

Call for Papers

Sung poetry in Amazigh and Arabic languages

Preliminary note

This inaugural issue of « *Poésies toutes !* » aims to deal with sung poetry in Amazigh and Arabic languages, based on the observation that in these two linguistic domains, poetry and song are important components of culture, if not the most important. This cultural affinity extends to the age-old relationship between these two arts. They are, in a way, two sides of the same coin.

This publication will be divided into two parts. Each of them will bring together contributions that explore sung poetry in the three idioms : Amazigh and Arabic, taking into account the diversity and linguistic particularities specific to each of them.

As this editorial choice is perfectly in line with the founding principles of the magazine, this issue will open its columns to contributions dealing with songs from both the “scholarly” and “popular” fields.

The aim of this call is to produce a multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary issue (literature, history of poetry, linguistics, musicology, ethnomusicology, history, sociology).

As a digital magazine, « *Poésies toutes !* » offers contributors the possibility of disseminating multimedia objects : images, sound documents, videos, field data, etc., in this thematic dossier as in all future publications.

Publication Languages:

Poésies toutes! accepts articles in Arabic, French, and English.

Calendar:

Please submit the title of your contribution along with an abstract (maximum 800 characters) by **March 15, 2025**, to the following email address:

poesiestoutes@gmail.com

The deadline for full article submissions is **July 15, 2025**.

Accepted articles will undergo a double-blind peer review process.

Arabic Studies

“[...] theorists are unanimous in believing that perfection is achieved only when melody is combined with poetic text.” (A. Shiloah, 1994)

This section of the thematic dossier will explore six main axes, beginning with an attempt to grasp the « the elusive 'language of songs' ») (F. Lagrange, 2012).

1. Language

Three linguistic registers are subject to analysis: 1. Pre-modern and modern poetry in *fuṣḥā* (literal Arabic); 2. Poetry in “Middle Arabic”: *Zağal*, *muwašṣaḥāt*, *šīʿr ʿammī* (Orient), *malḥūn* ; *mālūf/ṭarab andalūsī* (Maghreb), *šīʿr nabaṭī* (Arabian Peninsula); *šīʿr ḥumaynī* (Yemen) ; and 3. vernacular or dialect poetry : Algerian *šaʿbī* ; *ʿayṭa* (Morocco) ; etc.

In addition to studying the question of diglossia, the investigation will address the potential existence of a poetic Koïné in the poetries of the *malḥūn* and the *mālūf/ṭarab andalūsī*. It will also delve into the linguistic, poetic and prosodic aspects of poetry produced in these three language registers.

2. Genres

The pre-modern and modern repertoire in Arabic is largely dominated by entertainment songs; *ğazal* (love poetry) reigns supreme. However, other genres feature prominently: religious poetry (particularly mystical/sufi); panegyric (*madiḥ*); nationalist poetry, and political satire.

In addition to these genres, there are songs that are now part of our heritage, such as: the morning *fayrūziyāt*, broadcast by radio stations in many Arab countries; the *kalṭūmiyyāt* (Umm Kulṭūm's televised concerts broadcast every first Thursday of the month on Egyptian TV), the *ṭarab andalūsī* broadcast in the early afternoon and the *malḥūn* songs broadcast mid-afternoon by Moroccan national radio, etc. There are also commemorative songs for religious and national celebrations, often broadcast on anniversaries.

The axis seeks to question the relationship of the components of this repertoire to history and to measure their cultural, social and political impacts.

3. Choices: selection of poems, verses, and reprises

Sung poems fall into two categories:

1. Poems composed in the three registers mentioned above, composed by poet-lyricists and intended for singing (modern *zağal* ; *malhūn/mālūf*; ‘*ayṭa*; etc.).
2. The second category consists of pre-modern and modern poems in *fuṣḥā* and are chosen by a composer or performer. The choice of a poem can be coupled with a choice of verses within that same poem. Indeed, we often sing an extract rather than the whole poem, and not just because of the constraints associated with recording it on any medium. Indeed, this practice dates to ancient times as witnessed by the *aṣwāt* [sung poems] in *Kitāb al-Ağānī* by Abū l-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī (AD 897-967), which hardly exceeded seven verses (F. Lagrange, 2012).

This axis will focus on the criteria used by composers or performers in determining what is “singable” (F. Lagrange, 2012). Are these choices guided by poetic taste, audience preferences, trends, or political and historical contexts.

3.1. Choice of covers

There are two types of covers:

3.1.1 Covers: between emulative imitations and heritage preservation

A common practice involves reprising both the text and melody performed by different artists (Ṣafwān Bahlawān and his covers of the songs of Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahāb (d. 1991), Fu’ād al-Zabbādī and his covers of numerous songs, notably Egyptian). This serves as a tribute to the original performer and often carries a subtle desire to rival or surpass them.

Another case in point involves composers singing poems they originally set to music for other performers, as in Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahāb self-performed setting of Nizār Qabbānī’s (d. 1998) poem, later interpreted by Nağāt al-Ṣağīra.

3.1.2. Repetition of the same text in a different musical setting

This is also prevalent in Arabic music. For instance, Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Nabīh’s poem *Afdīh in ḥafīza l-hawā aw ḍayya‘ā* was first sung by Umm Kulthum and later by Aḥmad al-Bayḍāwī. Similarly, Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī’s elegy *Arāka ‘aṣiyya l-dam‘* was set to music three times by ‘Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī, Aḥmad Zakariyā (d. 1961), and Riyāḍ al-Sunbātī (d. 1981). Umm Kulthum performed all three versions, with the most recent (1965) becoming the most famous.

These revivals extend beyond classical Arabic poetry to other genres, such as *malhūn* pieces revived by groups like *Ġīl Ġilāla*. This axis will explore how such reprises reflect emulative imitation on the one hand, and how they contribute to the preservation of *turāt* (heritage) on the other, just as singing *muwašṣaḥāt*, *ṭarab andalusī*, *malhūn*, etc., does today.

4. Musical adaptation

The musical and vocal adaptation of the poetic text is the nodal point of sung poetry. This axis will focus on the relationship between poem, music/melody, and performance/singing. It will investigate the many aspects of this relationship, including how the poem is set to music, the relationship between poetic genres and musicological genres, how music can modify the poem, and the alignment between melodic phrases, poetic meters, and hemistiches.

5. Voice

Poetic performance is nearly intrinsic to classical Arabic poetry. Poets, whether composing orally and/or through their transmitters, as well as those who composed in writing, would declaim their poetry in public settings such as fairs, markets, royal and caliphal courts, and various assemblies.

Poetic performance engages the voice, breath, and body (including gaze and gestures). It delivers not only the content of the poem but also realizes its rhythm and musicality through internal and external rhymes, assonance, and alliteration. The poet's voice or that of the rhapsode actualizes the musicality of the poem only for the duration of the performance itself.

When a poem is adapted and set to music, it becomes enveloped in soundscapes, gaining a secondary musicality. The voice of the singer replaces that of the poet, as well as those of the listener and reader. "The *muṭrib* is not merely the mouthpiece of a poet, nor is he in their service" (F. Lagrange, 2012). Indeed, singers appropriate the poem, interpreting it; their voice serves and elevates it. Their expressiveness, phrasing, modulations, vocalizations, ornaments and their placement, as well as their departures from the melody for *irtigāl* (improvisation), represent critical avenues for analysis. These elements form the singer's performance, reflecting their deep immersion in both poetry and music, giving shape to their emotion and to the *saḥṭana* (aesthetic rapture) they transmit to the listener.

6. Reception: the *ṭarab*

This axis examines the phenomenon of the *ṭarab* and its various manifestations, paying particular attention to the interplay between the music, performer, and audience.

Ṭarab is an emotional state evoked by poetry and music, described as "the ultimate goal of music" (G. Pernon, 1998), encompassing a spectrum of feelings from inner delight to ecstatic trance, even leading to death in extreme cases (J. Lambert). Numerous scenes in *Kitāb al-Aḡānī* by Abū l-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī illustrate the profound impact of *ṭarab* on listeners.

According to F. Lagrange, the *ṭarab* “is born of the adequacy between the ethos inspired by the melody and the thematic of the *qaṣīda*, not by a naive descriptive nature of the music, but by the subtle alchemy imparted by the singer in his interplay between musical rhythm and poetic metre, through his diction, his choice of pauses, and breaths, coloring the text with countless nuances”.

When performing a *waṣla* (musical suite), the poem's aesthetic elements, its affectivity (Ullmann, 1964), are magnified by music and voice with the aim of provoking *ṭarab* in the receiver.

In the passage he devotes to the “criteria of excellence” concerning public performance enunciated by ancient Arab music theorists, A. Shiloah indicates that one of the qualities required of the musician-singer is their “ability to be moved and to move” (A. Shiloah, 1994), their ability to establish emotional communication in their interaction with the audience. An interaction in which their *saṭṭana*, and their impressive expressiveness, produce the *ṭarab* of the audience, that reacts to the performance they are witnessing in a variety of ways: cheers, applause, insistent requests for repeats expressed by the famous cries: “*a‘id! a‘id! a‘id!*”, encores, etc.

AMAZIGH STUDIES

In Berber studies, the 1960s ushered in a new era for literary objects, and poetry in particular. The approach that had dominated the colonial period—treating Berber poetry as a linguistic sample or as a documentary field tasked with revealing the “Berber soul”—was gradually abandoned. This shift gave way to a broader focus on the literary and aesthetic dimensions of these texts and their function in literary communication. While the practice of collecting and publishing poetic corpora has continued to the present day, carried out by both specialists and amateurs, new studies have highlighted the aesthetic value of these works and examined the structure(s) of Berber/Amazigh literary systems (Bounfour, 1999; Galand-Pernet, 1998).

Analytical perspectives have since diversified. These include studies on metrics and musical aspects through ethnomusicology (Jouad, Mahfoufi), the impact of writing on oral performances in modern song (Yacine), intertextuality between traditional and contemporary genres (Ameziane), and the effects of identity assertion.

This ancient Berber/Amazigh poetry, transcribed or renewed in new forms of performance (mediatized orality), also serves as essential material for understanding Berber societies : as early as the 1970s, these “texts” began to be used in ethno-historical approaches within the framework of oral history (J. Vansina, 1961) and “popular” history mobilized by various researchers from the 1970s onwards (Benbrahim, Agrou, Assam), approaches that have had an impact on the societies themselves : the social uses of this sung poetry are changing, as shown by the new contexts in which it is performed (local celebrations, regional festivals...), at the same time offering new objects for ethnology. By the same token, the development of NICTs is prompting a reassessment of orality, between the maintenance of a “primary orality” as defined by Zumthor, 1983 (Amussu, 2019) and the development of a “tertiary orality” in connection with “digital rationality” (*raison numérique*) as discussed by Mayer, 2009. Field or online surveys offer multiple signs of its current vitality.

Proposals may take these multiple perspectives into account, questioning continuities and ruptures in terms of performance, content (themes), form (prosody, musical aesthetics, etc.) and the functions of these multiple poetic updates.