exile, or after he returned to his homeland and conserved by the local tradition in Yâfi' (Bû Mahdî, 1993, 37). Or does this indicate that there are two different authors? It cannot be excluded. Yahyâ 'Umar is also often merged with some unknown authors like Ibn Ja'dân and Abû Mutlaq (Khallâqî 2005, 20). It would be interesting to make a stylistic and philological study of the whole corpus.

17 Only eight poems at 'Ammârî's.

18 It is noticeable that both Yahyâ 'Umar and Khû 'Alwî are also well represented in the corpus of *humaynî* poetry sung on Hijazî melodies recorded in Djedda in 1909 (Lambert et Regourd 2017). There was also a Hadramî poet, al-Beytî, who composed *humaynî* poetry in Hijaz where he was born, as early as the 17th century (idem, 133). This suggests to us that the *humaynî* poetry was scattered in the whole region at a very early period.

19 Not to be confounded with the Aden's sainton, also a poet, Abû Bakr al-'Aydarûs mentioned dnote 6.

20 Until today, I do not have more informations on this poet, but Ben Shamlân is a well known family in inner Hadramawt and in the diaspora in India and Indonesia. According to two of his texts mentioning urdu words, he clearly lived in India between the 17th and the 18th century (style close to Yahyâ 'Umar's by his linguistic creativity and his anti-conformism ('Aqîl s.d. 273)

century ('Ammârî 1991, 276-277)<sup>21</sup>;

- Sâlim 'Abbûd Bâ Nabû', poet from Mukalla who lived in the 19th century<sup>22</sup> (Bâ Hamdân 2011).

- Others, as Ibn Ja'dan and Abû Mutlaq<sup>23</sup> (al-'Ammârî, 1991, p. 335-338.) have not left any biographical informations.

Most of these poets are known to have travelled or emigrated to India and spoke about this country in their poetry, often using words of urdu inside the Arabic text ('Aqîl s.d. 273-277).

Closer to us, the poet ' Abd Allâh Bâ Hasan (1861-1928) (represented in 'Ammârî's collection), although he did not travel to India (Bâ Matraf 1983), lived in an environment of poets and musicians where the journey to India was very common, as it was the case of his friend Sultân b. Harhara, a musician who died in India in 1901, and who sang his texts (see *infra*).

If we return to the inventory established by 'Ammârî, we notice that before the years 1920s, the poems sung in the *sawt* include no local dialectal text. It is thus exclusively the Yemeni poetry which was used to play this key role<sup>24</sup>. It is a crucial point<sup>25</sup>. Among the first ones to have composed and sung in the dialect of the Gulf in the *sawt*, we find the Kuwayti 'Abdallah Fadâla<sup>26</sup> and the Bahraini, Muhammad b. Fâris ('Ammârî, 1994, 43). At the same time, these two musicians continued to draw *humaynî* texts from the Yemeni repertoire. As we saw it before, Muhammad b. Fâris recorded texts from passing by Yemeni musicians, in particular 'Umar Mahfûz Ghâbba (died in 1965) (Murshid Nâjî, 1983, 145); and also from his laundry worker who was a Yemeni immigrant ('Ammârî, 1994, 43)... Whereas Mohammed Zwayd boasted to have secretly recorded texts sung by the musician 'Abd al-Rahîm al-'Asîrî (a native of Hijâz), with the complicity of a walk-on hidden behind a curtain ('Ammârî 1991, 74) !

It is to say the importance of the Yemeni literature for the constitution of the cultural identity of the people of Bahrein<sup>27</sup>. Yet, because of the ancientness of this situation, The Gulf can also be considered as a conservatory for numerous Yemeni poems which are not found in the Yemen, as it is the case for a part of Yahyâ 'Umar's repertoire. Isn't it that this anomaly reflects the complexity of these cultural exchanges (see footnote 14)? As far as melodies are concerned, they may have followed similar mechanisms.

### **The music and the musicians: a Yemenite-Gulfian-Indian system**

The first historical mention of a musical relation between the Yemen and India is reported by a Hadrami source from the 16th century which states the existence of a cabaret held by an Indian man in the Yemenite harbour city of Shihr, and which was presenting shows of Indian girls dancing (Bâ Matraf 1983, quoted by 'Aqîl n.d. 270) ! During the same period, the Yemeni music was already flourishing, as certain historical testimonies mention Yemeni musicians playing the lute in front of Ottoman authorities in the region of Sanaa in the 16th century (Lambert and Mokrani on 2013, 84). But it is a little later, from the 17th century, that we find some explicit testimonies of

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21 Originate from the Shabwa-Habbân region, he lived between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century : <http://www.alwahdi.com/archive/index.php/t-1021.html>

22 <http://www.alwsta.com/vb/archive/index.php/t-51315.html>

23 These two names may be linked to one single poet, whose we don't know the biography.

24 The case of the *nabatî* poetry is different : it was noted in manuscripts since the end of the 18th century and it was sung as well, but on other musical forms, different from the *sawt*. As it was composed in Central and Eastern Arabia, it was mostly sung in the local *sâmîrî* form.

25 This does not mean that the dialectal poetry was not sung before the 19th century. But it was not a matter for learned men, it was not transmitted in a written way and it was not sung in urban music.

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[https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87\\_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9#cite\\_note-.D9.83.D9.88.D9.86.D8.A7-2](https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9#cite_note-.D9.83.D9.88.D9.86.D8.A7-2)

27 The Kuwaitis seem to have been more influenced by Iraq than by Yemen, as it is suggested by 'Abdallah al-Faraj's *dîwân* ('Abd Allâh al-Faraj, 1953). But during the first half of the 20th century, we notice many Yemeni poems sung by Kuwaitis, for example : *Yâ bi-rûhî min al-ghîd, Ahlan wa-sahlan bi-man fâq al-qamar, Marr bî wahtarash*, etc...

Yemeni musicians in India, and already in connection with Hadramawt and Yâfi'.

It was in particular the case of Yahyâ 'Umar (m. by 1725), who was not only a poet, but also a musician, and probably a composer: according to an oral testimony collected in a Yemeni community in India at the end of the 19th century, Yahyâ 'Umar, who lived in particular in Gujerat and travelled in India<sup>28</sup>, was a *qanbûs* player (he was called a *muqanbis*) (Philott 1906-1907).

For his part, the poet Zayn 'Abd Allâh al-Haddâd (Khû 'Alwî, d. 1744) who lived in the Gulf, was also probably a musician and player of *qanbûs*: a legend recorded by R.B. Serjeant in Hadramawt (in the 1940s) tells how, as a teenager, Khû 'Alwî played the instrument in secret from his parents, and was rescued from the reprimand by the instrument itself which began to "speak" in a supernatural way (Serjeant, 1951, 63). If these later legends do not bring us a complete certitude about Yahyâ 'Umar and Khû 'Alwî's musical practices (let us be attentive not to make anachronisms), they show us an artist's profile associating both the poetic and the musical creation and which seems credible at that time. In the same time, other testimonies show the existence of the *qanbûs* in Yemen during the same period, from the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century (Lambert and Mokrani 2013, chapter 3).

Closer to us, Sultân b. 'Alî b. al-Sheykh ben Harhara (m. 1901), a native from Yâfi' who died in Bombay poisoned by a jealous Indian mistress (Tha'lab 1984, 14), was also a great *qanbûs* player. Another great hadrami poet and composer, 'Alî Bâ Mu'aybad (m. 1922), lived at about the same time in the Gulf and in Bombay (Ghânem 1986, 12; Tha'lab 1981).

The mentions of these musicians throughout history from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> century, aside with other informations about music in Yemen and in Hejâz, suggests to us that there was an intense circulation of poetry and music between Yemen and India during this period, and that the lute *qanbûs* played an important role in these activities. It may even have been a common feature of urban music all around the Arabian Peninsula, although under different names (Lambert 2019).

From their part, the Gulfian musicians dedicatedly frequented the city of Bombay at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century,. The first one to be known as such is the Kuwaiti 'Abdallah al-Faraj (1836-1901) (al-Faraj 1953). As a son of a Kuwaiti merchant settled in India, he spent his childhood and adolescence in Bombay, and was considered as having learned there the western musical notation, as well as Yemeni melodies from the Yemenite Ben Harhara (al-Faraj, 1953 ; Ghânim 1986, 12)). He is known to have come back to Kuwait from the death of his father by 1858 (Dûkhî 1984, 194). A confirmation of the Yemenite influence is given by a disk recorded (in India in the 30s) by the Kuwaiti Yûsuf al-Bakar (m. 1955), a disciple of al-Faraj's, with the following title: "*Bin Harhara qâl*" (Salhi 2012, 10).

The first musicians of the Gulf who recorded 78 rpm disks were the Kuwaitis Abdullatif, Saleh, and Dawud al-Kuwaiti in 1927 in Baghdad.<sup>29</sup> On another hand, we have a very precise relation of two meetings in Bahrain in 1913, then in India in 1922, between a singer from the Hedjaz, 'Abd al-Rahîm al-'Asîrî (1855?-1950) and the Bahraini Muhammad b. Fâris (1895-1947), meetings where the former transmitted to the latter many poems and melodies from Hejaz and the Yemen ('Ammâri, 1991, 72). This was also the case of the other Bahraini, Mohammed Zwayd (1900-1982), who met 'Asîrî in Bombay, and where he then recorded many songs for the Odeon

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28 To illustrate this point, the source reports a beautiful legend : after having left the Gujarat and travelled in India, he came back to Baroda after sixteen years ; then, he was about to marry a girl which happened to be his proper daughter (because he had not raised her, he did not know her). But he was recognized by her when, during the wedding night, he began to sing his poetry for her with the accompaniment of the *qanbûs*, avoiding *in extremis* to commit incest.

29 In certain sources, 'Abdallah Fadâla (1900-1967) is credited to have recorded in Bombay in 1913 (Ghânim, 1986, 13). But this seems little probable, given his age. Yet some Arab artists were already recorded in Bombay between 1904 and 1910 (Kinnear 1994, 2000), but they were not identified by clear names : some Qorân by a Hijâzî chanter (2000, 57), an Omani singer (1994, 203) and another Arabic artist (2000, 85). There were probably more Arab artists recorded between 1910 and 1935 in Bombay (1935 is the date of the first recordings of Mohammed Zwayd in Odeon company, Bombay), but unfortunately, all these early recordings are still not documented, and we do not have the catalogues of these Indian record companies.



company in 1935. For his part, 'Abd al-Latîf al-Koweytî lived for a long time in India, where he learned the musical notation.

The specific role of Aden must be also underlined: the Kuwaiti boats going to East Africa made it a important stop over, and musical exchanges were frequent there (see Salhî 2016). The Omani Sâlim Râshid al-Sûrî (1910-1975), when he exiled himself from Muscat, went at first to Aden, and it is there that he acquired his first lute. Only after a long journey to East Africa and in Zanzibar, he landed finally in Bombay, where he too frequented the Yemeni, Kuwaiti and Bahraini musicians (Kathîrî 2012), and where he recorded several disks.

When listening to the 78 rpm *sawt* recordings, or to real tapes, we often hear an announcement which says: "So-and-so, *Yamânî*, *San'ânî*, or *Shihrî*, or *Hijâzî*. By these announcements which define commercial or traditional categories at that time, we learn a number of informations on Yemenite regional influences. The word *Shihrî* specially attracts our attention, because it was designating a musical style from al-Shihr, this Hadramî harbor which was the main one to send emigrants towards South and South East Asia, and which was superseded by al-Mukallâ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British took hold of Hadramawt. Thus this *Shihrî* musical style is a heir of the time when the commercial sailing was not between Aden and Bombay but between al-Mokhâ, al-Shihr and Surat...

Besides, in the non commercial recordings made by Yûsuf al-Bakar at the beginning of the 50's, al-Bakar himself quotes many *sawt* as *yamânî* or *san'ânî*. Actually, some of them can be easily recognized as Yemenite (Lambert 2020). For his part, Mohammed Zwayd secretly recorded Yemeni and Hijazi poems from 'Abd al-Rahîm al-'Asîrî with the help of a walk-on hidden behind a curtain ('Ammârî 1991, 74; Kathîrî 2012). He also says that he inspired himself from numerous *sawt yamânî*, transforming them in something new. But we still need to assess at what extent these influences were actually exerted.

We must also note a direct influence of India on the Yemeni music at the beginning of the 20th century which was extolled by the great Hadrami singer, Muhammad Jum'a Khan (1898-1965), who was born in India. His father, of Hadrami origin, had been a musician in the military brass band of the sultanate of Hyderabad<sup>30</sup>. Jum'a Khân (among others) sang several songs with Arabic lyrics and an Indian melody or rhythm, in a style called *muhannad*<sup>31</sup>, inspired by the Indian movies diplayed in Aden.

All these observations show us a very rich Arab-Indian musical life in particular in Bombay and between Bombay, the Gulf and Aden since at least from the mid 19th century. This musical life was still amplified by the beginnings of the commercial recordings in the years 1910-1920 (period which remains very little undocumented), but it existed obviously well before. And as we saw it previously, it was the opportunity to meet for Arab musicians from the whole Peninsula, the Hijaz, the Gulf, Hadramawt and Oman via India. Thus we could speak for this modern period of the city of Bombay as a real melting pot (Green 2013), in particular for what was going to become the form *sawt*.

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Obviously, Gulfian musicians and poets were very much inspired by Yemenite musicians, not necessarily through direct links but very often through links tied in the Arabian diaspora in India, first in Surat around the 17th century, and then in Bombay in the 19th century : this is what shows us the examination of the socio-economical context, the history of diffusion of the poetical texts and the diffusion of the music. To what extent these indications supplied by the sung poetry could also

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[https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF\\_%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9\\_%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86](https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF_%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9_%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86)

31 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZW\\_B352uxE&list=PL24BDC8E67A3D43AD&index=29](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZW_B352uxE&list=PL24BDC8E67A3D43AD&index=29)

Also in the same style, Ahmed 'Ubayd al-Qa'tabî : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vILKKoQnj8I>

See also Gabriel Lavin, 2019

be valid for the music itself? If, in the musical domain, sources are very scarce, especially before the middle of the 19th century, on the literary level, we saw the huge presence of the *humaynî* poetry outside the Yemen, at a point that we could speak about a "diasporic" *humaynî*, whether it was composed in the Gulf, in Hijaz, in India, or later in Indonesia (Serjeant 1951). In any case, all this poetry which is mainly lyric, was undoubtedly sung. Now it does not mean that the melodies on which it was sung were necessarily Yemenite. But the informations which we have on the music are largely cross cutting those on the poetry, as it is shown by the example of the *tawshiha*, a Gulfian musical form which was doubtless directly influenced by a Yemenite musical form (Lambert 2020). Similarly, the hypothesis according to which such poets as Yahyâ 'Umar and Khû 'Alwî were also great lute players (and *qanbûs* players) seems very plausible. More specifically, these informations are cross cut with our study of the lute *qanbûs* itself, conceived as a musical *koyne* in the cities and harbors of the Indian Ocean and the Gulf for several centuries (Lambert 2020). At last, we have strong indices that the oral tradition, combined with the habit of writing poems in manuscript handbooks preserved rather faithfully these traditions during several centuries (Idem). Thus, it suggests that since quite a long time, Yemenite music was present in India and was influential on the Gulf music, although in an indirect way.

Another remarkable lesson from the confrontation of these informations, is that the musicians of the Gulf were facing an important social and religious condemnation, at least at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, but probably much before: 'Abdallah al-Faraj in the Kuwait ('Ammârî 1991), al-'Asîrî and Mohammed ben Fâres in Bahrain ('Ammârî 1991), Sâlim al-Sûrî in Sûr (Kathîrî 2012), all had to flee from their homeland or their land of adoption because of their music playing. This reminds us similar facts documented in the Yemen at the same period and at earlier periods (Lambert 1997, chapter 3; Lambert and Mokrani 2013). From this point of view, for these musicians who could not practise freely their music, and specially not as professionals, Aden on one side (since the 19<sup>th</sup> century), and Bombay (and before, Surat) on another side, had been for centuries some ideal places for finding such a freedom.

If these realities have been forgotten because of the quick and drastic changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can re-discover some aspects of them now through a kind of musical archeology (Lambert 2020). Of course, this historical hypothesis will need more research to illustrate the direct borrowings of melodies and musical forms from each others, through musical analysis. This will be made possible by the recent exhumation of some historical sound archives from the Gulf from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for instance the old recordings of Yusuf al-Bakar (Salhi 2016). Let us bet that the next years will show more evidences of this circulation of Yemenite and Arabian poetry, music and musicians all around the Indian Ocean.

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## **PICTURES**

1. A map of Surat, 17th century