

EPHREM'S *MADROSHE*
AND THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX
BETH GAZO
A LOOSE, BUT FASCINATING,
AFFINITY

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INTRODUCTION

- [1] St. Ephrem is probably the most celebrated saint of the Syriac Church. His hymnal literature, produced prior to the Christological controversies of the fifth century, were inherited by the Syriac-speaking church, East and West, along with a musical tradition. The extent to which Ephrem's hymns are preserved in the hymnal literature is difficult to ascertain as a great number of the liturgical texts attributed to the saint are in fact of a later age. It is even more difficult to pass any judgment on the musical tradition that was associated with Ephrem's hymns.

- [2] Our objective in this brief outline is a modest one. We do not intend to study the poetic structure of Ephrem's hymns nor do we intend to propose a theory of musical tradition. Such work is

beyond the knowledge of the authors and will be best evaluated by capable scholars and musicologists. What we wish to do here is to point out some of the *qole* “melodies” in Ephrem’s genuine *madroshe* which correspond to known melodies in the Syrian Orthodox *Beth Gazo*, the church’s musical resource. Further, we demonstrate, in a recorded form [all recordings are in the online edition], how such *qole* may be chanted according to melodies that have been in practice in the Syrian Orthodox Church for many a generation.

- [3] No implication is made that the melodies recorded here are identical, or even similar, to the ones practiced by the saint himself or his pupils. The mere fact that a modern cleric can pick up a genuine piece written by St. Ephrem in the fourth century, recognize its *qolo*, and chant it with that *qolo*’s melody that is known to him with ease is fascinating in its own right. Our modest effort may indicate a link, no matter how loose, between Ephrem’s melodies and those of the *Beth Gazo*.

- [4] We start with a brief description of the *Beth Gazo* system. We then point out a number of the *qole* employed in Ephrem’s *madroshe* (based on Beck’s edition in the CSCO) which correspond to *qole* in the *Beth Gazo*. Finally, we give recordings of Ephrem’s genuine texts chanted with the corresponding melodies of the *Beth Gazo*. It is hoped that this modest work will generate scholarly interest in Syriac sacred music.

THE *BETH GAZO* AND ITS SYSTEM

- [5] The *Beth Gazo* is a liturgical book that constitutes a reference to Syrian Orthodox music, without which the cleric cannot perform any liturgical duties. The actual title of this book varies in modern editions: *beth gazo dqinotho*,¹ *dazmirotho*² or *dne’motho*³ “Treasury of Melodies,” “Songs” or “Chants.”

- [6] How is the *Beth Gazo* used? Each hymn in the entire Syrian Orthodox liturgical system is associated with what one might call a “title”, or more accurately a heading that indicates the melody with which the hymn is to be chanted. The title is usually of the form ‘*al*

¹ Dolabani’s first edition of 1913. See the bibliography for a complete list of editions.

² Konat’s edition of 1986.

³ Çiçek’s republication of Dolabani’s edition, 1981, 1985 and 1995.

qolo d... “as the melody of...” and has little, if anything, to do with the subject matter of the hymn itself. The *Beth Gazō* contains a listing of all such *qole*. Under each *qolo*, melodies of eight different modes are given, analogous to the eight-mode Gregorian chant system. To add to the richness of this system, some modes have variants of their own called *šuhlophe*—only the skilled can master them. The melodies are not documented using musical notation; rather, by texts that the cleric associates with melodies learned by tradition. *Šuhlophe*, on the other hand, are not documented but are transmitted orally from *malphono* to *talmidho*. An experienced cleric, of course, need not consult the *Beth Gazō*. He would have already memorized the hundreds of texts it contains along with their respective melodies including *shuhlophe*. Such music masters, alas, are hard to come by today!

[7] Earlier versions of the *Beth Gazō* contained thousands of melodies. Barsaum⁴ laments the loss of a “huge and rare” manuscript of the Monastery of St. Abraham in Midyat, due to the turbulent years of the First World War during which the Syrian Orthodox faithful were under much persecution. A few manuscripts representing portions of the original *Beth Gazō* survive and were used in a modern edition.⁵ Today, at most a thousand melodies survive. These are gathered in an abridged version initially published by Dolabani⁶ in 1913. We lament the fact that some of the melodies in the abridged version are unknown and presumed lost.

[8] The abridged version of the *Beth Gazō* consists of the following types of hymns (the term “hymn” is used here loosely and does not indicate a *madrosbo*):

1. *Qole shabroye* “vigils.” It is not clear what the term *shabroye* refers to. According to Barsaum,⁷ either such *qole* were originally sung during vigil hours (*shabro*), or they were sung by a group of people belonging to the order of *shabroye* “vigilants” (the same term is used in Latin, *vigiles*). The first two modes are

⁴ A. Barsaum, *kitāab al-lulu al-manthur*, 118.

⁵ Y. Çiçek, *beth gazō rabo*, 1992. This edition is mainly based on a manuscript which originates from Adyaman, Turkey.

⁶ Y. Dolabani, *ktbobo qpišo dbeth gazō*, 1913.

⁷ A. Barsaum, *kitāab al-lulu al-manthur*, 114.

dedicated to the Virgin, the 3rd and 4th to the saints, the 5th and 6th to penitence, and the 7th and 8th to the departed.

2. *Gushmo* (pl. *gushme*) “body” each of which consists of eight modes. These are recited during the daily offices known as *shimo*.

3. *Sebeltho* (pl. *seblotho*) *dmadroshe* “ladder.” It is this category that seems to have mostly inherited Ephrem’s *madroshe* tradition. Two of these follow the eight-mode system. The rest have one melody each.

4. *Phardo* (pl. *Pharde*) “single.” These are short hymns divided into eight collections corresponding to the eight modes. Within each collection, each hymn has its own invariant melody.

5. *Qonuno yawnoyo* (pl. *qonune yawnoye*) “Greek canon”. These are divided into eight collections corresponding to the eight modes as well.

6. *Mawrbo* (pl. *mawrbe*) “magnificat.” Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, these are divided into eight collections corresponding to the eight modes.

7. *Qole ghnize* “mystic hymns.” They exist in the printed edition in eight modes; the melodies of most seem to be lost, alas!

8. *Takbeshphotbo rabuloyotho* “litanies of Rabula.” Attributed to Rabula, these are divided into eight collections corresponding to the eight modes.

9. *Tborbo* (pl. *tborotho*) “broken.” They fall into three categories: those attributed to St. Jacob [of Serug], St. Ephrem and of St. Balay. Each of them follows the eight-modal system.

10. *Quqlion* (pl. *quqalya*) “cycles.” These are cycles from the Psalms and follow the eight-modal system.

[9] What makes the *Beth Gazō* even richer is the existence of various schools of music within the Syrian Orthodox tradition. Two main traditions are identified: East and West. The former represents the school of Tagrit and is only known to the Syrian Orthodox of modern day Iraq. The latter is practiced by the rest of the Syrian Orthodox Church and, in turn, has its own schools of music.

[10] Of the Western schools, the School of Mardin is by far the most popular and is considered the norm. This is due to the fact that for hundreds of years, the patriarchal seat was located at Deir

al-Za'faran near Mardin. The second largest school (in terms of practice) is that of Tur 'Abdin. Presently, it is used in Tur 'Abdin and in the Diaspora with communities originating from that region. Another tradition, which is preserved to some extent, is that of the School of Edessa. It is mainly used today among the Edessan community, presently living in Aleppo, Syria. Diarbaker (in Turkey) and Sadad (a village in Syria) have their own traditions as well; the former is not preserved well enough. The school of Harput (in Turkey) is another endangered tradition. With its inhabitants scattered in the four corners of the world with no substantial community in one particular place, it is only preserved in a recording made by the late Cor-Episcopos Abd al-Nur Samuel of Harput. India has developed its own tradition, which one might call the Malankara school of music; this tradition may have been derived from the school of Mardin.⁸

- [11] Syriac music suffers from the lack of scholarly attention. H. Husmann⁹ published, in musical notation, the body of *šhimo* and *qole shahroye* based on recordings by the late archbishop Mor Cyril (Qorillos) Jacob for the former and his brother *Malphono* Asmar Khouri for the latter. Recently, G.Y. Ibrahim published the tradition of Mardin, also in musical notation made by Nuri Iskandar¹⁰ of Aleppo, based on recordings made by the late Patriarch Jacob III in 1960. A similar publication of the Edessan tradition is imminent. The recordings of Jacob III were recently digitized and placed on the Internet by Syrian Orthodox Resources and the Syriac Computing Institute. (For other works, see the bibliography.)

MELODIES OF EPHREM'S *MADROSHE*

- [12] We have examined the following cycles of Ephrem's *madroshe* based on Beck's edition: Contra Haereses (CH), Contra Julianum (CJ), Carmina Nisibena (CNis), Ecclesia (Eccl), Epiphania (Epiph), Fide, Ieiunio (Ieiuni), Nativitate (Nat), Paradiso (Par), Virginitate (Virg). We found that the following *qole* have corresponding counterparts, in name and poetic structure in most cases, in the *Beth Gazō* (*qole*

⁸ G. Kiraz, an overview of the Beth Gazo on the Syrian Orthodox Resources web site.

⁹ H. Husmann, *Die Melodien der Jakobitischen* [sic] *Kirche*, 1996, 1971.

¹⁰ Nuri Iskandar, *beth gazō bnota*, 1992.

marked with * are illustrated with a recording in the online edition of this paper):

1. ܐܠ ܕܢܝܠܐ (CH, Eccl, Ieiuni)*.
2. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (Epiph)*.
3. ܐܠ ܕܝܥܝܘܢܐ (Ieiuni)*.
4. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CNis, Virg).
5. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CH, Nat, Virg)*.
6. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CH, CNis).
7. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ or ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ (Nat).

[13]

It is interesting to note that all of the above hymns fall within the *madroshe* category of the abridged *Beth Gazo*. Further, they occur almost adjacent to each other, though this might be a mere coincidence. The *madroshe* section of the Beth Gazo starts with the above *qole* in the order given, except that there is another *qolo* (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ) between items 2 and 3. The last item above is the 35th *madroshe* in the abridged *Beth Gazo*. The entire *madroshe* corpus of the abridged *Beth Gazo* consists of 54 *madroshe*.

[14]

To the disappointment of the modern cleric, the vast majority of Ephrem's *qole* are not present in the abridged *Beth Gazo* and, hence, their melodies cannot be recognized. Of the above mentioned cycles, the following *qole* belong to this category:

1. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ (Fide).
2. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CNis).
3. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CNis).
4. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CNis).
5. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (Eccl).
6. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CH, Eccl, Fide).
7. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (Ieiuni).
8. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (CNis, Fide).
9. ܐܠ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ (Epiph, Virg).

10. אַתָּה הַדְּרוֹשׁ הַחֲדָשׁ (Virg).
11. אַתָּה הַחֲדָשׁ (CH).
12. אַתָּה וְחַדְשֵׁי מַעֲסָא (Epiph).
13. אִמֶּה וְחַדְשֵׁי (CH).
14. אִמֶּה וְיַעֲזִיבָא זְמַנָּה (Eccl, Fide).
15. אֱלֹהִי חֲתִמְכֶּם (Eccl, Epiph, Ieiuni, Fide).
16. אֱלֹהִי וְיַעֲזִיבָא זְמַנָּה (CNis, Eccl, Epiph, Virg).
17. אֱלֹהֵינוּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (CH).
18. אֵלֵךְ אֶתְּ (Nat.).
19. אֵלֵךְ אֶתְּ (Fide).
20. אֶתְּ אֶתְּ (Eccl).
21. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (CNis, Eccl, Ieiuni).
22. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (CJ).
23. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (CH, CNis, Eccl, Virg).
24. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Nat.).
25. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Eccl, Epiph).
26. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Virg).
27. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Nat.).
28. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (CNis, Fide, Nat.).
29. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Eccl).
30. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Nat.).
31. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Ieiuni).
32. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Virg).
33. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (CJ, Par).
34. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (CNis).
35. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Epiph).
36. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Eccl, Epiph, Nat.).
37. אֶתְּ חַדְשֵׁי אֱלֹהֵינוּ (Ieiun).

38. ܡܕܗ ܕܢܐܠܐ ܫܠܡܐ (CH, Fide).
39. ܨܒܐ ܕܐܚܪܬܐ (CNis).
40. ܩܬܠܐ ܕܬܠܐ (Nat, Virg).
41. ܠܐ ܕܥܡܪ ܡܕܢܐ (Eccl).
42. ܡܬܬܠܐ ܡܥܡܐ ܡܥܡܐ (CNis).
43. ܡܕܗ ܕܠܐ ܢܢܐ ܕܥܡܐ (Virg).
44. ܡܕܗ ܡܥܡܐ ܕܡܥܡܐ (CH, Fide, Nat).
45. ܡܬܬܠܐ ܕܡܥܐ (Fide).
46. ܡܬܬܠܐ ܕܡܥܐ ܡܥܐ (CH, CNis, Virg).
47. ܡܬܬܠܐ ܕܡܥܐ (CH, Nat).
48. ܡܬܬܠܐ ܕܡܥܐ (CNis).
49. ܡܬܬܠܐ ܕܡܥܐ (CH, Fide).
50. ܡܬܬܠܐ ܕܡܥܐ ܕܡܥܐ (CNis, Epiph, Fide).

- [15] It is also interesting to note that while the entire *Paradiso* cycle is on the *qolo* ܡܬܬܠܐ ܕܡܥܐ (item 18 above), its poetic structure matches that of the *madroshe* ܡܬܬܠܐ ܕܡܥܐ of the *Beth Gazō* and the entire cycle can be chanted using the eight melodies of this *qolo*.

RECORDINGS

- [16] [The online edition provides *madroshe* from the genuine writings of St. Ephrem chanted according to the melodies of their corresponding hymns in the *Beth Gazō*. For each melody, we give Ephrem's text from Beck's edition with a recording in the voice of Metropolitan Gregorios Y. Ibrahim of Aleppo.]

CONCLUSION

- [18] We demonstrated in this brief outline a somewhat loose, but fascinating, connection between Ephrem's *madroshe* and modern practice of the Syrian Orthodox *Beth Gazō*. To what extent did Ephrem's music influence the Syriac-speaking Church and how much of that is still preserved still awaits investigation. There are numerous factors that complicate this matter. For example, the *qole* titles that appear in Beck's edition may be a later addition to

Ephrem's composition. The manuscript tradition needs to be further investigated in this regard.

[19]

In 1994, Brock (with Alison Salvesen reciting with him) demonstrated at the SEERI conference in India how Ephrem's *sugyotho* may be used today by the church in religious plays. Along a similar line, the poetic structures of Ephrem's *madroshe* can be compared with those of the existing hymns of the various Syriac Churches. Traditional melodies can be applied to Ephrem's genuine work in this manner giving the Syriac-speaking Church an opportunity to taste the fruits of its forefathers. An edition of Ephrem's work for "public consumption" that indicates to the modern cleric how to chant the hymns would be highly desirable indeed.

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