

## Module 1

### 1.3. IN SEARCH OF THE ORIGIN OF FLAMENCO

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#### 1. IN SEARCH OF THE ORIGIN OF FLAMENCO

Flamenco is a musical and dance art that does not come primarily from the world of the Academia, but from an original artistic reworking of popular music and dances, from mostly traditional roots. For some time now it has enjoyed worldwide diffusion: there are hundreds of annual events dedicated totally or partially to flamenco, thousands of academies (especially dance academies) spread all over the world... Countless books, essays and other writings have been and continue being written about this unique art form.

But what we have to ask ourselves here is: Where does flamenco come from and what do we know about its historical and cultural background? Since it is not an easy task to explain in a short space a complex subject like this, we will approach the question following three possible lines of reasoning. On the one hand, by presenting a summary of how those authors, who have had the most relevance and influence on the importance of flamenco today, have answered this question.

On the other hand, and since today it is generally accepted that flamenco as an artistic world began to appear itself around the decade of 1830-40, particularly in Andalusia, we will allude, albeit briefly, to the cultural environment that prevailed in the years prior to and contemporary with the emergence of flamenco. Finally, it will also be useful to allude to certain formal/musical features found in traditional folk music and dances in Andalusia and other parts of Spain, which have been constituted as "pre-flamenco" by some authors who have investigated them.

#### 2. A REVIEW OF THE STUDY OF THE ORIGINS OF FLAMENCO

Have issues such as Pre-Flamenco formal features in Andalusian music and dances, the socio-cultural environment in which flamenco emerged, etc been sufficiently studied?

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When the first flamenco environments began to emerge<sup>1</sup>, the first intellectuals who paid attention to them opted in their writings to describe these primitive environments in the form of 'costumbrista' or pictorial cultural scenes, without seriously asking about their origins, beyond making some vague allusions to the creative power of the people or, to possible antecedents from the Arab period... These texts present us with scenes some more or less realistic, some more or less literary recreations in which a burgeoning flamenco was beginning to manifest itself. This was the case represented in the articles "Un baile en Triana" and "Asamblea General", written by the Malaga-born Serafín Estébanez Calderón which were first published in 1847. Furthermore, from those years we find references to festivals and functions that we can classify as flamenco: in press reviews, in engravings and paintings, in travelers' chronicles, etc. The first report describing a well-organized performance that can be described as flamenco is found in the press of Madrid and dates from 1853<sup>2</sup>. But allusions to songs and dances in more or less pre-flamenco environments – not so organized– can be found in Andalusia from 1810-20 onwards. For example, there is a well-known reference to some scenes from Triana published in 1812/13 in a Sevillian newspaper, entitled *El Tío Tremenda* or *Los Críticos del Malecón*<sup>3</sup>. From these and other sources, we know that there was a gradual transition from flamenco environments that were not very "defined" or regulated (the very name "flamenco" to designate these environments did not become generalized until the 1860s) to others that were already more defined and moderately structured. These first environments took place in private homes, in dance academies, in salons, in improvised venues for an emerging tourism, and so on.

In short, although we have news from the first decades of flamenco's existence (between 1830-40 and the 1870s) that introduce us to its first environments, no one at that time seriously considered the question of its origins, nor did they attempt to answer it with any degree of rigor.

It was only in the second half of the century, when several flamenco singing cafés had already opened the first environments in which flamenco began to show itself as a more stable professional activity, that some began to write about it with a certain pretension of serious intent about the origins of flamenco. Highly cited has been the *Colección de cantes flamencos*<sup>4</sup> by Antonio Machado y Álvarez, also known as Demófilo (and father of the poets Antonio and Manuel Machado), who had already written some articles on flamenco in the 1870s. This work contains interesting data on flamenco coplas and lyrics, about which Demófilo ponders their historical

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<sup>1</sup> Depending on the features under consideration, the first flamenco environments can be located in the decades of the 1830s, '40s, and '50s.

<sup>2</sup> In the magazine *La España*, of February 18, 1853, ample news is given about an event of semi-public character that took place in the Vensano Halls, in the Baño street (currently Ventura de la Vega). See: Sneeuw, Arie C. *Flamenco en el Madrid del XIX*. Córdoba, Virgilio Márquez ed., 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding what was sung and danced in an event known as a "jaleillo pobre" (one of the meanings of the word in Massip y Moyá's dictionary), improvised by people from the neighborhood, probably gypsies, with for example a conversation between two neighbors. One tells that they sang, among other things, "la caña y la picaresca o el ole"; which was what corresponded at the time to townspeople like them, and not arias or similar, which would have provoked hilarity (Ortiz Nuevo, 1990: 22). In another passage (Ibidem: 25) insists that: sonnets, arias and villancicos corresponded to the "important" people, the proper thing for the poor people is "our caña and our ole".

<sup>4</sup> Machado y Álvarez, Antonio. *Cantes Flamencos*. Madrid, Demófilo, 1982.

background. He makes allusions to the *coplas de jaleo* as precedents of the flamenco songs and makes assessments about the evolution of the flamenco environments in the cafés, even predicting a possible decline of flamenco in his time, due to the appearance of mixtures that, according to him, could have distorted it. However, today it can be observed that Demófilo's approach was not particularly rigorous.

Just a few months after this work, an extensive article by Hugo Schuchardt, a prestigious Austrian linguist, appeared in an important German journal of philological studies, *Die Cantes flamencos*, as the result of his stay in Seville in 1879 (where he had moved to study Andalusian speech). The point of view that Schuchardt adopts is philological, but his approach is strikingly more rigorous than that of Machado y Álvarez. One of Schuchardt's main conclusions in this work is that most of the coplas flamencas were a reworking of traditional Andalusian popular lyrics, albeit modified. Its nuances, which we cannot detail here, serve to clarify the debated issue of the relationship between "lo andaluz" and "lo gitano". The problem is that Schuchardt's article was not translated from German until 1990<sup>5</sup>, so it has only been taken into account in studies on flamenco since then.

Another author who in those years raised the question of the origins of flamenco, in this case in terms of dance, was Benito Más y Prat. He did so in an article published in 1882 in *La Ilustración Española y Americana*<sup>6</sup>. It is true that rather than being a detailed study of historical sources and precedents, it is an early characterization of the emerging flamenco dance, for which he resorts to its comparison with other dance traditions of the time<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, research in the field of dance after this article seems to have been truncated for decades, until very recently.

In the first half of the 20th century, we find an overall approach to flamenco music, with more academic intentions in the essays written by Manuel de Falla on the occasion of the *Concurso de Cante Jondo* of 1922<sup>8</sup>. However, it should be known that Falla's purpose in writing his essays on flamenco music was not so much that of rigorous research but rather to defend, in the months prior to the event taking place, his intention to move forward with the organization of the Contest in the face of the attacks he received from intellectuals of certain prestige both from Granada (Francisco de Paula Valladar) and from other parts of Spain (Eugenio Noel). Falla emphasized in his writings the antiquity, sobriety and purity as the main values of what he described as primitive

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<sup>5</sup> Schuchardt, H. *Los Cantes Flamencos*. Seville, Fundación Machado, 1990. Translated by Gerhard Steingress, Eva Feenstra and Michaela Wolf.

<sup>6</sup> Mas y Prat, Benito, "Costumbres andaluzas. Bailes de palillos y flamencos", *La Ilustración española y americana*, year XXVI, n. 28, Madrid 30. VII. 1882.

<sup>7</sup> More specifically, Más y Prat compares flamenco dance with the tradition of the bailes de palillos (the traditional partner dances, either in their popular versions, such as the sevillanas and fandangos, or in the academized boleros) and with that of the Andalusian theatrical dances, academized versions of the popular jaleos, a tradition that he did not consider in his analysis.

<sup>8</sup> Falla, Manuel de. "Del maestro Falla: la significación de un concurso". In: *Noticiero Granadino*. Granada. 21. 03. 1922.

----. "El cante jondo". In: *Gaceta del Sur*. Granada, 21. 03. 1922.

----. *Writings on music and musicians*. Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1988.



Andalusian singing or *cante jondo*, as opposed to what he understood as its degradation or decadence, which was, according to him, what was emerging in those years in the usual practice of flamenco. He considered that flamenco had been "degraded" because the artists of that time had given in to the easy recourse, in order to reach a majority audience, who preferred to listen to "the cupletista rather than the cantaor". Then, it was urgent to protect and promote a serious, pure and ideal cante, rich in ancestral essences and far removed from the unauthentic gimmickry of cante as it was performed in those years. It can be seen that all the emphasis of Falla's theory is centered on exalting the value of what he called *cante jondo*<sup>9</sup>:

1. *Deep stylized, ancient singing.*
2. *Sober vocal modulation* or natural inflections of the singing, which cause the division and subdivision of the sounds of the range.
3. *Modal richness* of its ranges (modes, scales) which are an expression of its antiquity.
4. Enharmonism as a modulating medium, a feature that we understand Falla did not explain explicitly, referring to the connection of the "primitive Andalusian chant" with the most primitive oral ranges, particularly with those of Indian music<sup>10</sup>.
5. *Rhythmic flexibility* of the most authentic songs and, expression, once again, of their antiquity.
6. Use of *reduced melodic ranges*, usually not higher than the 6th.
7. *Repeated use of the same note*, frequently accompanied by upper and lower appoggiatura. This trait refers mainly to *seguiriyas* singing.
8. *Melody rich in ornamentation at times not randomly*, but when the emotional force of the text suggests it.

It was necessary to highlight these features, as opposed to those of "today's ridiculous flamenquismo" that "adulterates and modernizes the essential elements of flamenco". This is how he describes the inauthentic or "false" flamenquismo:

1. The sober vocal modulation or natural inflections of the singing becomes an *artificial ornamental twist* more typical of the decadentism of the bad Italian period.

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<sup>9</sup> Some of the ideas contained in the conference "El cante jondo, canto primitivo andaluz", published in a pamphlet written by Manuel de Falla on the occasion of the celebration, in 1922, of the Cante Jondo de Granada Contest, are quoted in a non-literal way.

<sup>10</sup> It refers to a type of "modulation" based on the position of the semitone in degrees other than those of our major and minor scales.

2. Clumsy enlargement of the limits of the reduced melodic range in which the "primitive singing" is usually developed.
3. The modal richness of the *very old ranges* is replaced by a lack of tonal variation, a consequence of the exclusive use of our only two modern scales (major or minor keys).
4. As for the ancient rhythmic flexibility of the primitive singing or *cante jondo*, it is replaced by the *coarsely petrified phrase* ("*la frase groseramente petrificada*").

Without questioning the exceptional artistic quality of Falla's works, today we know how to put these appreciations in context. There is no doubt that Falla had a high concept of the aesthetic beauty of many flamenco songs, among which he valued *seguiriyas*, *soleares*, *martinetes* and *tonás*, and that he knew how to make exceptional artistic use of these songs in several of his most significant works: *Fantasía Bética*, *El Sombrero de Tres Picos* or *El Amor Brujo*, composed in the years prior to these reflections. Moreover, with these writings he managed to bring the idea of the Contest to fruition. However, some of his opinions on flamenco, beyond the value of coming from an exceptional musician, can today be subjected to criticism and must be contrasted with the new data that subsequent research has managed to unveil about the origins and musical precedents of flamenco.

A very interesting work due to its originality, simplicity and the closeness from which it was written is *Arte y Artistas flamencos* (1935) by Fernando el de Triana (Fernando Rodríguez Gómez), a prestigious flamenco singer, guitarist and businessman born in Seville in 1867. He was a knowledgeable person about the flamenco artists and environments of the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. Although he was not the typical intellectual, but rather an intelligent businessman and *cantaor*, his writings contain very interesting and direct appreciations, without any added lucubrations, about the flamenco environments and artists of this time as well as the singing, guitar playing and dancing of the time<sup>11</sup>.

### 3. MORE RECENT STEPS IN THE RESEARCH ON THE ORIGINS OF FLAMENCO

As we understand it, it was in the field of popular literature where the first rigorous works appeared regarding written sources, which shed light on the origin of the *cante* (of the *coplas* of flamenco

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<sup>11</sup> This author kept memories from the late 1870s and older references from older dancers, which take us back to the mid-19th century.

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singing) and its relations with the coplas and songs of the Hispanic tradition. After the precedent of the aforementioned work by Schuchardt, it is worth mentioning the research of Milá y Fontanals<sup>12</sup> and at the beginning of the 20th century, those of Rodríguez Marín<sup>13</sup>, Menéndez Pidal<sup>14</sup> and the more recent and elaborated research of Margit Frenk<sup>15</sup> among others. In 1990, Francisco Gutiérrez Carbajo published *La copla flamenca y la lírica de tipo popular*, a two-volume work in which the origin question is presented in detail<sup>16</sup>. Since then, we know more about the greater depth regarding the continuities that exist between the peninsular popular lyric tradition –since the Middle Ages: jarchas, zejeles, moaxajas, cantigas and villancicos–, the folkloric-traditional lyric (the folklore that in one way or another has come down to us) and flamenco coplas. Here, we will refer to two types of continuities: in the metrical and strophic forms, on the one hand, and in the thematic and poetic resources on the other.

Regarding the forms, we know that most of the flamenco coplas can be integrated in two big groups: either octosyllabic quatrains or quintillas (*tangos, tientos, tonás, alegrías, fandangos, granainas, malagueñas, tarantos and tarantas, romances or corridos*, etc.), or seguidilla quatrains (*serranas, estribillos de alegrías*, etc.). There are also tercets, particularly in the soleares, décimas (in the *guajiras*) and occasionally coplas of irregular meter. The interesting thing about it is that these are the most extended strophic forms in the Hispanic popular lyric and these metrical-formal continuities are not found between flamenco and other extrapeninsular lyrics, with the exception of Hispanic-American folklore.

As for the thematic continuities between the Andalusian songbook, from the jarchas to the flamenco songbook, Gutiérrez Carbajo and Antonio Carrillo Alonso<sup>17</sup> have also found interesting similarities. These are not exact continuities as there is an evolution in time and in the environments in which these coplas are produced, but they are very significant. Following authors such as Margit Frenk Alatorre, a disciple of Menéndez Pidal, and Gutiérrez Carbajo studies, among others, the following correspondences of the flamenco coplas with the traditional ones of the Hispanic world: the figure of the sister and the mother as confidant or companion; the influence of the stars; the moles; the meeting of lovers in the street; diverse symbolic elements and common expressive forms in the structure of the dialogue, the reiteration of expressive words: mother, heart, friend, companion (related to the term *habibi* of the jarchas), sister, serrana (gypsy); recurring

<sup>12</sup> Milá y Fontanals, M. Observations on popular poetry. Barcelona, Imprenta Narciso Ramírez, 1853. Rodríguez Marín, Francisco. El Alma de Andalucía en sus mejores coplas amorosas. Madrid, Tipografía de Archivos, 1929.

<sup>13</sup> Rodríguez Marín, Francisco. El Alma de Andalucía en sus mejores coplas amorosas. Madrid, Tipografía de Archivos, 1929.

<sup>14</sup> Menéndez Pidal, Ramón. España, Eslabón entre la Cristiandad y el Islam. Madrid, E-Calpe, 1968.

----. Poesía árabe y poesía europea. Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1973.

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<sup>15</sup> Frenk Alatorre, Margit. Entre Folklore y Literatura (Lírica hispánica antigua) Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1971.

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<sup>16</sup> Gutiérrez Carbajo, Francisco. La copla flamenca y la lírica de tipo popular. Madrid, Cinterco, 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Carrillo Alonso, Antonio. La poesía tradicional en el cante andaluz. De las jarchas al cantar. Sevilla, EAU, 1988.



formulas, such as interrogations from loneliness, the sorrow of love, evil tongues, death as a solution, the absence of the lover and separation, love surrendered and without reward, the color 'moreno' or dark features. All these connections take us back to the lyrics of Castilian carols and other peninsular lyrics from the Middle Ages (Galician, Catalan, Andalusian and Castilian).

As for the advances in our knowledge of flamenco music, the musician and folklorist Manuel García Matos was a pioneer in the comparative study between the sound and musical forms of flamenco and those present in some traditional types of music in Andalusia and Spain. The works and articles by García Matos came to light in the 50's and 60's of the last century and were published in the compilation book: *Sobre el Flamenco. Studies and notes*<sup>18</sup>. After him, some folklorists and ethnomusicologists, rather few, have carried out other research works, with analyses and transcriptions that show continuities and similarities between some flamenco songs and other traditional musics that, therefore, can be considered as "pre-flamenco"<sup>19</sup>.

More recently, Guillermo Castro Buendía has been publishing for years on the musical origins and historical genesis of flamenco songs, work that he has always carried out with a large amount of historical data and musical sources that he handles in detail<sup>20</sup>.

Regarding the flamenco guitar, the guitarist and researcher Norberto Torres has published competent works on the continuities between the rasgueada tradition of the Spanish guitar, the more classical or academic tradition and the flamenco guitar<sup>21</sup>.

In recent years, the historical precedents of flamenco dance have also been studied, some of which date back to the 16th century. At present times, two related versions of the same pre-flamenco dance tradition can be distinguished: the jaleo dances (popular environments) and the Andalusian theatrical dances (theatrical environments), a school of dance that at the end of the 18th century already presented very "pre-flamenco" steps and elements. The gradual process of 'gypsification' of this tradition, which took place mainly in Andalusia has also been studied<sup>22</sup>.

Our knowledge about the origins and historical precedents of flamenco has advanced a lot in the last three decades. But since we cannot make an exhaustive review of works and authors here, we will end by citing two types of questions, approaches or fields of study related to the subject, in which important advances have been made in recent years.

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<sup>18</sup> García Matos, Manuel. *On Flamenco. Studies and notes*. Madrid, Cinterco, 1984.

<sup>19</sup> We have personally made transcriptions and comparative analyses of pre-flamenco and flamenco saetas and traditional fandangos and flamenco fandangos.

<sup>20</sup> A good overview of his research can be found in the following monograph: Castro Buendía, Guillermo. *Génesis musical del cante flamenco*. Sevilla, Libros con Duende, 2014 (two volumes).

<sup>21</sup> See for example Torres, Norberto. "The strumming style of the baroque guitar and its influence on the flamenco guitar. Fuentes escritas y musicales, siglo XVII". *La Madrugá, Revista de Investigación sobre Flamenco*, no 6, June 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Berlanga Fernández, Miguel A. "Los bailes de jaleo, direct precedents of flamenco dances". *Anuario Musical*, 2016, pp. 179-196.

On the one hand, it is worth mentioning the works that study the key role played by the gypsy people in the origin, conformation and development of flamenco. Bernard Leblond's work *El Cante Flamenco entre las músicas gitanas y tradiciones andaluzas*<sup>23</sup> was an important step forward in studying the Romani people and music in general, and gypsies and flamenco in particular. Although there are nuances to consider in relation to this work of Leblond, its publication marked a turning point and energized the field highlighting the key role played by the gypsies in the emergence and development of flamenco<sup>24</sup>.

The study of the phenomenon of Andalusianism as an aesthetic posture has also contributed to our knowledge of the historical origins of flamenco. The Andalusian fashion prevailed in Spain and Andalusia during the decades prior to the emergence of flamenco (from the last third of the 18th century, the period of *majismo*, a form of popular affirmation following the rejection of everything that the era of Enlightenment in Spain had regarded as traditional). This Andalusianism as an aesthetic posture and fashion remained alive until the mid-nineteenth century, and under new forms, it can be said that it has reached our days. The studies on this phenomenon carried out by Julio Caro Baroja<sup>25</sup> are very revealing in order to focus on the subject. Following him, Celsa Alonso's publications have highlighted the importance of the Andalusian fashion in signature music since the beginning of the 19th century<sup>26</sup>. The knowledge of this Andalusian fashion, so present in the arts and popular manifestations during the decades prior to and contemporary with the emergence and first development of flamenco, helps to historically frame the emergence and consolidation of this singular art.

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<sup>23</sup> Leblond, Bernard. "El Cante Flamenco entre las músicas gitanas y tradiciones andaluzas". Madrid, Cinterco, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> See: Berlanga, Miguel A. "Músicas trashumantes. Music of the gypsy cultures from India to Europe". European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Valle del Nansa (Cantabria, August 2-10, 2008): collaboration with the Santander International Festival. Marcelino Botín Foundation 2008. In: [https://www.academia.edu/2317576/Los\\_rom\\_y\\_la\\_musica.\\_Los\\_gitanos\\_y\\_la\\_musica](https://www.academia.edu/2317576/Los_rom_y_la_musica._Los_gitanos_y_la_musica)

<sup>25</sup> Caro Baroja, Julio. *Ensayo sobre la literatura de cordel*. Madrid, Istmo, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> Alonso, Celsa. *La Canción Andaluza*. Madrid, Ediciones del ICCMU, 1996. *Col Música Hispana, Antologías*, n.3. Torres, Norberto. "The strumming style of the baroque guitar and its influence on the flamenco guitar. Written and musical sources, XVII century". *La Madrugá, Revista de Investigación sobre Flamenco*, no 6, June 2012.



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