

SUSANA WEICH-SHAHAK, IN COLLABORATION WITH PALOMA DÍAZ-MÁS, *ROMANCERO SEFARDÍ DE MARRUECOS. ANTOLOGÍA DE TRADICIÓN ORAL*, MADRID, ALPUERTO, 1997, 222 PAGES.

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This volume, in Spanish, is another welcome example of Weich-Shahak's continuing work documenting, disseminating and providing accurate information about Judeo-Spanish song. Over eighty Moroccan Judeo-Spanish *romances* are fully transcribed (text and music) and annotated, with both textual and musical variants indicated. The selections are taken from Weich-Shahak's 1976-1994 fieldwork in Israel, deposited at the National Sound Archives (NSA) of the Jewish National and University Library at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; each item is identified with its NSA catalogue number.

When Dr Weich-Shahak says "brief" ("breve"), she means it — for example, the history of Moroccan Sephardim is covered in under two pages. While it is refreshing to read a scholarly work which says what it means to say and then goes on to the next point or finishes, sometimes Weich-Shahak can be a little *too* concise, and a little more information and analysis would be welcome. A tantalizing brevity is a characteristic of the background notes altogether, including Díaz-Más' expert but very short introductory observations. But after all, this volume is subtitled "antología", not "estudio", so the notes can be taken as knowledgeable prologomena. The interested reader should read Weich-Shahak's earlier, and also later, work, covering various aspects of repertoire, social function, and musical analysis, as well as her documentary recordings (Weich-Shahak in "references", below; also Etzion and Weich-Shahak).

In any case, Weich-Shahak certainly packs considerable solid information into relatively short texts; the section on melodic structure, for example, are particularly instructive. The text and music transcriptions are carried out and presented with the care and attention to detail which characterizes Weich-Shahak's work, and Díaz-Más' background notes on the texts are, as always, informative. The text transcriptions follow the CSIC system, and are explained clearly, though perhaps a table would be helpful for quick reference. The song transcriptions are well-laid out and easy to read. The incipit/title table at the end (191-202) is useful but appears to have been taken directly from a computer print-out and is not only difficult to read, its headings are actually in English: "theme", "incipit", "place", "code", "no." (number). There are very few typographical errors (e.g. "incuye" for "incluye", p. 27).

Regrettably, as over the past several years Hispanists have finally been giving it its deserved serious attention, *literatura de cordel* has been excluded (except for one ballad; see p.14). The author does list the titles she has recorded, and explains that they are omitted from the anthology only because of the lengthy texts and the differences in structure, not because of value judgments. Still, including at least the melody and a couple of sample strophes, and a sample concordance (a full one would be too extensive) would be helpful, including for comparative ethnomusicological and textual purposes. On the other hand, we find

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with fascination that there are three *romances* not included in the standard *Catálogo-Índice* (Armistead et al. 1978): one, explains Weich-Shahak, is similar to a ballad in the Larrea Palacín anthology, one is of relatively recent composition and the third appears unique to the author's own collection (*Amor y Psique*, #84). The addendum of five *romances* added to Weich-Shahak's collection while the book was in press contains some interesting examples, including the rarely recorded Moroccan version of the *Muerte del Duque de Gandía* (another example of a post 1492 event). For me, the most fascinating was a version of the rare *Hijo del vengador* (#87), for I recognized the informant (one of two recorded in Spain rather than in Israel), as the nephew of an elderly woman from whom I recorded the song in the early 1980's, in Montreal. His aunt told me he had recordings of her singing, and I eventually sent him copies of my own recordings of her; so it would be interesting to compare these two versions – sung by different generations of the same family, different gender, different professional relationship to music, living in different countries for most of their lives.

Among the many points of interest which it would be interesting to follow up are the discussion of the *romances* found both in Morocco and in Spanish oral tradition, and the care Weich-Shahak takes in pointing out those which entered Morocco from Spain relatively recently, during the Spanish Protectorate (p. 22 and for separate *romances* discussed). In her interesting discussion of Moroccan and Peninsular distribution of *romances* and of their melodic relationships (p. 24-26), it is not surprising that the author finds the strongest melodic resemblances in those *romances* which entered Morocco later. Some texts refer specifically to events which took place after the Expulsion —e. g. *La muerte del príncipe Don Juan* (#9) in 1497— but one should remember that the Jews were expelled from the Peninsula more than once: from Portugal in 1496-7 and from Navarra not until 1498. *Romances* found in Portuguese oral tradition are noted, though the existence of a recited version of the *Sacrificio de Isaac* (#12) among Portuguese Crypto-Jews is not noted.

The note (p. 13) about informants singing from family manuscripts seems to raise the fascinating question about the continuum of oral and written transmission, but it turns out to be a brief mention only. Other issues which are only briefly mentioned or very briefly discussed include linguistic analysis, which the author points out extends the purview of this volume (p. 15), the problematics of loan/graft/contamination (p. 15; the author provides a reference to a more detailed study), and the phenomenon of de-christianization (p. 17 re #19), which appears almost as an afterthought in a discussion of assonance, and again (p. 23) with relation to peninsular versions of *romances a lo divino*. Then again, many linguistic studies have given short shrift to the music, and following up all these paths of thought would lead to a very long volume.

A seasoned and very effective ethnographer, Weich-Shahak includes social function in her discussion of the music (p. 17). One interesting point she raises is the parallel between the re-hispanicizing of texts/language and of musical modes, during the Spanish Protectorate period (p. 18). Still, the discussion of social function (which the author has discussed more fully in other publications) is treated only minimally here (p. 20). One wonders, for example, how the incongruity between the textual content of certain ballads and their use as lullabies is seen by informants, for example, and whether this is different for Moroccan and eastern Mediterranean communities. There is also the question, not

addressed here, of which melodies were used for specific texts and which were exchangeable or not; for example, *Las quejas de Jimena* (#1b) is sung to the melody often used for *Gerineldo* (#59), and the variant melody for *Melisenda insomne* (#5d) is the one used for *Por la calle de su dama* (#11). Distribution of melodies by town would also be interesting: Tangier melodies are not always the same as Alcazarquivir melodies, for example; or, at times, I have recorded the same melodies in both places but with a different “twist” in the latter.

“*Interpretación*” (performance practice) is discussed very briefly (p. 20). The author explains that her detailed transcriptions include ornaments which are only audible at reduced tape speed but are still “parte del carácter de la melodía” (p. 14); a little more discussion of how these ornaments function would be interesting (Cohen, 1989: 220-225); as well as why the melodies sung by the incomparable Alicia Bendayan usually have more and also more complex ornaments: is this typical? an exceptional case? how do other women see it? Vocal timbre is not discussed. Many of these issues could be taken care of by using available and not very expensive technology to produce an accompanying CD, easily fitted into an envelope at the back of the book, as is becoming increasingly common with ethnomusicological publications.

I have some mild reservations concerning the rendering of metrical patterns: for example, in *Rosaflorida y Montesinos* (#7), *Diego León* (#37a) and a few others, the bar divisions seem somewhat awkward. This curious melody (which I recorded in a very similar version from a Tangier-born Moroccan Sephardic woman in Canada) would perhaps be better without time signatures, as indeed the author presents other ballads, such as *Tamar and Amnón* (#14b).

As Díaz-Más points out, the collection is “muy representativo del último estadio de la tradición sefardí de Marruecos”; still, more comparisons with collections besides Weich-Shahak’s, extensive though it is, might be interesting; also a discussion of whether the Israeli repertoire—or that of another country—has its own characteristics. Anahory-Librowicz’ Málaga collection (1981), and the Nahón collection from Tangier (Armistead and Silverman, 1979), come to mind. My own Moroccan collection from Canada includes discussions of the *romance*’s social function in the Canadian context (Cohen, 1989: 66-124); detailed transcriptions which could yield interesting comparisons of such ballads as *La envenenadora* (#54) and *Hermanas reina y cautiva* (#19) (Cohen, 1989: 223; lxxx-lxxxii); and comparisons to earlier transcriptions which parallel the interesting observations made by Weich-Shahak in this respect (p.26-27; cf. Cohen, 1989:240-247). Both Weich-Shahak and Díaz-Más observe that sometimes earlier and later versions of the same romance coexist. In the case of *Don Gato* (#75) the discussion could be clearer, so that the uninitiated reader really understands that the second version, described as “older”, uses a melody which not only is used for the previous song, *Muerte que a todos convida*, as Weich-Shahak points out, but that this latter melody is also used for a Hebrew *quina* (lament).

Díaz-Más suggests (p. 31) that the collected *romancero* “no es tanto una tradición viva como el recuerdo de esa tradición” (“this is not so much a live tradition as a memory of this tradition”). I am often torn between the undeniable truth of this statement and wondering whether in fact it’s another type of tradition, and a live one at that, a tradition of singing in a different context, a living-room or studio, for an eager scholar and a microphone (see Cohen, 1995 for discussion of new women’s roles in Judeo-Spanish song). If indeed this is a new live tradition, it

may be less colourful and less connected to daily life, but it is vital and important, and has also given a sense of accomplishment to many Sephardic (and other) tradition-bearers. Through the breadth of her work, her systematic and careful dissemination of it, and her evident respect and affection for the people of the culture she is helping preserve, Weich-Shahak has been instrumental in the creation and maintaining of this newly "traditional" context of the Sephardic *romancero*.

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