

The Paradigmatic-Individualistic Approach of Arab Musical Creativeness

I. Historical Background

The Emergence of a New Musical Art

An extraordinary process in the realm of music appeared shortly after the advent of Islam in 622 and its subsequent extensive conquests: the rapid and skilful establishment of a new sophisticated art, unknown previously to the great majority of the Muslim conquerors. This new art can be regarded as corresponding to the notion of a “great tradition”, in the sense assigned it in the book *The Cultural Role of Cities* by Redfield and Singer.¹ This study propounds ideas concerning the part played by cities in the development, decline, and transformation of cultures. In our case under consideration here, the term is said to designate the “high” and sophisticated musical art style elaborated in Near-Eastern music after the advent of Islam and widely adopted by the cultures under Islamic influence. Generally speaking this style represents a skilful fusion of selected elements from the previous great traditions of the conquered peoples (namely, Persia and Byzantium) with elements from the homogeneous Arab “little tradition”. This synthesis, in which the Arab elements acted as a catalyst, was effected in a spirit of compromise, and resulted in successful “new arrangements” conceived in such a way that they were considered by both conquerors and conquered as outgrowths of the old; this evolution proceeded in orthogenetic fashion.² It is noteworthy that what we defined as the “great tradition” contrasted with the many specific “little traditions” of particular ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional communities; the music of the little traditions is usually labelled “folk music”. Importantly, both the sophisticated new musical art and the variety of folk musical traditions were orally transmitted. This fact has obviously hampered musicologists interested in the past of Arabic

1 R. Redfield and M. Singer, *The Cultural Role of Cities*, in: *Classical Essays in the Culture of Cities* [1954], ed. R. Sennett (New York, 1969), pp. 206–233.

2 Orthogenesis refers to the extent to which the musical styles of the conquered cultures were replicated under the new conditions.