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**Inshad Dini and Aghani Diniyya in Twentieth Century Egypt: A Review of Styles, Genres, and Available Recordings<sup>[1]</sup>**

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IT IS OFTEN assumed that as 'orthodox' Islam rejects music, Qur'anic recitation (tilawa) and the Call to Prayer (adhan) are its only acceptable melodic practices. By the same logic, the special music of Sufism is bracketed under the labels 'heterodox,' or else 'popular,' Islam. Both 'orthodox' and 'Sufi' practices are then categorically distinguished from the 'secular' world and its music. This erroneous 'tripolar' view of music and religion in Egypt can be ameliorated by considering the rich range of Islamic melodic practices performed there.

Performance of inshad dini (Islamic hymnody) has been widespread in Egypt throughout the twentieth century, crossing all geographical and social boundaries.<sup>[2]</sup> Focusing primarily on the supplication and glorification of God, praise and love for His Prophet, expressions of spiritual experience, and religious exhortations, inshad practice is not limited by region, economic class, or religious perspective. Inshad expresses the affective dimension of Islam, most pronounced in mysticism (Sufism). While inshad is always Sufi in the broadest sense of that word, and though some Sufi orders are rightly famous for their liturgical inshad (while others include none), inshad has been appreciated in a broad social domain far exceeding the borders of the Sufi orders.

Indeed, while emotional Islam, most manifest in popular Sufism, may well provide the primary impetus towards musical expressions of religious feeling, the lines supposedly separating 'orthodox' from 'mystical,' 'elite' from 'popular' Islam are hardly even definable, much less sharp, at least in Egypt. Such divisions reflect perceptions and polemics, more than actual beliefs and practices. In fact, Sufi ideas and feelings—love for God, His Prophet, and the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's immediate descendents)—differentially diffuse throughout Egyptian society (even while this diffusion is not always acknowledged), and such ideas and feelings are most truly expressed in poetry and song. The difficulties in distinguishing 'orthodox' and 'mystical,' 'elite' and 'popular,' or 'secular' and 'sacred' singing reflect the more general continuities and overlaps between these categories and the need for circumspection when employing them.

Separating genres of melodic performance in Islam is also difficult. Textually, inshad can be easily distinguished from Qur'anic recitation and the Call to

Prayer. Inshad is primarily poetry; the Qur'an is from God, and the Call from Tradition. The sacredness of Revelation, and the special rules for reciting it (codified as tajwid), also limit the sonic elaboration of Qur'an in performance (though within these limits quite an astounding effect can be achieved; see Ayoub 1993, Nelson 1985). Yet there is significant cross-influence in performance styles, since the munshid (inshad performer) usually recites Qur'an and the Call as well, and since all genres of Islamic performance have been shaped by a common history and Islamic heritage. This heritage has frequently been suspicious or even hostile towards the use of music in religion, and has thus served to imprint certain similar features on all Islamic genres.

Still, when compared to Qur'anic recitation, the realm of inshad is far more flexible in performance, and freer to combine with other musical practices. While some Egyptians may claim to be able to make a sharp distinction between inshad and ghina' (singing, in the general sense), in fact they are not clearly separated in either concept or practice, and there is a continuum between performance of inshad dini proper, and performance of unequivocally non-religious singing.

Up until the turn of the twentieth century, separating inshad and ghina' is nearly impossible. During the nineteenth century, 'religious' and 'art' traditions interpenetrated, together constituting a single cluster of performance practices; today this cluster is sometimes called the turath qadim (old tradition). Gradually religious and non-religious singing disengaged with the advent of the commercial music industry (on this industry, see Danielson 1997:42ff, Racy 1975, El-Shawan 1979:91-101), which promoted more profitable entertainment-oriented music, drawing it away from religious traditions. However, strong cross-influences and musical borrowings continued to make any sharp demarcation impossible. During the mid- to late-twentieth century, the 'gray' zone between the strictly religious and the strictly secular has included orchestral versions of inshad heavily influenced by the urban song tradition (tarab; see Racy 1982) but performed by religious music specialists (shaykhs), and aghani diniyya (religious songs) performed by secular singers (mutribin) not recognized as shaykhs.

Within the sphere of inshad, Egyptians may differentiate genres according to performer, performance style, text, and context. Defining genres precisely can be problematic. Sharp and agreed-upon definitions of genre terms do not exist, but a rough consensus can be discerned, although genre categories may overlap somewhat. The main genres of inshad reviewed in this article—tawashih diniyya, qasa'id diniyya, Mawlid, ibtihalat, qisas diniyya, and dhikr—have accumulated a broad audience through live performances, media productions, or both.

#### **Normative features of inshad dini**

While continua connecting inshad and ghina' exist, so do shared criteria, norms rooted in Islamic traditions and attitudes towards musical performance, which Egyptians use to position performers and performances along them. While all Egyptians do not apply the same criteria in the same way, there are shared tendencies in evaluating what constitutes a truly religious performance. This fact has led to certain normative features of inshad dini.

True inshad performance should be interpretable as an act of religious devotion: to worship God, express true religious feeling, or call others to Islam. Concomitant aesthetic pleasure is acceptable if it is not an end in itself, and may even be considered advantageous if inshad can thereby obviate the desire for more 'worldly' music. As the experience of inshad should be

religious, however, inshad practices ought to maintain some perceptual distance from secular song.

Inshad should take place in a suitably sacred context, neither within core Islamic ritual (where it is not sanctioned by Tradition), nor in irreligious contexts (where it could be misinterpreted, mocked, or acquire unsavory associations). Within these limits, inshad may be performed at explicitly religious occasions, or general social ones. Professionalism is acceptable providing the munshid is serving God and Islam.

Being critical to establishing religious intention, function, and experience, the text must be central in inshad performance. Therefore its quality and message are very important. The most acceptable themes are glorification (tasbih) and supplication (du‘a’, ibtihal) to God; praise and love for the Prophet Muhammad and his family (madih, ghazal; see Schimmel 1985); expressions of spiritual experience; narratives (qisas) about religious figures; and exhortations addressed to the listener. Sometimes ambiguous love poetry may be used, though such poetry may be censured for being either too mystical, or too erotic. Most common of all is du‘a’ to God, and madih for the Prophet. Religious poetry is plentiful throughout Islamic history, composed not only by individuals known primarily as saints and mystics, for whom it constitutes the principal mode of linguistic expression, but also by several of the Prophet’s Companions (such as Hassan ibn Thabit, d. ca. 659); theologians (such as Imam al-Shafi‘i, d. 820); and Azhari scholars (such as Shaykh Salih al-Ja‘fari, d. 1978). Such poetry is frequently performed as inshad. Classical Arabic, the language of Revelation and Islamic tradition, is usually preferred (especially the qasida genre); but colloquial forms (mawwal, zajal) are also performed for greater accessibility, especially in rural areas.

Because the text is critical, so is the voice. Melodic vocalization delivers text into social performance, enriched by emotional expression to complete its meaning. For the sake of textual clarity and emotion, the solo voice is the paragon, and clear articulation is highly valued. Though no rules are codified for inshad performance, many of the principles of tajwid are often applied in practice to ensure understanding, and evoke the sacred aura of Qur’anic recitation; besides, the munshid usually knows them already due to his religious training.

Islamic law has generally regarded musical instruments warily; hence, these are restricted, or eliminated altogether, in most inshad genres. After the solo voice, the most acceptable texture is solo with chorus (bitana). Most tolerable among instruments are the duff (frame drum; for Tradition recounts that the Prophet approved it) and other percussion, as well as the reed flute (nay, or kawala); its breathy, plaintive sound, commonly employed in Sufi contexts, has become a symbol of spiritual yearning. Traditional stringed instruments, such as kamanja (violin), ‘ud (lute), and qanun (zither), as well as ‘folk’ instruments, draw stronger censure, although these are preferable to the western and electronic instruments featured in contemporary popular music and unequivocally associated with non-traditional contexts. Instruments may be used individually, organized in a small chamber ensemble (takht), or (later) a larger orchestra (firqa) as in Arab music (el-Shawan 1984). The variable usage of instruments illustrates one continuum connecting inshad and ghina’. Towards the latter pole, in orchestral inshad and aghani diniyya, one often encounters what I term the ‘religious sound’: a standard tarab orchestra in which strong percussion (especially duff and other frame drums) and nay (reed flute) are emphasized; a large chorus is included to resemble the bitana, or provide chanting analogous to Sufi dhikr (chanting the Names of God).

For many, the ideal musical style is serious, dignified, and contemplative;

ecstatic styles and evocations of secular entertainment music invariably draw criticism from some quarters. Usually, inshad evokes a sense of the culturally 'authentic,' pointing towards the Islamo-Arabic tradition, while avoiding the 'modernizations' and westernizations of contemporary commercial music. While some inshad accomplishes these tasks by incorporating 'folk' (sha'bi) traditions, the melodic style of much inshad is shaped by traditions of Qur'anic recitation and the turath qadim (thus it may be difficult for the novice listener to distinguish tilawa and ibtihalat). Among the most spectacular examples of Arabic singing in existence are recordings of the great munshidin (for example, Shaykhs Ibrahim al-Farran, Taha al-Fashni).

As in Qur'anic recitation, complex vocalizations which beautify the text without obscuring it are esteemed. The melodic line may be elaborate, heavily ornamented, melismatic, and sophisticated in its use of modulation and qafla (cadential phrase). Often a poetic line is first delivered simply to convey the meaning, followed by an elaborate melisma. For greater flexibility, expressivity, and emotional impact, melodic improvisation is central. The rapid beat evoking the moods and contexts of secular music is avoided in most genres. Unmeasured singing (resembling the rhythmic style of Qur'anic recitation) is favored for its contemplative associations and distance from most entertainment music; otherwise, meter is usually downplayed through use of slow tempos, pauses, or long complex meters (which evoke the Arabo-Islamic tradition of the old muwashshahat). Shorter, more regular meters are accepted mainly as accompaniment to the Sufi dhikr, although not without criticism from conservatives. As in older Arabic music, and Qur'anic recitation as well, listeners provide vocal feedback following the munshid's conclusion of a phrase, using exclamations such as 'Allah!' or 'Ya salam!.'

The ideals of inshad extend beyond sound and context, to social status and visual presentation. Due to religious training and experience the munshid is entitled 'shaykh.' He shuns the label 'mutrib,' preferring to be known as a munshid, or by more specialized terms (varying with inshad genre). His behavior and dress is appropriately shaykhly. The munshid wears traditional Arabo-Islamic garb, including a turban ('imma), shawl (shal), and flowing robes ('abaya, jallabiyya, quftan, or jubba), usually while grasping a rosary (sibha). Thus outfitted he may be indistinguishable from the muqri' (reciter) or khatib (preacher). By contrast, the mutrib sports 'modern' clothes.

Formerly, numerous women such as al-Hajja al-Suwaysiyya (nineteenth century), modestly dressed, excelled in public performances of inshad (Danielson 1997:23, 209n13, 42). But twentieth-century Islamic revivalist trends have promoted the notion that the woman's voice is 'awra (indecent); hence, voice, like body, should be veiled from public view. While most Egyptians do not subscribe to this blanket attitude, it has taken root as a widespread dislike of women performing publicly within religious contexts, with the ironic result that female vocalists must find opportunities to perform in the more objectionable and immodest world of commercial entertainment and nightclubs. The principal exception occurs in qisas diniyya, discussed below.

### **Recorded Inshad**

During the twentieth century, inshad has been recorded and produced for consumption as a media-based commodity, first on phonodiscs (Racy 1975), but primarily on cassette tape (El-Shawan 1987). As commodities, these recordings are commercial, often audibly studio-recorded, and unbound from the usual contexts helping to define a performance as 'inshad.' Producers assert that a recording is inshad not only by presenting suitable sounds and texts, but also via careful symbolic composition on the cassette label. The

munshid, identified as 'shaykh' so-and-so, is typically depicted in a demure posture, garbed in shaykhly regalia, and often superimposed over artwork replete with religious symbols, such as photographs of holy sites, mosques, minarets, crescent moons, and arabesques.

For the most part, inshad is recorded for consumption by Egyptians themselves, not for scholarly or world music audiences in the West; these tapes are material artifacts of Egyptian culture. Listening to such commodified inshad, one experiences sonic bits of an Egyptian world. Still, the listener must bear in mind that marketing considerations, the possibilities afforded by studios and recording technology, and governmental censorship (el-Shawan 1987:39-42) may render such inshad quite different from the corresponding live version—if the latter exists at all. Whole genres of inshad (notably tawashih diniyya) are available on cassette but no longer performed live. By contrast, 'world music' industry productions, while of higher fidelity and free of Egyptian government restrictions, are selected and tailored to the presumed tastes of the western world music market. Such recordings may attempt to represent Egyptian culture, but they are not part of it.

### **Turath Qadim**

Up until the early twentieth century, religious and tarab performance practices tended to overlap and combine in what is today termed the turath qadim, 'old heritage.' Education began in the kuttab (religious school), where students learned to recite Qur'an and acquired a basic knowledge of classical Arabic language and literature. Nearly all singers based their training on this education; many began by singing the religious repertoire, and were hence considered 'of the shaykhs' (see Danielson 1990/1991).

Consequently, inshad and ghina' were often close, sometimes indistinguishable, during this period. Elevated love poetry (muwashshahat and qasa'id) could scarcely be differentiated from spiritual poetry, particularly of the Sufi orders. A predominantly religious society favored performance of spiritual poetry not only for specifically Islamic occasions (such as Ramadan nights, the two Feasts, or the Prophet's Birthday), but also for festive social occasions such as the 'urs (wedding). Conversely, elevated secular love poetry could be 'borrowed' for spiritual use, as could secular instrumentation. Musical styles were close as well. Like the munshid, the tarab singer was accompanied by a responding chorus (called madhhabjiyya), and often was addressed as shaykh. A singer typically included overtly religious and ambiguous elevated love poetry in his repertoire, mixing them even in a single performance.

The most recorded inshad genres of the early twentieth century were tawashih diniyya, and qasa'id diniyya. In tawashih, performance alternates antiphonally between the lead munshid as soloist, in an unmeasured, improvisatory, melismatic style (this portion is sometimes called ibtihalat), and the chorus, using complex precomposed melodies in a quasi-metric framework. The solo munshid could also perform an entire classical poem in the solo style; this genre is generally termed qasa'id diniyya (or ibtihalat, when the theme is supplicatory). Light instrumental accompaniment might be added to either one.

It is no coincidence that some fine examples of the religious turath qadim, but only relatively few, have been recorded, for it was the emergence of the music industry in the early twentieth century, following the development of requisite technological and economic infrastructure, which both preserved these specimens, and established the ineluctable trajectory for their decline in subsequent decades. Some of the greatest recorded performers are Shaykhs

Yusuf al-Manyalawi, Darwish al-Hariri, Abu al-'Ila Muhammad, 'Ali Mahmud, Muhriz Sulayman, and Ibrahim al-Farran.[\[3\]](#)

### **Later Tawashih Diniyya**

Purely vocal tawashih (including *ibtihalat* and *qasa'id diniyya*) continued to be performed into the mid-twentieth century, though now increasingly divorced from the mainstream of urban Arab music (*tarab*). The latter, principally oriented towards secular entertainment, gradually dispensed with tawashih as a 'training ground' for new singers, especially with the proliferation of secular schools, and consequent demise of the *kuttab*. At the same time, the staid tawashih became less popular as entertainment for social occasions. As a consequence, tawashih eventually came to be considered unequivocally religious, though without any critical liturgical role to play; performers such as Shaykh Taha al-Fashni did not sing *tarab* music as had the previous generation of shaykhs. Sustained by neither social occasions, nor the burgeoning music industry, nor Islamic ritual, tawashih declined sharply during the past quarter century. Today recordings may be heard on the radio, especially on religious occasions, but tawashih is rarely performed live; *qasa'id diniyya* continue as liturgical *ibtihalat* (see below), and within Sufi contexts. Connoisseurs often deem Shaykh Taha al-Fashni the greatest tawashih specialist of the twentieth century; his voice is dazzling (see Fashni 1-4). Other outstanding recordings are those of Shaykh Muhammad al-Fayyumi (Fayyumi 1), and Shaykh Nasr al-Din Tubar (Tubar 1, last cut of side 2). Such recordings, today considered elite and mainstream expressions of Islamic feeling, are in fact part of a tradition once practiced at all social levels (and continuing to appeal to them), which is closely connected to the Sufi heritage, as well as the roots of contemporary secular Arabic music. The same remarks apply to liturgical *ibtihalat* (described below).

### **Mawlid al-Nabi; Inshad of the Mawaldi**

The Mawlid al-Nabi (often simply Mawlid) is an event (the Prophet's Birthday, on 12 Rabi' al-Awwal), a genre of text, and a genre of inshad. Textually, the Mawlid praises the Prophet Muhammad while relating his life's story, in poetry and prose. Many Mawlid texts have been composed based primarily on the classical *sira nabawiyya* attributed to Ibn Ishaq (d. c. 767) and presented by Ibn Hisham (d. 828, 833?). In Egypt, three such texts are most common: those of the Medinan Ja'far ibn Hasan al-Barzanji (d. 1765), of the Cairene 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Munawi (d. 1621), and of Sharaf al-Din al-Busiri, raised in Busir and Cairo (d. 1298, Alexandria). In addition, many Sufi shaykhs have composed Mawlids for use in their orders.

Melodized performance of Mawlid texts is especially common during the Prophet's month of birth. Mawlid performance may include sections of recitation, and singing, using the tawashih and *qasa'id diniyya* formats. Examples include Shaykh 'Ali Mahmud (Mahmud 2, side 2), Shaykh Ibrahim al-Farran (cut 2), and Shaykh Taha al-Fashni (Fashni 1, side 1, cut 3; for a radio-drama format see Fashni 4, side 1). In 1981, a small group of *munshidin* from the Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya order (see Gilsenan 1973) were invited to perform their liturgical material in Paris for the Eighth Festival of Traditional Arts, under the direction of lead *munshid* Shaykh Muhammad al-Hilbawi; several items were recorded and released for the 'world music' market. Cut 3 of Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya 1, featuring a Mawlid text by the order's shaykh, is typical of Mawlid performance within the Sufi orders. The solo *munshid* dominates, with occasional choral responses from the rest. Another Mawlid performance by Shaykh al-Hilbawi, accompanied by a different *bitana*, can be heard on Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya 2, cut 9.

Busiri's celebrated poem *Qasidat al-Burda* (the *Mantle Ode*) is recited throughout the Islamic world (Schimmel 1985:181ff). The poem is usually enhanced by insertion of blessings and praises for the Prophet (*salawat*), and often by the interpolation of additional poetic lines matching the original (*tashtir*) as well. In Egypt, the most renowned exponent is Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Atwani, who has recorded the entire poem (using an expanded *tashtir* text) on a series of cassettes, as a vocal solo with choral refrains. But despite continued popularity in the Sa'id and within certain Sufi orders employing it liturgically, the performance of *Mawlid* has generally declined during the latter half of the twentieth century.

The professional *munshid* specializing in *Mawlid al-Nabi* is sometimes called a *mawaldi*, but this term applies as well to a broader class of performers. The *mawaldi* performs *tawashih diniyya* accompanied by chorus and percussion, traditionally *riqq*, *duff* (frame drums), *baza* (small drum), *naqrazan* (kettle drum), and *kas* (cymbals); often the *mawaldi* himself plays a frame drum, or raps a cane with his *sibha* (rosary). Because he sings primarily *madih* for the Prophet Muhammad, especially the *Mawlid al-Nabi* and miraculous praise-stories about other prophets, he is also called a *maddah*. The *mawaldi* performs at a variety of popular festivals—the Prophet's birthday and saints' days (*mawalid*), as well as social occasions such as weddings. Perhaps the most famous *mawaldi* in recent memory was Muhammad al-Shibiti (d. 1976). Though this style of *inshad* has largely been superseded by *qisas* and *dhikr* over the last twenty years (see below), one may yet hear examples in Upper Egypt. Shaykh Ahmad Barrayn has produced many recordings of this type in Egypt (for example Barrayn 1), as well as a 'world music' CD in France (Barrayn 2). (For more extensive discussion of the *mawaldi* and *Mawlid* traditions see Abdel-Malek 1995).

The *Mawlid* and *mawaldi* cannot easily be classified either theologically or socially. The centrality of the Prophet renders the *Mawlid* dear to many Sufi orders and gatherings, yet the genre is accepted in a demographic circle far exceeding that of the orders, including members of all social classes; formerly at least it was employed as entertainment. Vocally, performance is linked to the *turath qadim*, and thence to Arab music in general.

### **Liturgical Inshad: Ibtihalat and Hadra Sufiyya**

Whereas much *inshad* has been used in various social contexts, two genres are today firmly liturgical: *ibtihalat*, and *inshad* of the Sufi orders.

*Ibtihalat* (supplications) are solo, unaccompanied, non-metric, and improvisatory; they are considered a form of prayer analogous to the *du'a'*. Performatively closest of the *inshad* genres to *adhan* and *tilawa*, *ibtihalat* is least vulnerable to charges of being 'music,' and thus has flourished even into an era of Islamic conservatism. Besides religious poetry containing supplications to God, texts often include *madih*, as well as traditional prose supplications and blessings for the Prophet; the whole performance may even be termed *ad'iyya* (prayers). The *mubtahil* (performer of *ibtihalat*) dresses like the *muqri'*; usually, he is one.

Though pure *ibtihalat* was never popular as entertainment, it occupies a central position in Islamic practice of Egypt: dawn (*fajr*) prayer is often preceded by *ibtihalat*, the *mubtahil* closing his performance with the Call to Prayer. Such performances are radio-broadcast daily from one of Cairo's principal mosques. At other mosques where a *mubtahil* is unavailable, this broadcast may be amplified through the mosque's loudspeakers. *Ibtihalat* are also featured before other prayers during Ramadan. Tapes of *tawashih* usually include extended solo sections termed '*ibtihalat*' (for example *Fashni* 1, side

1, cut 1), but recordings of the liturgical performance itself are scarcer; hear Shaykh Muhammad 'Imran ('Imran 2) and Shaykh Nasr al-Din Tubar (Tubar 2). Visitors to Egypt may also tune to radio broadcasts before dawn to hear a famous contemporary mubtahir, such as Shaykh Muhammad al-Hilbawi, or Shaykh Sa'id Hafiz. Ibtihalat of Shaykh al-Hilbawi may also be heard on Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya 2, cuts 3 and 8. The ibtihalat genre is close to secular singing of the turath qadim, particularly renditions of qasidas (still performed today by traditional artists such as Sabah Fakhri of Syria). While considered religiously elite and mainstream, the solo ibtihalat style is deployed also within liturgies of Sufi orders, and for public dhikr performances.

Inshad is central to the liturgies of many Sufi orders. Within the hadra (group meeting), inshad is often performed to accompany dhikr, the rhythmic chanting of God's Names. This chant (which may itself be melodic) imposes on the texture a regular and accelerating beat; inshad may be solo, choral, or antiphonal. In the less conservative orders, instruments are sometimes included. Solo or choral inshad may also be performed without dhikr, the former resembling ibtihalat. While madih and du'a' are always central themes, the inshad of a Sufi order is typically distinguished by the use of some devotional texts directed to saints and shaykhs important to the order, while other texts come from the general tawashih-ibtihalat-madhi tradition. Whereas other inshad is recorded by professionals, the munshidin of the orders are usually amateurs. Though often portrayed as marginal or lower-class, the Sufi orders of Egypt include members of all socio-economic classes; total membership in 1985 was estimated at three million (Waugh 1989:190).[\[4\]](#)

Liturgies of the Sufi orders are not of general interest in Egypt, and their munshidin rarely have professional ambitions to represent the order to the wider public. Consequently, commercial recordings of tariqa liturgies have not been produced (though some orders produce tapes for internal consumption only). Short excerpts of the elaborate musical dhikr of the Laythiyya order (now defunct) featuring Shaykh Ahmad al-Basatini was recorded during the 1932 Arab Music Conference in Cairo; samples are available on a CDEJ release entitled *Musique Arabe*. Two Paris performances of the Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya hadra (Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya 1, cut 1; Hamidiyya Shadhiliyya 2, cut 5) provide rare and valuable samples of this order's liturgy not dissimilar to their performances in Egypt, though considerably attenuated.

### **Orchestral Inshad**

As the social role of inshad declined, the widespread success of commercial Arabic music, based on the Arabic orchestra (firqa) as instrumental vehicle, encouraged certain munshidin to resist the reluctance of Islamic tradition to allow musical instruments within religious practice, and record with orchestras similar to those used by the popular mutribin of their day, as a means of drawing a broader audience. In order to project a definitively Islamic aura, however, these orchestras featured the 'religious sound,' one or more of the musical symbols evocative of Islam and spirituality (and contrasting with the usual sounds of secular tarab music): a strong duff section, longer meters, slower tempos, and liberal use of the reed flute. Large male (and sometimes even female) choruses are usually added to resemble the bitana. Within this new setting, the munshid's vocal timbre and style is preserved. Space for some vocal improvisation is maintained, within a heavily orchestrated and arranged format.

Such inshad may be labeled tawashih, ibtihalat, Mawlid, or ad'iyya, but must be carefully distinguished from the original vocal presentations of these



genres. Today, orchestral inshad is often heard in the media, as background music for religious programs and serials on television and radio. Examples produced by Sono Cairo include Shaykhs Muhammad 'Imran ('Imran 1, 3), Sa'id Hafez, Taha al-Fashni (Fashni 4, side 2), Muhammad al-Fayyumi (Fayyumi 2), Sayyid al-Naqshabandi (Naqshabandi 1, 2), and Nasr al-Din Tubar (Tubar 1). The government-sponsored religious orchestra, Firqat al-Inshad al-Dini (established 1974; see El-Shawan 1984:282), also performs in this style; recordings are available from the Cairo Opera House.

Orchestral inshad illustrates one position along the continuum from pure inshad to ordinary singing (ghina'). But despite its concessions to modern Arab music, this genre is recognized as distinct from aghani diniyya. Whatever the elaborateness of its musical accompaniment, the solo vocalist of orchestral inshad' is still a shaykh, known as munshid rather than mutrib, and deploys a vocal style which has become distinctive to inshad.

#### **“Sha‘bi” (“folk”) Inshad: Dhikr and Qisas Diniyya**

For official religious institutions and the government-controlled media, *ibtihalat*, *qasa'id*, and *tawashih*, being associated with high art and mainstream religious traditions, are the most acceptable genres of inshad. TV and radio broadcast recordings of these genres are presented as true religious expressions (even if they are not always palatable to members of Islamic revival groups). Official pronouncements of these same religious and media institutions categorize inshad genres popular among the broader, less educated population as 'folk' ('sha'bi'), un-Islamic ('bid'a'), or both. This fact does not preclude the popularity of 'sha'bi' inshad among all classes of Egyptians, particularly those favoring a Sufi orientation. In addition, such inshad features chamber-ensemble musical accompaniment (*takht*) reminiscent of older Arab art music, and often includes melodic excerpts taken from the twentieth-century secular tarab song tradition (especially love songs of Umm Kulthum).

Dhikr and qisas diniyya are the two principal forms of 'sha'bi' inshad in Egypt today. Currently, these are far more prevalent than the genres championed by the media, though mainly in rural areas and among lower, artisanal, and small merchant classes in the cities. Both dhikr and qisas are performed by professional munshidin, backed by musical groups.<sup>[5]</sup> The most spectacular and accessible performances occur at saint festivals, and the Prophet's Birthday celebration. But dhikr and qisas are also commonly performed for weddings and other social occasions. The heavily amplified performances are usually held in a large outdoor tent (*suwan*).

Cassettes of these genres are not issued on the government's Sono Cairo label, but rather by hundreds of smaller production companies, many based in the Delta. Performances and tapes must be sought in towns and villages, as well as in 'popular' (sha'bi) city districts. Except for occasional appearances on 'folkloric' programs, (where they are presented as quaint folk culture rather than proper religious expression), these genres are virtually absent from the broadcast media.

#### **Dhikr of the public hadra (madih)**

The public hadra combines dhikr (performed with especially vigorous bowing or turning movements), inshad, and musical accompaniment (percussion plus at least one melodic instrument; violin or reed flute are preferred). Though resembling a similar ritual performed within Sufi orders, this hadra takes place in a public space outside the jurisdiction of any organized order. Compared to the tariqa hadra, the munshid, rather than tariqa leader, is in

control; performance includes more music, a wider, more daring repertoire of mystical poetry, and a larger crowd. Though the public hadra is undoubtedly performed with great religious feeling, many also attend out of aesthetic interest, or for entertainment.

Especially popular in the Sa'id, for the last twenty years the greatest stars of dhikr music have come from middle Egypt. Most famous are Shaykh Yasin al-Tuhami and Shaykh Ahmad al-Tuni from Assiut (see Waugh 1989: 116ff and passim; Frishkopf in press 2). Further south in Qina, Shaykh Amin al-Dishnawi is extremely popular, especially among members of his Sufi affiliation, the 'Usba Hashimiyya. In the Delta, Shaykh Muhammad al-Bilbisi is well-known; Shaykh Ramadan 'Uways performs frequently around Cairo (and every Saturday afternoon at the shrine of Sidi 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, located in the madbah district).

While they may be classified as 'folk,' Shaykhs such as Yasin and al-Tuni savor the recondite, ecstatic mystical expressions of 'Umar Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235), 'Abd al-Rahim al-Bur'ī (d. 1058), Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), and other classical Sufi poets (for example Tuhami 1, based on a Sufi love poem by contemporary Egyptian poet Shaykh 'Abd al-'Alim al-Nakhayli; Tuhami 2, based primarily upon Ibn al-Farid's celebrated wine-ode<sup>[6]</sup>). Colloquial mystical poetry is also sung, and may also be exceedingly difficult (for example Abu al-Hasan al-Shushtari [d. 1269]). Other public hadra munshidin sing unambiguous poetry (classical or colloquial) praising the Prophet, Ahl al-Bayt, and saints. For this reason the dhikr munshid may be called maddah, with repertoire resembling that of the mawaldi. Musically, public hadra may draw on ibtihalat, elevated turath qadim, and modern tarab styles, as well as rural music.

Recently Shaykhs Yasin and al-Tuni have begun performing in Europe. Two such performances are available as a double CD (Yasin 4, including poetry of Ibn al-Farid and al-Hallaj), though the usual caveats regarding music produced by the world music industry apply to these high-quality recordings. (See Waugh 1989 for more information on public hadra inshad.)

### **Qisas Diniyya**

Qisas diniyya are religious stories (including colloquial poetry and narrative prose), performed by a munshid (here often known as a sayyit<sup>[7]</sup>), and accompanied by a larger ensemble than that used in dhikr. Qisas are more popular than dhikr in the Delta, while in the Sa'id the situation is reversed. Some munshidin perform both qisas and dhikr, even mixing them in a single performance. This relatively new genre seems to have emerged out of several older traditions which declined over the last fifty years: the old mawaldi (who sang the canonic religious stories of the prophets, with bitana and percussion accompaniment), and the old maddah (who sang non-canonic religious stories in colloquial Arabic while accompanying himself on the duff).<sup>[8]</sup> The modern sayyit combines these traditions with a large musical group, incorporating folk and urban musical styles, instruments, and melodic excerpts. The male sayyit, in his white 'imma, red ta'iyya (cap), and finely tailored jallabiyya, closely resembles the Azhari scholar or preacher, and draws religious status from this similarity. Performances often take place for saint festivals and the Prophet's birthday, and for weddings. Partly due to its proximity to secular music, qisas is the only contemporary genre of inshad in which women enjoy a substantial performance presence, participating as lead singers; such a singer may be called sayyita, or munshida.

There are two types of qissa: the qissa nabawiyya (prophet story) recounting prophetic miracles (usually of the Prophet Muhammad); and the qissa khiyaliyya (imaginary story), a fictional but suspenseful moral fable. Qisas

are enjoyed as entertainment, and the mood is lighter than for other genres of inshad, particularly for 'imaginary stories.'<sup>[9]</sup> Though the entertainment aspect of qisas is undeniable, and though the qissa khiyaliyya may not be overtly religious, performances generate a religious atmosphere due to the religious status and image of the munshid, religious contexts or expectations, and frequent interpolation of ancillary madih for the Prophet Muhammad.

A thriving cassette industry centered in Tanta produces scores of artists; most tapes are studio recordings. While live performances can be much longer, the physical limitations of the cassette medium, combined with economic factors, limit the length of commercial recordings to approximately forty-five minutes. Popular Delta performers include Shaykhs Ahmad al-Majahid, al-Sayyid Khamis, and Sharaf Ibrahim al-Tamadi. Well-known female munshidas include Haniyyat Sha'ban, and Wafa' (featured in the mawlid scene from the film *Umm Kulthum: A Voice Like Egypt*). (Abdel-Malek 1995 focusses on the qissa tradition.)

### **Aghani Diniyya**

If orchestral inshad results from munshidin seeking broader markets by incorporating a religious-sounding orchestra borrowed from urban tarab music, the reverse process also occurs. Though the Egyptian music industry is predominantly geared towards non-religious music, sometimes a respectable mutrib, known primarily for sentimental songs, and without necessarily claiming or invoking a 'munshid' or 'shaykh' identity, may record precomposed songs (usually in the mainstream tarab style) based upon religious texts: aghani diniyya. This may occur for the sake of a religiously-themed drama (for example Umm Kulthum's songs for the musical film *Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*), or for broadcast during a religious holiday. Aghani diniyya may be accompanied by the singer's ordinary orchestra, but more often one or more elements of the 'religious sound' are emphasized. Sometimes the singer temporarily assumes elements of the munshid's wardrobe, juxtaposed with religious imagery. Such productions help to enhance the mutrib's respectability, and artistic connection to the turath qadim, even when his musical education is far from traditional.

One may therefore distinguish two kinds of mutrib performing aghani diniyya. The first is the mutrib known to have begun his or her musical career as a shaykh or shaykha in the turath qadim. Performance of religious songs by such a singer is perceived as a sincere and authentic return to origins. Though she left the world of inshad early in her career, Umm Kulthum also performed many religious songs much later, several of which feature the 'religious sound,' including "Ila 'Arafat Allah" (1955), "Nahj al-Burda" (1946), "Wulida al-Huda" (1946), and "Ruba'iyat al-Khayyam" (1949-50). Another example is Shaykh Sayyid Makkawi, whose suite "al-Masahharati" (based on poetry by Fu'ad Haddad)<sup>[10]</sup> is often broadcast during Ramadan. Because of changes in music education from the early twentieth century, singers with roots in the old turath qadim have virtually disappeared today. The second type consists of other mutribin, such as 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, one of the first great singers to receive a modern musical education. Emerging primarily after the 1952 revolution, he attained fame for his romantic and nationalistic songs, but also recorded a set of religious songs for broadcast during Ramadan. Likewise, popular singer Muhammad 'Abd al-Muttalib was not trained as a shaykh; he too produced a religious album. Conservatory-trained Riyad al-Sunbati, besides composing many religious songs for Umm Kulthum and others, recorded his own song "Ilah al-Kawn" (Deity of the Universe), accompanied by a 'religious sound' orchestra and chorus. Simple religious songs in a folk-like style have been popularized by Muhammad al-Kahlawi, who appears on TV in shaykhly dress and surrounded by Islamic symbols

(Kahlawi 1,2,3). More recently, the popular mutrib 'Ali al-Hajjar, known primarily as a secular singer, recorded "Sallayna al-fagr feen" to great acclaim; in the video version he wears Islamic garb.

Even if the singer has received some training in religious learning and performance, aghani diniyya as performed by mutribin are not usually considered inshad. Formed almost entirely within the matrix of secular Arab music, they lack the vocal timbres, melodic styles, improvisations, contexts, and religious intentions of inshad. Most importantly, they are performed by singers not (or no longer) recognized as munshidin. However, similarities between orchestral inshad and aghani diniyya serve to illustrate the continuities linking the religious and secular traditions, and the difficulty of sharply separating the two.

Besides the aghani diniyya of the professional mutribin, a wide variety of religious folk songs (aghani diniyya sha'biyya) exists for various occasions (for example Ramadan, 'Id, Hajj). Formerly amateurs sang them for friends, families, and neighbors. The ubiquitous influence of the modern media, especially TV and radio penetration of even the smallest villages, has influenced and displaced amateur performance of religious songs (indeed, has eradicated nearly all pre-modern amateur folk music practices), while preserving some of its sounds and texts as 'folklore' within media productions. Today, if family and neighbors sing for the pilgrim at all, they might well select a folk-like religious film song—celebrating an impending visit to the Prophet's tomb—first performed by secular singer and actress Layla Murad (herself a convert to Islam from Judaism): "Ya Rayihin li al-Nabi al-Ghali."[\[11\]](#)

Ultimately, the value of ethnomusicological research is predicated on the fact that musical practice reflects, and hence reveals, broader social life. The study of music in culture is not an end in itself; but rather a tool for understanding culture, history, and the lived experience of both. The affective dimensions of such experience, so central to religious life, are often communicated through expressive sound—both among culture bearers, and from them to the ethnomusicologist. The historical study of Egyptian inshad, encompassing its changing musical, religious, and social dimensions, contributes to a general understanding of religious, economic, and social change. The systematic comparison of inshad genres in all their aspects (including poetry, music, and performance contexts) reveals many positions filling the space between the unequivocally secular and the unequivocally religious, disclosing a broad continuum of 'mystical' and 'orthodox' shadings, various juxtapositions of rural and urban musical traditions, and multiple class affiliations. Such a study suggests that facile categories, such as 'religious,' 'secular,' 'Sufi,' 'orthodox,' 'popular,' and 'elite,' too often adopted axiomatically, need to be handled with subtlety, careful qualification, and critical caution.

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[2]For a longer summary see Frishkopf, in press 1.

[3]For most of the references to recorded *inshad* in this article there is a corresponding entry in the Discography, alphabetically by artist; numeral s will serve to differentiate multiple productions by the same artist.

[4]This number appears to include only active members, and may neglect members of unofficial orders not registered with the government (which orders are more numerous than the official orders) as well as women (who frequently do no join as official members).

[5]The introduction of melodic instrumental accompaniment into *dhikr* and *qisas*, a phenomenon of the last fifty years or so, appears to have occurred as a consequence of the widespread influence of secular entertainment music through the media.

[6]This is the so-called Khamriyya; see Ibn al-Faird 1956:81-90 for full English translation and extensive notes by A. J. Arberry.

[7]This term is sometimes used in rural areas to designate any singer.

[8]These in turn are related to the old Islamic storytelling-preaching tradition of the *qusas*.

[9]I am grateful to Dr. Ibrahim 'Abd al-Hafiz (Folklore Institute, Cairo) for providing much of this information.

[10]During Ramadan, the *masahharati* walks through the street while singing religious poetry, calling, and beating a small drum (*baza*), in order to awaken Muslims in time to consume their *sahur*; he may be considered a kind of *munshid*. Unfortunately, this old musical tradition has declined, and recordings are not available.

[11]By Riyad al-Sunbati and Abu al-Sa'ud al-Ibyari; from her film *Layla Bint al-Akabir*.

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