

Djerba, Tunisia, 27 April – 27 July, 1978

FIELD NOTES

by

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July 1978

The following notes are extracted from the fieldwork report I prepared for the “Jaap Kunst” Ethnomusicology Centre, University of Amsterdam, as a first-year student on the Doctorandus (Masters) programme in ethnomusicology.

The recordings were made on a Stellavox reel-to-reel tape recorder loaned by the Centre and were deposited there on my return from fieldwork in July 1978. The Centre provided tapes for a complete set of working copies and in the 1990s I received a complete set of digital copies on CD.

On arrival in Djerba I found that the batteries supplied with the Stellavox were faulty and failed to charge. My recordings therefore depended on access to mains electricity. I describe the various workarounds this entailed in the notes below.

I took with me 26 x 5” spools to last 3 months. With little prior idea of the repertoires I’d find or the opportunities I’d have to record, I ended up having to record over previously used tape — a process that involved careful calculations over which items I would keep and which I could afford to lose. This explains the lack of chronological order between some of the recordings.

Recordings are listed by tape and track number, e.g. 1–1 = tape 1, track 1, etc.

Tapes 1–26 correspond to “Jaap Kunst” Centre archive numbers JK44–JK69.

Timings are given in brackets (minutes.seconds)

The repertoire is identified primarily according to information given to me time by the performers and by other members of the community, occasionally including Muslim neighbours.

Items are recorded at 19 cm/sec

TAPE 1 (JK44)

1–1 (00 – 4.18) 24-05-78 stereo

Place: Courtyard of the funduq next to the Ghriba synagogue, Hara Sghira

Repertory: Two Tunisian folk songs in maqām mazmūm, Traditionally played on mizwid (bagpipe with single reed).

Performer: Yakob Bsiri, Jewish musician from Hara Kebira: solo voice and ‘ūd; others on darbūka and țār.

Scene: Evening of the first day of celebrations for the festival of Lag b’Omer. Pilgrims throng the synagogue and the funduq where a temporary market has been set up. Against the continuous blare of music from radios and cassettes people are buying, selling, eating, drinking, cooking, washing, and preparing their rooms for the night. Yakob is about to return to his home in Hara Kebira for the night. The afternoon music for which he was hired (Tape 2) has long passed. He is hailed back by the police who request some popular Tunisian songs. By the time I had set up my equipment (which involved

first disturbing a family to use the socket in their room, then groping through the crowd with a shaky microphone stand, delicately held together with Sellotape) this spontaneous performance outside the police office was almost over. At the end of this item (4.10 – 4.18) Yakob scolds me for arriving to record him so late.

1–2 (4.26 – 5.44) 25-05-78 stereo

Place: Courtyard of the funduq next to the Ghriba synagogue, Hara Sghira

Repertory/performers: Rhythms performed on darbūkas by two teenage boys from Tunis who were staying at the funduq with their mother. She explained to me that she was Jewish and their father was Muslim. In Tunis the boys passed as Muslims, but at the Ghriba they presented as Jews.

Scene: The Lag b'Omer festivities in the funduq are punctuated by spontaneous outburst of darbūka playing, sometimes accompanied by singing and dancing. This occurs most frequently in the mornings, when there are no formal activities and people have not yet arrived from their homes and hotels elsewhere on the island. Here, two men and a woman are dancing in the tight space left by the crowd.

1–3 (5.50 – 9.15) 17-07-78 mono

Place: room in the home of a devout jeweller in Hara Kebira

Repertory: Blessings over wine, bread, and washing of hands for a) the evening before the Sabbath (*kiddush erev shabbat*), b) the Sabbath day (*kiddush yom shabbat*) and c) the ending of the Sabbath (*havdalah motzei shabbat*).

Performer: devout jeweller of Hara Kebira

Scene: I heard these blessings sung more coherently and melodiously in homes whose Sabbath meals I attended. Since orthodox Judaism forbids recording on the Sabbath I tried to find someone who would perform the blessings on a weekday. After many shy refusals I was grateful to this jeweller for accepting. Since I couldn't understand his Arabic and he couldn't understand my French or Hebrew, we relied on the sporadic help of his daughter who was for most of the time busy in the kitchen. After a brief trial recording in which he rattled off the prayers in an undertone I asked him if he could sing louder and slower. He does not pause between the different blessings but runs them all together.

1–4, 1–5, 1–6 (9.23 – 32.14) 21-07-78 mono

Place: room in a home of a Jewish family in Houmt Souk

Repertory: liturgical cantillation

Performer: Rabbi Attourgi of Hara Kebira

Scene: There was a consensus that I should approach a rabbi for an authoritative rendering of liturgical cantillation. As a woman I could not approach a Djerban rabbi directly and a friend from the community offered to act as an intermediary. Rabbi Attourgi was reputed to have a good voice and he agreed to be recorded at the intermediary's home in Houmt Souk. My friend made two journeys to transport me with my equipment and the Rabbi separately from Hara Kebira since the rabbi could not travel in the same vehicle as me. The two men sat together in a room with the microphone while I controlled the tape recorder in an adjoining room, communicating with my friend through a crack in the doorway. Rabbi Attourgi didn't have time for all the texts I requested and he inserted others of his own choosing. At the end of the session my friend escorted him home. I had not for a moment been in direct contact with the rabbi.

1-4 (9.23 – 12.34)

Reading from the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew bible): The Ten Commandments, Exodus XX, 1-17, beginning v. 2: "Anochi Adonai Elohim" (I am the Lord your God)

1-5 (12.45 – 15.48?)

Piyyut for the Sabbath table: "Tzur Mishelo Akhalnu" (The Lord our Rock whose food we have eaten

(There is no break between 1-5 and 1-6)

1-6 (15.55? – 32.13)

Reading from the Book of Jonah: Haftarah (passage from one of the Books of the Prophets read after the Torah) for Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)

TAPE 2, JK45 (23.49)

Single track (00 – 23.49) 25-05-78 stereo

Place: Courtyard of the funduq next to the Ghriba synagogue, Hara Sghira.

Repertory: piyyutim (sacred Hebrew songs), "auction" calls, crowd sounds

Performers: Yakob Bsiri on 'ūd and male musicians from Hara Kebira on bendir, țār, darbūka. Two teenage boys from Tunis on bendir and tar (see tape 1, track 2)

Scene: Second afternoon of Lag b'Omer festivities. The master of ceremonies, a burly man, is standing on a three-wheeled wagon bearing a red and gold, multi-tiered, hexagonal candelabrum. He is flanked on each side by the two boys from Tunis playing bendir and țār. Yacob Bsiri and his band are performing in the courtyard below. The crowd presses close. Someone tosses a coloured silk shawl to the burly man who makes as though to auction it. (Cries of "trois dinars . . . cinq dinars" etc, on the recording.) At the highest bid the musicians strike up a tune, the players on the wagon pivot around waving and beating their instruments, the MC flourishes the shawl, and bucha (spirit of fig) is passed round. The shawl is draped over the candelabrum and a new one is offered for "auction". The money received is offered to the Ghriba to help support the old men who spend their days studying and praying there (e.g. Bana, Tape 19).

By early evening the candelabrum is completely covered with motley shawls. On the first day it is wheeled into the Ghriba, the shawls are removed, and the candleholders filled with burning candles. On the second day the crowd follows the wagon and the performing musicians in a procession across the open countryside towards the village and the main synagogue of Hara Sghira, just below the Ghriba. The piyyutim continue inside the courtyard of the synagogue. Finally a rabbi makes a speech in honour of President Bourguiba.

Without functioning batteries I couldn't follow the procession with the recorder. In the funduq I used the electric socket inside the room of a couple of elderly pilgrims. They were delighted to help me but I clearly disturbed the wife's cooking arrangements: ideally she would be preparing something on the electric stove through the afternoon. I took a risk trailing the microphone cables through the crowd towards the benches where pilgrims were seated along three sides of the funduq. I mounted a bench as close as possible to the musicians and held up the microphone, slanting it above the heads of the intervening crowd. I had some difficulty persuading those who tried to displace me that their "help" was not needed. Others were also standing on benches so I didn't feel too conspicuous. Periodically I asked a neighbour to hold the microphone while I disappeared to check the cables and the controls on the recorder.

TAPE 3, JK46

3-1 (00 – 6.27) 05-06-78 stereo

Place: Courtyard of the bridegroom's house in Hara Kebira

Repertory: Tunisian popular songs (00 – 4.14; then chatting and 'ūd)

Performers: band of Jewish and Muslim male musicians on violin, accordion, darbūka and țār, led by Yakob Bsiri providing 'ūd and vocal solos. The band was amplified.

Scene: The first night of wedding celebrations in the groom's house: the eighth night of a traditional Djerban Jewish wedding. The bride remains in her parents' house with her close female relatives.

The courtyard is filled with tables at which the male guests are eating and drinking. The women are pressed, mostly standing, against the walls on three sides. In the front, a platform has been erected for the musicians who are seated round a table laden with beer and bucha (fig spirits). I place one microphone on the table in front of Yakob (lead voice and 'ūd) and I mounted the second on the stand, directing it towards the speakers. I had received the family's permission to record and no-one was disturbed.

3-2 (7.04 –30.25) 31-05-78 mono

Place: Room in singer's home in Hara Kebira.

Repertory: Israeli folk songs (Shirei Eretz Yisrael) and piyyutim (sacred Hebrew songs)

Performer: young woman aged 19

Scene: These songs are sung by teenage girls and young unmarried women during their ceremonies for Sabbath and religious festivals, when recording is not allowed. They hold the ceremonies in the girls' school where they receive a modern secular Hebrew education. Many women choose to continue their studies until their marriage, typically by their early to mid-twenties.

My friend first sang to me while she was cleaning dishes on the kitchen floor and agreed to be recorded. Apart from some initial shyness she sang without inhibition and with obvious enjoyment. We agreed to make another recording with some of her friends so that they could prompt one another (tape 13).

TAPES 4, 5, 8 = JK47, JK48, JK51

Total 11 tracks stereo

Tapes 4, 5 07-06-78

Tape 8 08-06-78

Place: Room in Yakob Bsiri's home in Hara Kebira.

Repertory: Piyyutim (normally sacred Hebrew songs, but for the Jews of Djerba, songs about the Ghriba in the Arabic vernacular (Derja) or Arabic mixed with Hebrew, were also considered piyyutim).

Performer: Yakob Bsiri — solo voice and 'ūd.

Scene: Yakob Bsiri (1912–2009) was *the* Jewish musicians of Djerba. He comes from a family of musicians and he was hired for Jewish and Muslim festivities on Djerba and the mainland. Yakob was born in Hara Kebira but his paternal grandfather had immigrated from Izmir during the protectorate.

On my first visit to his home he was away in Tunis. I spoke with Mme Bsiri in French. (Her husband only spoke Arabic.) She informed me about one "Mme. Ada" from Paris who had arrived the previous

year with a TV crew and had paid her husband generously. I explained my interests and my status as a student and she invited me to call when her husband returned.

I met Yakob Bsiri after I had become acquainted with his daughters. They readily agreed to interpret for me but their offers proved unreliable, and for most of the time I was alone with their father. He seemed pleased to play for me, and agreed to be recorded for no fee. I promised to send him a gift and copies of my recordings when I returned to Amsterdam.

On the day of our appointment I received a message that Yakob Bsiri required payment from my university. On arriving at his home, however, I found him ready to play for me and learnt that it was Mme Bsiri who had demanded the payment. I asked him for the songs he had performed at the recent Ghriba festivities since my recordings were confused with the noise of the crowd (tape 2). Yakob explained that during the ritual dressing and processing of the candelabrum only piyyutim (in Hebrew, Arabic (Derja) or a mixture of both) were allowed. He showed me books printed in Djerba containing texts of piyyutim, including Arabic texts in Hebrew characters.

After our sessions on 7 and 8 June, Mme Bsiri repeatedly approached me about payment. Whenever I arrived to keep a subsequent appointment with Yakob I was told he was busy or out. I understood that as a professional musician, Yakob would rightly expect to be paid. However, I did not have resources to pay him on a professional basis. The family was known to be well off and I felt, perhaps wrongly, that a token fee would be pointless and possibly also insulting. Like other Jewish families, the Bsiris prepared their own food, wine and spirits in abundance; any preparation from a shop would be rejected on grounds of Jewish dietary laws and I could think of no other gift I could find locally that would be of any value to them.

Eventually I stopped approaching the Bsiris and decided to look for other sources instead.

TAPE 4, JK 47

- 4-1 (00 –) 'ūd tuning
(1.26 –) 'ūd lead-in, mawwal
(1.50 – 8.55) piyyut in Arabic about the Ghriba adapted from a Tunisian popular song.
- 4-2 (8.56 –) tuning
(9.42 –) 'ūd lead-in, mawwal
(12.08 – 16.00) piyyut in a mix of Arabic and Hebrew about the Ghriba.
- 4-3 (16.07 –) 'ūd lead-in, mawwal
(17.22 – 21.04) piyyut in Arabic adapted from a Tunisian popular song to be about the Ghriba instead of a loved one.
- 4-4 (21.05 – 23.42) "Shalom nassim b'arezt" (Let us make peace in the land of Israel), adapted from the popular Arabic song "Andik bahriyya ya rais" (You have sailors, Oh captain). Celebratory piyyut sung at the Ghriba, weddings, circumcisions, etc:

TAPE 5, JK 48

- 5-1 (00 – 2.55) piyyut in Arabic about the Ghriba
- 5-2 (3.00 –) 'ūd, talking, household chat
(4.19 –) 'ūd lead-in, announces the piyyut
(4.32 – 8.00) "Yom ma'amad Sinai" (The day of standing on Mount Sinai); piyyut for Shavuot (Feast of Weeks)
- 5-3 (8.01 –) 'ūd, household chat
(8.21 –) 'ūd lead-in

(8.46 – 12.40) Tunisian circumcision song, traditionally sung by Muslim and Jewish women with darbūka

TAPE 8, JK 51

8–1, 8–2, 8–3: piyyutim sung in the synagogue on Sabbath and festivals when the Torah is taken from the Ark and carried in procession around the synagogue

8–1 (00 – 6.07) "Enosh notzar ve-chol nivra" (Man was formed and all that was created)

8–2 (6.08 –) mawwal
(7.02 – 9.24) "Tnu kavod le Torah" (Give respect to the Torah)

8–3 (9.26–) household chat
(9.57–) 'ūd lead-in
(11.04 – 15.40) "Yachid ne'edar" (Marvelous One)

8–4 (15.48 –) 'ūd lead-in
(16.07 – 20.18) "Goeli ya" (Oh, my Saviour), adapted from the popular Arabic song "Ya ghaliyya" (Oh my precious one). A celebratory piyyut sung at the Ghriba, weddings, circumcisions, etc.

TAPES 6, 7 = JK49, JK50

Total 9 tracks 8-06-78 stereo

Place: Room in singer's home in Houmt Souk

Repertory: Traditional Arabic songs

Performers: Jewish woman from Houmt Souk: solo voice, with her two daughters and a Muslim girl friend singing the refrains. The friend plays the darbūka. They all requested not to be identified by name.

Scene: Mme X from Houmt Souk was reputed to have the best voice and the largest repertory of songs among the Jewish women of Djerba. I had originally asked for "Jewish women's songs" or simply "women's songs" but had been assured by everyone I approached that there was no difference in the Arabic songs sung by women and men, or by Jews and Muslims.

The Jewish community of Houmt Souk at the time was effectively an extension of that of Hara Kebira: the male heads of the two remaining families were born in Hara Kebira. Mme X was born in Houmt Souk but her family originated in Hara Kebira where she has close relatives. She is related through marriage to Jacob Bsiri and she told me that she had learnt some of her songs directly from him.

Mme X invited me to lunch and after the siesta we had a lively recording session. Her daughters supported me in my coaxing and compliments, and eventually everyone's shyness and initial reluctance to sing disappeared.

TAPE 6, JK 49 (23.55)

6–1 (00 – 10.48) "Ya ma ya ghaliyya" (Oh my precious one)

6–2 (10.49 – 12.27) "Ya miskin" (O poor wife), attrib. Cheikh El Afrit

6-3 (12.29 – 13.44) "Qlaqt wa malit" (I'm troubled and fed up); a man complains about his wife, attrib. Cheikh El Afrit.

6-4 (14.56 – 20.12) "Ma nhabbshi rajul" (I don't want a husband); a girl refuses to marry)

6-5 (20.15 – 23.55) Song by Joseph Pariente, a rich Jew of Houmt Souk whose family had immigrated from Italy during the protectorate. Here he is mourning his beloved, a Djerban Muslim girl, who was killed by her jealous cousin.

TAPE 7, JK 50

7-1 (00 – 4.29) Tape 6, 5 cont.

7-2 (4.34–9.22) Melody of traditional Arabic song set to words by Mme X in an outburst of sadness caused by her eldest son Daniel's absence on the festival of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement): Daniel was studying medicine in Paris.

7-3 (9.25 – 16.48) Poem chanted at Jewish and Muslim weddings

7-4 (16.51 – 22.20) Song sung at Jewish and Muslim weddings

TAPE 9, JK 52

13-06-78 stereo

Place: room in 'ūd player's home in Hara Kebira

Repertory: Tunisian songs (Arabic)

Performers:

'ūd and voice: Jewish tailor

darbūka and voice: Jewish jeweller and friend of the 'ūd player.

Scene: Informal domestic music making after the evening meal. I was invited to hear the 'ūd player on several occasions, but he would always disappear shyly. The family had befriended me and I was frequently invited to their home for meals. One evening he remained, and we had a long conversation in Hebrew and French about Hebrew songs, Arab music, and European music. I improvised on the pedal-piano, which prompted him to play the 'ūd, recording himself on his cassette recorder. I suggested that the Stellavox would give better results, and he agreed to be recorded on another evening.

He tells me he is not interested in Hebrew songs, but he loves Arab music which he teaches himself from the radio and cassettes in the evenings after work. He learnt the 'ūd as a boy, starting on the instruments of musicians performing at weddings. Before his marriage he played professionally at both Muslim and Jewish parties.

On my subsequent visit his initial shyness had completely disappeared and he was joined by a friend on darbūka. After a trial recording he persuaded me to divert the microphone from the darbūka player, whose voice is consequently the weaker on this recording. Members of the household constituted a casual audience.

9-1 (0.44 –) mawwal; (1.34 – 5.55) Tunisian popular song

9-2 (5.57 – 10.43) Tunisian popular song

9-3 (10.48 –) mawwal; (11.48 –15.37) traditional Tunisian song for weddings and festivals

9-4 (15.41 –) mawwal; (16.50 – 20.45) traditional Djerban song

9–5 (20.50 – 24.56) Tunisian popular song

Tape 10, JK 53

20-6-78 stereo

Place: Courtyard of the birthday child's home in Hara Kebira

Repertory:

10–1, 10–2, 10–3, 10–7: Arabic songs;

10–4, 10–5, 10–6: Arabic-French (franco-arabe) songs

Performers:

Mme X (birthday child's grandaunt from Houmt Souk): solo voice. Mme X's two daughters: refrain, with țâr in 10–1, 10–2, 10–3. Birthday child's uncle: darbūka; occasionally sings along faintly.

10–5, 10–6: rubber duck squeaks

10–7: two female voices only, no percussion

Scene: Child's third birthday party. The guests are all female, including mothers with their infant children. The only male presence is the birthday child's uncle who lives and works in the house. Food and drinks are passed around, the infants play with the birthday child's presents while the older guests chat against the blare of Tunisian popular songs from a cassette recorder. Candles are lit and blown out, the cake is cut and photos are snapped. By early evening only close relatives remain, the cassette music has stopped, and I remind Mme X of her promise to sing. An intimate gathering of ten gathers in a corner of the courtyard. The child's uncle fetches a darbūka and holds the skin surface over burning coals to improve the tone. He claims not to be able to play, but he accompanies most of the songs nonetheless. Mme X's daughters also sing and one shakes a țâr. After some preliminary persuasion and encouragement I remain in the background while the performers suggest songs and remind each other of the words. The atmosphere is convivial and relaxed.

10–1 (00.23 – 3.40)

10–2 (3.58 – 6.07)

10–3 (6.14 – 7.48) = fragments

10–4 (7.50 – 11.14) "Ou vous etiez, mademoiselle?"

10–5 (11.50 – 13.00)

10–6 (13.22 – 15.23)

10–7 (15.42 – 17.58)

TAPE 11, JK 54

11–1 (00 – 6.30) 27-6-78 stereo

Place: courtyard of the bride's home in Hara Kebira

Repertory: traditional Arabic wedding songs performed live against records of popular Arabic and Western music.

Performers: Young women with darbūka.

Scene: Second night of celebrations of a traditional Djerban Jewish wedding. The guests who are all female sit in clusters on the courtyard floor. The bride sits amongst them in ordinary clothes. A group of young women sing, clap and play the darbūka against the blare of music from the record player. No-one dances, and the other guests seem to ignore both live and recorded music.

Eventually the women of the groom's family arrive and everyone crowds into a room adjoining the courtyard where the bride lies reclining on a narrow bed. First the groom's relatives, then the bride's relatives, and finally the remaining guests spread a special paste of flour and water over the bride's skin in order to blanch it. The music is replaced by periodic cries of yu-lu-yu-lu (ululation) and sporadic darbūka rhythms. Afterwards the musical activity resumes, a hot meat meal is served to the families of the bride and groom, and hot doughnuts are offered to the other guests.

Since the batteries did not function, I used an electric socket in the same room as the record player. I mounted one microphone on the stand to pick up the ambient sound, and I held the other, directing it towards the live music. Although I had received the family's permission to record, one of the bride's relatives resented my activity and periodically pulled the plug from the socket.

11-2 (6.37 – 16.28) 21-07-78

As for 1-4, 1-5, 1-6 (Rabbi Attourgi), cont.

"Et sha'arei ratzon": piyyut for Rosh Hashana retelling the story of the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22).

11-3 (16.33 – 18.48) 27-6-78

As for 11- 1 (wedding party at bride's house), cont.

TAPE 12 JK55

12-1 (00 – 5.38) 27-6-78

As for 11-1, cont.

12-2 (5.42 – 8.30) 21-07-78

As for 1-4, 1-5, 1-6 (Rabbi Attourgi), cont.

"Yigdal elohim chai": piyyut for the morning service (Shacharit) in the synagogue

12-3 (8.38-21.53) 27-6-78

As for 11-1, cont.

TAPE 13 JK56

Tracks 1 – 14 28-6-78 stereo

Place: my room in Hara Kebira.

Repertory: Israeli songs and piyyutim

Performers: Three friends from the girls Hebrew school

Scene: I asked my friends from the girls Hebrew school if I could record their songs for Sabbath and festivals, when it was forbidden to record, on a weekday. Their songs were generally sung to contemporary Israeli rather than the traditional Djerban tunes. When the headmaster heard about my request to one young teacher, he forbade her to accept, whereupon all her friends decided to refuse too. I promised that I would not reveal their identities, and eventually after a series of broken appointments, three friends agreed to be recorded together.

TAPE 14, JK 57

28-06-78

mono

Place: my room in Hara Kebira

Repertory: piyyutim

Performers: Two young Jewish jewelers; my landlord's daughter visiting from Israel.

14-1, 14-2, 14-3, 14-7, 14-9: two male voices.

14-4, 14-5: solo male voice.

14-8: two male and 1 female voice

Scene: I met the young men at a morning service in the synagogue. Each praised the other's voice, and they accepted an invitation to sing piyyutim together at my home. As usual with my informants, the first appointment was abortive: apparently the married jeweler's wife resented him visiting me. They kept the second appointment, but the unmarried jeweler arrived with a scarf about his neck: he had a sore throat which is evident in the recording. The two men chose their own programme. The landlord's daughter came to listen and she joins them in track 8. The connection of one microphone cable was broken, which prevented me from making a stereo recording.

14-1 (00 – 3.28): "Ochil yom yom eshta'eh" (I will hope, day after day, I will gaze longingly): piyyut for Simchat Torah (Rejoicing of the Law) sung in the synagogue; also sung at weddings

14-2, 14-3, 14-4: piyyutim for Sabbath and festivals, and for weddings

14-2 (3.30 – 5.44)

14-3 (5.49 – 7.06)

14-4 (7.11 – 10.38)

14-5, 14-6, 14-7: piyyutim for weddings

14-5 (10.40 – 11.06)

14-6 (11.15 – 11.51)

14-7 (11.57 – 17.42)

14-8 (17.52 – 22.50): "Tzur mishelo achalnu" (Rock from whose abundance we have eaten): piyyut for the Sabbath table after the meal

14-9 (22.52 – 23.5): "Adon olam" (Lord of the universe): piyyut for the Sabbath morning service.

TAPE 15, JK 58

29-06-78

stereo

Place: Synagogue in Hara Kebira

Repertory: Thursday morning service in which the Torah is read

Performers: Male congregants; bird song

Scene: The Torah is read during the morning service on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The ritual of processing the Torah around the synagogue to the singing of piyyutim, performed on the Sabbath and major festivals (when it is forbidden to record), is omitted on the weekday services, which are hurried through for those who are anxious to begin work. Djerban women do not participate in synagogue worship, but as an outsider I was accepted and even welcomed. The birds in the recording entered through gaps in the windowpanes.

TAPE 16, JK 59

16-1 (00 – 8.57)

Continuation of Tape 15 to end of service

16-2 (9.00 – 22.54) 03-07-78 mono

Place: my room in Hara Kebira

Repertory: Reading from the Torah: Exodus 19

Performer: Male jeweler from Hara Kebira

Scene: My landlord's daughter made an appointment with Aaron, which he did not keep, to read the Torah in my home. I approached him the following Saturday in the synagogue. Reluctantly he agreed to another appointment. He arrived late with a friend: I had found them together shortly beforehand, and when Aaron began immediately to make excuses not to come, I persuaded his friend to bring him along. The landlord's daughter also came to listen.

TAPE 17, JK 60

17-1, 17-2, 17-3, 17-4

As for 1-4, 1-5, 1-6 (Rabbi Attourgi), cont. 21-07-78 mono

17-1 (07 – 2.48) reading from the Song of Songs, recited every Sabbath eve between Pesach (Passover) and Shavuot (Feast of Weeks).

17-2 (2.54 – 6.28) optional prayer before the Sabbath eve blessings

17-3 (6.30 – 12.48) reading from the Haggadah (text recited at the Seder — the ritual meal for the Passover including a retelling of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery and their exodus from Egypt), followed by reading in Arabic unique to the Djerban Haggadah

17-4 (12.49 – 17.07) reading from the Book of Esther for the festival of Purim

17-5 (17.08 – 23.48)

As for 3–1 (wedding celebrations in groom's house) 05-06-78

TAPE 18, JK 61

Single track 05-07-78 stereo

Place: courtyard of the groom's home in Hara Kebira

Repertory: wedding ceremony

Performers: Rabbi, groom, best man, two male witnesses

Scene: The wedding ceremony precedes the final night of celebrations. The bride in traditional wedding dress and jewelry has been escorted to the groom's house to the accompaniment of piyyutim. She sits indoors in the company of her close female relatives facing the doorway opening onto the courtyard where, a few meters away, the ceremony is conducted. The musicians are seated on a dais overlooking the wedding party. The bride remains passive and completely covered throughout except for when the groom lifts her veil slightly, first to let her sip from the wine for the blessing, and then to place the wedding ring on her finger whereupon upon the marriage is consecrated. The rabbi then recites the seven traditional blessings.

I placed one microphone in the bride's room and the second on the musician's platform, just above the ceremony. I had not expected so much noise from the bride's attendants and the onlookers. As a result, the ceremony itself is virtually swamped for much of the time.

TAPE 19, JK 62

Total 7 tracks 18-07-78

Place: my room in Hara Kebira

Repertory: Piyyutim and blessings

Performer: Bana — old man from Hara Sghira

Scene: Bana is one of the old men supported by the Ghriba who spend their days studying and praying there. He is reputed to be the last expert in piyyutim on Djerba. A young man from Hara Kebira brought him to my home and left immediately, promising to fetch Bana in an hour. I was not prepared for this unexpected arrival, and after hurriedly setting up the recorder I ran out to find an interpreter. Meanwhile Bana busied himself pocketing all the food he could find in my house. When I returned he persistently asked for money. I gave him a token amount before he started to sing and I promised him a small fee which I paid at the end of the session.

19–1 (00 – 13.22)

Piyyutim for Simchat Torah (Rejoicing of the Law); circumcision; marriage (procession of the bride to the groom's house; trimming of the groom's hair); bar mitzvah (sung by the congregation in the synagogue as the boy makes his way up to read from the Torah; also sung during the festivities in the boy's home).

19-2 (13.25 – 15.26)

prayer for after the meal on Sabbath eve

19–3 (15.34 – 19.18); 19.19 – 24.30: Arabic); (24.35 – 27.08)

Three piyyutim for the Lag B'Omar celebrations at the Ghriba

19-4 (27.13 – 29.15)

Blessings for the Sabbath eve over wine, bread and the washing of hands.

TAPE 20, JK 63

Unspecified date between 23 July and 12 August 1978

Place: synagogue in Hara Kebira.

Repertory: Extracts from the service for Tisha B'Av (Ninth of the month of Av)

Performers: congregants.

Scene: The period of 21 days from the Fast of 17 Tamuz to the Fast of 9 Av (Hebrew calendar) commemorates the destruction of both the First and the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Each day at noon the congregants sit on the floor of the synagogue, instead of on the usual benches, and chant extracts from the Tisha B'Av service.

TAPES 21, 22 JK 64, 65

6-07-78

Place: courtyard of bridegroom's home in Hara Hebira

Repertory: piyyutim

Performers: Yacob Bsiri sings piyyutim with two Jewish jewellers on darbūka and ṭār

Scene: Last night of celebrations of a traditional Djerban Jewish wedding. As for the previous night's celebrations (tape 3, track 1) except that the bride is present in the room leading onto the courtyard, where she remains seated during the ceremony, and the mixed band of Muslim and Jewish musicians is replaced by a smaller Jewish group. The night of the ceremony is considered holy, therefore only Hebrew songs (piyyutim) are allowed, and a fine of 4 dinars is imposed for each profane Arabic song.

I usually did not succeed in recording a complete piece. The performance included extensive passages of tuning, false starts and interruptions for eating and drinking. Typically the tuning would merge into the start of a song whose beginning I was never quite able to anticipate. Eventually I found myself either recording such large tracks of tuning that only the opening bars of the subsequent song would fit onto the reel, or else I would miss both the tuning and the opening of the song.

TAPES 23, 24, 25, 26 JK66, 67, 68, 69

05-06-78 stereo

As for 3-1 (wedding celebrations in groom's home), cont.