

Musicological Conference on the Syriac Musical Tradition - An Eastern Heritage: Exchanges and Influences - Geneva and online around the Globe, 17-21 March 2021

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A comparative analysis of the Mosul, Baghdida (Qaraqosh) and Bartella Syriac Catholic Musical Traditions for Holy Week: Interactions and Influences

Executive Summary

Whereas so-called Syriac Catholic and Orthodox Western traditions (currently practiced in Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Holy Land) have been the focus of work for many researchers and academics, the Eastern Syriac traditions of today's Iraq are the least studied. These are also traditions particularly threatened of disappearing, following the ISIS occupation (2014-2017) and the resulting massive exile of Christians from the cities where they are practiced. Particularly in Mosul, very few Christians made return to their houses and churches.

No systematic listing of chants and melodies, nor transcriptions thereof, was made, nor was any scientific musical analysis about these traditions published. About 10 years ago, first on my own and then supported by the Laus Plena Foundation, I started a systematic recording, listing and transcription exercise for the three Syriac Catholic sub-traditions of Iraq (Mosul, Baghdida, Bartella). I benefitted also from recordings made in the years 1960-1970, and from other existing recordings. A first outcome of the results of this research work and the related analysis, which I am conducting since 2018-2019 in the context of a Master's Degree in Ethnomusicology at the Haute Ecole de Musique of Geneva (HEM), is presented in this paper, with focus on the liturgy, chants and melodies of Holy Week. In this paper, after introducing the context and some general characteristics of the three sub-traditions (Chapter 2), I will present the musical particularities of the Eastern Syriac Catholic Holy Week liturgy with the type of chants and melodies used by the three sub-traditions, their organization and usage, modes, rhythm, structure and other characteristics (Chapter 3, 4 and 5), with a comparative approach (Chapter 6, 7) to evidence the interactions and influences between sub-traditions. The analysis also includes a focus on some theological symbolisms and spiritual expressions which the music carries (review of the "Hasho" mode characteristics) (Chapter 8). Where of note, I have also evidenced some interactions with the Chaldean tradition of Iraq and some influences or differences found with the liturgical rites, melodies and chants of the Syriac Catholic Western tradition of Holy Week.

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Conclusions

We will attempt to draw some final conclusions from our observations and analysis of the three Syriac Catholic Iraqi sub-traditions during Holy Week. As evidenced at the beginning of this paper, further systematic research and analysis will be needed to finally confirm the propositions made.

- 1) The three sub-traditions of Iraq appear to be *truly distinct and specific*, but also *in close interaction and influencing each other*. Today, they are practiced physically very close to each other in the Nineveh Plain. Historically, they were enriched by the tradition of Tikrit – due to a massive affluence of refugees from Tikrit between the 9th and 13th centuries AD – with Baghdad probably having been influenced most by the Tikrit tradition¹. The interactions and influences between traditions are due to a number of factors, such as, as just evidenced, migrations, but also, bishops and priests being assigned to different dioceses and towns; codification of liturgical books in attempts to unify and fix the liturgy; physical proximity between the towns where the sub-traditions are practiced (easier and more frequent exchanges); existence of traditions within the same diocese, etc..

The Syriac Eastern sub-traditions also appear to have been *in contact and exchanging with the Syriac Western traditions*, as we find common melodies between East and West (though generally with variations). As the Syriac Church was not officially divided into the Orthodox and Catholic traditions until 1782, it is obvious that these two traditions have the same recent common sources, and their traditions should have remained very close. A comparative analysis including the Syriac Orthodox tradition of Iraq would be extremely interesting as a further step of analysis – and another further step would then be to include the Chaldean and Assyrian traditions.

- 2) Some (liturgical) books used for Holy Week today are *common* between the Eastern and Western Syriac Catholic traditions, others are *distinct*: the *Panqitho* (Book of Hours for the Holy Week) and the *Kthobo dqourobo* (Book of Mass) are issued for the whole Syriac Catholic Church since 1892, respectively 1922², whereas the *M'ad'dono* (Book of rites) is specific, respectively, to the Eastern and Western traditions (with the three Iraqi sub-traditions using the same *M'ad'dono*)³. The *Beth Gazo* issued for the Western Tradition⁴ is currently used in Iraq, whilst it is known that historically, an Eastern (or several Eastern) *Beth Gazo(s)* were used, but never in printed form. The reconstitution of the Eastern *Beth Gazo(s)* based on the manuscript evidence would be a great support for further research. Discrepancies observed in the practice with regard to liturgical books and the *Beth Gazo* used today are reasons to

¹ See Chapter 2.

² Chelhot, Ignatius George V, "*Panqitho*" Volume 5, op. cit.; Rahmani, Ignatius Ephrem II, "*Kthobo dqourobo*", op. cit..

³ Benny, Qyrillos Emmanuel, "*M'ad'dono*" op. cit. (Iraqi *M'ad'dono*); Chelhot, Ignatius George V, "*M'ad'dono*", op. cit..

⁴ Tappouni, Ignatius Gabriel I, *Beth Gazo*, op. cit..

believe that the Eastern *Beth Gazo* is still shaping the daily practice (See Chapter 6 and 7 in particular).

- 3) The types of chants (*Qolé, Bo 'wotho, 'enyoné, Madroshé, etc.*) found in Holy Week for the three sub-traditions reflect generally those found in the Western Syriac tradition and the whole Syriac Church. All existing chant types used during the year are also used during Holy Week⁵.
- 4) During Holy Week, an *extraordinary richness of chants and melodies are used* in the three sub-traditions, similarly to what is seen in other traditions of the Syriac Church, with many chants and melodies being *unique and specific to that special week, and some melodies being unique to the Eastern traditions*. For the latter, their analysis show that they interacted with the other Iraqi sub-traditions. For melodies specific to Holy Week, we found that some interacted with the Western Syriac melodies (see Chapter 6 in particular). The richness of melodies reflects the fact that Holy Week is the center of the liturgical year in the Christian faith.
- 5) A closer study of the Eastern rite of *Nahira*, the first rite of Holy Week, shows that *few Octoechos melodies are used* in the *Nahira* rite, which is constituted *almost entirely by special and unique melodies* - an indication that the rite and its melodies are very likely more ancient than the crystallization of the Octoechos, and that it preserved its fixed melodies after the Octoechos was established (see Chapter 7)⁶. We also observed from the rite of *Nahira* – mainly as a consequence of the majority of chants of the rite having special and unique melodies – that there is little evidence for the rule, according to which the seventh mode should be used during Holy Week, being observed, and the same is true for the rule according to which the sequence of melodies should be in the same mode. However, when listening to the *Nahira* rite's melodies, there is a perception of harmony among them, and a musically founded background was found to it based on an initial analysis (considering an average voice ambitus of melody, respectively, the natural ambitus range of the melodies)⁷.
While we observe in the Syriac Catholic tradition that the melodies that pertain to a same Octoechos mode are meant to, and generally do "fit together" musically⁸, the fact that the ancient *Nahira* sequence of special and unique melodies (not classified into the Octoechos), communicate a sense and appear to have musical elements of harmony, is an indication that the search for a *musical harmony among the liturgical chants* has quite certainly been an established idea in the Syriac Church even before the Octoechos crystallized, and which the adoption of the Octoechos further consolidated. The current rule that melodies that follow each other should be in the same mode appears to be a confirmation in this sense. Thus, one of the important scopes and function of the Octoechos system in the Syriac Church (even in

⁵ See Chapter 4 and footnote 70 on types of chants.

⁶ Based on my research, the trend for the use of many unique, specific chants and melodies is also found in other rites of Holy Week.

⁷ See Chapter 7.

⁸ We suggested, in agreement with authoritative authors, that there is an interaction between "musical modes" and Octoechos modes (see Chapter 4 and Appendix 2), which we believe helps to ensure melodies "fitting together" from a musical point of view. Also, we observed that when sometimes not perfectly compatible musically, changes of musical modes always have a function in the liturgy, to catch the attention of the listener. This is affirmed based on my own observations throughout years of practice of chanting in the liturgy.

early stages of development)⁹ appears to be precisely *to harmonize chants for the musical fluidity of the liturgy and/or liturgical cycles*, and we can expect to find some musical rules presiding to this harmony. Peter Jeffery suggests¹⁰, with regard to the origins of the Octoechos system for the Churches that use it, that "there probably was a musical relationship of some kind and thus, that the eight modes were a musical classification from the beginning"¹¹, i.e. well before the Octoechos further developed for the Syriac and Byzantine Church into a *liturgical* Octoechos, and for some traditions (such as the Byzantine and the Latin), into a theorized musical system (*musical* or *modal* Octoechos)¹².

As observed by previous researchers, both in the philological and (ethno)musicological fields¹³, and as confirmed by the studies and analyses presented in this paper, we note that Syriac chants and melodies subject to the Octoechos do not appear to be strictly classified into clearly musically defined Octoechos modes, while Octoechos modes refer to musical modes, and chants not subject to the Octoechos also refer to musical modes¹⁴.

- 6) The *Hasho mode* of Holy Week should be distinguished from the *Hasho* melodies (Chapter 4, 7, and Appendix 4). While the *Hasho* mode is a *unique* and *sui generis* mode (with regard to the Octoechos modes, and with regard to Arabic music more generally), used to maintain the general atmosphere of sadness of Holy Week during improvisations and cantillation prayers, the *Hasho melodies* for poetic chants are specific melodies for the Holy Week, and never use the *Hasho* mode.

The *Hasho* mode¹⁵ is an *exceptional* mode, with very *specific musical characteristics*, which *provoke feelings on the performers and listeners*. We suggest that these musical characteristics were chosen consciously by the original composers of the *Hasho* mode, which remarkably, was transmitted orally across centuries, though not linked precisely to any melody. The *Hasho* mode is a *variable* mode: If it has a base tone of sadness, it also expresses great joy and hope.

⁹ Peter Jeffery evidenced that each Christian tradition using the Octoechos "developed independently, employing the eight modal categories in its own way to arrive to its own result". See Jeffery Peter: "The earliest oktoechoi: the role of Jerusalem and Palestine in the beginnings of modal ordering", op. cit., p. 207.

¹⁰ Based on textual concordances among Christian traditions evidencing similar modal assignments. See Jeffery Peter: "The earliest oktoechoi: the role of Jerusalem and Palestine in the beginnings of modal ordering", op. cit., p. 207.

¹¹ Jeffery Peter: "The earliest oktoechoi: the role of Jerusalem and Palestine in the beginnings of modal ordering", op. cit., p. 207.

¹² On the notions of *liturgical* Octoechos and of *musical* or *modal* Octoechos, see Cody, Aelred, "The early History of the Octoechos in Syria", op. cit., p. 89; Kesrouani, Elias, "L'octoechos syriaque", op. cit., p. 78.; Frøyshov, Stig Simeon, "[The Early Development of the Liturgical Eight-Mode System in Jerusalem](https://www.academia.edu/2980443)", Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, 2007, 51, URL <https://www.academia.edu/2980443>, downloaded on 4 June 2020, p. 141; See also Jeffery, Peter, "Oktoechoi", "The new Grove dictionary of Music and Musicians", Volume 18 (out of 29), second edition, Stanley Stadie, Grove, 2001, p. 370-371 – who adopts the terminology "calendric Octoechos" for "liturgical Octoechos".

¹³ Jeannin, Félicien (O.S.B), "Melodies Liturgiques syriennes et chaldéennes, Mélodies syriennes, Introduction musicale", volume I, op. cit.; Jeannin, Félicien (O.S.B), "Melodies Liturgiques syriennes et chaldéennes, Introduction liturgique et recueil de mélodies", volume II, Maison d'Édition Leroux, Paris, Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut, 1928 ; Jeannin, Félicien, "L'Octoechos Syrien", Gorgias Press LLC, Piscataway (NJ, USA), 2010 ; Cody, Aelred, "The early History of the Octoechos in Syria", op. cit., p. 89-119 ; Malacrida, Gianmaria "Forme del Canto Siriaco", op. cit.; Kesrouani, Elias, "L'octoechos syriaque", op. cit., p. 77-91; Aydin, Gabriel, "Tmoné Qinotho, the Modal System of the Syriac Musical Tradition: An introduction to Qinto theory", Conference "The Syriac Musical Tradition – an Eastern Heritage, Exchanges & Influences" Haute Ecole de Musique of Geneva and online around the Globe, 17-21 March 2021; Brock, Sebastian, "What can the manuscripts tell us", Conference "The Syriac Musical Tradition – an Eastern Heritage, Exchanges & Influences" Haute Ecole de Musique of Geneva and online around the Globe, 17-21 March 2021; Jeffery, Peter: "The earliest oktoechoi: the role of Jerusalem and Palestine in the beginnings of modal ordering", op. cit., p. 147-209.

¹⁴ See Chapter 4, 6, 7, 8.

¹⁵ The *Hasho* mode is also used by the Syriac Orthodox Church (Interview with Fr Qeriaqos Tarrachi on 27 July 2021).

Though the analysis that we conducted suggests that a *Christian theological background* probably stands behind the musical characteristics of the *Hasho* mode, the persistence of the attribution of perceptions and feelings to modes, as is also the case for the *Hasho* mode (called, and expressing *sadness* and *passion*), also evidences the persistence in the Syriac tradition of ancient Mesopotamian beliefs regarding the power of music on psyche and emotions¹⁶. This is referred to by the Syriac author Bar Hebraeus remotely when describing physical characteristics of the modes, but more directly when explaining the reasons why different feasts were attributed these modes¹⁷ in the liturgical year, because of what they express¹⁸.

- 7) The *liturgical practices and beliefs* regarding Syriac music and their *attributed spiritual significance* (transmitted by the books and also orally)¹⁹ give precious indications on the *theological background* which presided over the adoption of the Syriac musical Tradition. Chant was considered by the Church Fathers as a *privileged way to dialogue with God* and as a *key factor of communion within and between the earthly and heavenly Church*²⁰. This must be constantly considered when analyzing the Syriac musical tradition, where the liturgy remains essentially chanted²¹. Syriac oral tradition and authors, on their end, appear to give great weight to the chants and melodies *being the carriers of the Word*²², a principle which is said to have influenced the early Syriac composers²³.
- 8) Any analysis of the Syriac Musical tradition must be put into perspective of its *relevant historical, political, social, cultural, economical, theological, liturgical and human context*, which are key to explain the reasons of some of its developments. In particular the *complex*

¹⁶ The theory of the "harmony of spheres", or "doctrine of the ethos", or "theory of numbers", was also known in the ancient Greek world, and more widely in other Far-Eastern cultures. See Farmer, George, "The Music of Ancient Mesopotamia", in Wellesz, Egon (Ed.), "Ancient and Oriental Music. The New Oxford History of Music", Volume I, Chapter V, op. cit., p. 246-249.

¹⁷ Bar Hebraeus, Gregorius, "*Ethicon*" translated into Arabic by Gregorius Paulos Behnam (Archbishop of Baghdad and Basrah), op. cit., Chapter five (About the melodies), p. 134-143; Kesrouani, Elias, "L'Octoeïchos Syriaque", Conference "The Syriac Musical Tradition – an Eastern Heritage, Exchanges & Influences" Haute Ecole de Musique de Geneva and online around the Globe, 17-21 March 2021, p. 1-5.

¹⁸ See Appendix 3.

¹⁹ Such as the fact that the Gospel is not chanted, that there is no exchange of Peace during Holy Week – See chapter 8. Other ordinary gestures during the year being omitted during Holy Week include the fact that the faithful do not kiss the crosses, the Gospel and the hand of the bishops (all reflecting a rupture of the relation to God during this week). See also footnotes 129, 130.

²⁰ Cassingena-Trévidy, François, "Les Pères de l'Eglise et la liturgie", Desclée de Brouver, Paris, 2009, p. 72 ss.

²¹ It must be noted that for hermitic life, the early Fathers, as Bar Hebraeus refers, suggest to abstain from chanting when praying. In fact, when isolated from the community, there is a danger that the melody, which is the mean, distracts from the purpose, which is the connection to God by the Word. This affirms the idea of the superiority of the Word over the melody. See Bar Hebraeus, Gregorius, "*Ethicon*" translated into Arabic by Gregorius Paulos Behnam (Archbishop of Baghdad and Basrah), op. cit., article 1, Chapter four (About chanting), p. 126-134.

²² Bar Hebraeus, Gregorius, "*Ethicon*" translated into Arabic by Gregorius Paulos Behnam, Iraq, 1967, article 1, Chapter four (About chanting), p. 126-134. On the general spirit of early Christians towards music as a sacred expression, see Corbin, Solange, "L'Eglise à la conquête de sa musique", Collection pour la musique dirigée par Roland Manuel, Librairie Gallimard, 1960, "Témoignages du premier Christianisme" (p. 1-28), "La musique est un ministère sacré" p. 29-51.

²³ Syriac compositions are centered on the poetic structure of the text and the rhythm of the Word (sacred text) – See Wachsmann, Klaus, "[Untersuchungen zum vorgregorianischen Gesang](#)", [Veröffentlichungen der gregorianischen Akademie zu Freiburg in der Schweiz](#), Verlag von Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg, 1935, p. 35 and ff., in particular p. 46-47, 59; Bessler, Heinrich, "Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance", Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion MBH, Potsdam, 1931, p. 46-50. See also Schmutz Schwaller, Ivar, "Liturgie und Melodiekomposition Bericht über Arbeiten und Ergebnisse im Vorfeld einer traditionell fundierten Melodiekomposition" (1983), URL https://ivar-schmutz-schwaller.de/?page_id=595, downloaded on 12 March 2021; Schmutz Schwaller, Ivar, "Die Lehre der Melodiekomposition nach alten Orientalische Traditionen der Kirche" (1985), URL https://ivar-schmutz-schwaller.de/?page_id=595, downloaded on 12 March 2021.

history of the Christian Churches and of their interactions play a fundamental role in understanding these developments.

- 9) As the Eastern communities face new decimation due to current situations of war and economical and political uncertainties, it is particularly urgent that an *organized scientific effort of preservation* of this precious heritage is made and supported *firstly in their homelands*, where the oral tradition still subsists with greater authenticity and richness.