CHAPTER 3

Al-Āla as a Literary Phenomenon

1  The Canon

Three printed anthologies define the canon of al-Āla texts as performed today: IM, IJ and MW. Together, these works represent the modern embodiment of the two manuscript anthologies, *Kunnāš al-Ḥāʾik* and the corpus of *ṣanāʾiʿ* collected by al-Jāmiʿī. However, the process by which the essentially oral materials that lie behind them came to be committed to writing is not completely understood, and the manuscript evidence available to date is far from comprehensive. This chapter examines these modern texts and the manuscript traditions from which they sprang with the aim of characterizing the relationships among them and what they may reveal of the processes which formed them.

The intertextual relationships among the three anthologies will be taken up more comprehensively in Chapter 4, where their complex and often problematic relationships to the oral dimensions of the tradition will be dealt with, as well. The present chapter opens the search for traces of orality in the written canon embodied in these three anthologies by describing in some detail the two historical anthologies of al-Āla that lie at the root of the printed canon and have helped to define its boundaries. Let us begin with the first and more important of the two, *Kunnāš al-Ḥāʾik*.

2  *Kunnāš al-Ḥāʾik*

The texts of the Moroccan Andalusian music were first committed to writing in the early 18th century by Muḥammad al-Būʿaṣāmī. His anthology, *Īqād aš-šumūʿ li-laḏḏat al-masmūʿ at-ṭubūʿ*, has survived only in fragmentary form, which preserves most of the author’s introduction and portions of just six *nūbat* (*al-Iṣbahān, al-Ḥijāz al-Kabīr, al-Ḥijāz al-Mašriqi, al-ʿUššāq, al-Māya, and ar-Raṣd*).1 It does, however, make reference to the four *mayāzin* recognized at the time, as well as the *ṭubūʿ* today held to be authentically Andalusi. It is unclear now why this work was not as widely known as the *Kunnāš al-Ḥāʾik*, but it certainly did not achieve the same degree of fame: it is today cited only by specialists in the tradition. It is, however, the earliest known example of an attempt to collect what was performed in the *nūba* tradition in written form. As such, it would seem to have set (or reflected) the convention of presenting

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these texts in the form of poetry in the classical style, conventions which al-Ḥāʾik followed half a century later. (It is not known whether al-Ḥāʾik was aware of al-Būʿašāmī’s work: no version of Kunnāš al-Ḥāʾik mentions him.)

The more important anthology by far was completed near the end of the 18th century by the anthologist, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥāʾik at-Tiṭwānī al-Andalusī (in some manuscripts, al-Fāsī, as well). His Kunnāš (“handbook”) serves today as the key reference work for all subsequent comprehensive collections in the tradition. It captures what the anthologist himself had collected of the ṣanāʾī performed in nūbāt using the 25 ṭubū’ held by al-Ḥāʾik to have originated in al-Andalus. Little is known today about the anthologist, other than his name and a few clues in his anthology about his purpose in creating the work. Fernando Valderrama Martínez has conducted the most thorough research into the author's biography, but found no information on al-Ḥāʾik among leading families of Tetuan, al-Ḥāʾik’s purported home town. From the appellation “al-Fāsī” added to his name in some sources, Valderrama Martínez suggests that the anthologist probably compiled his work while living in Fez, but his family may have originated in a village near Tetuan.

That the Kunnāš eventually had an important impact upon the tradition is clear. Perhaps not at first but certainly over time, it came to be regarded as the defining written record of al-Āla. Musicians and aficionados alike now treat it as a kind of essential textual moment, identifying the Andalusian musical heritage of Morocco as an art form worthy of conscientious preservation. The very act of compiling the nūba tradition and organizing it on the written page as a teaching manual made this idea possible and initiated a process that contributed to the music’s present status as the classical music of Morocco.

Valderrama Martínez (1953, 1954) also was responsible for the first serious study of the Kunnāš as a document, describing the anthology’s basic structure and characterizing its contents, based upon two manuscripts he found in Morocco. Other data on Kunnāš manuscripts may be found in Amnon Shiloah’s The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (1979), which refers to three incomplete manuscripts located in European archives (nos. 066, 067 and 297). A third scholar, Manuela Cortés García (1995, 1996, 2003), who studied with Valderrama Martínez, has also written on the Kunnāš. Finally, Malik Bennūna has conducted extensive research on the poetry of al-Āla and provides a wealth of historical and literary data on the Kunnāš in his introduction and in footnotes in his 1999 edition of manuscript #144 at the Ḥizāna Dāwūdiyya archive in Tetuan.

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2 See HST, Chapter 3 §2.
3 1954, pp. 33-34.