

The Musicality of the Coptic Hymns

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1- INTRODUCTION:

According to the “**Coptic Encyclopedia, vol.6, pg.1715**”; The Coptic music can be described as an expression of the continued pride and faith, still alive today among the Copts, as a remnant of an age-old tradition.

This music is monophonic, sung mostly by men in A-cappella style except for some responses chanted by the congregation. Small cymbals and triangle are often used with specific pieces during selected services.

Having survived for over 2000 years, Coptic Hymnody is the oldest musical heritage in the world still in existence to this day. Its tunes are preserved in the hearts of the Egyptian (Coptic) Church by “**Oral Tradition**” alone. Its rhythms and time signatures were deeply rooted in the hearts of, and chanted by, Cantors and Clergymen for generations.

A valuable treasure containing more than 1048 hymns which were handed down from generation to generation by gifted and dedicated Cantors, who were able to memorize this large sum of hymns with their diverse composition forms, scales and cadences, and perform them in 35 different rites and occasions over one calendar year (**see table-1 below**). Ironically, some of these hymns are recited only once a year, yet they were kept unchanged, as is the case with Good Friday hymns when the Church celebrates the crucifixion and burial of the Lord Christ.

Although considered a spiritual inheritance devoted for worship inside the Coptic Church, this musical heritage became a focal point in the eyes of the modern world because of its cultural and historic depths emanating from its pharaonic roots and due to its musical beauty and the sweetness of its compositions.

Many international festival organizers sought after bringing this heritage to their musical festivals as a valuable icon for its historic, spiritual and musical values. Some musical groups like “David Ensemble” of Cairo have gained recognition because of their deeply spiritual and scientifically accurate performance, are often invited to perform these hymns in many festivals worldwide.

TABLE No: (1)

Listing of the number of Ancient Egyptian (Coptic) Hymns recited in various occasions.

(Prepared by the author with the help of Mr. George Atif of the David Ensemble)

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN (COPTIC) HYMNS	Ser #	No. of Hymns	Rubric	Name of Occasion	Total No. of Hymns
	1	104	Divine Liturgy	Congregation hymns (Eucharist Service)	417
	2	209		Priest parts & Deacon's responses (Eucharist Service)	
	3	78		Congregation hymns in Vespers & Matins Prayers	
	4	17		Deacon's hymns – offering of incense	
	5	9		Doxologies	
	6	14	Praises	Vespers' praises	86
	7	72		Midnight praises	
	8	12	Joyful	Feast of Neirouz	289
	9	7		Feast of John the Baptist	
	10	5		Lazarus Saturday	
	11	21		Palm Sunday	
	12	17		Joyous Saturday	
	13	38		Feast of the Resurrection	
	14	18		Feast of the Ascension	
	15	20		Pentecost & the Kneeling service	
	16	5		Feast of the Apostles	
	17	5		Feast of the apostles (washing of the feet service)	
	18	12		Feast of the Cross	
	19	28		Nativity Feast & Paramon (the preparation)	
	20	27		Epiphany	
	21	8		Feast of the Wedding of Cana of Galilee	
	22	11		Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord	
	23	6		Feast of Jesus' Entry into the Temple	
	24	10		Feast of the Annunciation	
	25	6		Feast of Jesus' Entry into Egypt	
	26	7		Feast of Transfiguration	
	27	26		Hymns for the Crowning (Weddings)	
	28	45	Kyahk	The month of Kyahk & the Advent	45
	29	33	Fasts	Nineveh Fast and the Great Lent	55
	30	12		Fast of the Apostles	
	31	10		Fast of the holy Virgin St. Mary	
	32	58	Sad	Pascha week & funerals' hymns	58
	33	15	Misc. Prayers	Blessing of new homes and Ghallilaon oil	15
	34	16		Ordination of Clergy and Consecration of Monks	16
35	67	Mystical	Myroon, Unction of the sick and Baptism	67	
1048		TOTAL No. OF COPTIC CHURCH HYMNS			1048

The owner of this heritage, the Coptic Orthodox Church, had always been preoccupied by making the hymns a worship tool and means for elevating the spirituality of the believers who attend the liturgical services. As a result, many scholars have overlooked the importance of studying the musicality of these hymns which is considered, from a purely scientific point of view, the origin of music sciences in the Middle East, if not in the entire universe.

Historians tell us that the ancient Egyptians had colleges and schools for learning the sciences of music and singing. The best of those schools were found in the metropolis of Memphis (Saqqara), as evidenced by the pictures and writings engraved on the artifacts that show musicians and singers learning the musical profession. The graduates of those schools who excelled were appointed to work in the king's Royal Palace and the homes of higher state officials.¹

In his book **"The Life of Moses the Prophet"**, the Jewish historian Philon of Alexandria wrote that when Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's palace four thousand years ago, he was made to study all sorts of music sciences including its harmonic and rhythmic forms, as well as poetry and rhymes.

When saint Mark the apostle and evangelist (one of the seventy apostles appointed by Jesus Christ) came to Egypt, he established a school of theology in Alexandria and dedicated one of its departments for teaching music so that music would remain a science. He also authored the first Divine Eucharist Service (later attributed to St. Cyril the great)² in which he included all that he received from the Holy Mouth of our Lord Christ, in addition to the hymns which were composed at that time.

St. Mark had received these hymns from Christ the Lord personally in the "Upper Room in Jerusalem" where St. Mark lived with his family. This room was a "rehearsal place" for the disciples to sing praises with the Lord **"And when they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives"** (Mk.14:26).

That way, our Lord established the first "Chorus" in the New Testament for reciting praises. He would recite the psalm in His Sweet Voice, and the disciples would respond saying "Hallelujah".

The Church historian Bishop Josabius of Caesarea wrote quoting "Philon" (who lived in the days of the apostles) describing the act of praising in the days of the apostles: "And so they

¹ Nabil Kamal Botros; "Coptic music in Egypt & its relation to the music of the Pharaohs" - Masters degree thesis – Faculty of Music Education – Helwan University – 1976.

² H.H. Pope Shenouda 3rd "The beholder of God St. Mark the Evangelist" 3rd Edition 1985

did not spend the time in contemplations only, but they also composed songs and praises for God in all kinds of tunes and rhythms and they divided them into different measures”³

The creative composition of hymns however, did not stop at that time, but proceeded further. We find St. Athanasius the Apostolic, the 20th Patriarch (326 - 373 AD) composed several hymns, among which is the wonderful hymn “**O-Mono-genes**” (Oh Only Begotten Son of God) which is recited during the sixth hour every Good Friday. And so, the creativity and hymn composition continued through the first three centuries AD until most of the Coptic hymns were composed in a scientific and spiritual form, to be recited by the saints and all Copts over the years till this day.

2- HYMNS COMPOSITION:

There are two distinct styles of composition used in the Coptic Music for musical presentation; they are the Melismatic and the Syllabic styles.

First: The Melismatic Style:

In this style, a vowel can be sung alone with excessive tunes that go high, low, long, short, continuous or intermittent, before singing the next letter. The origins of this style go back to the music of the pharaohs according to “**Demetrius of Falerone**” (one of curators of the library of Alexandria) who wrote in 297 AD saying “The Egyptian Priests were accustomed to praise their gods through the seven vowels of the alphabet which they sang in succession one after the other, thus producing sweet sounds.”⁴

From the above, it can be seen that Melismatic style was used in the days of the Pharaohs then carried over to the Coptic Church as a style only not as hymns by itself.⁵

It follows that when composing the various hymns, the Church fathers resorted to using Melisma style for several reasons, some of which are:

- **Melisma is for incessant (continuous) praising.** In the Coptic Church, praising the Lord is founded on the important understanding of becoming like the angels who praise God incessantly as the Lord says: “**For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven**” (Matt.22:30).

³ Father Matta El-Meskeen, “**Daily Praises and the Psalms of the Hours**” Studies in the Church Traditions, fourth book, third edition, 1993 – Anba Makar Monastery, the prairie of Shiheet.

⁴ Scholars of the French invasion of Egypt – Description of Egypt, seventh book, “Music and singing in ancient Egypt”, Ttranslation by Zuhair El-Shayeb, page 83.

⁵ Mustafa Atalla and George Kyrillos – Coptic Music – University of Helwan, Graduate Studies Diploma in the music of the Pharaohs, 2006. HEEPF – page 56.

Therefore, Melisma is the most appropriate style for realizing the idea of praising incessantly, for with it, the tunes are increased for one letter before uttering the next.

A good example is the hymn “**Alli-El-Korban**”. It is a 4 minute long hymn, yet only one vowel is sung which is the first letter of the Coptic alphabet, the letter “**Alpha - Ⲁ**”, and is also the first letter of the word “**Alleluia – Ⲁⲗⲗⲏⲗⲟⲩⲓⲁ**”. The hymn starts and ends with that same letter. The rest of the word Alleluia is sung in another hymn that follows during the procession of the Lamb “**Alleluia Fai Pe Pi**”. Sometimes the hymn is not finished to the end depending on how long it takes the priest to say inaudible prayers and perform rubrics. When listening to the 4 minute long hymn “Alli-El-Korban”, which is composed to recite one vowel only, one knows that Melisma style is employed cleverly to make praising the Lord a continuous life to be lived like the angels who praise God without ceasing saying “Holy Holy Holy is the Lord of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your Holy Glory”. Such words were also formulated into many hymns with different tunes and styles, some Melismatic and others Syllabatic.

- **Melisma for Expression.** In the Coptic music heritage, melismatic style was never a “fill-in” to elongate the time spent for praising the Living God !!, on the contrary, upon careful examination of the hymns formulated that way, it was found that Melisma expresses three things:
 - a- It expresses the meanings of the words (lyrics) of the hymn in a direct way and explains them through their tunes.

When listening to a hymn like “Ari-Ho-Ou-Chasf”, which means “Increasingly Exalt Him forever”, and its numerous tunes for about six minutes (the duration of the hymn) saying very few words that can be counted on the fingers of one hand, one could feel the word “increasingly” expressed through “Tonal Exaggeration” (Melisma) and the musical sentences full of Melismatic tune formations. Also the ascension of the tones that start from the middle vocal range to the higher notes, express the action of “Exaltation”.

The expression of the word “Forever” can be felt in the sequential arrangement of various tunes over the entire hymn with their changing modes (scales/maqamat) from Ajam to Rast then Ajam again in the base area then to Iraq mode in the tenor area, and the repetition of the entire section, similar to what happens in the “Sonata formation”.

- b- The use of “Melismatic style” can also express the spiritual mood (or state) of the Church during a specific occasion or over a whole season. Considering the state of meekness experienced during the great lent; Most tunes then are characterized by meekness, hence, melisma can be very limited and may not even exist in some

hymns like the hymn “Ti Hirini” which is considered an example of “Tonal Meekness” and simplicity in tempo. ⁶

However, when melisma is used in other Lent hymns, it is there to express a different type of spiritual state, as in the hymns “Entho-Ti-Shori” and “Share Efnouti”, and the great old hymn “Mighalo” that gets chanted on Lent Sundays and the last Friday of the great Lent. It can also reflect a state of sadness as that of the Church during Paschal week, where its tunes are characterized by sorrow and grief, and where melisma reaches its high tops. On Good Friday the highest summit of these tops is reached starting from the sixth hour to the twelfth hour.

It can also express a state of joy and ecstasy as is the case during festive Church celebrations like Christmas, Epiphany, Resurrection, Pentecost, and other feasts of the Lord. Hymns for these feasts are characterized by joyous tonal ornamentations that show this state of happiness. Here the melisma is combined with these ornamentations in a delightfully active way as can be seen in the “Singary Psalm” (referred to the town of Singar). Recited before the Gospel reading, this tune ends with two groups of “**Alleluia**” with melismatic formations and ornamentations so joyful, that almost take the Psalm outside the boundaries of dignity.

Another expression is for the state of anticipation as is the case during the advent (Coptic month of “**Kyahk**”) when the Church anticipate the birth of the Lord. Tunes at that time are found to be many, recited in continuous succession one after the other, in the evening and midnight praises, where the melisma wanders coming and going, not ending until the break of dawn to be followed by the hymns of the divine liturgy which end in the morning.

There is also the state of supplication when asking for God’s mercy and singing the words “**Kireye Eleyison**” (Lord Have mercy).

Those and many other moods experienced by the Church throughout the “Rubric Year” which consist of about thirty five (35) rubrics, each having its own character. The tunes of every hymn for every occasion or rubric express the emotions of the particular occasion.

- c- Melisma also expresses the spiritual thoughts of the Church during the performance of the hymn. Hymns in the Coptic Church are not merely musical notes placed together aimlessly, but they are composed with purpose. There are times when the words that explain the spiritual thought of the Church are completely silenced, leaving the

explanation process to the music and the rubrics of the occasion, for the rubric in the Coptic Church is not stone-deaf but full of life and carries the thought of the Church in its folds.

An example is “**Alli-El-Korban**”, one of the old hymns of the Church (per the reference made in canon No: 40 of Pope Athanasius the apostolic).

⁶ George Kyrillos – Lecture at the University of Tikhone, Moscow – April 2013

It is recited after the prayer of the hours (Psalms) and just before the procession of the lamb. In this hymn, the tunes and the rubric both together do the explanation. As the priest stands at the door of the sanctuary facing westward towards the congregation, with a Lofafa (napkin) in his hand, and the deacon standing to his right side carrying the wine flask inside of a napkin in his right hand and a lit candle in his left hand to cast light on the Korban (bread) at the time of election of the lamb. The bread is presented to the priest to elect one loaf of bread (Korbana) without blemish, to become the Lamb. Then he turns towards the Altar facing east in seclusion with the Lord, and praying for the believers especially those who offered the oblations and those on whose behalf they were offered whether alive or departed.

During that time he places the “Lamb” on his left hand, and wets the fingers of his right hand and wipes the lamb symbolizing the holy baptism of our Lord Christ in the Jordan.

At this moment, the voices of the deacons begin to rise chanting the tunes of this hymn “Alli-El-Korban” as a group without accompaniment of neither the cymbals nor the triangle. All of these actions and chants paint the journey of our Lord from the time of His baptism in the river Jordan to the moment of His holy resurrection, at which point the entire congregation sings the hymn of “**Alleluia Fai Pe Pi**” (This the day which the Lord Has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it).

The tunes flowing from the mouths of the deacons, slowly and with dignity at the beginning of the hymn, having a time signature of 3/4 representing the blessed steps of Jesus Christ as He moves from Galilee to the Jordan, and the water on the priest fingers with which he wipes the Lamb on his left hand symbolizing the holy baptism, all of these tunes and actions are carefully established by the Church to express these thoughts and meanings, in spite of the absence of any spoken words. The responsibility of explaining the meaning and formulating the thought becomes a tonal/rubrical responsibility. Without melisma, it could not be realized.

- **Melisma has an effective musical value:**

This great value inspired other music composers from outside the Church to make music that has tonal exaggeration (melisma). Perhaps the musical formation known as “El-Door” (The Number) confirms this idea because the second part of the “Door” usually contains much “Aaahaat” (chanting the word “AH” several times in melisma style).

This part is called “The Hunk” which is a word that expresses the singing style of the main part of the “Door” when the singer and the choir alternate singing the “Aaahaat”.

If the melisma did not possess this musical value, it would not have been used by musicians in their composed songs. Many singing compositions were filled with

melismatic tunes. **“Mohammed Abd-El-Wahab”**⁷ is considered one of many who realized the value of this melisma and understood how does the Church use it cleverly; hence they used it in a similar fashion. Thus, when Abd-El-Wahab composed his beautiful piece **“Marreit Ala Beit El-Habayeb”** (I walked by the home of the beloved) and came to where it says **“Weqeft Lahza Haneyya”** (I stopped for a heartwarming moment), he wanted, by using melisma, to express that this pause, while the yearning and passion filling his musical heart and mind, made it feel like a brief moment although it was not that brief at all. In fact he stopped and his feet were frozen to the ground and did not leave the place until his eyes and his heart were nourished by the surrounding aroma of his beloved.

In spite of the fact that the Arabic word **“Weqeft”** (stopped) has no vowels (only consonants) and does not lend itself easily to malisma, and although the basic rules of composition do not encourage the tonal exaggeration with a consonant, yet, Abd-el-wahab found himself regrettably forced to challenge this convention and break the rules by placing heavy melisma on the first letter of this word which is a consonant, aiming to illustrate and express that this brief and short moment felt so long where he went through his good memories with the beloved though only a scent of where that beloved dwelt.

This is what happened with the hymn **“Alli-El-Korban”** as it extends on the first letter of the word Alleluia. The Church who inspired Abd-El-Wahab with the idea of melisma, did not challenge the well-known rule however, since this first letter of Alleluia **“Alpha”** is a vowel not a consonant.

There are many more examples that show how famous musicians and composers have used melisma in their songs for its wonderful musical value.

- **Melisma to place the individual in a state of clarity:**

Outside the Church man lives in noisy, restless, distorted, struggling world. Upon entering the Church, there begins a process of clarifying the mind and soul. The Church tries earnestly to relieve the person from the burden of these internal struggles through the quietly flowing tunes of melisma. In these tunes, the Church provides more music

than words so that one is not burdened by concentrating on attempts to understand their meanings, and the mind is cleared completely from the flood of the worldly noises.

⁷ Prominent Egyptian musician, singer and composer (1907 – 1991)

Only then more words can be introduced when a clear mind is available for good concentration and understanding.

At the moment of entering the Church, a person could be like a cloudy glass of water filled with sediments and impurities clouding the clarity of the pure water. The Church waits patiently until all clouds of impurities sink to the bottom out of the view, and the melisma in this case becomes the agent that speeds up this purification process due to its superior ability to calm the soul.

- **Melisma enhances contemplation and free flow of thoughts:**

And that is why the Coptic Church resorts to this style of music to give the believers the chance to contemplate and free their thinking which may have stiffened by various worries and nervous pressures, allowing it to be lifted upwards carried on the wings of this musical offering. The spoken words most often like spiritual information in need for concentration of the brain, while the melisma is like information-less tunes that lift up the heart in a devotional journey of contemplation. Such period of devotional thinking will likely lead to understanding matters of divine and heavenly nature, and enables the mind to paint better pictures of the spiritual images than what sermons or direct instructions could present. Melisma contributes to a large extent in loosening the bonds that bind the mind and hinder the imagination. A story about a little child in Sunday school may illustrate this concept:

The Sunday school teacher was telling the class about the angel. A beautiful, pure luminous heavenly creature that has wings and the child started to imagine and paint in his own mind a picture for this beautiful creature. Developing the picture using his own

imagination, the child became satisfied with the picture he created in his mind for the angel. When the teacher wanted to illustrate what the angel looks like, he showed the class a painted picture of an angel then the little child cried. The teacher asked him why he cries, the child said: The picture I had in my mind is not like the one you showed us, but very much more beautiful.

- **Melisma; as a substitute for musical instruments:**

When our fathers the apostles evangelized the Gospel throughout the world, they chose to use the rites of the Jewish Synagogue in which all singing and chanting was

Acapella style, but the rites of the Tabernacle which was known to the Hebrews by using all musical instruments, was not preferred by the apostles when

establishing the Church rites. This choice was confirmed by rule (Canon) No:80 of Clement of

Alexandria that prohibited musical instruments from entering the Church disallowed their use therein.

Knowing that the human larynx is the best and most accurate musical instrument to cleverly sing the microtone, the Church did not resort to using the musical instrument, being of lesser quality than the natural God given larynx. This also helped the general Church, East and West, to sever all relations to other worships, in which, musical instruments formed a fundamental element in the idol worshipping celebrations. The prevention of their use in the Church was in order to keep the believers from remembering the evil ways of idol worship and concentrate their attention on the Divine power of the new words.

For these reasons and many others, the Church forbid the use of musical instruments during the liturgy, and because instruments produced tunes only not words, the Church resorted to the Melisma style as a substitute for the absence of the instruments in the liturgy, hence, it did all the “music only” verses and refrains. That being nice and producing sweet sounds, the use of Melisma extended beyond doing “music only” parts and became extensively used in the “body” of many hymns, to the extent that the count of the words (Lyrics) of some of the long hymns that last for about 30 minutes, do not exceed the number of the fingers of one hand.

From the preceding, we can summarize that Melisma no doubt, had originated from the pharaohs and was adopted by the Coptic Church – as a style but not as music – in order to attain continuous “Angelic Praise” that never faints nor ceases. The Church improved it and molded it into shapes and forms that serve the spiritual concepts and used it to express the moods of the occasions and explain the words, as well as to clarify the minds and hearts from the many distortions imposed by the outside world and enable contemplation and devotion. In addition, it replaced musical instruments, the use of which was forbidden in the holy liturgy.

This melismatic style transcended later to the Arabic music in the musical singing form known as “Door”, and from that it was used in the older songs until it reached the contemporary light songs.

The graph below illustrates the transition of Melisma from the days of the Pharaohs to the present.

Melisma In The Music Of The Pharaohs
(ADDING TUNES ONTO THE SEVEN VOWELS)
Considered the basis of Melisma in the whole world



Melisma In The Coptic Music
Was transferred to it from the Pharaohs and developed by the Coptic Church to be used to; serve the spiritual thoughts and concepts, express the moods of the Church in different seasons, explain the words, purify the minds from external world distortions, allow a chance for devotion and contemplation, and replace the use of musical instruments in the holy liturgy.



Melisma In The Arabic Music
Was taken from the Coptic music and appeared clearly in the "Door form" as the "Hunk", from there it was adopted by the Old Egyptian Songs



Melisma In Contemporary Light Songs
Was acquired from the Old Egyptian Songs but in a simplified form

Second: The Compact⁸ (Syllabic) Style:

While the Melismatic style was used by the Egyptian (Coptic) Orthodox Church to give the believers present in the service a chance for understanding and contemplation, the compact style (called Syllabic) was introduced by the Church to deliver a large amount of spiritual and faith related information in the least amount of time possible. Whereas in the Melismatic style the objective was to place many tonal variations onto a single vowel, the “Syllabic” style on the other hand is where the church purposely gives one tone for every letter of a word, and sometimes two or more letters are combined into one note. The Church uses this compact style with its fast tempo and quick rhythms to present and or inject many concepts, beliefs, spiritual stories, psalms, and Doxologies, through a simple tune usually void of rhythmic or modal changes and has no tonal ornamentations to speak of. Hymns using this compact (Syllabic) style, therefore, are of such simplicity that allows all believers present in the Church to recite them accurately, thus enabling all to participate in this musical fellowship of praise.

This style of music received acceptance in other artistic circles outside the Egyptian Church, and stretched to be applied on songs inside and outside the country (Egypt), and is mostly known as **RAP** (Rhythmic African Poetry), an expression used by African Americans since the 1960’s.

As the 2000 years old Egyptian (Coptic) Church hymns inspired musicians of the world with the Melismatic style of Pharonic roots, the Church also inspired them with the compact (Syllabic) style. Although it became known in the Bronx district of New York in the USA around the beginning of the 1970’s, the name of this style (RAP) clearly indicates that it originated in Africa where Egypt is located. Also as with the compact Syllabic style and its quick and energetic rhythms, we see the Church injects all religious concepts and stories through a simple tune, we find that in the RAP music the performers usually express themselves and their dissatisfaction with life’s difficulties and hardships.

The free encyclopedia “Wikipedia” wrote that some RAP singers concentrate with their songs on the spiritual or religious side, and that the Christian RAP at present is considered the most commercially successful type of religious music, while the “five Percent Nation” – an Islamic religious group – were found in the RAP music more than any other religious group. Artists like Rakim, Busta Rhymes and Nas had much success in spreading their belief.

It is noted that all of them have constant and unchanging style in singing, which could be boring to the audience if they listen to the RAP music with its intense poetry recited on a constant beat within a short time frame. The Egyptian Church however, had the wisdom to mix between both styles, the Syllabic and the Melismatic in its successive hymns, so that

⁸ **The Compact (Syllabic) style** is a style in which the Church purposely assigns one letter of the alphabet (sometimes more letters) to one musical note.

if you listen during one of the Church rites to a Syllabatic style hymn, the following hymn would be in the Melismatic style, and so on.

In the rite of mid-night praise, it starts with the hymn **“ten thino”** (Arise O children of the light to praise the Lord of powers), which is formed in the melisma style, followed by a number of **“Stikhons”** (poetry or singing verses) which are done in the Syllabatic style, and beginning with the verse **“Hopos ari ehmot nan”** (that He may grant us salvation of our souls)... and so on, for the four **“Hosat”** (Canticles), beginning by the first canticle that starts by **“Toti afhos enje Moisis”** (then Moses praised), which tells the story of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea and their deliverance from Pharaoh’s chariots, chanted in a Syllabatic style, then followed by the **“Lobsh”** (Ending) of the first canticle **“Khen O Shot”** (with the split the waters of the sea split, and the very deep became a walkway) in the melismatic style.

Then comes the second canticle **“O-onh evol em-Epchois”** (give thanks unto the Lord for He is good) which is compact hymn for psalm #135 of David the prophet, followed by its ending **“Maren O-onh evol”** (let us give thanks to Christ) in the melismatic style. And so on, the alternation and variation between Syllabatic and Melismatic for the balance of the canticles and their endings and all the remainder of the rite of mid-night praise, without boredom in this rather lengthy rite lasting for four hours with melismatic and syllabatic hymns.

Some people consider that there is a third style of composition which is the **“Neumatic”** in which a single letter is sung with two or three notes either ascending or descending.

3- THE SCALES / MODES (MAQAMAT):

The musical “Maqamat” (scales) with their intervals and measures are what create the specific taste or flavor of any people’s music according to their cultures and backgrounds. Western music is characterized by limited scales either major or minor with its two kinds, the melodic and harmonic.

The music of Sudan is characterized by the pentatonic scale. The Arabic music is characterized by numerous scales having $\frac{1}{4}$ tone(s).

Scales for the Coptic hymns are somewhat similar to the Arabic scales for they both have numerous scales, but the Coptic music has rather subtle differences regarding certain musical particulars. These differences become apparent upon listening to it, and are more pronounced when analyzed musically. The reason being that the Coptic music has what is called **“Microtone”** which is analogous to the $\frac{1}{4}$ tone in the Arabic music, but is higher (sharper) by a very small amount called **“comma”**⁹. This tiny bit of increase gives a subtle

⁹ The “Comma” is a very small distance (difference in frequency) which can only be determined mathematically. It is the difference between two notes that produce synonymous sounds Enharmonic (like “D sharp” and “E flat”). Mathematically speaking, there is a very small difference between these two notes called “Comma”. This difference comes from splitting the distance between two notes into two halves, one half is plain (Diatonic) and the other half is

difference in the hearing taste compared to its parallel in the Arabic music, and certainly a major difference compared to the diatonic distances in the western music.

The Coptic music scales (Maqamat) are of a heptatonic formation, either natural diatonic as the case with the major and minor scales where distances between the notes are either full or half tones or the distances between some notes at $\frac{3}{4}$ of a tone, which is called the middle interval.

This kind of distancing made it theoretically possible to divide the musical scale into 24 quarters (Microtone) resulting in the creation of more than one hundred scales. The musical structure of these scales is composed of the succession of two genders “**Guens**” either connected or separated by a distance, and each gender consists of four notes.

A group of researchers specializing in music and computer conducted an experiment proving that ancient Egyptians were the first to discover the “**Pentatonic Scale**” that was used in the old kingdom, and they developed it at the start of the modern kingdom to the “**Heptatonic scale**” seven note scale of Amino, and that they were the first to know the music and the musical scales, and that Pythagoras had lived in Egypt for 21 years learning all he could about the Egyptian music arts. The Greeks also wrote about the excellence and perfection of the ancient Egyptian music, and that the Coptic music is the historical successor of the music of the Pharaohs, and it was the founder of the basis, the rhythms and the rules for the music of other nations.

Many of the Arabic music scales were taken from the Coptic music scales then the Persians gave the scales and tunes Persian names like “**RAST, DOKAH, SIKAH, etc**” and these names are still in use at present. One of the researchers is studying the possibility of renaming these scales by their original names if they can be found, or giving them Coptic names to suit the nature of the occasions when these hymns and scales are recited.

What distinguishes the scales of the Coptic hymns from their Arabic counterparts is that with the Arabic scales, the composer is usually tied to the rule that he has to rest back to the tonic base of the scale; hence, the endings are usually anticipated. However, the Coptic scales give chance for liberation from conforming to this tradition of going back to the pivotal note, thus enriching and giving more color to the formation process.

Some Coptic hymns are distinguished also by tough negotiations and scale transposition within the same hymn. This is contributed to the cleverness of the composer on the one hand, and to the diversity of the Coptic scales on the other. At the end of the hymn it is

normal to see a non-conformance to the tradition of going back to the original (starting) scale as is customary in other compositions.

colored (Chromatic). The Chromatic half (D – D sharp) is larger than the Diatonic half (D – E flat) by a value equal to $\frac{1}{9}$ of the complete tone and is called “Comma”. This very small difference is more noticeable in string instruments. Comma is the term used to identify the difference between the complete major distance (C – D) with a ratio of $\frac{9}{8}$, and the incomplete major distance (D – E) with a ratio of $\frac{10}{9}$, and the relation between these two ratios is $\frac{81}{80}$.

It is also normal to find in many hymns what is called “scales transposition” that is the style of changing the scale on the move, as is the case with the hymn “*Kata Ni Khoros*”. Such technique was copied from the Coptic music by some prominent musicians (e.g. Sayed Darwish¹⁰ & Abd-El-Wahab) in order to enrich their music, and its implementation was considered to be a sign of a rich and superior musical composition.

4- RHYTHMS AND BEATS

Rhythms and beats in the Coptic Church are very limited and very simple, for the Church does not depend on extravagance of the rhythms or tempos while reciting the praises. It is known that violent beats have an effect on the body (flesh) but not on the spirit, and intensifying the beats and tempo in the musical work is usually a sign of shallow musical work that is void of true musical and spiritual values.

We notice in the famous and well recognized international classical music works that instruments used for keeping the tempo are few and the roles they play are limited, whence a large orchestra may only have a couple of Tympanis, one large Drum, a Triangle and a Gong so that they are only between 5 – 10% of the total instrument count in a large orchestra reaching 120 instrument.

As the role of these instruments is very limited - total number of bars played may not exceed 600 in the entire piece – so is the case with Coptic Church hymns where the job of the percussion instruments (Cymbals and triangle) is very precisely defined.

Not only the number and role of these instruments are reduced, but also the types of beats and time signatures were limited. So, only the following time signatures are allowed in the Coptic Church:

(2 / 4) , (4 / 4) , very little (3 / 4) , and the free style (Adlibitum).

However, changes and transformations of rhythms and speeds in the same piece are seen in many hymns.

About the Time Signatures used in Coptic hymns, H.G. Bishop Makarius wrote (quoting an unpublished research by Mr. Emad Sami):

“Time signatures used in Coptic hymns can be summarized as follows:

1 - According to the western notation methods we find that the Copts have mainly used the time signatures (2 / 2 & 2 / 4) as seen in the hymns “Alleluia Je Ef-mev-ee” & “Tai Shori” and the “Intercessions”

2- Some hymns used the time signature 4 / 4 like “Rejoice O Mary”

3 - The time signature 3 / 4 and the like were nonexistent, but it is noted that all the hymns, which are accompanied by cymbals & triangle, do have a time signature. But those hymns which are not accompanied by these instruments or where these

¹⁰ Famous Egyptian musician/singer, considered the father of Popular Egyptian music (1892-1923)

instruments are not allowed, would usually have a broken time signature. The reason for this could be attributed to either the lack of experience on the part of the Cantors when adding ornamentation to the hymn and end up breaking the rhythm, or when catching their breath which can happen in hymns that are sung solo such as Pascha week hymns. This could be the reason for a feeling of discomfort among listeners.

4- There are few Hymns that have no time signature to be broken, and could not be used with any rhythm. These hymns are usually performed solo, although there is a claim by some that these hymns can be transcribed and annotated onto music sheets.”

¹¹

It was later found out that 3/4 time signature is used in a few Coptic hymns such as the hymn “*Ari Pa Mev-ee*” (Remember me O Lord when You come in your Kingdom) recited at the start of the 9th hour of Good Friday just before reciting “*The Faithfulness of the Right-Hand Thief*”, also the Hymn “*Kyrie-Eleyson*” that precedes the procession of the 12th hour of the same day, and the overture of the hymn “*Alli-El-Korban*”.

It was also established that the hymns which are not accompanied by percussion instruments, or where the use thereof is prohibited, do not necessarily have a broken beat because there are hymns that have perfect beat but not accompanied by percussion, e.g. the hymn “*Ere Po Esmo EthOwab*”, and other Hymns containing sections that are free of rhythm (Addlibitum).

Although the Middle Eastern music that surrounds the Coptic music is very rich in its complex beats and rhythms (about 48) including: “*Medawwar*”, “*Mohaggar*”, “*Masmoudi Kebeer*”, “*Nokht*”, “*DorHindy*” to name a few, yet the Coptic Church was able to attract the world’s attention to its music by the simplicity of its rhythms and beats and the diversity of rhythms the same hymn.

The music scholar Newland Smith wrote: “The composer of the Coptic hymn did not bind himself with the musical rules and basics for beats and rhythms, but was rather bound by the spiritual meaning of the hymn which he expressed through his own feeling”¹²

As a rebuttal of the above, one of the researchers said:¹³

- 1- Since the beginning, hymns with which man praised his Creator, have always been the most eloquent, strongest, and the most adhering to the rules of music science. They were the role model followed by other composers.

¹¹ H.G. General Bishop Makarius – Introduction to Coptic Music – its origins, characteristics and wealth. – Coptic Orthodox Episcopate of El-Menia & Abu Korcas. Preparatory print 2010 page 258.

¹² Fr. Matta El-Meskeen – The daily Praise and prayers of the hours – page 136

¹³ George Kyrillos – Coptic Hymns, its music and spirituality” first printing 2001, published by St. Mark institute for Coptic History Studies – page 136.

The scholars of the French conquest of Egypt in their book “Description of Egypt”, wrote about the ultimate vitality, scientific power and the extreme supremacy of the hymns the prophet Moses sang after crossing the Red Sea, and those which he recited shortly before his death. They said;¹⁴

“Moses who received the knowledge and sciences of the Egyptians as if he were the son of Pharaoh himself, must have composed those hymns according to the principles he was taught, and with the same artistic sensation which he must have acquired from the beautiful poetry and songs of the Egyptians and which deserved to be recited and sung in the temples, where he could taste it himself”.

They also said:¹⁵

“One wonders now, if that genius which dictated such beautiful poetry onto Moses could also inspire him with beautiful expressive singing inspired by the power of sensation, since he was deeply knowledgeable in all branches of ancient Egyptian musicology?”

Judging by what those scholars wrote, it is clear that Egypt knew the rules of poetry, music composition and formation, rhythms and beats since more than 5000 years ago.

- 2 - The first school of theology established by St. Mark the apostle, which was told about in the history books as being an important and highly regarded institution until the middle of the 5th century AD, such that the chair of its Dean was considered the second ranking post in Coptic Egypt following that of the patriarch, and for a long time, many Popes and Bishops were selected and elected from among those Deans, and many of the great Popes of Alexandria who were known for their vast knowledge and great zeal, like Alexandros & Athanasius & Dionosius & Cyril & Dioscorus¹⁶, were among its graduates; That great school taught music in addition to theological studies.

It is most logical to expect that a school of such status would teach music according to solid basis and rules. It is also believed that all rules of music in the world must have come from the rules taught in that school, and that the basics and rules for the subjects of “Harmony” and “Counterpoint” were known in that school.

St. Athanasius the apostolic the 20th Pope of Alexandria (326-373 AD) and one of the great saints who graduated from Alexandria school of theology said: “..... as when a person hears from a distance a harp with many and different strings, and likes the

¹⁴ Scholars of the French conquest – Description of Egypt – 7th book – music and singing of the ancient Egyptians – translation by Zuhais El-Shayeb – page 91

¹⁵ Scholars of the French conquest – Description of Egypt – 7th book – music and singing of the ancient Egyptians – translation by Zuhais El-Shayeb – page 93

¹⁶ The Coptic History Committee –Essence of the history of Christianity in Egypt – 3rd printing 1996 – page 108

harmony in its tunes – i.e. the sound is not composed of low, medium and high notes only – but all the strings give their sounds together in harmony. If a clever musician tunes his Harp intelligently and makes the high notes agree with the lows and the middle notes with all the other notes in harmony such that the resulting sound is all like one tune, so did God’s wisdom hold the universe like a Harp, and made what is in the air in harmony with what is on earth, and what is in the sky harmonize with what is in the air, and united the part with the whole..... “.

When he uses phrases like **“The harmony of its tunes”** and **“all the strings give their sounds together in harmony”** and **“the resulting sound is all like one tune”**, one can tell that Pope Athanasius was knowledgeable in the subject “Harmony of sounds”, which can be verified by his musical abilities and personality since he composed some of the most enriching Church hymns, including **“O Monogenis”**.

- 3 – A number of researchers analyzed many Coptic hymns and found them to be in accordance with solid musical rules, basics, beats and rhythms, and that their tonal shapes and formations are divided into correct musical sentences each containing eight measures (bars). The sentence is divided in two musical phrases, the first phrase ends with an **“interrupted cadence”** while the second phrase ends with a **“perfect cadence”**¹⁷ and the latter constitutes the ending of a healthy musical sentence resting on the base note ¹⁸ (Tonic), then another typical sentence starts.

This is the correct scientific shape which was followed by famous world musicians in their numerous musical works guided by the Coptic music.

They also found out that some musical sentences which end with Corona (elongated last note), consist of a number of measures shorter than the actual length of the correct sentence but having the same overall length. From a musical standpoint, this gives some sort of musical balance. It was used by many world musicians in

¹⁷ **Cadences** are an important feature in the formation of music and hymns. They are not intended only for concluding the entire hymn but also for concluding musical sentences individually. They are of many kinds, each of which gives a certain sense of the preceding sentence. Some of the kinds are:

- + **Half close** which gives a sense of indecisive ending.
- + **Transitional ending**, used for switching from one scale (Maqam) to another.
- + **Imperfect (incomplete) cadence**, used to give a sense that ending is not yet, because it is only a small part within the hymn.
- + **Religious cadence (Plagal)** and is used for endings of musical sentences in religious songs and Church liturgical services.
- + **Interrupted cadence** which gives the listener a feeling to expect a perfect cadence ending, but it diverges taking the listener to an imperfect ending.
- + **Figurative ending** which contains tonal ornamentations
- + **Perfect cadence** which is used at the end of the main sentences and at the end of the hymn.

¹⁸ The base note is the first note of the musical ladder (scale) and the scale is usually named by the name of its first note for its importance in music composition and for the audible comfort felt when the music rests on that note. The composition usually starts with the same note.

some of their works when they placed a Corona above the last note at the end of the musical sentence to achieve this balance.

They also found numerous “scalar transpositions”, i.e. changing the scale in the middle of the hymn, as seen in the hymn “*Kata-Ni-Khoros*” and the hymn “*O-oniyatow*”. These transpositions were adopted from the Coptic music by some musicians like “Sayed Darwish” and “Abd-El-Wahhab” in order to enrich their compositions.

They also found in these hymns some changes in the Tempo so that the beat is not constant from the beginning to the end of the hymn, but changes from time to time as necessary. Some hymns, or sections thereof contain free sentences (Addlibitum) that do not follow any tempo.

The change in Tempo and beats¹⁹ is also a style which allowed the Coptic music to occupy the rank of a “teacher” among the music of the nations, making their music colorful with the different beats, and getting out of the realm of “musical naivety” and be elevated to higher levels imitating the Coptic music. As well as speed changes within the hymn that became a distinguished characteristic of Classical music, after being copied from the Coptic music. We notice that the composers of great works (Symphonies, Concertos, Sonatas, etc.) give the first movement a different speed from that of the second (which is usually slow), and of that of the third movement (which is usually fast).

Therefore, it is very logical to conclude that the Coptic music has basis, rules, beats and rhythms, is the first in the world to establish such principals for the music of the world since it was taught to the scholars at the school of theology in Alexandria.

5- THE FORMS (FORMATS):

Formats of the Coptic hymns illustrate the extent of the musical sense and the artistic awareness, which the early Church fathers were blessed with. The forms are numerous and diverse. Some are simple and others are complex. The hidden truth is that lack of awareness of these forms by deacons and cantors, results in a mutilated performance, such that listeners cannot ascertain the beginning of one part from the following part in the form, leading at the end to a maze of tunes, in

¹⁹ Beats (Dhoroob) are the rhythms for the oriental music. They consist of a number of accented beats, repeated throughout the hymn, having different strengths. A full strong beat is called “Dom”, and a sharp weak beat is called a “Tek”, with moments of calculated silence that may appear between them. These rhythms are given Persian or Turkish names like “Masmoodi”, “Samaai teqeel”, “Dareg” etc., and they are usually enforced in a recital by the use of percussion instrument(s). In the Coptic Church, a pair of cymbals perform this job, and to give some shine to the joyful hymns by the clanging sound. These are called “Polyrhythms”.

which, both the performers and the listeners alike, are lost, while being slapped by the loose parts of the form here and there.

One of the researchers is of the opinion that there is a special importance which must be placed upon making the deacons and the cantors understand the musical form of the hymn.

This importance is based on the following reasons:²⁰

- 1 – Making the deacon and the cantor aware of the hymn’s features and its partitions, thus recognizing the parts that repeat from new ones.
- 2 – It makes the deacons and the cantors praise with understanding, so that the hymn is performed with clarity regarding the partitioning they learned, and their understanding is reflected on the performance. Then the prayer is done with the spirit and the mind together, as the philosopher of Christianity St. Paul the apostle said.
- 3 – Understanding the form contributes effectively in the speed of learning the hymn from the teacher. Thus hymn lessons are not much of a chore to the learners due to concentration on learning tunes after tunes by heart, with no time separations between parts, especially when some of them prefer not to read the music notation for the hymns, either because they do not know how, or for maintaining its original identity through oral tradition.
- 4 – Understanding and absorbing the musical form of a hymn makes it easy to select the proper style of performance (Antiphonal between two groups North & South, or responsorial, or group or Solo).

According to Egon Wilisch, the forms can be classified into two types: Poetic forms and Musical forms.²¹

FIRST: THE POETIC FORMS:

This is based on the “*Stikhon*” unit (quarter), on which most forms are based. It consists of 4 sentences separated by a colon “:” , each sentence is made up of a number of articulations some have a strong accent others have weak accent, according to poetry presentation rules in the language of the hymn. This system exists in most hymns.

Some of the most known Poetic forms in the Coptic music are:

²⁰ George Kyrillos – The use of Ancient Egyptian hymns in composing and directing contemporary Egyptian musical compositions – Masters Degree Thesis – The Academy of Arts – Higher institute of Arabic Music – 2013 – page 36

²¹ Nabil Kamal Boutros – Master’s degree Thesis – previous reference – page 189

The Psali: Is similar to poetry (rhyme) consisting of many “Stikhons” could be as many as 24, each stikhon has four sentences. Each stikhon usually starts with a letter from the alphabet (Coptic, Arabic, or Greek, according to the language of the Psali) and arranged in the same order as the letters in the alphabet. Of the most known Psalis, is the Psali Batos for the three young men the saints Cedrak, Mishak, & Abednego, which was written in Greek.

The word “Psali” is of Greek origin, derived from the book of Psalms, which is called “Psalms” in Greek, and is a synonym to the word “Praise”.

A research about the Psali was filed by “Yassa Abd-El-Messih” (1898-1958) and published in the magazine of the Coptic Studies Institute by El-Nagda Press, Cairo, 1958 – page 85.

The Theotokeya: *“Theotokeyas are praises for the Holy Virgin St. Mary the “Theotokos” (i.e. the mother of God). They contain explanations, contemplations in the old symbols, and applying the prophecies on the new conditions of the Master and using them as a reference to the virginal pregnancy, and the birth of the Lord of Glory and his incarnation, etc. They are attributed to St. Athanasius the apostolic the patriarch. It was said that a man from Kurmus who became a monk in the monastery of St. Makkar in the prairies of Shiheet and later was declared a saint, is the one who composed their music.”²²*

“It is assured that the first and second “Sherat” (Hails to Mary), recited as the ending of Saturday “Theotokeya”, are part of the fourth sermon given by Pope Cyril the first, the 24th pope of Alexandria (412- 444 AD), also known as the pillar of faith, at the Church of the Holy Virgin St. Mary in the city of Ephesus, between the 23rd and the 26th of June, 431 AD, after the declaration by the third continental assembly of the saints in Ephesus in 431 AD; that the Holy Virgin is in truth the Mother of God.”²³

The Teotokeya is one of the “Poetic Forms” used for praising during mid-night praises. It consists of Rhythmic pieces in Coptic that do not necessarily rhyme (except a few Theotokeyas). There are seven Theotokeyas in total, one for each day of the week. Three of them are known as the “Adam” Theotokeyas , for Sunday, Monday & Tuesday, and the other four are called “Batos” for Wednesday, Thursday, Friday & Saturday.

The Adam Theotokeys are characterized by being short with somewhat joyful tunes because they are recited starting on Sunday and **“the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord”** (John 20:20). The Batos Theotokeyas however, are characterized by being long, exhibiting meekness and submissiveness, because they are recited starting on Wednesday, when Judas Iscariot made the agreement with the Jews to

²² Ibn-Kebar (14th century AD) – “A Lantern in the darkness for explaining the Service”- Vol. II – The Mina Printing Establishment – First print – 1998 – page 118

²³ Athanasius, a monk from the Coptic Church – Glossary of the Ecclesiastic Nomenclature – part I, 2001, first printing – page 271

deliver the Lord Christ, then Thursday when Christ was arrested, then Friday when Christ was crucified, and Saturday when He was buried.

The Theotokeya is composed of a number of parts, could be as many as 15 parts as in the Sunday Theotokeya, each part is comprised of two sections, each section has a number of "Stikhons", and each stikhon has four sentences. There may be a constant refrain at the end of each part or each section which may have one stikhon or more. Sometimes parts could be followed by melismatic style hymn, e.g. the hymn "*Shere-ni-Maria*" that covers all the stikhons of the first section of the seventh part in Sunday Theotokeya, and the hymn "*Simouti*" that covers two stikhons of the second section of the same, yet all the theotokeyas are of the Syllabatic style.

The Doxology:

"Doxa" is a Greek word that means "Glory". The Doxology is a rhymed form used for praising to give glory to the Lord Christ, the Virgin Mary and the rest of the saints. There are two types; either Batos or Adam. Any one of these two types can be recited in any day of the week. However, the tune of the Batos doxologies contained in the book of the Annual Holy Psalmodeya, changes five times during the rubric year. The tune for the Adam Doxologoes contained in the doxologies book does not change during the year.

A Doxology consists of a number of Stikhons, each having four sentences, and they are all recited in the Syllabatic style.

The Hoas:

"Hoas" is a Coptic word that means "a praise" or "praising", and is also called "Canticle". In the rite of mid-night praise of the Coptic Church, there are four Canticles which are recited the same way throughout the year regardless of the occasion in the Church.²⁴

The first Hoas (Canticle) is the praise which Moses the prophet sang with the people of the Lord while his sister Miriam conducted, and it is a very old praise that spread east and west in all the Christian rites. This 1st Hoas and the 3rd Hoas (the praise for the three young men) were the first anticles to be used in Christian liturgies in general.

A Hoas is composed of a group of Stikhons recited in the syllbatic style with a fast and energetic tune, followed by either a "Lobsh", a psali and other hymns, or by the "Doxa"as is the case with the 4th canticle. The word "Lobsh" (Coptic for "elaboration") has a beautiful melismatic tune accompanied by the cymbals and the triangle, and there are two of them, one following the first canticle, and the other following the second. The 3rd Canticle is followed by the Psali "*Erepsalin*" in the syllbatic style, then a very nice Greek piece called "*Tenen*" in the melismatic style,

²⁴ Athanasius, a monk from the Coptic Church – Glossary of the Ecclesiastic Nomenclature – part III, 2003, page 271

then another praise with extremely beautiful tune called **“Ten-Oweh-Enthok”** with a complex formation using melismatic and Syllabic styles.

The context of all four canticles is strictly from the scriptures; 1st Hoas is chapter 14 in the book of Exodus, the 2nd from Psalm 136, the 3rd from the book of Daniel, and the 4th is psalms 148, 149 & 150.

The Verses of the Cymbal:

The word verse is used here as a direct translation of the Arabic word “Robh” meaning “quarter”. In the terminology of the Coptic Church, “quarter” is a Coptic piece divided into four stikhons or sentences. Based on these four are built all praises in the Coptic Church contained in the books of: The Annual Psalmody, Psalmody of the month of Kyahk, the Psalis of the feasts, Psalis of the days, the Dephnar and the Doxologies.²⁵

The verses of the Cymbal is one of the forms used in Coptic Church singing and it follows the prayer of Thanksgiving in the evening and the morning offering of incense, and in some of the other prayers of the Church, like the beginning of the three Laqqans , the kneeling prayers, funerals, and other prayers. It was named as such because it is recited with the accompaniment of the Cymbal. It originated from the ten quarters recited in the introduction of the Adam Doxology of the morning **“Pi-O-Oyni-Enta-Efmi”**. This “verses of the cymbal” was mentioned by Pope Ghobrial the 5th (1409-1427 AD) in his book (the arrangement of the rites”. There are two types of the verses of the cymbal; the fixed verses which do not change, followed by the unfixed verses that change with the Church occasions and seasons, be it fasting or feasts and so on, then it is concluded by an ending part like **“Ethren Hoas Erok”** (so that we may praise You)

The Refrain (El-Maradd):

Which is a simple musical sentence recited by the congregation in liturgical prayers in response to either the priest or the to the calling of the deacon. It may consist of one or two words in its simplest form, or one or two stikhons in its bigger form. Some of the oldest refrains in the Church are: “Hallelujah”, “Amen”, “Kyreye-Eleyson” (Lord Have mercy), also there are “Psalm refrain” and the “the Gospel refrain”, each with its own tune according to the occasion in the rubric year. The forms of the refrains are usually of simple construction, mostly consisting of a single, short and simple musical sentence, such that the congregation can easily recite it, however, some refrains may contain several sentences but can still be recited by the congregation.

²⁵ Athanasius, a monk from the Coptic Church – Glossary of the Ecclesiastic Nomenclature – part I, 2001, first printing – page 59.

Josabios the Caesarian wrote “In the evening service of the feasts when one chants in the appointed time, the others would listen in silence and do not participate in the chants except at their end”²⁶

Similarly, St. Basilus wrote in the letter No: 207 to the priests of Caesarea saying: “... They start praising by the psalms, first they are divided into two groups reciting antiphonally, and then they hand the overture of the hymn to one of them while the rest recite the refrain”.

The hymn (the tune):

The hymn is more complex than the refrain in its format, e.g. the “Singary Tune” which is the tune for the psalm in Christmas and Easter celebrations, and its name refers to the town of “Singar”, and the “Adribi Tune”, the hymn of the blessing “**Ten O-Osht**” the hymn of the Virgin “**Tai Shori**”, the hymn of the Holy Spirit “**Pi-Epnevma**”, the “**Trisagion hymn**” (Agius O Theos), the hymn of the Cross “**Fai Etaf Enf**”, the Crucifixion hymn “**O Mono Genis**”, and many other hymns which range in length from 3 minutes to 30 minutes.

When analyzing the forms of these hymns, one must consider the second type of forms, which is the Musical Forms.

SECOND: THE MUSICAL FORMS.

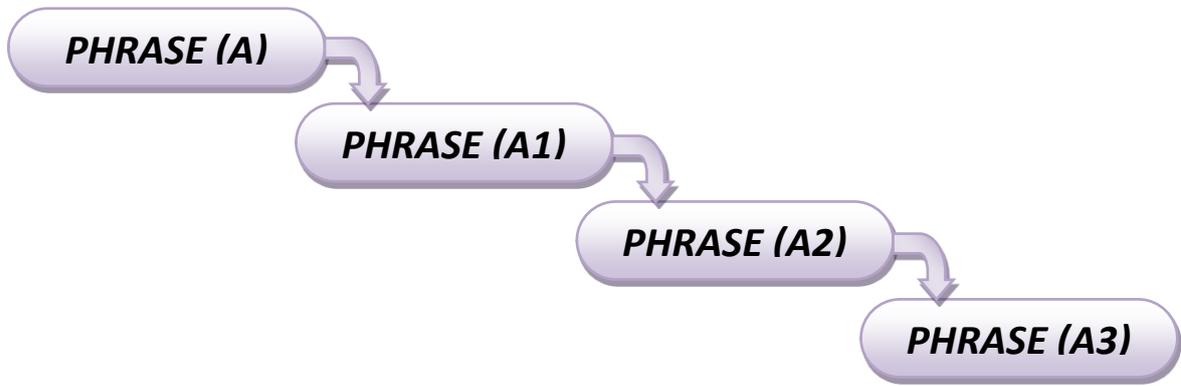
Coptic hymns have several and diverse Musical Forms, of which are:

The Form (A – A₁ – A₂ – A₃), which is similar to the “single shape” Form, that exists intensively in the mid-night praise, and in hymns of the liturgy of the Eucharist

e.g. the “Intercessions”, “Rejoice O Mary” (called Aspasmus Adam and recited after the prayer of reconciliation).

This form is widely used and sometimes it ends with a closing phrase (B) which is different from the base phrase (A), where (B) represents a “Coda” or a trailing ending to the hymn. An example is the joyous hymn “*Epouro*” (*O King of Peace, recited in the Feasts and weddings*)

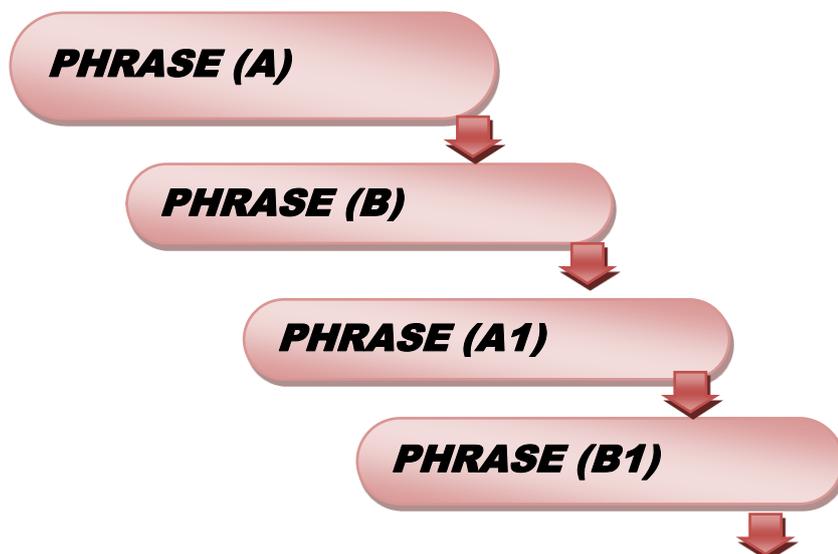
²⁶ Josabios the Caesarian – The History of the Coptic Church – the second book – chapter 17 – item 22 – translation by Hegomen Marcos Dawoud – Dar El-Karnak – 1960, page 89.



Sometimes, the phrase (B) is repeated at the end of the hymn while mixing with another phrase (C) as in the hymn **“Khen O Shot”** the Lobsh of the first canticle, and the hymn **“Maren O Onh”** the lobsh of the second canticle.

In such hymns, phrase (B) has a simple construction without Melisma but with an energetic Syllabic nature. However, in some forms, the phrase (B) comes in a rather complex shape free of rhythm (Adlib), mixed with a little melisma, as in the hymn **“Epchoice Efnouti”** in which, phrase (B) came in, not as a trailing ending as usual, but to have an expressive role with its high notes for the Throne of the Glorified Lord of Sabaouth (an Hebrew word meaning hosts) who is worshipped by all the Angelic hosts, saying Holy Holy Holy is The Lord of Sabaouth.

- The Form (A – B – A₁ – B₁ – C) like the hymn **“Ni Savev Tiro”** (Oh you wise men) recited in the presence of the Pope and/or the Bishops.

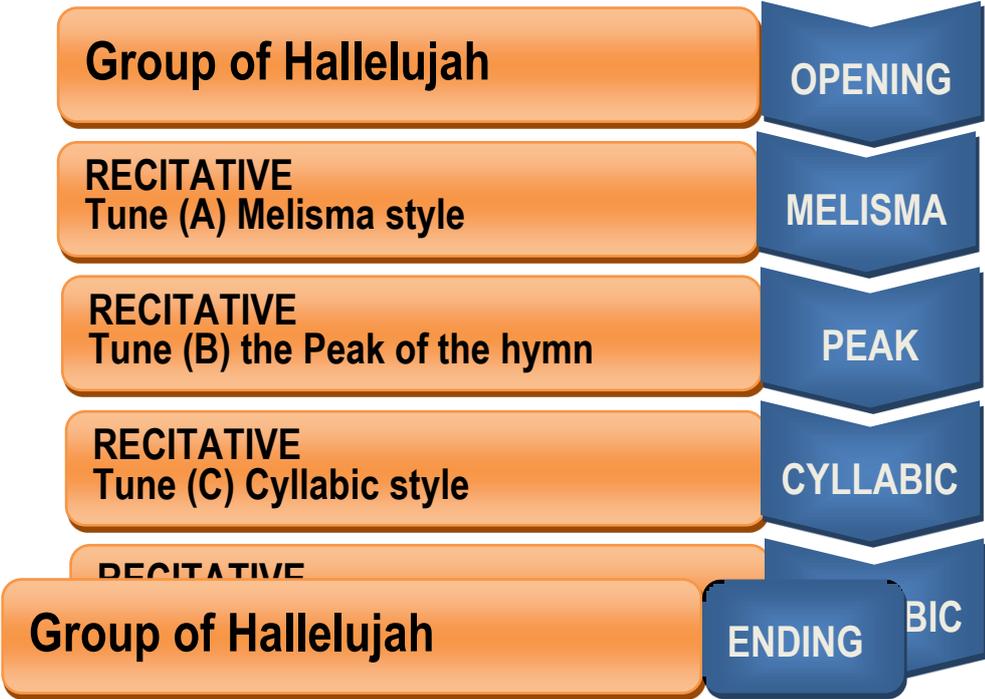


PHRASE (C)

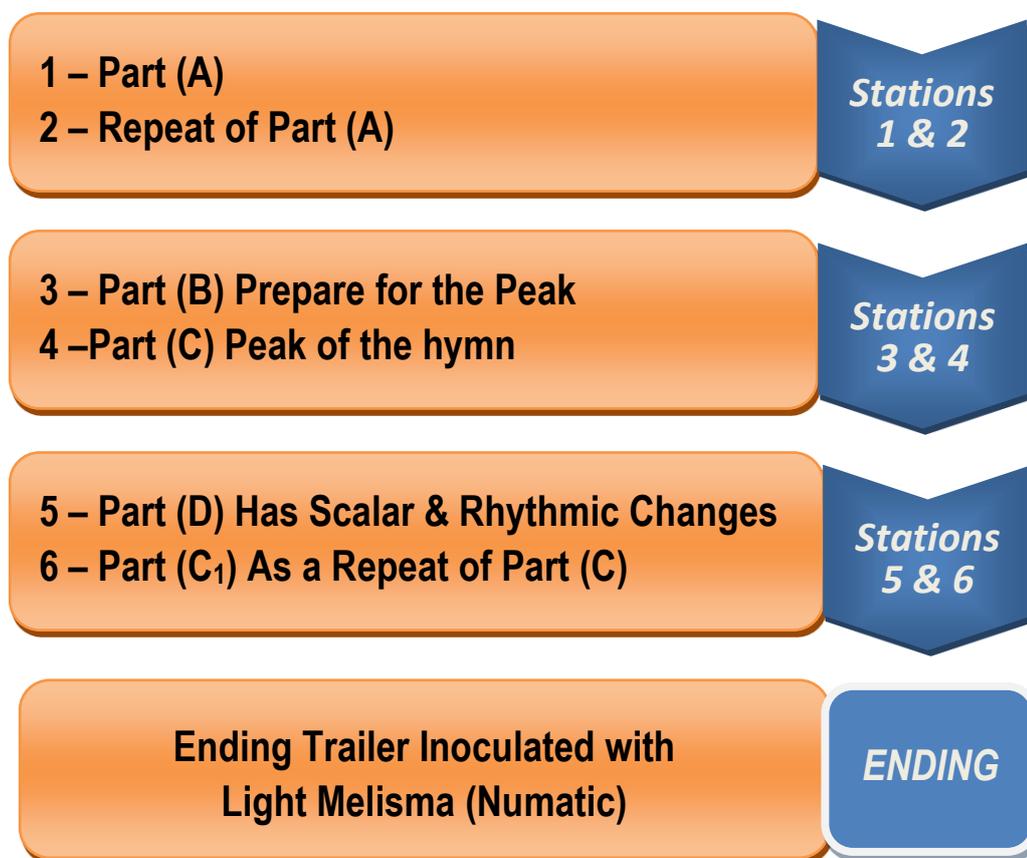
All of these forms are usually of simple construction and easy to analyze. Nevertheless, there are some hymns with extremely complex formation that are closer to Sonata form with its three divisions; Exposition, Development (where the scalar transpositions and the untraditional changes in the rhythm occur, showing the composer cleverness) and the Recapitulation division, which in some hymns may not rest on the same base note of the hymn’s scale as is customary, but the same scale is reconfigured on a different note half a tone higher than the original base note, as is the case with the hymn *“Kata Ni Khoros”* (All the Heavenly Choirs and Hosts), the wonderful hymn recited during Resurrection season.

The musical sentence in Coptic hymns is balanced. Its two phrases are presented as a question and answer, which can be seen in the hymn *“Ghigotha”* (the Scull in Hebrew). This hymn in E-flat major is recited on Good Friday at the time of re-enactment of the burial of Christ the Lord. The historian Philon (20 BC -55 AD) wrote that the music of this hymn was recited in the funeral of the pharaoh in the Temple.

There are many other forms like that of the Psalm in the Singery tune (Named after the town of Singar that drowned in a flood). It starts and ends with two groups of Hallelujah, and a recitative performance in between as illustrated below:



Meanwhile there are forms that have complexity in their construction and composition like the **“Great Praxis Response”**. It is composed of six parts in pure melismatic style, followed by an ending trailer as shown in the following illustration:



The musical Forms and Shapes of the Coptic hymns (1048 hymn) are numerous and is considered fertile grounds for scientific researches, through which this rich musical tradition can be analyzed in order to comprehend its musicality and know the shapes of its different forms, their categorization, and their connection to the rites where they are performed.

The Endings:

The endings in the Coptic Music are unusual in their nature, appearance and content. They are not like those extravagant endings we see in the classical works that are clear and decisive, in the fifth then the first, (e.g. G – C) giving a perfect and screaming ending. Nor are they like the endings of Arabic songs consisting usually of a descending scale ending with its base note. Nor like any other ending that gives the so-called “Spicy hot ending”, which drive the audience to applaud due to its strong and sharp taste, regardless of how plain, simple, slow, or monotonous the main body of the music work may be.

This is totally different with the Coptic music, as there is no need for applause and it is not allowed during liturgical prayers. As well, there is no need to overwhelm the congregation with extravagant endings; therefore, endings for the Coptic Church hymns are quiet, different and diverse. There is no stipulation that endings have to be in the

same base note of the scale that ends the hymn; it can end on the second or third tone or any other tone according to the spiritual state and feelings that lead and direct the composer.

It is rather a well-known fact that ending with different note than that of the base requires a high level of cleverness and musical abilities, for it is quite easy for a the beginner composer to end the piece in the base note of the scale of the musical piece. It is quite normal for the musical scale (Mode) of the piece to naturally lead the composer to the natural resting tone for the composition, passing through the feeler of the scale (its seventh degree called the leading note). It gets its name from the fact that it leads the composer to the natural resting tone which is the base note of the scale.

Following are some examples of hymn endings that depict the nature of Coptic Music Endings.

Apekran



Be Ouik

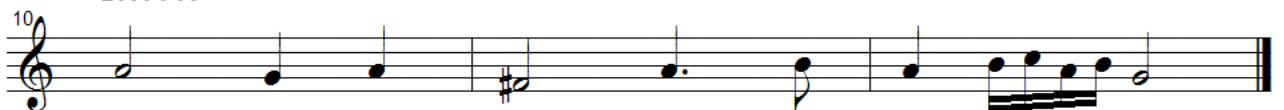


Ei Parthenos

Rit



ΚΑΤΑ



Mazmour Kiyahki

Mazmour Sanawi

Mazmour 150

6- ORNAMENTATIONS AND BEAUTIFYING FEATURES:

In general, these are predominant characteristics of the Egyptian art works from old. They reached an epic during the time of the fourth and fifth Dynasties as represented in the meticulous and clever paintings and carvings on the temple walls, pillar crowns, palaces, statues, papyrus papers, and all Egyptian artifacts of the pharaohs which fill almost all museums of the world.

The ancient Egyptians used ornamentation symbols like the shape of the Sun, the Lotus, the Chrysanthemum & the Susan Flowers, Papyrus, Palm tree branches, Grape clusters and other surrounding shapes and pictures.

There is no doubt that the style of ornamentation was reflected on the musical arts and extended to the Coptic music where we see the beautifying features and ornaments in all their forms:

Appoggiatura²⁷: Found in many hymns like the *“great Praxis response”* & *“Ondos”* (a hymn for the apostles), and;

Acciaccatura²⁸, the Tirata²⁹, the Fioritura³⁰, the Mordente³¹, Gropetto³² which is the most commonly used ornament in the Coptic music and appear clearly in some of the

²⁷ **Appoggiatura** is a short musical ornament (usually written with small font) and sung before, and takes its time from that of, the main note that follows. It can either be singular, i.e. consist of one note, or paired i.e. has two notes, such that none of the ornament notes is like the main note.

hymn endings, and the Trill³³ which is found also in many of the extended tunes of the Church hymns and is concluded by the Gropetto.

Ornamentations in the tunes can be added to the core of the main hymn, and these are fixed and adhered to by the hymn performer(s) without any change, such as the ornaments

contained in the last part of the Singary Psalm (recited in Christmas and Easter), where these ornamentations are woven into the two *“Hallelujah”* which end the psalm.

They can also be among the ornaments added by the singer during the recital, with the purpose of beautifying the hymn and expressing the depth of its meanings. In this case, each cantor has his own style in ornamenting these hymns according to his feelings and vocal capabilities, especially since this style of improvised ornamentations flows out of his own inner feelings. It is impossible to find two or more singers who agree in doing the same ornaments when reciting the same hymn together. Also it would be virtually impossible for the same singer to repeat the same hymn with a carbon copy of the ornaments he used in the same hymn at a different time.

Mr. Nabil Kamal wrote: *“When the priest recites solo, he is free to use ornaments in expressing his own spiritual feelings at the time without changing the frame of the tune. But when a group of deacons or worshipers sing together, a different style of performance could be noticed where they start somewhat slow and without ornamentation during this group singing. Also the entire hymn would be performed from the lower areas in the singer’s voice”*.³⁴

“Robert Lach” is among the famous musicians who specialized in the study of “Melisma” and the ornaments in the Oriental Church. He proposed some general principles for categorizing musical ornaments as follows:

²⁸ **Acciaccatura** is a very quick ornament, sung before the base note and has no sound similar to the base sound.

²⁹ **Tirata** is an ascending or descending ladder type ornament, composed of two or more notes and is recited quickly with the first beat of the rhythm such that the accent is placed on the main tune.

³⁰ **Fioritura**: series of short notes connecting two successive notes, having the time of the first note



³¹ **Mordente** is two ornamental notes that precede the main note, such that the first of them is the same as the main note, and the second is higher or lower by one degree.

³² **Gropetto** ornamental notes consisting of; Either three sounds that take their duration from the base sound that comes after them and start with a sound higher or lower by one degree than the base sound, and the second ornamental tone is the same as the base sound, Or four sounds that take their duration from the preceding sound starting with a sound higher or lower by one degree than the base sound with the second and fourth sounds the same as the base sound.

³³ **Trill** is an ornament resulting from producing two sounds, one of them is the base sound and the other is higher by one degree, repeated successively as in a fast constant yodeling for the duration of the base sound, and it usually is followed or ends with another ornament like the Gropetto.

³⁴ **Nabil Kamal Botros** – Masters degree thesis – previous reference – page 195

First category: where ornaments revolve around one note. This is called *“Periheletic”*, i.e. helical (or axial), ornaments and includes different kinds of chants and Mordentes. This is the simplest and oldest kinds of ornaments.

Second category: may be called the *“Chained Ornaments”* where a group of small notes are “chained” together after exiting the beginning of the sentence, so that they are in one direction (ascending or descending).

Third category: is concerned with ornamenting the last portion of musical sentences as some kind an ending. The expert *“Ilona Borsai”* had published an article that includes a study of the kinds of ornaments in the Coptic hymn *“Ten O Osht”* (a hymn that was transcribed by *“Margaret Toth”*) where she, Ilona, divided the ornaments in this hymn into two types:

- Ornaments that have tones ranging between one and four in count. This type precedes a main tone in the sentence.
- Ornaments that are the same as the first one, but they succeed a main tone in the sentence.

Toth was using the instrument called “Milograph” in transcribing the Coptic hymns music. This instrument captures all the ornamentations in the cantors’ voices.

7- THE CAPABILITY OF EXPRESSION (EXPRESSIONISM):

Through its music, rhythms and scales, the Coptic hymns are distinguished by having an extra ordinary capability for expressing, not only the words of the hymn and their meanings, but also the spiritual atmosphere surrounding these hymns.

This ability is considered an extension for the music of the ancient Egyptians, about which, the German Egyptologist “Adolf Erman” wrote that the expressions performed by the ancient Egyptian singers as depicted in many paintings for the singers, musicians and dancers, were means of expressing the meanings behind the songs.³⁵

In the hymn of the Resurrection and the holy fifty days *“Christos Anisti”* we find that the music for the phrase *“Thanatow Thanaton Patisas”* which means *“By Death He conquered death”* expresses the opposition and confrontation between the two words *“DEATH”*. The first word *“Thanatow”* the tunes are strong and sharp to express the power of the Lord Christ’s Death on the wood of the Cross, while for the second word *“Thanaton”* the tunes are defeated, low and weak to express the death of sin which was trampled on by the powerful Death of Christ the Lord.

In the hymn *“Ies O Pan Agios Pateer” (One is the All Holy Father)* which is recited towards the end of the Eucharist service, just before the congregation approach to partake of Holy Mysteries, we find that the tunes are of a “cautionary” nature to alert the partakers that there is only One Who is Holy, lest some thereof may think they are

³⁵ Farmer, H.G. – Music of Ancient Egypt – New Oxford History of Music – Vol. 1, page 262

holy or saints³⁶. Hence, the ending of this hymn (Finale) came in a cautionary, strong, and sharp tune with a loud clang to it.

The hymn *“Ee-Parthenos” (Today the Virgin gives birth to the Sublime Essence)*, recited in Christmas Eve service, starts as a whisper to express the “Mystery” of incarnation, as revealed to the shepherds that night.

The hymn *“Ti Hirini Ente Efnouti”, (The Peace of God)*, recited during the days of the great Lent, is meek in its rhythms, extremely simple and scarce in its tunes, to affirm the condition of meekness and devoutness being lived by the Church in these days.

So; the Coptic hymns are expressive hymns, even though this relationship between its music and words in the surrounding atmosphere was not discovered until the twentieth century through an Egyptian television program titled *“Behind the Tunes”*, aired by the SAT7 TV channel, and a book titled *“The Spirituality and Music of the Coptic hymns”³⁷*, and a Masters degree thesis Titled *“ The relationship between the music, the context and the rubric”* presented to the Institute of Coptic Studies in 2007.

8- CONDUCTING:

The subject of conducting the liturgical hymns in the Coptic Orthodox Church is of great importance and was never researched until December 2013, when it was discussed as the thesis of a Masters Degree³⁸ in Cairo.

In its early days, the Church saw the importance of having a leader (director), also known as the *“Arreef”* (One who knows), or the Cantor, or the Teacher, who stands as a Maestro to conduct this large number of hymns with their diverse tunes, especially with the participation of the congregation present in singing some of the hymns. This conducting task was, and still is, done instinctively and spontaneously.

Conducting as an art was known to the ancient Egyptians. *“Hans Hickmann”* wrote two essays, the first³⁹ in 1949, and the second⁴⁰ in 1952. He stated that hand movements and gestures were provided by the conductor for guiding the players and singers through the song or the hymn. The name for this approach is *“Chirognomy”* i.e. the language of the hand and the ancient musicians gave it much attention.

The importance of conducting in the Coptic Church can be determined by the following seven parameters:

1- The method of formatting the musical work:

The Coptic music contains rhythmic changes and intensive scalar transpositions, with complex musical frame for most of these hymns. Formatting the tunes including the

³⁶ **Fr. Kyrillos Kyrillos** – The three liturgies aligned with exacting and explanation – The Church of St. George, Khamarawayh, Cairo – Second printing - 1987

³⁷ **George Kyrillos** – The Spirituality and Music of the Coptic Hymns – Church of St. Mark – Maadi, Cairo - 2002

³⁸ **George Kyrillos** – Masters degree thesis – The high Institute of Arabic Music – previous reference – Egypt - 2013

³⁹ **Hans Hickmann** – Observations sur les Survivances de la Chironomie – pages 417 - 427

⁴⁰ **Hans Hickmann** – Atti del Congresso di Musica Sacra – pages 100 - 106

free (addlibitum) parts and the relationship between the music sentences and their lyrics are staggered, and in most hymns, especially the melismatic ones, the musical sentence may come to an end, while the corresponding lyrics does not end till the beginning of the next musical sentence, thus bonding the hymn into one properly built structure. This is the feature distinguishing the Coptic hymns from all others. Therefore, conducting of the Coptic Music has a special importance and distinct nature, in spite of the music being Monophonic.

2- The number of performers:

Performing the Coptic hymns is done through two Choirs, one in the north side and one in the south side. While there is no orchestra playing, there are the congregation and the clergy who have their responsorial parts, requiring an alert conductor with foresight, to unify their performance with that of the two Choirs through the use of clear and precise signals. This, in addition to having solo parts by deacons or the priest, adding to the importance of the role of the conductor.

3- Movements while performing:

Many of the Coptic hymns are performed during processions around the nave of the Church building, around the Altar, before the icons, and some are recited while bowing or kneeling down, or worshipping with the forehead to the floor. The conductor's role hence, becomes very critical so as to keep the worship from becoming chaotic if the performers do not see or hear each other.

4- Locations of the performers:

There are several locations from where to perform a tune. Deacons can sing from inside the sanctuary, others from outside, one may stand before the podium, another may be standing at the door of the sanctuary to do a response, and there is the congregation present in the nave participating with responsorial parts.

All of that require a leader to conduct and coordinate this large volume of vocal traffic between everybody as well as with the priests who participate from different locations in the Church building.

This does not prevent this "leader" from delegating some of his responsibilities to others. For example, he may assign the task of conducting the servants of the Altar to the older deacon inside the sanctuary, to lead this group and distribute the duties and responses among them, and conduct their group performance of some hymns that can be recited as a group, (e.g. "Ies Pateer Agios", "Aspazeti", "Pi Nishti", and others that require leadership and coordination).

The chief Cantor (Moallem / Arrif), being the main Maestro who conducts the deacon groups, the congregation and the clergy outside the sanctuary, would always maintain his contact with the sub-group of deacons inside the sanctuary.

5- Actions and Rubrics that accompany the performance:

Singing and chanting hymns in the Church is usually accompanied by various actions necessary for performing the rite, such as holding the candles and censers, placing and removing covers, carrying icons and banners, etc. therefore the leader's role becomes extremely important resembling that of the director of an opera. Expressions

6- Performance dynamics and Expressions:

The Coptic music is expressive and its performance is full of dynamics. Its musical sentences offer explanation of their lyrics; hence, it requires a leader who can, through his signals to the performers, determine and outline these dynamics and expressions.

7- Polyphonic and Homophonic musical fabrics:

Because the Coptic music is basically monophonic, there are some who thought it does not need conducting, overlooking the other factors that underline its importance. However, and in spite of their thinking, the Coptic music has been performed outside the liturgical services in a polyphonic, homophonic shape such as the example

presented by "Ernest Newland smith" for the hymn "*Migalow*" with the orchestra, and a copy of that recording is kept with the recordings of the Coptic Studies Institute in Cairo, Egypt.

The Coptic Church is extremely meticulous regarding the rubrics and the rites accompanying the recital of hymns. Each hymn has a ceremonial rite to accompany it. Reciting the Gospel has its rites, the hymns before and after the reading of the Gospel have other rites, and the procession of the Lamb also has different rites, and so on. And that is why the importance of, and the need for the role of a leader in the Coptic music. This leader is called "*Arreef*" or "*Moallem*"⁴¹ and is often called the Chief Cantor.

This "*Moallem*" is considered the first "Maestro" appointed by the Coptic Church 2000 years ago, and after the Pharaohs when the world did not know about music conducting at that time. But before the Coptic Church knew about conducting, it should be recognized that king David the prophet was able to establish the concept of having to have a leader, an expert and a mentor, according to the Holy Scriptures:

"Chen.a.niah, leader of the Levites, was instructor in charge of the music because he was skillful;" (1 Chronicles 15:22)

⁴¹ **Arreef**, is an Arabic word from the verb "Yaaref"(to know), and it means the one who knows all there is to know about the hymns, the rites and the rubrics, including those performed by the priest. He is responsible mentor newly appointed priest(s) and correct any mistake that may occur during the beginning period of his new service.

He is also called the "*Moallem*" (Arabic for teacher) because he teaches the hymns and the rites of the Church to the younger generations. Therefore, they (the teachers) are accredited for preserving the Church hymns by the "*Oral Tradition*" through the generations. Their role resembles that of the conductor in the international Choir musical works.

“Then David spoke to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps and cymbals, by raising the voice with resounding joy” (1 Chronicles 15:16)

This affirms the existence of leaders, i.e. not just one or two, but many leaders to lead the singers and the instrument players.

“Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals” (1 Chronicles 25:1)

“All these were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the authority of the king. So the number of them, with their brethren who were instructed in the songs of the LORD, all who were skillful, was two hundred and eighty eight.”(1 Chronicles 25: 6,7)

This number (Two Hundred and Eighty Eight) of experts appointed to teach singing indicates how high the accuracy and the quality was of the singing offered in worship of God the Creator. The phrase ***“under the direction of their father”*** indicates the discipleship in singing at the hands of the fathers, i.e. the whole house was consecrated for the religious singing, and then comes ***“Chenaniah”*** as a leader in charge of music, and the fact that there was a large number of singing leaders, indicates how much importance did king David place on conducting, because the leaders of the singing are the “Conductors” of the Singing Choirs, and the many singing leaders indicates there were many singing groups (Choirs).

It can be seen then, that praising in the days of King David the Prophet was a perfected task that had rules and fundamentals as well as leaders and experts for mentoring, and a spending budget in order that praising God is offered in perfection. Their logic then was that it is not befitting to let singing for the people be of a high quality, while the singing offered to God their Creator is of lesser quality.

In the end we must say that we have Egypt and the Palace of Pharaoh to thank for this, because that is where Moses was brought up and he in turn handed this knowledge to the children of Israel, to arrive unto the era of King David the Prophet after some five hundred years.

The history tells that Moses learned reading at the age of ten, and was educated in many subjects and sciences including music with its many forms; Harmony, Rhythms, Vocal, and poetry, and also studied medicine, and after receiving an education in civil and military subjects, he was educated in philosophy and theology at the hands of the most famous Egyptian professors.⁴²

⁴² The life of Moses - the first book – by the Jewish Historian Philon

The intent here is to show that the importance of music conducting, and the presence of music conductors, was recognized since very long ago as an art form and a science, and also a necessity for praises befitting for the Almighty.

Direct and Indirect Conducting:⁴³

Most orchestra and choir conductors are accustomed to think that conducting should only be for those in front of them, i.e. the musicians and singers. However, an Egyptian conductor/researcher was inspired by the way Coptic hymns are conducted, and discovered a shortcoming in the international system of conducting. He noticed that many conductors do not pay much attention to the audience sitting behind them who normally outnumber the musicians and choir members facing them. Failure to include the audiences in the

musical work and make them involved as an inseparable part of the work being executed by the orchestra, would most likely result in a separation between the public and the orchestra, which may lead to a loss of concentration on the part of the orchestra.

Prior to this separation taking place, there are usually indicators to predict it, including: Some of the audience may drift away from the work, first emotionally then mentally then start whispering to the next seat neighbor, then a gradual spread of unrest and quiet noise. All of this can happen while the Maestro is the last to notice, because the Maestro is not conducting the public at his back, hence the name “Reverse Conducting” or “Conducting Backward”. It can then be stated that the Maestro conducting the musicians and the choir may take the term “Direct conducting”, and conducting the public behind him “Indirect conducting”.

Indirect conducting can be regulated by principles and rules. One of these rules is an important one which also applies to direct conducting; and that is before the Maestro starts conducting by signals, he should start by removing any ambiguities that may surround the musical work about to be presented, by explaining it to the audience in simple terms. Not necessarily in the same fashion he would explain it to the members of orchestra, but simple enough to establish their connection with the work.

Another rule for the indirect conducting, and that is for the Maestro to “Glance” at the audience while conducting the players/singers located at the extreme right or left of the stage. This would be a suitable moment for him to examine the reactions of the audience and their connectedness with the work. Naturally when he looks at the center of the stage, i.e. straight ahead, he would have his back completely to the audience making it much harder, but not impossible, for him to follow their reactions in a glance. This “glancing” by the maestro is similar to the glancing that players and singers located

⁴³ **George Kyrillos** – Masters degree thesis – the High Institute of Arabic Music – the Academy of Arts – Cairo, Egypt - 2013

at the far sides of the stage do to see the conductor's signals, which is known as ***"Peripheral Vision"***⁴⁴.

If the Maestro does not perform these two simple rules, it leads to the sad conclusion that he neither has the basic information about the work he is presenting nor does he care about disappointing the audience who came especially to the concert.

The understanding by the Maestro of these facts and requirements, and conveying them to the performers and the audience, is far more important than the accuracy of the signals of his stick (baton) which provide only the technical portion of his job. It was scientifically proven that when the orchestra and choir members understand the work they play and sing, they can perform with feelings and excel far more than if they perform only with technical accuracy. Similarly, when the audience understands the work and feels part of what is being presented to them personally; their enjoyment cannot be compared to an enjoyment obtained by merely watching an accurate performance.

Should the concert be recorded by professional photographers or videographers, their cameras capture clips of the performers, the conductor and the audience equally, although the audience do not play or sing. These professionals understand that audiences are an integral part of the production, judging by the vast difference between a dress rehearsal, virtually without audience, and the actual concert that follows in a few hours but with audience.

Indirect Conducting in the Coptic Church:

Examination of the Coptic Church approach in this regard reveals that the importance of these two concepts of directing was understood by the Church, and that is why the concept of "Directing Sideways" was introduced to achieve all advantages of the direct (forward) directing, and solve the inconveniences of the indirect (backward) directing, which is proven very difficult no doubt, because how can a maestro effectively lead a congregation with his back turned to them?

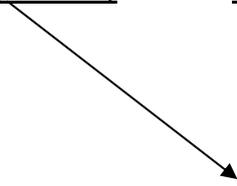
The Church designated a spot for the Cantor (the Muallem) that positions him to be beside the "North Chorus", facing the "South Chorus", semi facing the ladies' pews, and beside the men's pews. This way, the congregation is not behind the leader, but to his side and semi front, allowing easy communication with the worshipping public via either head movements or facial expressions, which is a must in the liturgies of the Coptic Church since the praying public are participants not just listeners.

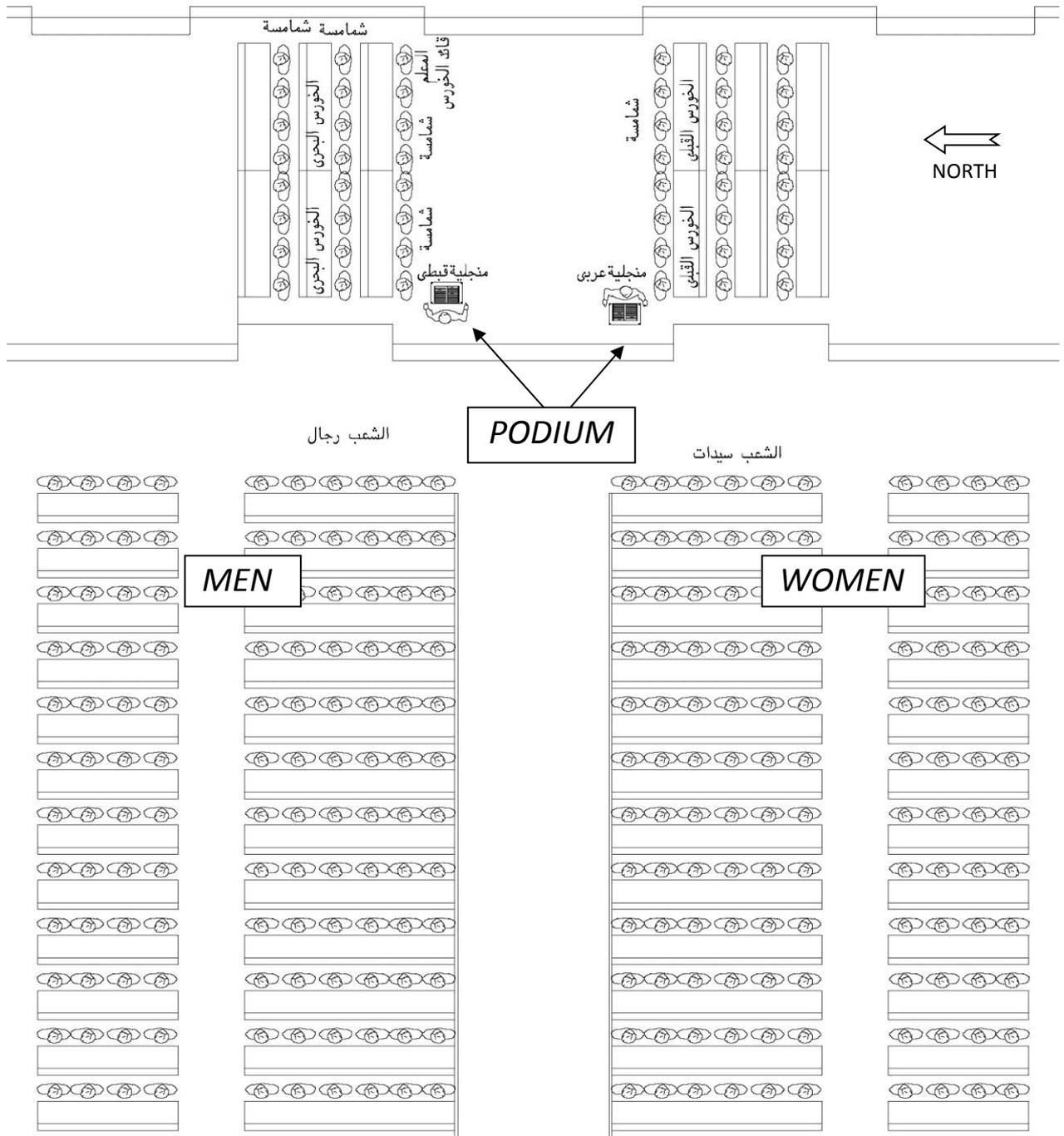
⁴⁴ **Don V. Moses, Robert W. Demaree Jr. & Allen F. Ohmes;** A handbook for Choral Conductors, Face to Face with orchestra and Chorus, second expanded edition, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indianapolis, 2004 – page 35.

DEACONS (NORTH)

CANTOR (LEADER}

DEACONS (SOUTH)





**THE LOCATIONS OF DIFFERENT PARTICIPANTS
IN THE LITURGY OF THE COPTIC CHURCH**

CONDUCTING THE COPTIC HYMNS DURING PROCESSIONS:

A procession in the Church is a rubric to celebrate an event or an occasion having special spiritual or religious significance. Processions were known since the first centuries AD, and they are accompanied with hymns and responses suitable to the occasion and censers, candles and Crosses.⁴⁵

The first mention of these processions is found in the Spanish tourist "*Igeria*" notes (late 4th century AD), describing the Passover Week Processions, as she traveled through the city of Jerusalem visiting the sites that witnessed the last events in the life Christ on earth.

The Coptic Church pays special attention to celebratory Processions, for their deep spiritual significance. They unite the congregation with the worship events and rubrics through participation whether by looking at the procession or touching the Cross, the Icons and the banners that go by thus making them feel closer to the event, and giving a practical sense of the verse that says "Emmanuel is in our midst now", He is not far away on the Altar as the hymns "Shari Efnouti"& "Aspazeste" mention, but He is All present everywhere and here among His people. Other times the procession gets the congregation to participate with singing and praising, especially when the tunes are simple and easy like the joyous Kyrialayson.

Also the sound volume effect produced by the singing deacons, increasing as they approach the worshiper and decreasing as they move away, gives the musical effects known as "Crescendo" (ascending strength) and "Diminuendo" (descending strength), producing a penetrating effect in the souls of the listeners. That is exactly what sound engineers do at times to bring about this effect of "Fade-in" or "Fade-out". A recent CD recording of the hymn "Golgotha" in a production called "The Egyptian Mozart" did use this technique to get the same effect of coming and going.

Processions are among the more important rubrics that require more attention and concentration from the leader, and the Church provided precise designs for all their details as explained in the examples below:

❖ Timing of starting the Procession:

Each procession for every rite has a definite start time and pre-determined hymns to be recited that cannot be changed. In Good Friday service, the procession starts at the end of the twelfth hour prayer after the "mitanyas" (one of the ways of worship) with 400 times "Kyrialyson". During this procession, everyone in the Church recites the word "Kyrialyson" (Lord Have mercy) in the long joyful tune accompanied by the cymbals and the triangle. Following the Good Friday prayers, there comes the Apocalypse night celebration (called the night of Saturday of the light, or Joyous Saturday), which has three processions:

⁴⁵ **Athanasius** – a monk from the Coptic Church – Introductions in Church Rubrics – 2\7
Glossary of the Ecclesiastic Nomenclature – Part 2 2002 – page 77

First procession is after psalm 151 “Anok Pe Pi Koji” (I am the young among by brothers), with the hymn “Maren O Onh”.

Second procession just before the Matins offering of incense, through which the hymn “Ten Oweh Enthok” is recited.

Third procession just before the litany for the Gospel in matins, where they recite Kyrialyson.

In addition to these processions, there is a fourth procession which is done at the beginning of the Resurrection Feast praise, Saturday evening, in which they recite the hymn “Ten Thino E-Epshoi” (Arise O children of the Light”.

During the Resurrection Feast eve Celebration, the Resurrection procession is performed after the Resurrection re-enactment, and turning the lights ON. During this procession, many hymns are performed some with Greek words (e.g. Khristos Anisti , Tolitho, Ton Sina) and others in Coptic words (e.g. Pi-Khristos Af-Tonf)

On the feast of the Ascension (the 40th day of Pentecost), a similar procession is done. Also on the 50th day of Pentecost (the feast of the Holy Spirit descending upon the Apostles) there is a similar procession but it is performed during the raising of the morning incense.

The Church has other processions; in the two feasts of the Holy Cross, in the rite of the reception of a newly ordained priest, in the Doxologies of the saints, in Baptisms, etc... In all of these processions there are hymns to be recited with the Leader playing an important role.

❖ Participants in processions:

The Church specified precisely who can participate in processions. There are processions, like that of the Pauline (the reading of St. Paul epistle), which is composed of two parts; the first inside the sanctuary around the Altar, to be done by the priest with the Altar servant (deacon) holding the Cross opposite the priest across the table of the Altar, and the second outside the sanctuary done by the priest alone censing, during which the deacons sing some hymns like “Tai Shori”, “Ti Shori” or “Entho Ti Shori”. There is also the procession of the Lamb, in which the priest and the servants (deacons) of the Altar participate. The priest starts the procession by reciting “O-o-Ou Nem Otayo” (honor and Glory), to which the Altar deacons respond by “Pros Evek sasthe Eeperton” (Pray for these Holy Oblations), then the congregation respond “Alleluia this is the day which the Lord Has made”. But the processions of the 12th hour of Good Friday, Resurrection feast and the Pentecost, all priests and deacons participate in them.

❖ Arrangement of the participants line-up:

The order in which the participants are lined up in all processions, is pretty well defined. Who precedes the procession, and who follows in which order and who goes at the tail end, and what does each of the participants carry, and so on. It is customary that the Archdeacon carrying the Grand Cross precedes the processions of 12th hour of Good Friday, Resurrection Feast, the Pentecost and the two feasts of the Cross, followed by the deacons, the readers, and the singers, all of whom are carrying the banners for the occasion, small crosses and lit candles, followed by an elder deacon carrying the Icon of the feast and walking backwards with his back towards the rest of the deacons and his face towards the priest who carries the censer giving incense before the icon, followed by one of the deacons carrying the box of incense and facing the same direction as the rest of the deacons who carry the banners and the crosses.

❖ The participants Attire:

Some processions are done with the complete white attire for priests and deacons, such as the Resurrection feast and the Pentecost. Some others are performed while the priests are in their black robes with an embroidered vest on top while the deacons are not dressed in the formal white attire such as the procession of Covenant Thursday (Maundy Thursday) and the three processions of Apocalypse night. Other processions are performed with the priests wearing their black robes and the vest on top and the deacons with the white tunics and like the procession of Good Friday

❖ The Route of the Procession Path:

Each procession has a different path determined by its rubric, although most of them start and end inside the sanctuary, but the remainder of the path is determined by the type of procession and the number of participants. The procession of the lamb is a single revolution around the Altar that starts and ends inside the sanctuary. Other processions start inside the sanctuary and continue on to the outside passing through the side isles of the Nave for two times, then passing through the center isle to end inside the sanctuary where it started.

❖ The hymns recited by the participants and non-participants in the Procession: There is not a single procession performed in the Coptic Orthodox Church without being accompanied by hymns. The Coptic Church built all of its rubrics and worship rites upon the hymns and praises. Thus the hymns are the common denominator in all processions. So even when the priest and the deacons serving the Altar offering incense in a procession become silent as they recite inaudible prayers, the deacons outside the sanctuary begin reciting the hymns of the rite or the occasion, and the praise never ceases in any of the processions.

• **Classification of the Ritual Processions in the Coptic Church:**

They can be classified into three classes:

1 – Processions included in the service of the Eucharist⁴⁶.

EXAMPLES:

i) Processions of the incense. These are usually for the priest only and three times around the Altar, during which the deacons recite the suitable hymns while standing (they do not participate in the procession except by singing as in the verses of the cymbals and the Doxologies). Leading the hymns in these processions is for the Church Cantor who stands at the head of the north Chorus giving hand signals to indicate the beginning and the end for each part and the speed of the hymn. And if he plays the cymbals, then its beats determine the speed while the movements of his head give the start and finish for each part. The south Chorus stands across from the Cantor and alternate reciting the hymn “Antiphonally”

ii) Procession of the Lamb; this is for the priest accompanied by the Altar servants only. They go around the table of the Altar singing the hymn “Pros Eveksaste”. The leader in this case is the one carrying the wine flask, who hands the tune to the Cantor outside the sanctuary to start reciting the hymn “Alliloya Fai Pepi” with all the deacons.

iii) Procession of the Gospel; Occurring before the Gospel reading and after the litany for the Gospel. In it the priest goes around the Altar once, accompanied by the one deacon who recited the responses of the litany. The deacon would be walking backward facing the priest while holding the Gospel and the cross, and the priest facing the direction of rotation (anticlockwise) giving incense and placing his right hand on the Gospel. During this rotation (procession) around the Altar, the psalm is recited in the suitable tune (Annual, Kyahki, or Singary) under the leadership of the Cantor who determines the beginning and the end for each of the four sentences of the psalm. It is worth noting here that before all musical sentences for each “Stikhon”, there is unturned recitative reading performed by one of the deacons who is capable of recitative performance. For this reason, a lot of concentration is required from the singer, who leads in this case, especially when performing the psalm in the Singary tune. This psalm is rather complex and full of Rhythmic and Scale modulations. It covers a wide spectrum of notes starting from the lower notes in the beginning, into the middle notes in the second part, then slowly goes into higher notes, to end with a group of tonal ornaments in the word Hallelujah which repeats as an expression of joyful rejoicing, because this tune is specific to festal services.

2 – Celebrative Processions for occasions concerning the Lord.

EXAMPLES:

i) Procession of the Cross, performed in the vespers and matins of the two feasts

⁴⁶ **Athanasius** – a monk from the Coptic Church – Introductions in Church Rubrics – 2\7
Glossary of the Ecclesiastic Nomenclature – Part 2 2002 – page 77

of the Cross (17th TUT, and 10th Baramhat if the Coptic calendar year). In these processions the priests and the Altar servants (deacons) go around the Altar 3 times, and then the other deacons from the north and south choruses join them and proceed around the nave 3 times while singing the “great” Kiryalison 3 times followed by the hymn of the Cross under the leadership of the Church Cantor, who leads all the deacons as well as the congregation who participate in praising especially during the “Great” Kiryalison. Unlike the processions of the incense and that of the Gospel, leading through these processions is more difficult, and if the Maestro does not perform his leading role properly, the praising crowd may lose their homogeneity.

ii) Procession of the Burial Icon, which is performed at the end of prayers of the 12th hour on Good Friday. In it, the arch priest, the priest s and the deacons proceed around the Altar three times, then around the nave 3 times singing the great Kiryalison. Upon their return to the Sanctuary after the third time, they chant the fabulous hymn of the burial “Golgotha”. This hymn is said to have its roots going back into the days of the Pharaohs as assured by the Jewish historian Philo, who lived in the days of the apostles.

In this procession, the leaders role is also very important, even more so than the processions of the Cross due to the large number of parishioners who usually crowd the Church on Good Friday and participate in the praises singing Kiryalison (Lord Have Mercy), and keeping everyone together without imbalance and on tune adds more burden on the leader.

The leadership in this procession is not much different from the three processions of Joyful Saturday evening praise, or the Resurrection feast and the Pentecost processions, except that the Resurrection hymns are many and more difficult, with each hymn having a special taste and rhythm vocal requirements, which poses more difficulty on the one hand, but reduces the number of participating public on the other hand.

3 – Celebrative Processions for other occasions

EXAMPLES:

- + The consecration of a new Church.
- + Holy Matrimony (Procession for the couple’s entrance and exit).
- + The funeral service procession for a member of the clergy which follows the funeral prayers.

Leadership importance in these processions is probably less than other processions, except where the public’s emotions are high (as in weddings or funerals) which may increase the difficulty of the leader’s task in maintaining a proper performance.

There are other Church Processions not discussed above such as:

- i. Covenant Thursday procession (Judas who broke the law)
- ii. Procession of the Lamb in the feasts of the Lord.
- iii. Procession for the reception of the newly ordained priest.
- iv. Palm Sunday Procession (Similar to the two feasts of the Cross).
- v. Procession for the reception of the Pope and/or the bishops.

In all of the above there is a definite role for the leader which may differ according to the occasion

9- ACAPELLA:

The Coptic Orthodox Church hymns are characterized by being “Vocal Only” hymns where musical instruments are not used except for two instruments, the cymbals and the triangle. These are used in a number of hymns to control the tempo and add a spirit of joy in joyful hymns.

“Paul McCommon”⁴⁷ in his analysis says: “When Christ came and Christianity started to spread, persecution of Christians was also spreading and the worship fellowship

⁴⁷ **Paul McCommon** – Music in the Bible – Arabic interpretation by Gus Conrad – Beirut 1971

meetings had come to an end, except for small groups of believers who used music secretly. The large music celebrations mentioned in the Old Testament had been totally abolished, yet the instinctive willingness of Christians to express their joy of salvation through singing and praising was not extinguished. The musical revival in later years however, helped in satisfying this deep desire of the people to shout with praises. Having been well established, the worship music had become more accepted by the people than any time in the past”.

The word “Secretly” signifies that music instruments were not used in order to keep the audible sound of their praising as low as possible so that it could not be heard outside the place of worship. Then Paul McCommon goes on to say: “Nowadays, people who insist that musical instruments are from the devil and should not be used in worship gatherings, may be basing their thinking on the fact that the New Testament says very little about musical instruments, overlooking the fact that in the beginnings of new testament times, followers could afford to purchase expensive instruments as those used in Old Testament, because most Churches in the New Testament were always on the move due to persecutions, hence they did not have the time to improve music or train musicians”. Nevertheless, the logic of this opinion of McCommon’s did not receive acceptance by some researchers.

A magazine called “Ibdaa” (Innovation) - second issue -February 1994, had an article about the subject of prohibiting the use of musical instruments in the Coptic Church; It mentioned: “Singing in some ancient Egyptian Temples depended on the Larynx. For example, in the tomb of Osiris the god of the dead, in the holy island of Phiala, it was prohibited to use musical instruments, which is the same tradition followed by the Coptic Church, and the Hebrews had two musical rubrics: The rubric of the Temple which used all musical instruments at that time, and the rubric of the Synagogue which used purely vocal music ⁴⁸ **“Acapella”**. When the Apostles spread the Gospel throughout the world, they chose the rubric of the Synagogue (the purely vocal), and the rule No: 80 of Clement of Alexandria reaffirmed the prohibition of musical instruments in the Church. To illustrate; it was the custom during the procession of the emperor from his palace to the Church, to play the water organ, and when they approach the Church, they left the organ away at a distance in

adherence to the tradition of vocal only music in the Church. This tradition is exactly what is being followed by the Coptic, Greek, Syrian and Russian Churches to this day. The Church of Rome, however, has changed their vocal music since the year 1000 AD to instrumental music, and added harmony to play it on the organ.”

Some people suggest that prohibiting the use of musical instruments could be attributed to the fact that the human larynx is the greatest instrument suited to perform the difficult ¼ tone with accuracy and perfection, so why use a man-made instrument which

⁴⁸ **Acapella** is a term used to identify the singing without instruments. It is a style taken from the ecclesiastic music as a purely singing style, and reached its peak in the 16th century at the hands of **“Giovanni da Palestrina”**

is inferior to the natural one created by God. Others suggest this prohibition goes back to the early centuries, when the Church in general, east and west, wanted to sever all connections to other worships, and did not allow the making of statues or sculptures, and prohibited the use of musical instruments which was a fundamental element in idol worship celebrations, in order to keep the believers from the remembrance of evil idols and bring their attention and concentration to the power of the divine words.

Mr. Adel Kamel provided another reason for not using the musical instruments in the Church, and said: *“Knowing that the Coptic music came to us from the religious music of the Pharaohs which they recited in the temples, and that the architectural features of the temple differs completely from the architectural features of the Churches in the early ages which were built underground for fear of persecution and tortures that came upon the Copts during the times of martyrdom, it is logical to conclude that hymns were performed by voice only, and it is highly unlikely that they used any musical, especially the percussion, instruments when they were facing execution and death at any moment”*.

It is known that the **“Gregorian Chant”** was a style of singing and composition that was based on the rules and principles established by St. Gregory in the sixth century AD. It is a style distinguished by dignity and artistic simplicity, to te point it was called **“Plain Chant”**. This style achieved its peak in the year 800 AD. There is no doubt that this dignified Gregorian style was taken from the (Mother) Coptic Church and transferred to the Church of Rome.

In their known book **“The description of Egypt”**, the scholars of the French invasion of Egypt spoke about their conviction that there was no musical instrument accompaniment in the **“song of Moses the Prophet”**, and said

“We challenge any courageous musician to tell us about an instrument, existing or imaginary, that has achieved a degree of perfection sufficient to mix with the voice in likeness without affecting the simplicity, the nobleness or the manhood of the style, and not degrading the greatness and respectability of the thoughts, and even if such instrument(s) existed and could be a match to such a powerful tune, then Moses would not have hesitated to use it with this hymn”.

St. Clement of Alexandria wrote a message which was published in his well-known book **“The Educator”** where he criticized the use of musical instruments saying: *“In his true nature, man is an instrument of peace, while all musical instruments, if you search and investigate, are found to be instruments and means for war and embattlement, that enflame the feelings toward desires or toward carrying the weapons, and fuel rage and anger. The only instrument which is for true peace is the Lord the Logos alone, whom we must use to praise God. After that we shall not use the “Tanbour”, the “Sour”, the “Tambourine”, the “Nay”, or any of these instruments that were used by the war experts, who did not have the fear of god in their hearts, in their meetings and carnivals aiming to awake their twisted minds with those sounds; but rather let our decent and elevated feelings be in harmony with the Law (the Nomos)”*.

From this message of St. Clement we see that prohibiting the use of musical instruments goes back to the second century AD, and that the “Nay” (Bamboo Flute), which is a delicate, sweet, soft sound instrument that brings comfort to the tense nerves, an instrument that has a touch of dignified sadness suited for the Church hymns, this instrument was viewed, at that time, as an instrument for enflaming the feelings towards desires and carrying of weapons and bringing about feelings of rage and anger, and should be used only by the war experts.

The thinking portrayed by St. Clement message, though different from King David the Prophet’s view of the instrument (which he used to make with his own hands for worshiping and praising God), and in spite of the spiritual view by the Holy Scriptures both Old & New Testaments towards musical instruments, it appears that perhaps the music around the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries AD, was of such nature and style that stirred rage and anger, and that the aim of those who used it in their celebrations and carnivals was to distort the minds of its listeners and participants into unclean thoughts. And perhaps that was why St. Clement was afraid that this type of music with its ill effect on people’s hearts and thoughts, and the use of its instruments, might penetrate the Church and replace the feelings of peace and humility with those of rage and anger.

It was written that the Copts during the time period preceding St. Clement at the end of the second century, had received the method of praise using the Flute and the Psaltery from the devout Jews, during their general meetings called “Agape”, and that they continued using these instruments till the year 190 AD when Clement of Alexandria stopped the use of “Nay” (the Flute) and replaced it with the cymbals “Cymbalon”. It was also mentioned that 190 AD was the year that Clement of Alexandria started his assignment as the director of the Alexandria school, and his ecclesiastic activity that intensified between 190 and 200 AD. Since the first day of his assignment as the director of the school of theology and the beginning of his ecclesiastic activities, he was determined to prohibit the use of musical instruments in praising, and even during their Agape meetings when they gather around the “Agape” table away from the rubrics of the holy liturgy.

He explains his personal vision and views about the musical instrument when he gives an analysis of psalm 150, where King David the prophet invites all creation and all musical instruments to praise the Lord. In his analysis, St. Clement says:

“Praise Him with the sound of the Trumpet” because with the sound of the Trumpet, those who slept will be called to the Resurrection.

“Praise Him with Psaltery and Harp” The Psaltery of the Lord is the human tongue, and the harp is the mouth when moved by the Holy Spirit like a string.

“Praise Him with Timbrel and Dance” refers to the Church contemplating the resurrection from the dead in the beating on the Timbrel’s dead skin.

“Praise Him with Strings and Organs” The Organ is the human body, and its nerves are the strings which when accepting the nourishment by the Holy Spirit, gets tuned in harmony and played by the human voices.

“Praise Him with loud (good sounding) cymbals” refers to the two lips of the mouth as they produce praising tunes.

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” This is an invitation for the entire creation to give praise to the Lord for He takes care of and looks after every breathing creature, and the human is truly the instrument of peace⁴⁹. But because each of the races use one of these instruments for declaring war, and since there is not a single instrument for “Peace” which is the word by which we honor and glorify God, therefore we do not use except the word alone, we do not use the trumpet, or the psaltery or the drums or the flute which those who specialize in war use in their celebrations. Isn’t the harp with the ten strings, a symbol of the word of Jesus? ⁵⁰

The famous harp in Ireland is copied from the harps transported by the Egyptian evangelizing missions, one of the most known of them was the regiment of Thebes which started from Italy, to Switzerland then Ireland. This denotes that that the missionaries were keen to bring with them musical instruments (like the harp) as an important part of their program of evangelizing, so that praising the Lord becomes the main basis in their mission.

Egyptians, especially those from Alexandria, excelled over many other nations in playing the “Nay” (Bamboo Flute) and the “Gank” (an early form of the harp), to the extent that Alexandrine laymen who could not read or write were able to critique the performance of any Nay or Gank player and pinpoint any mistakes the player makes.

The art of playing the Nay in Alexandria had reached such perfection that Nay players from Alexandria were much preferred and invited to many places to perform, and people were ecstatic to host them and have them perform. Yet Clement of Alexandria stopped the use of the Nay and replaced it with the Cymbals **“Cymbalon”**.

Some moderate thinkers, who are enthusiastic about musical instruments, are of the opinion that using musical instruments should be allowed for praising outside the Liturgy, but they agree with prohibiting their use in the Divine Liturgy. This position is based on the need to preserve the Coptic Church traditions which were handed down from our fathers the Apostles through the generations.

⁴⁹ **Fr. Kyrillos Kyrillos** – The three liturgies aligned with exacting and explanation – The Church of St. George, Khamarawayh, Cairo – Second printing – 1987 – page 240

⁵⁰ **Fr. Matta El-Meskeen** – The Eucharist and the Liturgy – part one – Abba Makar Monastery – Wady El Natroun – 1977 – page 416

10- THE INSTRUMENTS:

The use of musical instruments in the Coptic Church is limited to two instruments only: The Cymbals (Naqoos) and the Triangle (Trianto). These are of the percussion family of instruments and are used mainly to control the tempo by providing the audible beats, and to add an atmosphere of delight during the performance of some hymns. They also assist the Leader (the Maestro) in his task, as their sound is sharp and can be heard by a large crowd of singers.

The “Naqoos” (Cymbals) consists of two round sheets of a special copper alloy that are clanged against each other. Each is concaved in shape and has a small dome in the center, with a hole in the middle to attach a leather string for handling and playing. The Triangle consists of two pieces of metal rod, 7 or 8 millimeter in diameter. The long one is shaped as a triangle and the short one is straight, and the sound is produced by striking one against the other. This is used in present orchestras. The Church prohibited the use of any other instrument in the Divine Liturgy.

Here are pictures of these instruments:



St-Takla.org



St-Takla.org

THE CYMBALS “CYMBALON”

THE TRIANGLE “TRIANTO”

The Coptic hymns depend on sweet melodic tonal path, rich and diverse, which does not leave the hymns in need of instrumental coloration.

11- THE MONOPHONY:

The Coptic hymns are neither polyphonic nor Homophonic but rather *“Monophonic”*. They depend on a strong and coherent single melodic line that is homogeneous and diverse, with many scales (Modes/Maqamat) rhythms, and changing speeds, filled with leaps and ladder type compositions but they all come from one line of sweet singing which is Monophonic in its formation.

This does not mean that this music cannot conform to polyphonic or homophonic formulation; some of the Egyptian and non-Egyptian composers were attracted by the beauty of this monophonic tonal line, and they put it into polyphonic formations, using the sciences of “counterpoint” and “Harmony” that originated in the palaces of the Pharaohs, according to the scholars of the French invasion of Egypt and Phelon the Jewish historian who lived in the days of the Apostles.

According to the Greek historian “Deodore the Sicilian”, the Egyptian god “Tut” who was known to the Greeks as “Hermas” was the first to discover the order and distribution of the stars and the planets, and also discovered the harmony and the nature of the musical sounds that come from the other planets, thus the belief by the Egyptians that he was the maker of the “Three Stringed Lyre” in imitation of the three seasons of the year (back then). He adopted three notes: A high (sharp) note representing the summer season, a low (deep) note representing the winter season, and a medium (middle) note to represent the spring season. This idea made the ancient musicians believe that for each string there is a symbol that explains one season of the year. In other words, for each season, there is a musical note especially for that season.

If this story about the god Tut is regarded as a legend or a fairy tale, then how can the scholars explain the change in the tunes of the Coptic Church hymns according to the seasons of the year without changing the words in spite of how ancient they are? There is not a single scroll or modern church rubrics book that does not instruct the Cantor to perform the hymns in the tunes suited for these seasons according to the rites of the Coptic Church hymns.

12- THE ORAL TRADITION:

The Coptic Church played a miraculous role in preserving the Coptic Hymns Heritage, which was handed down from our fathers the Apostles, and through times that had no sound recording capabilities nor were the methods for music transcription known. This was done through the so called *“Oral Tradition”*. For this reason, the Church appointed the *“Cantors”* who had the vocal capabilities, and enjoyed a sharp memory and a strong ability to concentrate and imagine the tunes and the shapes with their different methods and scales, and the different rubric seasons and occasions for the hymns to be recited. The Church also made sure that capable Cantors were present in all of those generations who can receive the hymns and pass them onto the next generation.

Each Church has its own *“Moallem”* (Teacher) whose primary task - in addition to chanting in the liturgies and praises and all other Church prayers – is to *“hand out”* (deliver or teach) the hymns to groups of deacons.

This Moallem (Teacher) during liturgies and praises, stands at the head of the deacons line-up to be their leader (Maestro) giving them precise hand signals that determine the suitable speed for the hymns and where their beginnings and endings are. He also plays the instrument of the Cymbals accompanied by a deacon on the triangle when performing a joyous tune.

13- TRANSCRIBING COPTIC HYMNS MUSIC:

Transcribing the music of the Coptic hymns heritage is a treacherous and difficult subject due to the nature of the Coptic hymns as a spiritual and musical inheritance with a special nature on one side, and on the other side, as an Egyptian musical art that has its own scales, rhythms, and musical formats.

There is no doubt that what the Coptic Orthodox Church did to preserve the Coptic hymns as received from the first fathers, without the presence of any form of music transcripts, even the elementary ones known back in the 11th century before taking the present format known and agreed upon by all the world, is nothing less than a great miracle, especially with the absence of any sound recording means. The miracle of preserving one thousand and forty eight (1048) hymns for a time period of 2000 years through *“Oral Tradition”* alone.

The reason for the miracle is the insistence of the Church on preserving everything they received from our Fathers the Apostles; the rites, the prayers, the spiritual mysteries, the priesthood hierarchy, the orthodox spiritual concepts and also the hymns, that remain preserved to this day without transcription or vocal recording means, which is something that defies all logic.

For this reason, the Church was diligent in appointing Cantors capable of memorizing and saving such a large sum of hymns in their memories, in spite of the difficulties involved including the different methods and scales and the frequency of recitals, some hymns are only sung once a year.

With all of these challenges, there was always those who can deliver the hymns, i.e. the teacher (Moallem), and those who can receive them, i.e. the deacons. There is, no doubt, a strong motive force and spiritual power that helped preserve these musical treasures.

In a lecture given by Mr. E. Newland Smith, the late professor in the Royal Music Academy of London, he spoke about the difficulty of transcribing the Coptic hymns, for it is totally different from the music of all the other nations.

Although there might be some indications to the presence of music notation system using Dots and the elementary Ekphonic⁵¹ for the Coptic music, yet the Copts have been able to preserved their music over the centuries mainly by using the “Oral Tradition.

Only in the 19th century AD that scholars began to transcribe the Coptic hymns music using the conventional system of notating western music. The French researcher “Guillaume Andre Villoteau” who was among the French troops during the French conquest of Egypt, is regarded as having the first attempt in such transcription, where he dedicated five pages of his book “The description of Egypt” (1809) for the hymn “Alleluia” of the Coptic Divine Liturgy.

By the end of the 19th century, there were other notations done by “Jules Blin” (Chants Liturgiques des Coptes – 1888), and others done by “Louis Badet” (Chants Liturgiques des Copets – 1899).

Since the notations done by “Jules Blin” were not greatly trusted for their inaccuracy, those done by “Louis Badet” were considered somewhat more accurate with regards to the general shape and appearance of the hymns.

In the 20th century, “Kamel Ibrahim Ghobrial” published notations for a small number of hymns and responses; (The musical notations of the responses of the Church of St. Mark - 1916).

Unlike those who preceded him in notating the hymns, Ghobrial was a lieutenant in the Egyptian Army, and deeply submerged in the musical traditions of his Church. He designed his transcripts for the Coptic youth and in an attempt to make them more appealing to the public, he tried to adapt the music on the “Piano” with the addition of an accompanying

⁵¹ Beginning in the ninth century AD, a special type of notation called “ekphonic” was developed to indicate in the lectionaries the formulae used in the chanting of the appointed scriptural periscopes of the Byzantine liturgy.

rhythm (without harmony, but with one note an octave apart). As well, he made some changes in the pitch and the rhythms of the vocal tunes. In spite of these clear modifications, he kept the main line (theme) of the tune intact. Mr. Ghobrial became well recognized and appreciated for his pioneering efforts as a Copt aspiring to notate his people's music.⁵²

While the Coptic Encyclopedia stated that he kept the main line (Theme) intact, it should be noted that such notation, by the nature of the music, had affected the main line of the tune, because the action of "adapting" the Coptic tune to the western instrument "The Piano" does harm the microtone and modifying the rhythm and the pitch does alter the music.

After approximately one generation, one of the more daring attempts in this field was started by the British musician "Ernest Newland Smith" who came to Egypt by personal invitation and under the care and sponsorship of Dr. "Ragheb Moftah" for the purpose of transcribing and notating the music of the Coptic Services.

In the period from 1926 to 1936, and after listening to some of the best Egyptian Cantors, Mr. Smith was able to produce sixteen volumes of written music, which included the complete music of the Divine Liturgy according to "St. Basil the Great", and many other important hymns and learned responses for special occasions. The first volume of the sixteen volumes contained more than 100 pages by itself.

Because "Smith" felt that excessive ornamentations were individual add-ons by the individual Cantors, he opted to ignore most of these vocal ornaments. Consequently, his notations portrayed simple lines for the tunes that were adapted to the western notation styles while using western scale signatures (Keys). His notations of this part of the music melodies (void of ornaments), gained approval when compared with the work of the recent scholars. The bulk of his efforts have saved the researchers much of the materials they use in analytical comparisons.

Transcribers / annotators, who did not have the advantage of voice recording apparatus, were not able to compare what they heard to what they transcribed. As a consequence, many complex rhythms and improvisations were not accurately captured nor clarified until the year 1950. Music scholars with interest in working tape recorders were able then to produce more detailed and accurate notations. Among those scholars were "Hans Hickman" and "Rene Minar", who worked both separately and together on transcribing short hymns. By slowing down the replay speed of the tape, Minar was able to listen carefully and capture the ornaments more accurately than was previously possible.

In doing so, he noticed that the western notation system cannot actually illustrate the minute differenced in rhythmic formations and the expressions imbedded in the Coptic

⁵² Aziz Soryal Atteya – The Coptic Encyclopedia – Volume 6 – page 1743

music, thus, he suggested using old symbols such as those used in the “Gregorian Chants” hoping they would be useful.

Upon directions from “Hickman”; scientists at the “Ethnomusicology” Lab in “Hamburg University” were able to employ more sophisticated audio equipment which enabled them to record the finer oscillations in sound waves, thus capturing and annotating complex differences in individual improvisations in reciting the Coptic music to the nearest $\frac{1}{4}$ tone.

In the year 1967, “Ilona Borsai” went to Egypt in order to collect materials for study and analysis. In a short period of time spent on studies of “Ethnomusicology”, she was able to publish about seventeen articles containing notations and observations on certain aspects of the Coptic music which were not previously explored.

In the year 1969, “Margaret Toth” came to Cairo from Hungary to study the Coptic music, and similar to “Newland Smith”, she worked with Dr. “Ragheb Moftah”, using the recordings he collected. She annotated the complete music of the Divine Liturgy according to St. Basil the Great, using modern methods for recording and repeat-listening. She finished annotating a huge sum of details, where not only audible ornaments were notated, but also additional tones that cannot be heard except at lower speeds. However, due to the huge amount of details contained in these notations, they were not readable by the majority of musicians, as well, since they were mostly mechanically produced through the use of the “Milograph”, they did not convey the spirit of the music.

Also, since the notation was done in a western style, the microtone was not notated similar to the way of notating the $\frac{1}{4}$ tone in the Arabic music which is closer in nature, and for which, the methods of notation and the system of “Key Signatures” were established for a long time.

Towards the end of the 1970’s, “Maryanne Robertson” from the United States, started to work with tapes while notating portions of the Liturgy of St. Basil and the services of the Holy Pascha week. She did not notate the ornaments in as much detail as “Tuth” did, considering her main specialty is in Chorale music where ornamentation features are not clearly defined because they depend largely on the individuality of each singer. It was noted that the variations in the voice vibrations and ornaments of the Cantors, have helped in enhancing the meanings of the text being accompanied by the music.

In the year 1976, Mr. Nabil Kamal Boutros, (a violin teacher in the school of musical education, university of Helwan, and a member of the Classical Arabic Music Orchestra), had completed his thesis for a master’s degree entitled ***“The Coptic Music and its relationship to the music of the Pharaohs”*** where he presented a comparative notation

and analysis for one of the Coptic hymns which was performed by a number of different choirs.

The western style of notation was not designed for notating the Coptic music; nevertheless and after all, it appears to be the shape in which this ancient music of the near east can be written. By comparing the different notations by sincere scholars, one may be able to at least realize the complexity and diversity in the traditional Coptic Music.⁵³

Yet, all of what was notated by all of those mentioned, was not able to reflect the nature of the Coptic hymn, as being unique in its historical depth and spiritual senses. Before attempting to notate these immortal treasures, a person must first be someone who co-existed with the **“Oral Tradition Process”** and learned these hymns through it since his younger days, as well as having studied music and the sciences of musical composition and its theories. E also must be an Egyptian who lived in, with, and through, the Maqamat to have them engraved in his inner feelings in order to be able to express them in writing. He must also be someone who lives in and through the depth of the Coptic Church rubrics, rites and traditions, smelled its incense and practiced its spiritual rituals, and learned the ways and behaviors of the Cantors who teach these hymns.

Therefore, the notations and transcriptions created by one of the deacons who studied musical sciences, and who leads and conducts an ensemble specializing in performing the Coptic hymns and the Psalms, have received acceptance by all the musicians dealing with the Coptic music, and also the clergy men who find the music performed by an orchestra from his notations exactly match what is chanted by the Cantors in the Church services.

These notations have also received praise and acceptance from the internationally known Maestro **“Youssef El-Sisi”** who had previously and strongly criticized what was done by the Well-known Hungarian **“Margaret Toth”** when she excessively included ornaments in her notations of the Coptic music and commented the Dr. Toth may be the best person to write and notate the heritage of the Hungarian Folklore, but she may not be the most qualified to notate the Coptic music heritage. This is a task for a Coptic deacon who studied music and quite learned in the heritage of the hymns.

Consequently, the notation by **“non-Egyptians”** of the Coptic hymns became a subject of controversy and criticism, and the notation of the same by deacons who are well trained and versed in this heritage and who studied music sciences was obviously the only solution to this subject which was the center of musical debate for many centuries.

Two important viewpoints resulted thus far;

The first: strongly objects the idea of notating the Coptic hymns heritage, regardless of who does it, Egyptian or non-Egyptian.

This opposition is based upon a speculative fear that notating the Coptic music will put a **“freeze”** on and will bind this heritage that was handed down through the Oral Tradition

⁵³ **The Coptic Encyclopedia** – Vol. 6 – pages 1743, 1744

on the mouths of the arch-priest, the metropolitans, the bishops, the hegomens, the priests, the deacons and the entire congregation, and will become hard solid in the form of ink on paper, its tunes will become stiff, it will not grow, and cannot carry the feelings of the cantors who add little to it while it adds much to them.

This opposition also assures that the process of notating the hymns will no doubt kill the hymn lessons where the deacons, young and old, gather around their teacher who sits among them singing the hymn sentence by sentence with his sweet voice, and they recite after him, then he repeats while they engage and receive, with the hymn, his feelings which he transfers to them through his emotions and involvement in the tune that interacts between his mouth and their ears... It is the Oral Tradition that stood its grounds against the wars and the persecutions, at a time when this oral tradition was taking place not in air conditioned rooms overlooking beautiful gardens with nice scenery as the case is nowadays, but in dark underground caves and dungeons without fresh air, and the only thing that moved there was the sound of the deacons breathing while compressed in large numbers in a small place that can hardly contain them or contain their true feelings towards the living Christ Who transferred to them this spiritual musical seedling which He placed it Himself in the mouth of St. Mark in the Upper Room of his house in the city of Zion whose doors the Lord Loved more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

This is the first point of view adopted by a group of intellectuals who believe in the value of the heritage and the Oral Tradition. Among this group is Dr. Ahmad El-Maghreby, Ex. Director of the Egyptian Center for Culture and Arts.

The Second: point of view is one that supports the idea of notating the hymns by deacons who are well trained and have learned the hymns by heart, deacons who studied the sciences of music and composition, and are gifted in music annotation to qualify for this task.

The group who adopts this point of view recommends that annotations done in this fashion should be based on the recordings collected by Dr. Ragheb Moftah and recorded by the voice of the late Moallem "Mikhail Girgis El-Batanouny", many of which were accompanied by the Chorus of the Institute for Coptic Studies that Moallem Batanouny formed himself, especially for this purpose.

This group senses and fears a great imminent danger that threatens the Coptic hymns as a result of:

- The absence or the rarity of distinguished, highly gifted and qualified Cantors like Moallem(s) "Gad", "Farag Abdel Messih", "Sadek", "Tawfik", and others who are role models in performing the Church hymns and their ability to teach and faithfully pass their knowledge and passion of these treasures to younger generations. Accordingly, notation should result in documenting and preserving the fine and delicate features of these hymns that require extra ordinary musical gift, spiritual

wisdom and understanding for delivering and teaching the hymns according to the teachings of the Apostles. And;

- The lack of adequate means for testing and screening the deacons prior to their ordination for ensuring their ability to perform these hymns and responses, which resulted in hatching and delivering a large number of “Seasonal” deacons who hear the hymns as if they were strangers to them, and who fill the Church pews during festive seasons only, but leave them empty the rest of the year.
- The lack of sufficient time for receiving and learning the hymns because of life’s demands on their time, placing the youth worldwide in a state of “Daze” and resulting in absenteeism from the hymns classes.
- The sudden appearance of strange tunes which float up to the surface, without any known origin or foundations.
- Many deacons tend to like “beautifying” the tunes by adding ornaments which they invent on their own, in attempts to imitate some famous cantors.

In addition, this second group regards musical notation of the hymns as having innumerable benefits, among which are:

- ❖ The preservation of this great heritage, and recording its music in a scientific and accurate way that indicates the microtones, the scalar and rhythmic transpositions, the speed variations, the fundamental ornaments, and archiving all the music sheets, with the original sound recordings from which the music was notated, in order to avail them to the world musicians which helps the spread of these hymns, making them an indirect method of evangelizing in the entire globe.
- ❖ The ability to “read” the music of the Coptic hymns makes praising an easy task, especially when we know there is more than 1000 hymns to be memorized; some of them are recited only once a year, and also realizing that learning how to read music is not all that difficult.
- ❖ Recording the hymns music on music sheets enables printing the music along with the text in all the service books, e.g. the “Divine Liturgies”, “Deacon services”, “Psalmody”, “Paschal week”, etc., which enables all congregations everywhere to be blessed as participants in the liturgies and other worship rubrics, not merely listeners.
- ❖ Teaching the hymns through the use of music notation, will bring the Church into the Civilization of the present, especially knowing that there are some who use other, unscientific, incorrect, uncivilized and unconventional methods, employing signs like arrows, dashes and other wiggly lines in an unsuccessful attempt to reflect musical expressions and fundamentals like times, scales, notes, and the like, which have no convention whatsoever and cannot by any means give indication to times, tones, scales, etc. And if it was found necessary to teach hymns by scribing signs (arrows and dashes)

on paper, these signs ought to be the conventional and universal method, agreed to by the whole world, after many trials and attempts starting from the 9th century and evolved into a more perfect shape which we have at present.⁵⁴

- ❖ Scribing the hymns using the regular music notation techniques will simplify the researching, studying and analyzing the sentences and phrases, the forms and shapes, the rhythms and their variations, the measures, the scales and their transpositions and many other features of this music. Thus enabling the researchers to study and compare and dig deeper into this musical, spiritual, cultural, and human heritage, which is considered by many a fertile field of research.
- ❖ Notating the Coptic Musical Heritage will result not only in unifying and standardizing the hymns in the Coptic Church, but also in unifying many other performance features like breathing intervals, controlling the speeds and their changes, the tonal and timing bonds, which is a very important and vital factor in changing the shape of the hymn.

We can see that each of these two groups, either for or against notation, has its own reasons and rationale to substantiate its position, but it would still be possible to produce notation carefully, and with some adaptation, using positive thinking, in order not to turn it into a stiff heritage. This can be done by keeping the “Oral Tradition” alongside the scribed music, such that the written music becomes a helping agent to achieve perfection, not a

totally separate system that cancels the Oral Tradition and replaces it entirely. The music notes then would record the time measures and the basic notes, or the so called “Canto Fermo” (literally: Fixed Song), which does not include ornaments and individual additives that get added by individual cantors, each according to his current mood while reciting.

In all cases it is known that notating the music has its weaknesses like recording on tapes or CD’s which resulted in a lesser degree of accuracy than that of the Oral Teaching Tradition.

⁵⁴ Scribing the music, or “Music Notation” was in common use in Europe at the beginnings of the 9th century AD, and was called (Neumes) and it has symbols similar to those used in “short-hand writing” like the dot, the comma and the dash bending right or left, etc. All these symbols were placed atop the poetry words for reminding the singer which direction the tune goes (ascending or descending) for the song that was learned before. These symbols were intended for determining the length of the note and indicating the time allotted to it, or to switch from one note to another. This method remained in use till the end of the 11th century when Franco of Cologne, Germany, came up with new signs having different shapes, each sign representing a time value, and each one is equal to 1/3 the time value of the immediate next larger sign. In the 14th century, “Philip de vitry” added other signs having lesser time values. The shape of the signs kept changing and improving until they arrived at the present shapes and names. Music notation has benefited the preservation of musical works and kept them from being lost, changed, or tampered with. In addition, the newly added signs have enriched the notation technique and increased its accuracy by being able to register and record every detail of the piece, breathing stops, the colors and shadows of performing and expressing.

14- THE CANTORS:

Since most priests and members of the clergy were not always as gifted as the singers (Cantors), the tradition was - and still is – to delegate the task of reciting the music to a professional Cantor, called **“Arreef”** in Arabic (literally: the one who knows) or **“Moallem”** (teacher). This person is the one who gets trained by the Church to be responsible for the correct teaching of the hymns and responses in all the Church services.

Most often, was chosen from among the Blind, due to an old popular belief that the sense of vision for a blind man is transferred from his eyes to his ears, a transfer that reinforces the musical gifts and abilities. He would be expected to attend all services to recite and chant all hymns and other rubrics in their proper times, and earn his living that way.

The **“Moallem”** is not a member or a rank within the priesthood ranks, but in times gone by, it was the custom that certain prayer is recited for his appointment as the Cantor of the Church. Here is the prayer:

“O Mater Lord, who is capable of all things, this here is your servant standing before You, who came to Your Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, we ask that You enlighten his way to know how to recite your holy words and sing the spiritual hymns unto You with understanding”.⁵⁵

Little is known about the cantors before the year 1850 A.D. However, it became obvious at that time that the text and music were not performed correctly in most cases by careless or untrained cantors. This phenomenon caused the Patriarch pope Cyril (Kyrillos) the 4th (1853-1861) to feel uneasy about the situation, and decided to make the training of cantors one of the main priorities of the Church. He saw that specialists, who are gifted and well trained in singing the hymns and performing the rites, can help solve this problem by having them train and teach the others, and making them responsible for improving the music.

Having this issue under consideration, the pope found a blind young man who was enrolled in a school near the Cathedral of St. Mark, whom he felt was gifted and had sweet voice with a trained ear and appointed him to teach hymns. Later, this cantor was ordained as deacon and was called **“Abouna”** (father) Takla.⁵⁶

As part of his job, Father Takla corrected the pronunciation of the Coptic language by his students and insisted on proper articulation and learning (receiving) of the hymns. In

⁵⁵ **The Coptic Encyclopedia**, vol 6 – page 1736

⁵⁶ **The Coptic Encyclopedia**, vol 6 – page 1736

the year 1859, and by order from pope Kyrillos 4th, assisted by the deacon “Erian Girgis Moftah” the teacher of the Coptic language in the college of the Patriarchate, father Takla issued the first printing of the book “Deacons Services”.

Also at the direction of the pope, father Takla included four Greek hymns after translating them into Coptic and preserved their original Greek tunes and classified them as Greek hymns⁵⁷, and they are still being recited to this day in Christmas and Easter.

In addition, father Takla sang Coptic hymns of his own composition in the homes of the Ottoman elite. The Governor (Khedive) was so impressed by one of Moallem Takla’s patriotic works in Coptic, that he bestowed upon him the prestigious title of “Bey”.

Father Takla had seven students who received from him his knowledge and skills, among them were two cantors; Fr. Marcos of Matay, and Moallem Armanius. In the next generation, one of his students was blind and blessed with a clear voice and a sharp memory, who was later known as Moallem Mikhail Girgis El- Batanouny.

In his youth, Mikhail was sent to many Churches in many Egyptian cities and towns to learn and collect hymns. He was the sincere and dedicated one in the school of St. Didimus for the cantors, and he was the one selected by Dr. Ragheb Moftah to recite the Coptic hymns for the British music scholar Mr. E. Newland Smith, who notated many Coptic hymns and songs from 1928 to 1936, and consequently became the means through which many great treasures of Coptic hymns were preserved by music **notation**.

Moallem Mikhail passed away in 1957 at the age of 75.

The cantors and deacons who learned and studied at the hands of Moallem Mikhail, like Moallem “Tawfik Youssef at the “Monastery of Moharraq”, Moallem “Sadek Attalla”, Dr. “Youssef Mansour”, and many others in the Churches of Cairo and other municipalities, have been acknowledged as experts in the liturgical services and the correct teaching of the Coptic hymns. They also helped in the sound recordings of the liturgy at the center prepared by Dr. Ragheb Moftah for this purpose.

The ancient Egyptians preferred that cantors be blind, who used to place their hands on their cheeks while singing. From this tradition the Church got the idea to enlist the help of blind cantors in receiving (learning) and delivering (teaching) the hymns, because of their sharp memories and their ability to concentrate and imagine the tunes and the shape of the beats, to which they gave the expression “**Hazzaat**” (accents or vibes).

The selection of cantors was done with care and attention regarding their vocal capabilities in correctly performing the tunes and the rhythmic shapes. To this day, every Church has its own cantor, whose prime task – besides singing the hymns in the liturgies and other occasions - is to teach and hand over what he knows to deacon groups. Deacons would line up in two groups (North Chorus and South Chorus) and the Moallem stands at the head of the north Chorus performing the role of the Maestro,

⁵⁷ When the Coptic Church adopted some hymns from the Greek Church, they were “Egyptianized to take on the Coptic features regarding the speeds, the tempo, the ways of recital, the musical scales, and genders (guens).

whose hand signals determine the appropriate speed for the hymn, the vocal pitch where the hymn starts, and the points at which the beginnings and the ends of different parts are.⁵⁸ The Cantor also plays the Cymbals to adjust the tempo.

About the hand signals given by the cantors, Ragheb Moftah says⁵⁹:

“From the pictures found on the ancient Egyptian artifacts, it was ascertained that the moves and signals given by the hands of Muallem “Mikhail El-Batanouny” when reciting the Coptic hymns are very similar to the same moves done by the cantors and musicians in Pharaohnic Egypt.”

Adel Kamel⁶⁰ wrote:

“We present a picture for the arch-cantor of the Coptic Church of St. Mark, and the master of Coptic hymns in our time, the late Moallem Mikhail El-Batanouny, while performing some hand moves and rhythmic signals (Cironomie) that are an exact copy of what was done by his predecessor of the ancient state, as shown on the walls of the tomb of “Nunkhfetka” in Saqqara, and a resemblance could also be detected between the voice of the Coptic Chrch Cantor and the sound of that singer in the resonance that fills his larynx. “Kurt Sacz” was the first to uncover this resemblance and authenticated it through the contractions of the forehead muscles above the nose and those of the mouth.”



⁵⁸ **George Kyrillos** – Lecture at the house of the Russian musicians – October 2011

⁵⁹ **The contemporary thoughts and Arts Magazine** – Cairo, issue 140, July 1994, pg.152

⁶⁰ **Adel Kamel** – PhD thesis – previous reference – page 192

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE LATE MOALLEM
MIKHAIL GIRGIS EL-BATANOUNY

There are times when the “*Arreef*” (Cantor) stops singing, being satisfied by the performance of the choir, or when someone among the deacons can perform the Moallem’s role, or if there is an Arch-deacon present. This silence of the Cantor indicates that he is checking to ensure that his teaching was fruitful in creating a new generation capable of preserving this immortal spiritual heritage⁶¹.

The cantors’ job is also to implant the love of hymns in the hearts of those deacons, and to create a new generation of the musically gifted children to become the deacons of the future.

15- ARABIANIZATION OF THE COPTIC HYMNS:

The Modern Coptic Language” remained the language of Egypt during the rule of the Greeks and the Romans. When the Arabs came, they kept it till the year 709 AD, when “Abdullah, brother of Walid Abdul Malek Ibn Marwan” came to power and prohibited the use of the Coptic language in all government departments and replaced it with the Arabic language. In the year 799 AD, “Al-Hakem Be-Amrellah” decreed that it is unlawful to use the Coptic language at all, even on the streets and the homes. However, the Copts kept using it in their Churches, and it was still used by all Egyptians, Christians and Muslims alike, for several centuries, during which, the language was in continuous decline.

For this reason, some people resorted to “Arabianize” some of the Coptic Hymns, while keeping the original tune in the Coptic language. But this Arabianization distorts the musical features of the hymn, and twists the translated Arabic word under the yoke of the tune that was not made for it. This mix resulted in a hybrid new hymn, the product of an imperfect match between a Coptic tune that was separated from its Coptic words that have been molten with it spiritually in the pot of the Coptic Church for 2000 years,

⁶¹ **George Kyrillos** – Musicality and spirituality of the Coptic hymns – previous reference – pg.65

and being forced to mix with Arabic words that are foreign to it, for no reason other than the ignorance with the Coptic language or the unwillingness to preserve it or spending a little effort to learn it, hence came these hybrid hymns.

Some experiments were conducted in Egypt by a group of artists to “Arabianize” the operas of the music giant “Mozart”. These attempts were also severely criticized by many critics, because they “mutilated” the music by the words that were forced to mingle with it, and the result was that the transparent and beautiful music of Mozart became dark and cloudy from bending under the heavy burden of words it could not carry.

Dr. Sanfawy wrote saying: *“The fame and popularity of the international songs that are spreading now, are only for the original version of the song in its original music and original lyrics. No matter how many translations and redistribution in other languages, the original text for which the music composer made the tunes, is always the best. For example, although the Italian language is the most beautiful languages in which famous world operas were sung and performed, yet the opera “Carmen” by its French composer “Georges Bizet” who composed its music based on the original French text is far better and more enjoyable in French than in Italian.*⁶²

The Coptic hymns Arabianization efforts were being carried out without proper understanding of their meanings and with no scientific musical awareness, which resulted after Arabianization, in totally different hymn, so far away from the original tune, musically speaking.

For instance, the hymn *“Hiten Epresveya”* which was translated to Arabic we find that attempting the recital of the Arabic words onto the original tune, made the music of the resulting hymn very different when comparing the notations of the two. The Arabianized version did not have the same persistent repetition of the note G in the Coptic version which was to express the persistence in imploring the Virgin for her intercessions it also did not express the kneeling that should accompany the mention of the Holy Trinity. And when offering the “Sacrifice of Praise”, the tempo did not slow down as it should per the Coptic original expressing the care and diligence in choosing the sacrifice to be like that offered by Abel not like the one offered by Cain, and the tones did not go up higher to indicate that the sacrifice of praise which is offered on the Altar of the heart is ascending to the heaven for the Heavenly Father to smell it as He did the sacrifice of His only begotten son at the evening time on the Golgotha.

All of these beautiful meanings were lost in the tunes of the Arabianized version, while the original Coptic version had outlined and expressed all of them in no more than one minute.

⁶² **Dr. Fathy Abdel Hady El-Safnawy** – The primitive music and the the music of the ancient cultures – The General Book Organization - 1985

We should not overlook that many of the Arabianized hymns have now become part of the heritage as they aged in the bosom of the Coptic Church for several centuries, and have acquired a special taste and beauty which cannot be ignored or abandoned by any means. The idea of keeping the original music with its original Coptic lyrics must grow and flourish in the hearts and minds of the Coptic youth, not only for preservation of their spiritual heritage, but also for preservation of their identity as Copts, as the Armenian people did in spite of being subjected to mass annihilation, and kept their own language till the present.

16- MUSICALITY OF THE HYMNS LANGUAGE:

The Coptic language is a musical language like the Italian language, and it found itself resting comfortably on the throne of music. Its seven vowels are divided into three divisions:

- Letters leaning towards the `A` sound:
Only one vowel which is Alpha (Ⲁ)
- Letters leaning towards the `E` sound:
Four vowels: (Ⲅ - Ⲟ - Ⲡ - Ⲣ)
- Letters leaning towards the `O` sound:
Two vowels: (Ⲑ - Ⲕ)

Although this number of vowels (seven) is considered a large number in comparison to other languages like Arabic which has only three vowels (ALEF “أ”) & (WOW “و”) & (YEH “ي”) yet the musicality of the Coptic language does not stop at this limitation of seven vowels, but expands the three vowel divisions listed above by grouping some vowels together to create variations in the way they sound. A common example is when the two vowels “Ⲑ” and “Ⲣ” appear together in a word, and sometimes three adjacent vowels are seen together. There are many more examples for adjacent vowel clusters and their pronunciation.

In addition to the above, some of the Coptic language vowels may be pronounced as consonants when they come next to other letters, as in the case of the vowel yota “Ⲡ” in the word “Ⲫⲁⲓ” (FAI) which means “this”. The vowel yota in this case is pronounced as a consonant although it comes after the Alpha Ⲁ. The interesting thing here is that the word “Fai” Ⲫⲁⲓ did not lose its musicality because of having the consonant “Yota” at the end, but the vowel “Alpha” (that leans towards the sound `A`) overcame the letter Yota (that leans towards the sound `E`) and turned it into a consonant. The word Ⲫⲁⲓ is

the opening word of the beautiful hymn of the Cross “Fai Etaf Enf” (This is He who offered Himself...).

In a research done by Dr. “Maged Samuel”⁶³ regarding the original roots of the Coptic Language vowels, he uncovered the most important feature in the Coptic hymns; The Melismatic Style.

Dr. Samuel spoke about the Pharaohnic and Greek roots of the vowels and said that vowels contain more sounds than the consonants. That is why the ancient Egyptians used the vowels in their chants of the hieroglyphic text of “Horos” and “Apollon” where these letters are recited and are named “Parmata”.

In the “Bani Hassan” cemetery, a wall painting from the middle kingdom shows a group of singers reciting some letters appearing in two columns above each singer. Scholars explain that these letters represent the sounds produced by those singers. The repeated letters in a column can be explained as a rehearsal for this singing at the end of each sentence or as elongation in a certain word, exactly as what happens now in the Coptic Church hymns.

Some engravings were found in the city of “Miletus” in “Ionia” on the northern outside wall of the theater of this town, which had mention of the vowels in the heritage of ancient people. Another find in that city was a piece of stone that drew the attention of many archeologists. Archaeologist Boeckh⁶⁴ saw that a group of planets were engraved on it,

they are: (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Earth, and Venus). On the second line, at the top of each elliptical shape we read the seven vowels of the Greek alphabet. Marcus the heretic⁶⁵ claimed that these seven letters represent the seven heavens, and that the Greeks and the Egyptians use these letters to refer to the seven notes of the 7-stringed harp (the Heptacord).

Aside from the negative effect of translating the Coptic hymns to the Arabic language with regards to its spiritual value as an inheritance received from the forefathers and as a universal heritage, it was realized also that using the exact original tunes of the Coptic hymns to try and sing the translated Arabic words is virtually impossible, because the two languages do not have the same number of vowels (Arabic has three and Coptic has seven). The musical capability of the Coptic language is more than double that of the Arabic language, even though the Arabic language compensates for the lack of vowels by adding “shaping signs” (i.e. Fatha, Kasra, Dhamma) to the alphabet letters.

63 Maged Samuel – Examination of some Coptic Church seasonal hymns from a Choral perspective Thesis for the PhD degree from the faculty of musical education, Helwan University, 2001, pg 90

64 Maged Samuel – The previous reference – page 91

65 Maged Samuel – The previous reference – page 92

Therefore, adhering to the Coptic tune when reciting the Arabic version of the hymn will definitely distort the pronunciation of the Arabic words, which would be unacceptable by the Arabic speakers as well as the owners of the Coptic spiritual inheritance and musical heritage.

If translating Arabic lyrics of a song to the Coptic language using the same original (Arabic) tune results in a song less flowing and not as beautiful, even with more vowels in Coptic than there is in Arabic, then how much more is the case for the other way around, i.e. translating Coptic to Arabic with the same music? To elaborate; here are some examples:

1. The hymn of the Blessing (Ten O Osht):

The hymn starts with the words “**ΤΕΝΟΥΩΥΤ ΜΦΙΩΤ**”, its Arabic translation is “we worship the Father” (in Arabic letters نَسْجِدُ لِأَب).

For those who speak Arabic; these two words contain absolutely no vowels, while the Coptic words contain five vowels. Therefore, the music created for, and based on having, five vowels, cannot agree, or be used, with words void of all vowels.

2. The hymn (khen O Shoat): These are the beginning words of the “Lobsh” of the first canticle “**ΒΕΝ ΟΥΨΩΤ ΑΨΩΤ** “ when translated to Arabic it reads (قطعاً إنقطع). The Arabic words have no vowels, while the Coptic have five. The same applies here as well.

3. The Hymn of the golden censer (Ti Shori Ennob): These beginning words “**Ψωτηρη ἱνουβ**” are translated to Arabic as (المجمره الذهب). Again the Arabic words have no vowels, while the Coptic words have four vowels. Same thing again.

4. The response after the Gospel reading of Christmas eve service:

(O Seyyo Af Shai Khen Ni Man Shai), in Coptic:

“**ΟΥΣΙΟΥ ΑΨΩΑΙ ΔΕΝ ΝΙΜΑΝΨΑΙ**” translated to Arabic it reads

(نجم أشرق في المشارق) meaning (a star has shined in the east)

In Arabic, the four words have only two vowels. The first of which has to be pronounced as a consonant with the following word. The second is equivalent to the letter A in English. In the Coptic version there are eight vowels, hence similar argument as in the points above applies.

5. Psalm 118:

A small portion of this psalm was taken for the hymn

(Alleluia Fai Pe Pi Eho Oou Eta Epchoice Thamiof)

ΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΙΑ ΦΑΙ ΠΕ ΠΙ ΕΒΟΟΥ ΕΤΑ ΠΟΣ ΘΑΜΙΟΥ

Meaning “This is the day which the Lord has made”

The Arabic text is (هذا هو اليوم الذى صنعه الرب). In reality though there are five vowels in the Arabic text, they are virtually four only because two of them have to be together as a consonant and one consonant is pronounced as a vowel. In the Coptic text there are eleven vowels. This again is similar to what is presented above.

6. The same or similar examples can be provided using other hymns :

The hymn “Tenen O Theen” a Greek hymn for the three young men, and another Coptic praise for the three young men “Ten Oweh Enthok khen pen heet tirtf” and many others.

All of the above examples are randomly selected to illustrate the inability of the Arabic language to “contain” the music which was composed for Coptic words that bask in a sea of vowels. It is also possible through comparing the poetic (vocal) musicality for the two languages in the above examples; a huge difference between the “Motifs” can be seen.

In general, the ratio of musical ability of the Coptic letters compared to the Arabic letters, we find it averages 4:1.

17- METHODS OF RECITAL:

There are four methods established by the Church for reciting the Coptic hymns to correspond with the scriptures and the teachings of our fathers the Apostles, and also to create sort of praising dialogue between the congregation and the clergy and deacons, and to attract the attention of the listeners such that they do not feel bored by the monotony in some chants that can extend for long hours. In each of these methods, the role of the Cantor (Moallem) is different.

❖ Reciting in two Choruses (Antiphonal):

This method is known as “Antiphonal singing”, where the hymn is recited in alternation between two groups of deacons (the north Chorus, and the south Chorus) one answers the other.

Scholars have tried to determine the origin of this method and how the antiphonal singing was introduced to the Church. Some said that St. Peter the apostle saw it in a vision, others said it was introduced to the Church of Antioch via St. Ignatius the Theophorus in the first century AD as taken from the worship system in the

Jewish synagogues. Then it was taken from Antioch (Syria) to Palestine and from there to Egypt.

*A story is told about St. Ignatius that he saw in a vision that the angels were chanting hymns for the Holy Trinity, and this agrees with what is written in the book of Isaiah **“Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: Holy , Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory”** (Isaiah 6:2,3).*

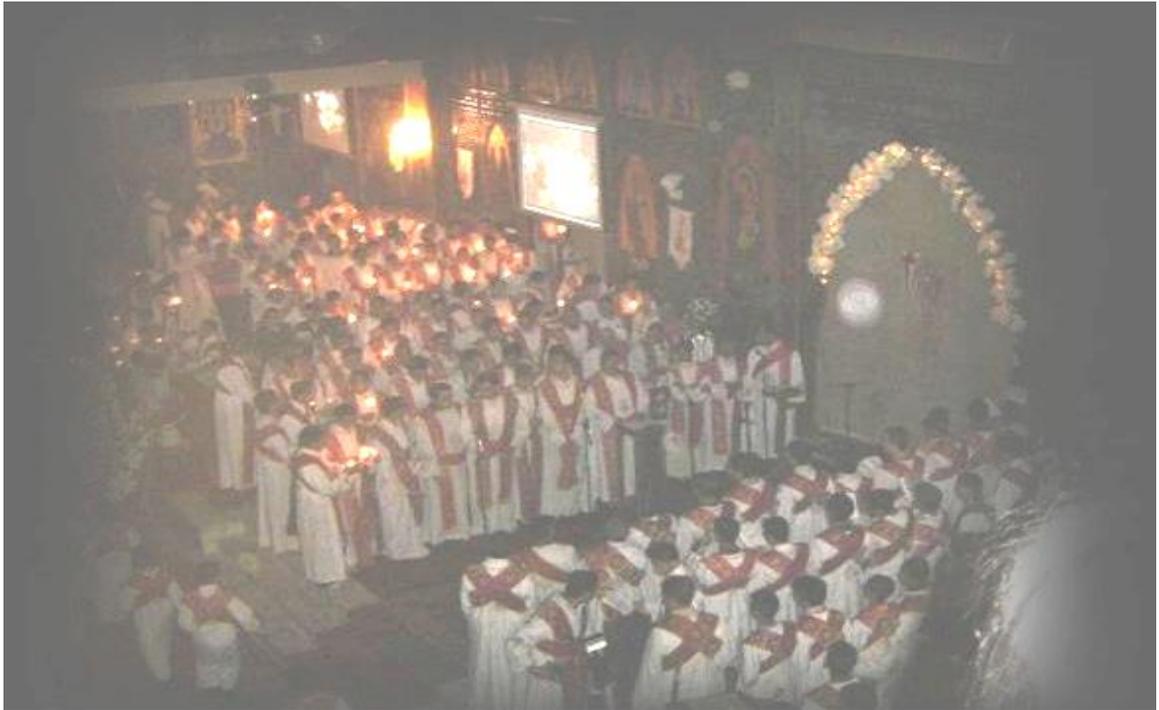
*In fact, praising in two groups (Choruses) is a very old rubric in the temple, that was followed since the days of “Ezra” and “Nehemiah”, for the scriptures say: **“Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps”** (Nehemiah 12: 27), **“31 So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand on the wall..... 38 The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite way,... 40 So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God,... 42The singers sang loudly....”***

(Nehemiah 12: 31, 38, 40, 42).

The Coptic translation of the book of Psalms is believed to be taken from the Hebrew copy called “Massoretic” which had been used by the hermit Jews of Alexandria before converting to Christianity, and it was from them that the Copts adopted the “Antiphonal” singing method.

The Jewish historian “Philo” mentioned in his book where he describes the life of the first Church of Alexandria and all of Egypt as it was in its early days with its Jewish features (45 – 55 AD), that those hermits used the “Antiphonal” method in their night praises⁶⁶, and it was transferred from them to the Church as a rubric for the Divine services, and subsequently it was adopted by the Latin Churches

⁶⁶ Fr. Matta El-Meskeen – Previous reference – pg 87, 88



Archive Photograph illustrating the Antiphonal method with two Choruses; One in the North side, and another in the South side.

Similar antiphonal singing system was arranged by the Church where one Chorus stands inside the sanctuary, and another outside, following psalm 24: ***“Lift up you heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.”***

Also at the beginning of the twelfth hour prayer of Good Friday, after the door (curtain) of the sanctuary is opened indicating the reconciliation between the Heavenly and the Earthly, a dialogue starts between two groups of deacons, one inside and another outside of the sanctuary, while reciting the paschal praise ***“Thok Te Ti Goam” (Thine is the power...)***.

This is a form of antiphonal singing illustrated by the Church rubric. In the Gospel according to St. Matthew and St. Mark, it is mentioned that the crowd who went out to greet Jesus when He entered Jerusalem, had divided themselves into two groups one that went before Him and another that followed Him: ***“Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out saying: Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!”*** (Matt. 21: 9)

In his letter No. 207 to the priests of Caesarea, Saint Basil, affirming the importance of antiphonal praise says: ***“The people go to the house of prayer at night confessing in tears before God, and then they move on from their prayers to start praising with the psalms where they would split into two groups to recite the praises antiphonally, and then hand over the beginning of the hymn to one of***

them and the rest respond”.

The Muallem (leader) usually stands at the head of the north Chorus in order to be able to lead and gives signs with his right hand, and with his facial expressions, where the north Chorus starts praising as he leads, then the south Chorus responds by reciting the following part (Stikhon) being led by an archdeacon or someone dependable to unite their response, still under the overall leadership of the Muallem, for he is the only leader of both groups. The hymns recited in this fashion have special nature and distinct features:

- They contain scalar transpositions that can be very complex, requiring good ability to control the tunes.
- They contain rhythmic and speed variations, requiring control of the rhythm and speed of the tempo.
- They have compounded musical formats.
- Melisma forms part thereof, which becomes dense at times

Therefore, the role of the Muallem here becomes vital.

❖ ***Responsorial Praising Method:***

Some of the history books wrote that the “Responsorial” method of singing was known in the 14th century AD, and was taken from the ancient Coptic Church, where the choir (Chorus) or the congregation respond to the Muallem “the soloist”. This method has caused the invention of the title “***Virtuosi***” or the “***master singer***”⁶⁷. This confirms that the performance of the Muallem (Arreef) was beautifully expressive, that those from outside the Church were impressed and affected by his sweet and accurate performance. The Arreef would sing some verses while the congregation listens, then they would respond at the end of each verse by a fixed response.

⁶⁷ **Ahmad Bayoumi** – The music expressions dictionary – Ministry of Culture – Egyptian Opera House – 1992 – page 347



Archive photograph showing the Responsorial method of praise

It was told about St. Athanasius the apostolic that he used to instruct the deacon to recite the psalm, and that the congregation respond by saying *“For His mercy endures forever”*. In other words, he was asking them to recite the second canticle (Psalm 136) using the responsorial style by singing solo then responding with the refrain.

The historian Philo recorded especially the midnight praises which they observed during the occasion of the *“Great Feast”* and the songs which they used to sing, showing how it was when the one person sings solo for a time the others would listen in silence and not participate in the song till the end.⁶⁸

St. Basil says in the same letter No: 207, after explaining how they would split into two groups to sing praises antiphonally, he says *“After that they hand the hymn over to one and the rest respond”*.

It is important to point out that the ancient Coptic Church created this system for several reasons:

⁶⁸ **Fr. Matta El-Meskeen** – previous reference – page 128

- The participation of the congregation in praising through a small refrain that can easily be remembered and recited by all (e.g. Amen, Alleluia, Lord have mercy, Etc.)
- Ensure the congregation's engagement and concentration.
- Ensure that the congregation is not separated from the liturgy in the times of solo singing, and if that happens, singing the refrain would bring them back.

The leader's role towards the two choruses and the congregation shrinks at this time because they recite the refrain together, while the solo singer is left to do his part freely till he gets to the refrain. The leader then gives the starting signal for everyone, and the singing starts at the proper time including the two choirs and the rest of the congregation.

The responsorial refrain is characterized by the following:

- Its time does not exceed 10 seconds.
- Does not exceed three bars in length (musical cell or Theme).
- Has no Melisma, for it is usually Syllabic style.
- Has no rhythmic changes
- Has no speed variations.
- Simple music time signature

Hence, it differs from the Antiphonal and the Collective (group) methods in the nature of its composition.

❖ ***The Collective praising method (one group and single voice):***

Like all responses recited by the congregation (referred to in the prayer books as "The congregation says"). These responses are usually supplications with incessancy and strength as seen in the response "Amen Ton Thanaton" (Your death O Lord we proclaim), in which the congregation vows to preach the death of Christ and His holy resurrection. Also the hymn (response) of "Erepe Esmo Ethowab" (may their saintly blessings), and the hymn "Oas Perin" (As it was, so shall be).

There are other hymns for the congregation also, with somewhat longer tunes and compounded rhythms, but simpler than those of the deacons by all measures. They can be described by being:

- Musically simpler, usually without scale transpositions or complex rhythmic changes.

- The speed does not usually change during the hymn except in a few (as in the hymn “Hiten ni Presveia” {through the intercessions of the Theotokos}).
- Characterized by its Syllabic (compact) style, since the Melisma adds to the difficulty of learning and memorizing the hymns. They also differ in their nature from those recited with the responsorial method, as they represent a stronger participation by the congregation in the liturgy, since the time of a hymn in the responsorial method does not exceed a few seconds, thus easier to learn and memorize.

St. Basil in his letter (207) affirms the necessity of collective praising when he says: ***“they all offer a psalm of confession to the Lord as with a single voice and a single heart”***.

It is then up to the leader to unite the performance of the hymn by all the Church (Deacons, north and south, and the congregation) through controlling the beat (pulse) and unifying the breathing and the feelings and attention, by the simplest of signals and moves depending mostly on “Facial Expressions”.

❖ ***The Solo method of praising:***

The singular (Solo) style or method distinguishes the Coptic Church, because everything recited by the priest or the bishop is a form of the solo praise, and when the deacon recites the hymn of the introduction to the Pauline (one of St. Paul epistles) or the Catholic epistle⁶⁹ or the Praxis⁷⁰, or to recite the psalm in the annual tune or in the Adriby tune during paschal week, all of these are forms of the singular (solo) praise.

⁶⁹ **Catholic** is a Greek word meaning universal or collective, the Catholic epistles refer to those written by apostles other than St. Paul.

⁷⁰ **Praxis** is a Greek word meaning Acts, and refers to the book of the Acts of the Apostles.



An archive photograph showing a deacon standing at the podium (the mangaleyah) reciting the Pauline epistle introduction solo, while everyone else is listening.

The Coptic Church has a very important conceptual understanding in this regard. The condition is that solo praising must not result in self-admiration or pride due to the nice voice or the good recital by the soloist, but it must rather be a declaration of his love in which he enters into a covenant with God to love Him more than anyone else. St. John Chrysostom in his explanation of psalm 42, he affirms the above by saying:

“Don’t think then that you came here just to sat some words, but when you recite the response, consider it a covenant for when you say “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You O God” you are actually entering into covenant with God, you are signing an agreement without paper or ink, you have confessed with your own voice that you love Him more than everybody. You do not prefer anything over Him; you are inflamed with His love”.

In this Solo method, the role of the Muallem is only to observe the singer from a distance, so that he could correct any mistakes he may make lightly, kindly and quickly not to affect the praising.

18- DIVERSITY IN THE COPTIC HYMNS REPERTOIRE:

The Coptic Church had prepared a repertoire for each occasion of its liturgical and rubric occasions, so that the praising programs might penetrate, be effective, diverse, complete, and dynamically changing in spite of it's moving in a constant traditional frame. This diversity was necessary since the rubrics and hymns for some occasions may take ten continuous hours or longer to complete, like the rubric of Good Friday where the congregation is "nailed" inside the Church from the early morning to the late afternoon or evening enjoying a continuous tour of tunes and hymns around Him who was "nailed" on the Cross for them, without boredom or even the slightest desire to leave the Church filled with the aroma of the sweet spices and incense and decorated with roses and flowers.

To accomplish this objective, the Church did the following:

- Diversified the timing of the consecutive hymns, such that we find short hymns or responses not exceeding five seconds, and others that may reach over thirty minutes. In doing this, the Coptic Church was careful to arrange the hymns in a thoughtful way, and followed a short tune or response by a

long hymn and so on. The short tune could be an alert for the congregation to pay attention or a brief introduction for the choir.

There are many examples; a short response like “προς χωμεν” which means (let us listen) is followed by a long and compounded hymn “ⲡⲟⲥ ⲉⲩⲛⲟⲩ” (Ephchoice Efnouti) meaning O Lord God of powers. A long response like “απλαζεθεε” the great, is followed by a short hymn like “ⲉⲓⲧⲉⲛ ⲛⲓⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲓⲁ” (through the intercessions) which is recited after the prayer of reconciliation in the divine liturgy. This diversification in the length and time of hymns prevents restlessness and helps the congregation to concentrate and brings about equilibrium in the listening.

- The Church also diversified in the speeds and rhythms of consecutive hymns. The fast hymn is usually followed by a slower one (Adagio), and the hymn with a simple rhythm can be followed by one that has compounded rhythms. Although rhythmic compositions in the Coptic hymns are rather simple, yet it was possible to effectively diversify their use as a way of expressing spiritual meanings and attracting the attention of those present.

It was mentioned earlier that the oriental music – surrounding the Coptic Church – is rich with the different kinds of beats and rhythms, approaching 48 kinds, (Medawwar, Mehaggar, Masmoudi kebir, Nokht, Door Hindi..., Etc.) nevertheless, the Coptic Church with its simple rhythms was able to attract the attention of the whole world to its music, for it was careful to have

diversification of the rhythms even inside the one hymn. One of the most famous hymns that have diversified rhythms yet very short in length (only one minute long) is “ⲉⲓⲧⲉⲛ ⲛⲓⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲓⲁ”. There are many more hymns that have such diversity like:

“ⲟⲩⲧⲟⲥ”, “ⲡⲓⲡⲛⲉⲩⲙⲁ”, “ⲛⲁⲥⲁⲡⲛ”.

- In addition, the Church introduced diversity in the methods of performing the hymns. A solo hymn is followed by a group hymn, and antiphonal hymn is followed by a solo then a responsorial response, and so on.
- There is also diversity in the style of composition, so that a hymn that is mostly Melismatic, would be followed with another of the Syllabic style, and one of certain formation is followed by one with a different formation. The Church fathers were careful in diversifying the nature of successive hymns with regards to the mix of melismatic and syllabic, which is quite apparent especially in the midnight praise. We see the entire first canticle is recited in a syllabic style, followed by the “Lobsh” recited in melismatic style. Then comes the second Canticle in a syllabic style, followed by its Lobsh in the melismatic style, and so on. Observing this mix in the praising eliminates the chances for the mind to drift

away, or for the boredom to creep in, in spite of the long hours it takes to finish the praises and knowing that there is no dependence on extravagance whether in the rhythms or the tunes, and there is no accompaniment by musical instruments.

- The Church employed and mixed a bunch of different ancient Egyptian scales (maqamaat) and their genders (guenses) that exceed one hundred in total. This creates a renewed atmosphere of tonality in the hymns. The diversity of Maqamaat in the repertoire was intentional. There are two styles for diversity in scales used by the Church:
 - Using several scales inside the same hymn, by transpositions in the sentence formation depending on the skill of the composer, as we can see in many hymns like “Epouro” in the sentence “Semni Nan”, and the hymn “Ari Ho-ou Chasf in the sentence “Ho ou chasf” and the hymn “Kata ni Chorus” at the sentence “Ef Erepsalin” and towards the end of the hymn when the first part of the hymn gets repeated at the end, but it gets transposed to the same maqaam with half a tone higher.
 - Using the same maqaam in the one prayer (e.g. procession of the Lamb, the “awashy” (supplications), the prayer of reconciliation) then changing the maqaam in the following prayer.

Hence we find that the procession of the lamb is predominantly in the scale (mood) called “Saba”, while the maqaam “Ajam” is prevalent in the prayers of the commemoration of the saints. This is the reason why some researchers suggested to re-name the scales (Maqamaat or moods) used in the Coptic music to Coptic names that follow the praising areas where these scales are used. For example: re-name the maqaam “Saba” to be called “Pi-Heyeeb” (ⲡⲓⲬⲉⲛⲃ) which is Coptic for “Lamb” and since this scale “Saba” is prevalent in the praising area of the procession of the lamb, and so on, provided that such re-naming only takes place after careful study of all the scales and the areas of praise where they are predominantly used, so that the new names reflect the nature of the prayers where they are used.

The purpose behind suggesting this re-naming is:

+ It is preferable that Coptic names are used for the scales of the Coptic hymns, not Persian names. It is not befitting to use names like “Hijaz” an “Uraq” for Coptic scales and Genus, as if the Coptic language ran out of Coptic names.

+ Giving the scales and their subdivisions Coptic names that have meanings and indications connected to the hymn, will have a positive effect in deepening the connection between the musical and the spiritual aspects.

+ The undertaking of this project by a group of researchers will have a great impact in enriching the musical sciences by what will be discovered about the nature of these scales and the occasions in which they are recited.

- The Church also specified an effective role for the only two musical instruments used (the Cymbals and the Triangle) to realize the audible balance between hymns that use them and others that don't. Using these two instruments in some hymns brings about a different taste of delight than without using them. Instrumental accompaniment, no doubt, has an effective role in the audible diversity. This diversity is noticeable in orchestral works executed by large orchestras (120 or so players).

The "Piccolo" is a small instrument with a sharp sound that soars above all sounds, giving a totally different taste than that of the "Flute" with its sweet transparent sound. And the "Oboe" with its unique countryside sound when

played solo, differs in turn from the Clarinet, and so on with the rest of the wooded wind instruments, which are different than the brass wind instruments, each of them gives a different effect, but all together they give a feeling of power, victory and exaltation.

Not to mention that all these "wind" instruments differ from the stringed instruments, either played with a bow (the violin family) which has more than thirteen techniques of playing to give different effects than the other string instruments played by "plucking". Also the numerous percussion instruments found in the large orchestras.

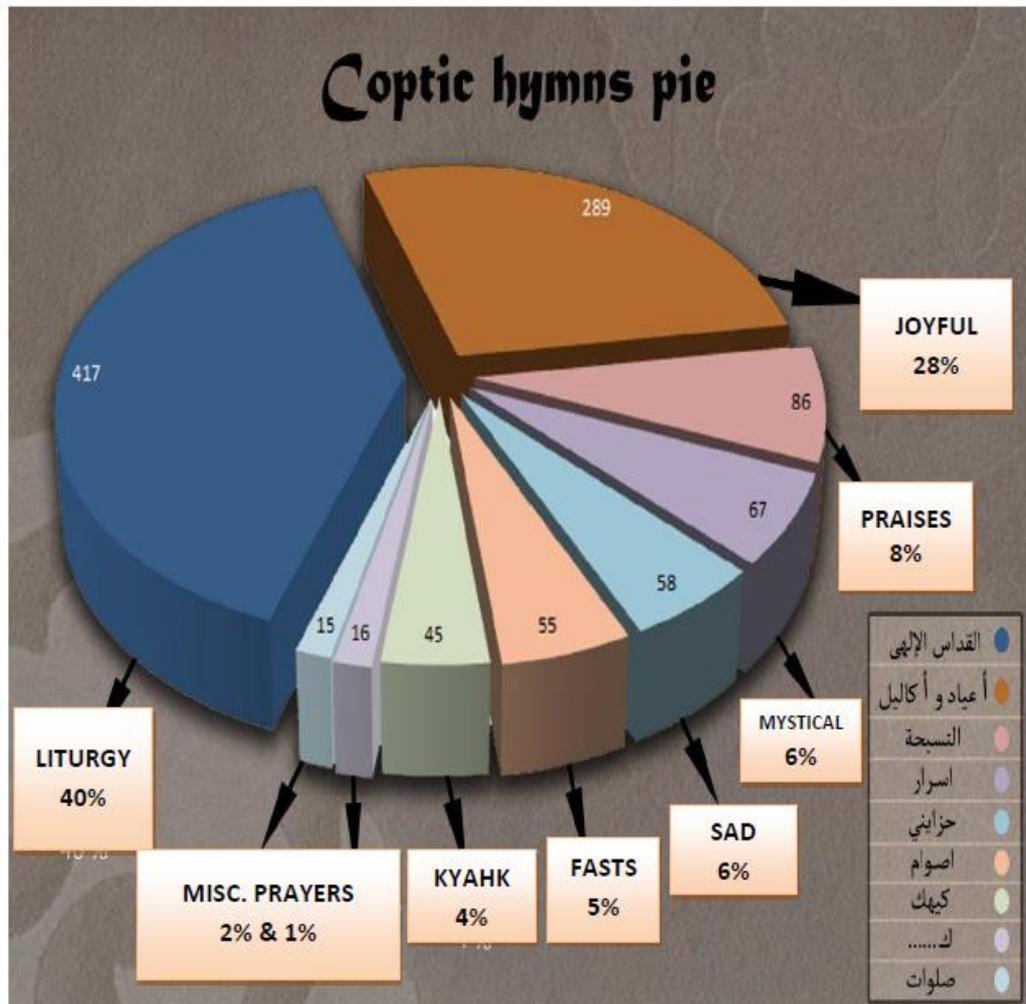
But the instrumental accompaniment in the Coptic Church is limited to two percussion instruments only; the Cymbals and the Triangle, which are used in hymns that have rhythm and tempo, and only the "Joyous" hymns out of those.

The effect of these two instruments is far deeper than the large orchestra mentioned above, to the extent that some leaders in the Church preferred not using any of these instruments, even outside the liturgy, so that the hymns maintain its Acapella style, for they enjoyed the hymns without instrument accompaniment. Many non-Egyptians from different nations expressed their admiration and enjoyment when hearing the Coptic hymns with the Cymbal and Triangle only rather than those accompanied by the rest of the instruments. Upon careful consideration, we find that Coptic hymns with the distinguishing

Acapella style, have acquired reputation of being noble, serious full of dignified humility, which made it unique and sets it apart from any music heard outside the Church.

The Cymbal and Triangle get used every now and then to introduce a change and bring about a special and temporary effect, and to spread an atmosphere of delight such that people don't think of Coptic Church as having a gloomy nature, for it is not like that⁷¹, and when they are played properly, these two small instruments cause a great effect and change the surrounding mood in a big way that is not proportional to their size. See the pie chart on the next page for illustration of the amount of hymns recited in different rubrics.

⁷¹ By analyzing the Coptic Church hymns being recited all year round, it was proven that only 6% of those hymns have a bit of sadness in them, but the rest have a joyful nature.



Pie Chart showing the percentage of hymns recited in different rubrics.

- The Church caused the movements inside the Church to have an effective and deep role in the service. For example, when the bishop and the priests proceed around the Church and around the Altar, carrying the censers giving the sweet aroma of incense, accompanied by the deacons carrying the candles and icons and the crosses with the hanging banners, and singing with one voice “Keryeleison” (Lord Have mercy), and other hymns of the occasion, this has its deep and renewed psychological and spiritual effect, and the situation would be quite different without these moves.

Also during the hymn “Ten Hos Erok” (we praise You we bless You, and we worship You) while the deacons and the congregation are kneeling down in worship, gives a feeling of humility and reverence which cannot be experienced if they were standing. And reciting the hymn “Amen Ton thanaton so kyreie” (Your Death O Lord we proclaim we entreat You), while the entire crowd have their hands raised up above in supplication and their feet are about to be

lifted off the floor, has a far more effect than if recited with the hands down.

- The official attire of the clergy were given their role in the coloration of the general atmosphere accompanying the recital of the Coptic hymns. For example, after the offering of the morning incense, the catechumens liturgy begins with the hymn of the blessing “ten O Osht”, during which the priests put on the white service robes the symbol of purity and the light, same with the deacons. This gives the hymn of the blessing more shine as the white attire reflects on it giving its recital a cheerful color.
- The sound of the Church Bell with its abnormal effect on the soul at the time of offering the oblations while chanting “Keryeleison” (Lord Have mercy), in its simple tune of the “Saba”scale, giving an overwhelming feeling of the call to salvation, and the combined sound of the bell with the tunes of the chants have a great effect in attracting those who are far away to come inside.
- The Church also made all kind of arts come together during the recital of the hymns, the fine art represented by the icons that ornament the Church, Architecture represented in the domes and pillars, illumination represented in the candles and chandeliers, the décor seen in the woodwork of the iconostasis and the veils, while the sacrifice of praise ascends in the midst of all that, creating a superior spiritual dimension.

Thus, whoever attends these repertoires all year round will never feel bored in spite of how long they may be.

19- SUBJECTIVITY TO INSTRUMENTAL TUNING:

The Coptic hymns can be played on musical instruments!

The tradition necessitated that only Cymbals and Triangle are allowed to accompany the hymns in the liturgies, but this does not mean that the hymns cannot be subjected to and played on the tunes of the different musical instruments.

The world renowned musician Mr. E. Newland Smith wrote about the Coptic music that: “The source of composition is not instrument based, and the Coptic composer was not bound by the basics and rules of the musical composition, but was rather bound by a meaning or a concept, and that the Coptic Hymns are an exception to the hymns of all other Churches in that they are not subject to instrumental tuning”⁷².

However, one of the researchers elaborated on this statement by “Smith” and said that he (Smith) as non-Egyptian, was unfamiliar with the Coptic scales, and that he cannot play on the piano scales like “Saba”, “Huzam”, “Bayati”, “Gaharkah”, “Rast”, or any other of these Egyptian scales, while thousands of musicians are very capable of playing such tunes on instruments like Oud (lute), Nay (Flute), Kaman (Violin), Chello, Qanoon (Lap Harp), exactly as they are recited everyday in the liturgy. The Coptic music was compose according to, and using the original Egyptian scales which were afterwards used by the Arabic music and were given Turkish and Persian names like “Gaharkah”, “Sikah”, “Nahawand”, “Ajam”, “Huzam”, “Hijaz”... etc.. All of these scales were played on musical instruments, when composers from outside the Church used them in composing their musical works and songs.

There are also a number of ensembles like the “David Ensemble” who produced recordings of these hymns with the accompaniment of these musical instruments, and they are available on their web sites.

⁷² **Fr. Matta El-Meskeen** – previous reference – page 136

20- CONCLUSION:

Although it is a purely spiritual music aimed at worship services only, the Coptic hymns are exacted by musical professionalism that testify to the great skills of its composers, who denied themselves and kept as anonymous their identities, such that it was not possible to know who composed most of this musical heritage. Nevertheless, they left behind to the world musicians, a great heritage and an amazing scientific musical wealth that moves their imagination and desire for research in all fields of music, until the time comes for world universities to follow the footsteps of the “Helwan” University in Cairo, Egypt for the teaching of this great musical heritage as one of their programs for the schools of music education and conservatories and other arts academies and the universities interested in Egyptology Coptology and Liturgical music.

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