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Source: *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 47 (2015), pp. 45-63

Published by: International Council for Traditional Music

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5921/yeartradmusi.47.2015.0045>

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SYRIAC CHANT AT THE NEGOTIATION OF SOURCE AND METHOD IN THE TWO MUSIC-“OLOGIES”

by Tala Jarjour

As a monophonic song type originating in early Aramaic Christianity, chant in the Syriac-speaking church has long fascinated music scholars.¹ This continuously practised Levantine tradition is little understood, despite the increasingly global presence of Suryanis who strive to maintain their liturgical tradition at home and in the diaspora.² Owing to multiple waves of migration, Aramaic Christians are increasingly present in Europe and the Americas. The historical home of this autochthonous population remains, however, Mesopotamia and the Eastern Mediterranean, although in steady and rapid decline. The current severity of the decline of these local communities is unprecedented in modern history due to the violent expansion of military-religious extremism under the guise of the Islamic State (IS), which has expelled Christians from large swaths of Iraq and Syria since June 2014. The long-term effects of such adverse circumstances remain unclear, but developments since 2003 have spurred attention to the cultures and musics of East Christian communities, necessitating a reassessment of the relationship between scholarship and these musical traditions.

Syriac chant survives mainly in oral/aural practice, and has featured in a small number of European studies over the past two centuries. Even though recording technology has been available since some of the earliest comprehensive accounts appeared in print (particularly Jeannin's 1925 transcriptions), recording was not used in any significant capacity until 1960, when Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Jacob III (1912–1980) recorded an abbreviated version of the *Beth Gazo*, the book of prototype chants that clergy memorize as the basis for learning and mastering the musical tradition.³ One might be tempted, therefore, to adopt a binary categorization of sources: to think in terms of historical sources being liturgical manuscripts and printed musicological books on the one hand, and of ethnographic

1. A preliminary version of this article was presented at the nineteenth ICTM Study Group of Historical Sources of Traditional Music meeting in the Austrian Academy of Sciences, held at the Vienna Phonogrammarchiv in 2012. The article addresses the two themes of the study group meeting, namely, the tension between historical sources and contemporary fieldwork in ethnomusicology, and multidisciplinary approaches to the study of historical sources of traditional music.

2. Syriac is the literary dialect of Aramaic. It started around ancient Edessa (in modern Turkey), was the language of local Semitic groups, and thus became that of early Christian scholarship in the Levant. In this article, I use the Arabic attributive “Suryani” to refer to all things pertaining to the Syrian Orthodox Church. Suryani is also the Arabic name of the language, Syriac. It is the designation by which the people and the church (in the feminine form, Suryaniyya) are known in Syria. While in the global context the term might be contested, locally it is the acceptable designation.

3. For information on the history of the recording see the *Syriac Orthodox Sources* website: <http://sor.cua.edu/bethgazo/PY3RecordHistory.html>.

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sources as those which a researcher creates (e.g., recordings and interviews) on the other. But the viability of such a binary is questionable, given the separation it presumes between its opposing categories and the great overlaps in source types that exist in reality. Moreover, the temporal overlap between the relative youth of printed musical sources (two centuries) and the ancient history Suryanis claim for their musical sounds (two millennia) further complicates any categorical division. In locating the study of Syriac chant at the interface of musicology and ethnomusicology, as I do in this article, I highlight two points which constitute dual sides of the same proverbial coin. The first is the history of music disciplinary choices and their implications with regard to the material of research; the second is the necessity of overriding some disciplinary boundaries that persist, despite theoretical leaps within the more broadly defined field of music studies.

The study of eastern types of Christian chant has to account for a number of issues and disciplinary contradictions that do not immediately reveal themselves to the researcher, but which unsettle existing scholarly perceptions. To name a few: (1) Syriac chant is a Christian tradition, but it is one that does not lend itself to European (or North American) theologies; (2) it is a Levantine religious tradition, but it is not synonymous with Islam; (3) its musical sounds are reminiscent of Arab music, but it is a musical practice that does not fully submit to *maqām* theory; (4) it is widely considered a modal musical tradition, but it subscribes to no existing modal theory, regardless of issues of consistency within the various systems (Jarjour 2015); (5) it is Christian chant, but it shares little, if anything, in common with better known types of chant such as Byzantine or Gregorian chant; (6) it is “oriental,” but its study does not subscribe to the common tenets of orientalism in relation to secular and sexualized contexts. So how do we think about Syriac chant? How do we study it? How do we account for local historical, ecclesial, and musical complexities? And how do we contextualize these questions within existing scholarly understandings?

To address some of the issues underlying these questions with respect to source and method, I employ the example of a study that is at once historical and based on fieldwork: the musical part of *Description de l’Égypte* (1826) by Guillaume-André Villoteau (1759–1839).⁴ Villoteau’s study is historical because it dates back more than two centuries and, at the risk of employing an arguable disciplinary category, because it relies on transcribed musical notation—“text”—rather than on sound recording, a technology this particular example predates. Villoteau’s study also contains an element of fieldwork because he visited the country in question and, according to the source itself, collected his data from the people whose music he had set out to describe.

A close look at this example underlines the importance of interdisciplinarity in the study of Syriac chant as it demonstrates the need for tools from various fields

4. An essential component of the task at hand is fieldwork, which is at the heart of the theoretical and operational questions with which source and method are both accessed and created in studying living traditions. It should be noted here that fieldwork and historical sources are not seen in juxtaposition, but as potentially complementary and in any case integral to the research enterprise.

of knowledge. Through an analytical reading of a section from book 14, I hope to demonstrate that seeing Syriac chant at the negotiation of music's disciplinary boundaries on issues of source and method not only proposes possibilities for new perceptions of contested matters of source and method, but also offers insight into the workings of existing epistemologies in relation to the Christian East. In particular, I question dominant perceptions in music studies, which will reveal that certain epistemological constructs (western–non-western, European–oriental, textual–oral), and methodological divisions (historical–ethnographic, past–present, synchronic–diachronic) have contributed to keeping Syriac chant understudied. Whereas Syriac chant has largely resided at the margins of scholarly fields such as Syriac studies and chant studies, my goal is for the study of Syriac chant to find adequate avenues in contemporary music studies.

Through the example of Villoteau's nineteenth-century writing on Syriac chant, I also hope to shed light on orientalism, the Christian East, and the then-nascent music–ologies. Syriac chant, along with other oral musical traditions of eastern Christianity, had a strong presence at the inception of European music studies when early European scholarship looked at the sung musics of eastern churches in its search for origins in European music. Subsequently the study of Syriac chant was marginalized as scholarly explorations of music developed and assumed–ological suffixes. While the field of Syriac chant studies is worthy of a name, it is today in a state of such neglect that reviving it requires revisiting that formative moment in European scholarship to assess the direction it took early on. For modern-day music scholarship to make new propositions about Syriac chant, therefore, it has to reckon with cultural disjunctures and dislocations,⁵ as well as with discontinuities in the academic fields within which Syriac chant has received modest attention.

From an overarching, disciplinary point of view, this article contributes to bridging the gap between historical sources and fieldwork in the study of chant. It is motivated by a practical problem familiar to researchers of little-studied musics which are at once historic and oral. Most eastern ecclesiastical traditions, like oral traditions in general, lack written sources when compared with those available, for instance, on Gregorian chant. Yet, when studying continuously practised traditions, scholars can speak to practitioners, listen to the music, and observe its process, rather than relying on reconstructive speculation. Taking the study of Syriac chant as the focal point of my argument, I tackle some problems involved in finding and selecting sources, in interrogating them, and in assessing the validity of the various types of data they may yield. My wider goal is to explore new ways of thinking about lesser-known musical traditions under the umbrellas of musicology and ethnomusicology, while still benefiting from other disciplines' tools of knowledge production. By dealing with what might be considered as either/both historical or/and fieldwork material, the present article touches on subdisciplinary boundary negotiations by engaging questions on theoretical approach and scope that reside in

5. On “disjunctures,” see Bohlman (2003); on “dislocation,” see Young (2004:180).

a contested space between musicology and ethnomusicology—a space not entirely encompassed by either, but belonging to both.⁶

Sources: A context-driven query

Every musical tradition has its proper set of complexities which practitioners know (analytically, intuitively, or both) and outsiders learn gradually through extended close contact. Syriac chant is no exception. Given the difficult history Syriac Christianity has endured since its early days under successive unfriendly powers and massive waves of migration, the history of the church and its music is one of fragmentation: different surviving groups have developed various degrees of independence that render ecclesiastical–musical centrality an obsolete concept. Therefore, authority in chant knowledge is tied to certain locales where genealogies of mastership were sustained by demographic strength and historical continuity; those locales became chant centres where local variants persisted for a significant period of time and formed distinctive schools of chant. For example, Deir al-Za‘faran (near Mardin in southeastern Turkey) was an important monastic base with its own musical character that clerics and monks have transferred to Syria in recent decades. The monastery no longer houses monks, but the Patriarchal Seminary in Ma‘arrat Saidnaya outside Damascus is the new base for this school of chant thanks to decades of steady clerical influx from the Mardin area. Neighbouring Edessa (currently Şanlıurfa) was home to an urban school which has been displaced entirely to Aleppo in northern Syria (Jarjour 2015, Jarjour in press). Another example is Şadad, a town in the Syrian hinterland famous for its particular school of chant.

Accordingly, a number of seemingly peripheral pieces of information are significant in the Syriac context. Matters such as the place in which a chant was observed/recorded, how and why it was accessed by the researcher, the degree of authority the cantor/source represents in the local economy of knowledge, surrounding musical frames of reference, the state of chant preservation, the strength of teaching, the cantor’s teacher lineage, and his (sometimes her) expertise, are but a few examples of the different elements that have great bearing on how music may be seen and studied at any given moment in any given place. For the larger Syriac-speaking church, fragmentation and diverse frames of local and historical reference have permeated every aspect of the church’s existence and its sense of identity. The host of names by which the church is known are a telling tale. Designations such as Aramaean, Aramaic, Syriac, Syrian, Assyrian, and Suryani reflect various frames of historical reference and inform multiple layers of significance, especially

6. For debates on subdisciplinary definitions and problems of scope and method, see the essays in Cook and Everist (1999) and Stobart (2008). It is of relevance to mention here that other crossings of problematically divided categories will appear in the course of this article, such as western/non-western. The imagined line between the two becomes even more deceptive when sources in the West are seen as historical sources for a tradition that is firmly based in the East—that is, the “Orient.”

on issues of belonging and local conceptions of Suryaniness.⁷ The name issue is an extended dilemma with political, social, and emotional implications that affect the local and diaspora communities on many levels (see, for example, Atto 2011; Cetrez, Donabed, and Makko 2012), including the musical level.

For instance, something as simple as describing a single chant melody is entangled in a web of complexities inherent to the most basic information a researcher might relay about this melody. It is important to know who sang the melody, and where, when, how, and from whom s/he learnt it; these details are as important to anything a scholar might study about the melody as its very sounds. They *are*, in fact, information about its very sounds. The complexity of deciphering local knowledge is further exacerbated by issues related to access. Different interlocutors offer different degrees of access to information depending on their knowledge, expertise, and social/ecclesial position; different researchers are granted access in different ways, depending on *their* knowledge, expertise, and position. The fact that I was immediately accepted by the closely guarded community of Şadad, for instance, was due to old family friendships that provided the trust I had to earn in other locations.

Over and above being part of any fieldwork undertaking, variables in the Syriac context have such a bearing on the results that generalizations risk obfuscating even musical analysis. In other words, specifics of context are of such importance to the generation of knowledge about Syriac chant that they influence it on all levels, including that of musical theoretical analysis. Musicological studies on Syriac chant have produced dozens of transcriptions and analysed them with the aim of uncovering a presumed musical system based on eight modes. In my years of interacting with Suryani clerics and deacons, I have come to appreciate the layers of Syriac chant's performed reality. The more places I visit and the more Suryani people I interact with, the more I discover about how active this complexity is in the formation of the musical sounds and the ways in which they are disseminated and must, therefore, be understood. In the Edessan school, for example, Holy Week chants follow a particular type of mode that does not count among the canonical eight, and is, therefore, not adequately recognized in musicological accounts. This instance of modal anomaly offers unique insight into Suryani conceptions of modality and musicality (Jarjour 2015). Another example is the Greek Kanons in Şadad, which have melodies of a particular intervallic structure, while they are predominantly recited monotonously in other schools.⁸ Such close knowledge becomes possible only through extended and involved fieldwork. It is with this knowledge that historical documents such as Villoteau's account may be

7. For a published take on Suryaniness and some of its musical manifestations, see Jarjour (in press).

8. Known in Syriac as *qonune yawnoye*, the Greek Kanons are a hymn genre from the *Beth Gazo*, which, like most *Beth Gazo* genres, follow an eight-fold musical scheme. Their name comes from the fact that they were translated from Greek, at least in their current form, though they originate in Syriac genres that predate the creation of this genre. For more, see Jarjour (2002, 2006).

interrogated and understood in light of the practical realities in which they were constructed.

Based on Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse, Edward Said (2003) proposed a paradigm-shifting theory that has since forced scholars of any discipline relevant to the Orient to reckon with a number of difficult issues. The main propositions of Said's *Orientalism* concern power relations between the colonized East (the "Orient"), and the colonizing West, which have resulted in monolithic conceptions of the former by the latter. Accordingly, "oriental" societies in the Near East have been seen, and for a long time, as homogeneously Arab from a cultural point of view, and as predominantly Muslim from a religious point of view. This form of "colonial discourse" (Young 2004:216) has hindered a contextually based understanding of these societies, let alone one that takes account of the cultural, historical, religious, ethnic, and musical diversity among their components. Just as later theorists turned Said's focus on representation to a critique of the mechanism of imperial management (Beckles Willson 2013:8), the discursive shift I propose here is as much one of authority of knowledge (i.e., the authority to represent a given musical culture), as it is one of perspective. Grounding ethnographic engagement in such local knowledge as shown in the previous paragraph, I interrogate, in the next section, Villoteau's oeuvre through the prism of orientalism. I do so to gain insight on the disciplinary positioning and implications of eastern Christian musics within music scholarship of the nineteenth century and beyond.

Musicologist in tow with Napoleon

In addition to being an early historical source, Villoteau's take on Syriac chant provides an example of problems of interpretation which current research on the subject may still confront. In what follows, I consider issues pertinent to contextual detail, cultural-historical analysis, and representation. Villoteau accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte on his military campaign to Egypt as a member of a scientific commission and wrote the musical part (book 14) in *Description de l'Égypte*. As part of reporting on the music of minorities, his account of the music of the Syrian Church was presented alongside that of the Armenians, the Copts, and the Jews of Egypt. Villoteau's research, although sometimes praised for its "erudition," was also criticized for relying on "conjecture" (Mongrédien and Ellis 2012).⁹ At any rate, his section on Syriac chant remains the earliest known printed source on the subject in European literature.

Villoteau's account of Syriac music—or the music of the Syrian nation, as he put it—stresses the *fidélité*, exactitude, and scrupulousness with which he notated selected melodies, so as to preserve the "national character" of the people to whom they belong (1826:312). A certain "nation" is thus presumably suggested as one that has a language, a musical tradition, and professional musicians (311). The

9. While this criticism stands as relevant in Villoteau's treatment of Syriac music, erudition may not be an accurate description of this part of his work, as the following discussion demonstrates.

nation remains undefined beyond this statement, while the discussion implies the existence of a minority group belonging to the Syrian church in Egypt. The only reference to this minority group, however, is a complaint by the author that he was unable to find a single professional musician in the region who had some knowledge of the principles and rules of this music.¹⁰ Villoteau then proceeded to offer an account of the music as relayed to him by an unidentified priest who alone possessed “a certain knowledge” of the chant (310–11).¹¹ The musicologist’s primary concerns were in finding musical systems rather than in locating or relaying information about the people who use them.

Villoteau transcribed sixteen examples and categorized them into two groups of eight melodies, presumably representing the eight modes, within two chant types he proposed. While he offered little by way of analysis or description of the music and melodies, Villoteau characterized each of the two types by comparing it to neighbouring traditions. The first type “seems to announce that its author was born in a country neighbouring Persia and frequented by the Greeks, which makes it more *sensible*.”¹² The second type, is where “we find the strange ornaments and the bad taste of the people of Asia Minor, combined with the rudeness of the Arab melodies” (311). According to Villoteau, who indicated that his information was gleaned from the priest, the two groups correspond to two rites, the first of which was instituted by St. Ephrem and the second by St. Jacob. In a footnote, Villoteau described Ephrem as deacon of the church of Edessa, an institution that flourished in 370 CE, suggesting that Ephrem’s chants predate the Ambrosian chant and date back more than 1442 years (311). Jacob, whom Villoteau identified as a disciple of Eutyches,¹³ must be Jacob Baradaeus, the most revered figure in the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church.¹⁴

While Villoteau designated Ephrem as “*originnaire et natif de la Mésopotamie*” (311), he offers no information about the origins of Jacob. Villoteau might have known that Jacob Baradaeus was, like Ephrem, born in the environs of Edessa but, unlike the Edessan deacon, Baradaeus famously served the Miaphysite churches among the Arabs and was closely affiliated to the Christian Arab tribes known as

10. “*Quelqu’un qui eût quelques notions positives des principes et des règles de la mélodie syrienne*” (my emphasis) (Villoteau 1826:310–11).

11. “[L]e seul qui nous ait paru avoir une certaine connaissance du chant syriaque de cette nation” (Villoteau 1826:311).

12. The adjective *sensible* in this instance is closer in meaning to the English “sensitive” than its literal translation (i.e., “sensible”)(311).

13. Eutyches is an early sixth-century bishop of Edessa whose stance on early Christian Christological disputes lay the foundation for the Miaphysite Syrian Orthodox Church. Jacob Baradaeus, a sixth-century bishop who followed suit, was instrumental in preserving the church from extinction under Justinian’s persecution. It is established that the ordination of two Miaphysite bishops, Jacob and Theodor, in 542/3 (facilitated by Theodora, Justinian’s wife) was the main reason for preserving this denomination (Shahid 1995, vol. 2:734).

14. Jacob was protected by the Ghassanids, the largest Arab tribe in historical Syria, who for a long time ruled all Arab tribes. Baradaeus was so significant in the church’s existence during the sixth-century turbulence and persecution of Miaphysites that his epithet became synonymous with the Syrian Orthodox church, which is often called “Jacobite” (Shahid 1995).

the Ghassanids (Shahîd 1995). Other than this historical connection, it is difficult to find a premise for the correlation Villoteau makes between the Jacobite melodies and Arab melodic characteristics (other than by Villoteau's possession of this knowledge, which he, if he actually possessed it, omits from his account). Hence, the category of chant Villoteau associated with ancient Greece (i.e., "the Occident") via Persia is described as more refined in contrast with the second category to which he ascribes explicitly rude characteristics and implicitly Arab and Turkish (i.e., oriental) connections.

I turn for a moment to the two chant types and their two presumed corresponding types of "rite." The word Villoteau uses for type is "*meschouhto*." In Syriac hymnody, *mshuhto* (ܡܫܘܚܘܬܘܐ) means "meter." The word itself may also refer to a metrical or rhythmical homily or to a chant (Payne Smith 1999:290). However, Syriac poetic hymnody is metrical and has eleven types of poetic meter based on syllabic groupings (Ibrahim 2003:154–56). The three most common types are named after their supposed inventors: Balai, Ephrem, and Jacob; they are composed of five, seven, and twelve syllables respectively.¹⁵ In his pursuit of a musical system, Villoteau created a binary grouping that is based on a misinterpretation—perhaps a mistranslation—of terminology. Villoteau's misunderstanding of the word *mshuhto* and of metrical categories in Syriac hymnody led him to propose a binary system of classification that has little to do with the tradition it attempts to classify.

Being elementary to Syriac hymnody, the three common poetic meters were among the first things Suryani deacons discussed with me. It is therefore practically impossible that a priest would not have understood what the three meters represented. It remains unknown how this information escaped Napoleon's musicologist companion. This type of error is rectified in subsequent publications by Benedictine monks. Comprising skilled philologists and a musicologist, the orientalist monks, who resided in Lebanon at the turn of the twentieth century in the Syrian Catholic monastery of Charfé, corrected Villoteau's error and relayed in their ensuing publication the regional connections of their main informants in order to establish the musical authority of their sources (Jeannin 1925, vol. 1:6).¹⁵ As the scope of this article does not allow for a discussion of this work, suffice it to say here that the level of linguistic accuracy in treating Syriac terminology had become significantly higher by that point.

Language, at any rate, was not the only barrier that would have prevented a better interpretation of this musical tradition. Villoteau's account demonstrates that for over two centuries, scholars have been aware of the necessity to speak to Suryani people in order to understand their music. The emperor's scientist did no less. Yet, and despite an expressed pursuit of scientific accuracy, the deductions Villoteau made in his pioneering study bore inaccuracies, and those inaccuracies, as well as the results they yielded, indicate underlying issues in the scholarly dispositions of the time.

15. The Benedictine monks' account shows awareness of various levels and types of local expertise. They attribute referential authority to their interlocutors, such as connections to Edessa, but without engaging with the complexity of local variety.

Most telling is the dual interpretation Villoteau constructed based on a linguistic error. The stipulation of two rites based on names led to inferring internal cultural and historical boundaries within the tradition along the lines of West–East, Greek–Arab, and sensitive–rude. At the basis of this interpretation of information gleaned from local sources was a predetermined us/them binary. In an instance of orientalist projection of western norms of thinking on the tradition under study (Pasler 2000), an “Other” in this case was constructed in relation to an imagined self: one being the Syriac nation; the other non-Christian peoples. Villoteau doubtless heard and transcribed melodies containing increments of the tone smaller than the semitone, so it would be difficult to posit an intonation-based division between one diatonic set of eight melodies and another microtonal set that justifies a western–eastern tonal divide. Villoteau’s binary cultural descriptions more likely reflect his imagination of the musical corpus at hand than the actual nature of its musical sounds. Moreover, the implied Christian–Arab/Muslim division is rather consistent with dominant colonialist interests at the time. Such a division would have been emphasized as colonial powers flirted with Christian (and other) minorities in the region, competing for their loyalties in a bid to weaken the Ottoman Empire and replace it. Acknowledging that scholarship today is no more immune to the politics of labelling than it was in the nineteenth century, I strive to defer the authorial voice to the tradition bearers. A case in point is employing the local autoreference “Suryani” where neutrality on the contested matter of name is not an option.

Although Villoteau’s information collection did not fully correspond to fieldwork methods as ethnomusicologists conceive of them today,¹⁶ regarding his account as an example of early fieldwork offers interesting insights. An ethnomusicologist today would be curious about how Villoteau acquired his information, and a Syriac chant scholar would want to rectify the questionable propositions his study makes. For example, I mentioned earlier that Villoteau’s work was based on the account of a certain priest. The only information relayed to the reader, however, is that the priest possessed some knowledge; details such as name, origin, affiliation, position, and location are not included. Reading this account with some contextual knowledge (on matters such as norms of chant dissemination, and internal discourses on the politics of name), raises a number of questions. Who are the people whose music Villoteau studied in Egypt? What is a Syriac “nation”? What was the extent of this priest’s knowledge? Why is he a good source if there were no experts on the tradition? Who and where are the experts? These are essential questions to the process of source and method selection and assessment. I grapple with them regularly as I attempt to reconstruct historical narratives about regional chant schools, expert lineage, or local communities, which differ hugely between monastic locations in Turkey, for example, and urban centres in Syria.

As I continue to examine elisions and currents of orientalism at the turn of the nineteenth century, I return to tracing connections between subdisciplinary

16. Bohlman quotes a 1980 entry on ethnomusicology in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, in which the author, Barbara Krader, characterizes accounts taken of non-western music at the time as no “better than superficial” or “simply bad” (Bohlman 1987:148).

genealogies in music scholarship and early European interest in “oriental” Christianity, this time in disciplinary historical terms.

(Ethno)Musicology and the Orient

The notion of oriental music emerged as part of a musicological developmental process that had roots in eighteenth-century literary Europe.¹⁷ Early prominent figures, mostly French and German, who wrote on oriental music a century after their literary counterparts, mainly considered musics from the Islamic Arab world but mentioned on occasion the Christian peoples of the region.¹⁸ When ensuing colonialist scholarship launched enquiries into the East, musicologists availed themselves of military, missionary, and travel accounts. These second-hand sources were only replaced in the latter half of the twentieth century with information gathered in situ, as musicologists began to travel around the world with recorders and notebooks, and the prefix “ethno” became commonly used. With this preview of subject and method development in music studies in mind, one may wonder what has happened to the study of those eastern musics in the meantime,¹⁹ and why—or how—have some of them disappeared so imperceptibly from the limelight. The following section is an invitation to address these questions.

After scholars interested in studying music from around the world reached a relative consensus on the term “ethno-musicology” in the mid-twentieth century (Kunst 1955:9), the work of a number of prominent musicologists succeeded in blurring the boundaries that subsequently became apparent between musicology and ethnomusicology.²⁰ Yet, musicology and ethnomusicology—with their respective subareas—maintain a degree of separation, albeit imagined at times. Most studies that deal with contested matters between the two —ologies appear to

17. While acknowledging the different valences of the term, Georgina Born defines musicology as scholarship which “privilege[s] the study of Western art music, whether historical or contemporary...conducted primarily by means of formalist, historical or critical methodologies.” (2007:205)

18. According to Said (2003), the effect of French colonialism was greater than that of any other European colonialism in the formation of Orientalism.

19. The argument that Jewish music studies arose as yet another manifestation of the self/Other in musicology brings a sizable body of scholarship to this discussion on the basis that some of it at least was Middle Eastern and much of it was religious. However, the ethnic dimension, either stated or implied in studies of Jewish musical traditions, sets these apart from the Christian traditions where the intersections of ethnicity and religion are more varied. Despite its significance, music scholars have yet to consider ethnicity in relation to Christian musics in the region (i.e., the Levant, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia, or large parts of what is commonly called today the Middle East).

20. Scholars whose contributions to music studies challenge this disciplinary division are many. Nicholas Cook’s much-argued declaration, “We are all (ethno)musicologists now,” at a British Forum of Ethnomusicology conference became the title of a frequently cited article in an important collection of essays on the subject (Stobart 2008). Even within musicology, rethinking music and the subdisciplinary boundaries that musicology shares with other forms of music studies has since produced new directions (and names), such as “critical” or “new musicology” (Born 2007).

shift the boundaries that separate them by redefining subdisciplinary categories, thereby effectively redrawing the boundaries themselves. These quasi-disciplinary boundaries become pronounced when, for instance, musicologists set limits to what other disciplines may deal with when it comes to music (e.g., musical theoretical analysis, western/non-western), just as they do when ethnomusicologists question the validity of research that is not based on fieldwork and ethnographic methods.

In the case of Syriac chant, another boundary-sensitive matter is part of this mix. When examining East Christian traditions in terms of the relationship between musicology and ethnomusicology, one must also consider the Orient vis-à-vis European conceptions of the non-western, of the European Other, at the time of musicology's inception as a discipline.²¹ Studying the Orient had implications for post-Enlightenment music histories, which, through key encounters between nineteenth-century European music-historical writings and Middle Eastern music, has set the scene for the role of music as subject of discovery and as historical process in the twentieth century (Bohlman 1987). While not conflating ethnomusicology and musicology at the end of the nineteenth century (1987:160), Bohlman suggests that music in the Middle East had a medial position in which what we subsequently came to call ethnomusicology and musicology were conceptually interdependent. This suggests that ethnomusicology, at least on a methodological level, is an older academic enterprise than the relative youth of its name might suggest.²² Moreover, that eastern Christian music was the subject of European interest at the time meant that it, too, was present at a pivotal moment in the disciplinary formation of music studies. Ethnomusicology thus developed in tandem with a deep interest in the musics of the East, and the presence of the Christian East at that stage should inform disciplinary discourses on the nature(s) of the two music-ologies at the same time as underlining its subsequent neglect.

Whereas oriental types of pre-Islamic and eastern Christian religious chanting were eventually subsumed by subfields of musicology (such as systematic musicology and chant studies) or moved altogether to reside within other fields (such as philologically oriented Byzantine or Syriac studies), certain sacred musical traditions fell to the far margins of the musicological enterprise. Among those sidelined was Syriac chant. Even though pioneering European manuals, histories, and encyclopaedias drew attention to ancient and contemporary musical practices

21. Among the relevant issues at stake here was the contemporaneous development of tonality in Europe and music literature of the time. For example, Christensen (1996) suggests that Fétis, who saw music theory as an historical product (as opposed to one that belongs to the natural sciences), suggested "*tonalité*" as the synthesis of a dialectic between music theory and history, thus understanding it for the first time as a philosophical concept (an idea imparted on music by the mind, as opposed to the then common conception of tonality as a physical phenomenon to be passively received from nature). He writes that Fétis also drew on Choron who used the term in distinguishing western and non-western scale systems, and was deeply influenced by German idealism, especially Hegel's notions on history and consciousness. Christensen thus suggests that tonality, situated in Europe in the nineteenth century, distinguished Europe from Other non-tonal musics.

22. Some scholars suggest that musicology was, at the outset, an ethnomusicology of sorts (Tomlinson 2003).

from the Near East, only three studies in the twentieth century have dealt with Syriac chant in any depth (Jeannin 1925; Kuckertz 1969; Husmann 1969–1971).²³ Bohlman notes that the historical and intellectual contexts of the nineteenth century directed the attention of European authors eastward.²⁴ He also notes the failure to discuss the musical practices of Christian and Jewish sects resident in the region (1987:153). What, then, explains this neglect? And the subsequent shift of oriental musics away from the centre?

Based on my experience of researching Syriac chant for more than a decade in various locations, I suggest that several factors have contributed to its neglect by scholars. These include: the scarcity of written (historical) sources on these musics; researchers' lack of agility across the myriad of languages within which the traditions typically operate; religious and ethnic complication; difficulties of access to music knowledge and its holders; the oral/aural nature of traditions; and the non-diatonic nature of the musical sounds. No existing musicological study tackles these issues. The need for local knowledge, then, is also a need for locally attuned epistemologies.

It appears, one might speculate, that not many nineteenth-century musicologists were inclined to follow Villoteau in creating their own musical sources through transcription. I wonder if objection to the *musicologue's* scholarship was not due to the authority he claimed in creating his own source documents—even if by imperial assignment—but that the academy thought this work to be conjectural because the academy was not able to verify it. Indeed, complexity surrounding source and method has afflicted the study of Syriac chant for centuries, but so have the interpretive possibilities within which they were determined.

According to Edward Said (2003), the European creation of a conceptual and cultural Other—the Orient—was based on processes of collective imagination that are more reflective of issues within western societies than they are true statements about the societies they study in the East. The Orient in this sense was created from an occidental point of view. Although it was initially articulated in literature, this conception became prominent in most fields of colonialist thought and theory (Said 2003), including music. From a postcolonial perspective, therefore, existing power relations were reflected in scholarly selectiveness and the knowledge it produced.

23. Similar to the German music historian Rapael Georg Kiesewetter (1773–1850), his French competitor for European centre stage, François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871), ignited an interest in the music of the past. Then Adrien de La Fage's (1805–1862) focus on plainchant and the music of the Near East underlined the contemporary French interest in church music performance and authentic chant, which established a tradition for these fields and resulted in new works such as the *Revue de la musique religieuse, populaire, et classique* (1845–1849), as well as the appearance of anthologies and collections of chant and early vocal music (Duckles et al. 2012).

24. Bohlman explains that, based on Hegel's monolithic design of human history to which many nineteenth-century historians subscribed, civilization migrated from East to West, and since Christianity started in the East, the musical traditions of eastern churches were thought to offer a glimpse into European Christian music in the past. By the same token, music associated with Islam was seen to offer a bridge (perceived geographically, historically, and culturally) that could provide useful evidence of this trajectory. This contextualization, however, stops short of explaining why the Christian traditions remained out of sight.

The creation of ideas, histories, and bounded cultures emerged from structures of power inherent to the process of their study, which reflected forms of domination in various shades of hegemony (Said 2003). Without suggesting that the Orient portrayed in eighteenth-century European thought and literature was an entirely fictional construction, Said proposes that it remains, nevertheless, what the West decides it is.

The creation of a collective Other, fear of this threatening external entity, the perceived exotic nature of an imagined “them,” and the erotic powers they were ascribed in relation to a European “us,” were all elements of an orientalizing process that took place in music.²⁵ Taken at face value, such sexualized imagery as that of Saint-Saëns’s *Delilah*, for instance, may seem of no immediate relevance to sacred musics. However, the predominance of various forms of orientalizing accounts for the marginalization of eastern Christian chanting in nineteenth-century colonial Europe.

According to Said’s theory, processes of orientalizing reach beyond imagined sexual subjugation, as the academic designation “orientalism” reflects a high-handed power-assuming attitude of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century colonialism (2003). This process also applies to desensualized music, which was the status of sacred forms of song in Enlightenment (and post-Enlightenment) Europe (Tomlinson 1999). Thus, subordinating the Other took doctrinal forms of hegemony that included modes of theorization, and those extend to eastern Christian musical traditions. The sociocultural critiques *Orientalism* and postcolonial theory provide of the way in which the West regarded the East reveals that eastern Christian musics were fetishized as glimpses into European musical pasts. In this way, they fell under a normative epistemology which gave them a small, manageable place within the European historiography of sound, and prevented subsequent scholarship from dealing with them as a source of valuable new knowledge beyond nineteenth-century perspectives. For contemporary chant scholars, this means that new tools of knowledge creation must be invented, and existing epistemologies must be

25. Musicological studies investigating representations of the Orient are informed by Edward Said’s propositions regarding the pejorative connotations with which his thesis has coined the term orientalism. Ralph Locke’s paradigm of orientalism, for instance, recognizes the duality: “us” (collective self), the morally superior West, versus “them” (collective Other), the appealing but dangerous Orient (2005). This is “an eroticized encounter in which ‘they’ come close to causing ‘our’ downfall,” write Born and Hesmondhalgh in their introduction to a collection of essays entitled *Western Music and its Others* (2000:8). Moreover, this Other, suggest the authors, “is figured as a highly sexual female.” It is *Delilah*, in the case of Camille Saint-Saëns’s famous opera, “who is both desirable and desiring and represents both temptation and threat” (ibid.). Similarly, Pasler considers that representations of the Orient in French opera say more about what was repressed in the French psyche at the time than they do about the subject matter (2000). Locke and Pasler associate female sexuality in nineteenth-century orientalist musical works in France with how French society operated rather than with what the Orient actually did or thought at the time. Such orientalizing imagery in opera and in paintings not only created a specific Orient, but served as an “exotic mask” that allowed the smuggling “into the art gallery and opera house” of what was normally repressed in France apropos female imagery (Locke as quoted in Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000:8).

revised, before the Christian East can be seen in its own light. Rethinking source and method, then, is but one step in the reconstruction of appropriate disciplinary spaces for Christian musics from the East.

Concluding notes

I have dealt in this article with forms of intellectual preoccupation surrounding eastern Christian musics in European musicology that remain largely unrecognized. By interrogating an admittedly quintessential colonial example, I have presented some of the issues scholars studying eastern ecclesial chant still confront today. Subtle and theoretical though they may be, these issues have persisted in European scholarship on eastern Christian chant throughout the twentieth century and beyond. In a postcolonial and postmodern era, I hope to have underlined issues relevant to identifying, verifying, and approaching sources on oral traditions in current practice. While I did not set out to propose a sacred musical orientalism, I will be content with having suggested the likelihood of its existence. As space and scope do not permit tackling later sources on Syriac chant (and at the risk of raising a new claim this late in the argument), I note that some of the issues with which contemporary chant scholars deal when consulting musicological sources are due to the strong grounding musicology has in post-Enlightenment European epistemologies, particularly modernist empiricist methodologies. But that subject merits an independent discussion.

Despite lacking engagement with contextual information, which was consistent with his orientalist approach, Villoteau's account is a revealing source for the contemporary study of Syriac chant. Over and above what it conveys about music studies in the nineteenth century, a close reading of it compared to observed reality is informative on religious and ethnic intricacies in the Christian Middle East, on postcolonial musicology, and on western engagement with eastern Christianity. As a historical record juxtaposed with issues present in twenty-first-century fieldwork, Villoteau's study is a reminder that despite the availability of highly developed fieldwork techniques (with ever-more-portable equipment and massively accessible digital resources), current research is not immune to misreadings as it still relies on interpretation, nor is it protected from the influence of cultural and disciplinary politics. This is equally true today as it was at the time of Napoleon, despite the increasing development of sound and image recording technologies and whatever verification they might allow. That is particularly the case in subjects such as Syriac chant which continue to suffer from the scarcity—or ambiguity—of sources, a lack of tried and tested methods, and unquestioned prejudicial frameworks. Chant scholars today ought to recognize these issues as they move forward in new directions.

At the interface of the two most musically inclined –ologies lies the study of Syriac chant. Given its historical location at the formative stages of musicology, along with its necessary location within contemporary methods

of ethnomusicology, studying Syriac chant connects a number of threads that coincide with interdisciplinary—and music subdisciplinary—debates and shifts. New directions in musicology offer possibilities for studying the eastern Christian musics it had once abandoned.²⁶ Invitations to rethink the discipline and its limits involve a number of variants in terms of inclusion and exclusion, especially regarding source and method. Moves towards subdisciplinary boundary adjustments (Born 2007) coincide with calls to account for hegemony and for pluralistic musicologies of postdisciplinarity (Bohlman 1993). A discussion on provincializing musicology is a call for a musicology that problematizes authority (Cook and Everist 1999), and relational musicology is a musicology more aware of its encounter with various Others that leans towards seeing music as a process of meaning production (Cook 2004, 2012). Such decentralizing shifts in music studies reconfigure norms of power and the authority of knowledge possession and production in ways that reposition such musics as Syriac chant within more discursive subdisciplinary relations than those of persisting colonial legacies.

Yet, perspectival expansions within the subdiscipline of musicology do not cover everything that the study of eastern Christian traditions requires, which necessitates the use of analytic tools from a number of fields, among them theology, history, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology. Born suggests that under current hierarchies of legitimacy, reconfiguring subdisciplinary boundaries is necessary. Creative intellectual justifications should be used to redirect attention to “new objects of study, new perspectives on old disciplinary objects, and new conceptual and methodological resources relevant to all musics” (2007:208). In a related vein, Stokes (2008) emphasizes the importance of locally informed approaches as opposed to overarching totalities in the incremental advancement of disciplinary transformation. Taken together, these new directions offer an opportunity: they open possibilities for developing new studies of eastern Christian chant and for carving new approaches within current musicology.

Despite having had a presence at the inception of our currently recognized music-ologies, the study of Syriac chant has remained subject to orientalizing habits that have rendered it an inconvenient topic for two centuries.²⁷ As it regains a place within new music studies, Syriac chant belongs to no single existing field as it necessitates tools of knowledge production that borrow from multiple disciplines. An enquiry into Syriac chant, therefore, is inherently interdisciplinary in scope

26. This article does not make clear distinctions between comparative musicology and ethnomusicology in the subdisciplinary historical sense, and that is for two reasons. Firstly, distinctions (as well as similarities) across analytical and theoretical divides continue to stir arguments, a most recent revival of which may be followed in issues of *Analytical Approaches to World Music* (see Savage and Brown (2013), Clarke (2014), and Locke (2014)). Secondly, because such distinctions have no bearing on the article’s core claim with respect to the discipline’s relation to Syriac chant. Connections between ethnomusicology and music history should be considered in a similar vein (Blum, Bohlman, and Newman 1993). For notable recent contributions to theory and method in historical ethnomusicology, see McCollum and Herbert (2014).

27. For example, I am not aware of studies on Syriac chant in Egypt since Villoteau’s.

and methodologically adaptive in approach. At the heart of source and method negotiation, the earliest historical source on Syriac chant studies exemplifies the necessity for contextual grounding and the interconnectedness of subject and theory (or source and method). It shows that disciplinary boundaries need be permeable and subdisciplinary connections need be discursive, so that little-understood musical traditions may be seen in a new light.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement and thanks are due to the many Suryani people whose generosity of spirit has contributed to the creation of this article, to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, to the journal editors for their close engagement with my prose, and to Nicholas Cook and Andre Redwood for reading and commenting on drafts.

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Abstract in Arabic**الترتيل السرياني: جدل المصادر والمنهجيات في العلوم الموسيقية**

ينبثق هذا المقال من التعقيدات المتعلقة بدراسة التقاليد الموسيقية الشفوية إذ يتناول مفهوم المصدر في تلك الأنواع من الموسيقى التي لم تحظ بقسطٍ كافٍ من البحث العلمي. تنتمي الأسئلة التي يعالجها المقال إلى المساحات المعرفية المشتركة بين الحقول العلمية الموسيقية من ناحية وبين علوم الدراسات الموسيقية وغيرها من الحقول العلمية من ناحية أخرى. يتناوله مثلاً من أول المصادر الأوروبية التي درست الترتيل السرياني (أو الإنشاد السرياني)، يبحث المقال ارتباط تاريخ العلوم (الغربية) الموسيقية بأنواع الموسيقى المسيحية الشرقية، ويركز على الطبيعة الجدلية للعلوم الموسيقية، خصوصاً الميوزيكولوجيا والإثنوميوزيكولوجيا، منوهاً إلى تبعاتها على مفاهيم التخصص العلمي.