

Chapter VI
Musical Explication and Spiritual Contemplation
on Some Coptic Hymns

1. pogro "Ebooro" Hymn
2. zol zoqa "Golgotha" Hymn
3. ? et? ??p?? ?? ?a "Hitenne Presvia" Hymn
4. ?? ????da cq "Arihoo Chasf" Hymn
5. "Onem nai Simphonia" Hymn
6. "Amen Ton Thanaton" Hymn
7. "Apipsaline" Hymn
8. "Agios" Hymn

This Chapter includes musical explanation, accurate and simplified, for eight Coptic hymns covering fully the Orthodox meanings, concepts and dogmas implied in these Hymns. These, when read, accompanied by listening to the hymns chanted, I think would be sufficient to engrave them in the reader and listener's hearts.

1- The pogo Hymn 'Ebooro' in Arabic

It is chanted with three melodies:

- One melody for the Morning Service of the Feasts: Christmas, Epiphany, Resurrection, and Holy Nuptials.
- A second melody is used at the conclusion of the Adam Theotokies (i.e. glorifications for the Theotokos) in the Midnight Praise.
- A third melody is used in the Passion Week, at the conclusion of each Hour, responding after every part (stychon) with the words "κῆριε ἐλεεσθ?" (Keri elisoon).

The text of this hymn is included in the Service Book of Deacons on P.777, as well as in the Book of the Annual Holy Psalmody P.144 (the Arabic texts of both books).

The language of the Hymn:

All the words of this hymn are written in Coptic language.

The Occasion on which the Hymn is chanted:

Some of the deep spiritual words are distinguished for their fitness for every occasion along the whole year round, especially when these words do not convey a specific event or occasion such as certain days or feasts like Christmas, Epiphany, Resurrection, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Apostles feast, Transfiguration Day; or fasts like the lent or the Passion week or Kiahk...etc.

Examples of such spiritual words as 'Ebooro' which mean "O King of peace ...grant us Your peace ...Disperse the enemies of the church, and fortify her, that she may not be shaken. ...Emmanuel Our God, is now in our midst, ...May He bless us, and heal the sicknesses of our souls and bodies"...

They are words that stir up the emotions, and we need to repeat them every day: in passion, in sadness as well as in pleasure and joy, even when we sing praise every day.

These words fill our hearts with the peace of God, which surpasses every mind. For Saint Paul said: *"For He is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace"* (Eph.2: 14)

Therefore, 'Ebooro' is chanted on various occasions with more than one melody, for its words are given the color that fits the occasion.

On feasts and nuptials this hymn is chanted with the joyful tune of praise. At the conclusion of the Adam Theotokies, it is chanted with its distinguished active tune, whereas in the Passion Week with the sad tune.

The method of performance:

'Ebooro' with the joyful tune is performed by using the cymbals and the triangle: the two instruments which, when used, reveal the state of joy the church lives.

'Ebooro' with the sad tune is performed without using the cymbals and the triangle.

'Ebooro' consists of four "verses" and a conclusion; therefore its performance is more beautiful with the "antiphon" method by responding between the choruses on both sides or between the chorus and a soloist.

The Musical scale and tempo:

We will present here three melodies for "Ebooro": the joyful tune, the yearly praise tune, and the sad tune.

The joyful tune, a marvelous melody full of life, cheerfulness and depth. It is the melody that changes the state of any person, from excessive sadness to spiritual delight, from frustrating despair to hope, and from slackness and laziness to active struggling. Therefore, the church has chosen this melody to be chanted by the faithful in the feasts and the nuptials, with the use of the cymbals and the triangle.

‘Ebooro’ with the joyful tune begins with "Byati mode"¹ and from "fourfold scale"²

The musical ancient deep-rooted stanza begins bearing the redolence of years and manifesting the spiritual dimension enwrapping every tune. Then it changes with extreme smoothness to "Agam Mode" at the word (? εμ ? ? ? a ?) (cemni Nan) to hover round the zone of sharp refrains, then out of it to go back to "Byati mode " with a stanza similar to the first one.

As to ‘Ebooro’ with the yearly praise tune, which is also of "Byati mode" and of twofold scale and higher tempo, it is a tune by which those who are awake for Midnight prayer praise the Lord.

The third tune of ‘Ebooro’ is the sad tune with which the congregation chants along the whole Passion Week. It is of ‘Agam mode’³, which is of exceeding power. Probably the wise church has chosen this strong mode for this sad week to assure the Copts and all the world as well that we do not mourn as those who have no hope, but our mourning is filled with the power of hope, for we are confident that our Lord Jesus Christ died to grant us life.

As for the tempo of the three tunes it is almost steady, about 100 pulses per minute.

Explanation and Contemplation

‘O king of peace, grant us Your peace, render unto us Your peace, and forgive us our sins.’ How deep these words are indeed and strong! They fill the soul with peace, that

¹ Al Byati, is an Egyptian musical scale distinguished for the step of sika within its seven tones and it is usually based in the beginning and the end on the "Re" tone.

² The musical scale, is the one which defines the equal division of the musical stanza through a certain bar (mesura), which would be simple or compound, twofold or threefold or fourfold according to what it includes of the number of signs which define the time of tunes and pauses in each bar.

³ "Agam Mode" is equal to the big musical scale with regard to the distance between its tunes.

peace which we ask from Him, the King of peace, to "lay down in peace, and sleep" (Psalm 4:8)

So the joyful "Ebooro" starts quiet and slow to express this peace pervading us. And with its smooth, joyful and delightful stanzas it begins to express the state of one singing joyfully, being filled with peace, with peace blessing, for "*the Lord will bless His people with peace*" (Psalm 29:11)

After a while the hymn goes up gradually in active rhythms up to the phrase 'Semni Nan Ntek Herini' which means 'render unto us Your peace'.... Here the tone changes in genius fluency to "Agam tone" with the same scale of the base "tonic" (i.e. the stability) of "Al-Byati tone" with which the hymn began.

And in the new scale the tunes rise to hover round the zone of the sharp refrains¹, then the hymn becomes strong bright expressing the demand of the people who joyfully feel peace, but demand from the king of peace to render unto them His peace together with forgiveness of their sins.

In this strong and sharp zone, the tune depicts the feelings of a man who by his peace of heart could pass safely through the water and the fire, to overcome tribulations, and to come prevailing, victorious and joyful. As the Lord has promised us, saying, "*these things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33)

Then the tune goes back to "Byati tone", and to the mid-zone of the musical scale, to conclude the first stanza. This musical mode is repeated

¹ The higher the tunes go, the sharper they become. The zone of playing or chanting in which contain these sharp tunes is called the zone of refrains, and the voice is bright and glittering.

four times. Then the hymn of joy ends with a final stanza "Coda"¹ that is "ten oo osht" which means "we worship You".

N.B.: When David Ensemble performed "Ebooro" with its three melodies, this final appendix "ten oo osht" has been put after the sad tune only as a conclusion for the three melodies altogether in order to create a connection among the three. However, in the Holy Liturgy, the three melodies are not chanted together, for the purpose of performing them together is merely to reveal the musical genius and depth of spirituality of the Church fathers, who composed three melodies for the same words, each to express a specific occasion.

It is noteworthy that most of the other hymns, which we tackle in this book, did not use the seven tones of the whole musical scale "Octave"². But this compound melody made use of nine tones (more than one octave) as well as various rhythms, and moved between two basic modes: Byati and Agam.

As for "Ebooro", the yearly praise tune, it is active like all the hymns of praise songs. It is of "Byati mode" also. Though the words are the same, the tune is different, depicting the joy of one feeling himself distinguished among others for the peace he has. So he chants "*There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked*" (Isaiah 57:21).

¹ Coda is a type of final stanzas for the musical pieces and is put to give the impression of a determined and more effective final. But the "Codita" is a very small final appendix.

² The Octave consists of eight tones: seven of which are the tones of the musical scale, in addition to first tone repeated.

For all the wicked are deprived of this peace, “*even if they speak peace to their neighbors, mischief is in their hearts*” (Psalms 28:3). Therefore, there is no resemblance between this tune and the former one, neither in smoothness nor in cheerfulness, but the only resemblance is in its power.

And if we consider the musical note of this hymn, we will find it exceedingly simple in composition. The rhythmic form is simple with only two rhythms, and a fluent melody that utilizes only five tunes of the musical scale. It is only one musical stanza in one mode, consisting of twelve bars (mesura)¹ repeated four times.

As for "Ebooro" in the sad tune, it is one of the strongest and simple tunes in the Coptic Church. How wonderful and how marvelous this tune is when the whole congregation chants it during the Passion Week, being overwhelmed by a marvelous and completely true spirituality!

In spite of the sad feelings reflected in the hymns, and in the image of the cross printed on the black wrappers that decorate the church, and imprinted in the memory of the congregation and fixed on the Crucifixion panel, in spite of all this, the sad tune of “Ebooro” is mostly powerful. It is the power of hope in the expected Resurrection. When all the congregation chant it in one voice, I feel as if the church is shaking. I myself shake within, feeling that all the mountains of evil hovering over my breast is dissolving like wax, and the powerful peace of God that surpasses every mind fills me, overflows the church and the congregation. It seems as if the church has gone high up and became a sky, or the sky has condescended and the glory of the Lord came down upon the earth!

¹ In the past and till the sixteenth century music was written without vertical "Bars" And from the seventeenth century there began the use of a horizontal line to cut the musical scale, separating the bars from each other.

Here I recall the image depicted in the Book of Chronicles when *"the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph, and Heman and Jeduthun...stood at the east end of the altar having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them the priests sounding with trumpets. Indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord...that the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord. So that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."* (2Chr.5: 12-14)

- (1) It is not a miracle; it is a reality we should live. As we sing praise in one voice, the earth becomes heaven and the glory of the Lord fills the place, the cloud being one of the features of this glory. But the Lord's glory has other features besides the cloud, which if we feel, we will become sure that the glory of the Lord has filled the house, the church or the heart. And the peace; the peace of God is another feature of this glory. For if the mountains of hatred and spite melted, if the hills of envy and slander trembled, if the bounds of lust within this congregation broke down when they shouted with one voice "Ebooro" (O king of peace), then we should be sure that the glory of the Lord has filled the church and His peace had come unto the believers' hearts.

In this sad tune, full of the power of hope, expressed by "Agam mode", each of its verses or "Coplets"¹ is preceded by (kyria elyson) three times i.e. "Have mercy, O lord, upon us" for the congregation is well aware of their urgent need of the ample mercy of God, especially in an era in which peace is absent, that peace which we all need, the peace which, when filling the believers, they will shout with David: *"God is our refuge and strength, ... therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea ... God is in the midst of her ; she shall not be moved ... "* (Psalms 46)

¹ "Coplet" is a chanted or a poetic verse.

So, when the mercy of God comes down upon them they shout “Emmanuel our God, is now in our midst...” It is the faith in God being in the midst of His people who sing praise to Him in one voice that He may purify their hearts and heal the ailment of their souls and bodies.

And when the people becomes sure that God is truly in their midst they shout with the same hymn “Ten ow osht emmoko pi khristos” i.e. "we worship you, O Christ". With this worship they conclude this hymn.

"Ebooro", with its three tunes represents a musical spiritual genius, which has power to draw the attention of any musician whatever be the musical school he belongs to.

I remember that I met with some famous musician who leads a modern musical school, and I was sure that if he listens to this hymn he will not like it, being a leader of the modern style of songs which differs in quality, form and taste. But, amazingly, he was impressed greatly by the hymn and seemed distracted, so I thought that he got wearied of the hymn. I tried secretly to stop the cassette recorder, but he rebuked me in order to let it up to the end. When the hymn came to its close he said to me: “this hymn kindled within me amazing emotions. Images and icons moved in my mind as if they were a video tape recorded in a monastery.

O, my God ...I wish I would receive your peace within me, so as not to be frightened by the tumult of the world around me, or when the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea.

O, my God, let my hymn be as that of Paul and Silas when they were in prison praying and praising You...and a great earthquake happened; for behold the jail’s foundations shook ...the doors opened ...and the chains loosened.

I wish my praise song loosen the chains of my sins so that I may be released by You, and no other than You may reign over my heart. When I praise You, make me feel that You are God Present among and in midst of us, so I can see You in Your glory, and with your light I view the light. Then I will see well and know you as a crowned king reigning over my heart. So I shout "Ebooro" 'O King of peace ...grant me your peace'.

Ebooro Hymn

- O King of peace, give us Your peace;

Establish for us Your peace;

And forgive us our sins.

- Scatter the enemies of the Church;

And fortify her that she may not shake forever.

- Emmanuel our God in our midst;

Now with the glory of His Father

and the Holy Spirit.

- May He bless all of us

and cleanse our hearts;

Heal our souls and bodies.

- We worship You, O Christ,

with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit;

For You have been crucified and saved us.

- The Golgotha Hymn

This hymn is sung at the end of the Twelfth Hour Prayer of the Good Friday. The text of this hymn is included in the Deacons' Service Book (Page in the Arabic Text).

Language of the Golgotha Hymn:

The words of this Hymn are a mixture of Coptic and Greek languages, but mostly Coptic except for the phrases that start with "Glory to the Father ... Both now and forever ... Holy" which are in Greek (zoxa patri ... Ke nein ... Agios).

The Occasion on which the Hymn is Chanted:

It is chanted on the memory of the burial of the Lord Christ, at the end of the Twelfth Hour Ritual Prayer of the Good Friday, and is called "the Burial Canon". While chanting it, the deacons go around the altar. The eldest priest takes the Burial Icon or the Crucifixion Icon, wraps it with a strip of white linen and places the cross over it, then he buries it in flowers and fragrant oils and puts five seeds of carnation or incense. These refer to the nails, thorn crown and the spear. Then he covers it with the Prospherine and puts two candlesticks with lighted candles on both sides as a symbol of the two angels who were inside the holy tomb, one at the head and the other at the feet.

- Golgotha in Hebrew - Ikranione in Greek is the place where the Lord of Glory was crucified, with His hands stretched between the two

thieves who were crucified with Him, one on His right, and the other on His left.

- The place of Golgotha was near Jerusalem, but outside its walls, for St. Paul says, *“Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate therefore, let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”* (Heb 13:12)

) It seems that it was a spot visible from some distance, because the Scripture says, *“there were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene.”* (Mk 16:7).

- The word is taken from the Greek word “Ikarniune”. Some think that this name was given to this place because of the many bare and unburied skulls. Others say that the place was an open space for execution. However it is commonly thought as being a hill in the form of a skull. In the evening, after the Lord Jesus Christ had breathed His last, Joseph, from the city of Arimathea, who was a rich man and a disciple to Jesus, came to take the body of the Lord. Joseph was a good and righteous person who was also rich. He was a councilor: a member of the Synhedrin. It was said that he refused to attend the trial of the Lord Christ, and abstained from voting because he was against their decision and action.
- The rule in the Jewish law was that no dead body remains on the execution tool. Moreover, the Roman law allowed the household of the person sentenced to death to ask for the body and take it. So, Joseph of Arimathea was encouraged and asked Pilate for the body of Christ to be able to bury it before the Sabbath. He had a garden near Golgotha where he had engraved a new tomb, so he took the body of Jesus to bury it, and Nicodemus shared him that honor.

- Nicodemus also was a member of the Synhedrin Council, a Pharisee and one of the Jews rulers. He is the one who once came to the Lord Christ by night so as not to be seen by anyone to discuss and learn from Him about the second spiritual birth. Being convinced by the Lord's words, he defended Him at the Synhedrin when the Pharisees attacked Him. He said to them, "*Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?*" (Jn)
- Joseph and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus and they wrapped it in strips of pure linen with spices and fragrant oils, laid it in that new tomb that was hewn out of a rock. While doing this, they were praising Him with tearful eyes. This same Praise became the Burial Canon sung by the church up till now.

The Method of Performance:

This Hymn is performed by all the deacons standing around the altar at the Twelfth Hour of the Good Friday without using the bell or the triangle.

Mode and Speed of the Hymn (Tempo):

This hymn dates back to thousands of years. If we listen carefully to it, we will find it very simple in its musical structure to the extent that the first stanza seems like an elegy of those common at that time.

Philo of Alexandria, a Philosopher from the first century asserts that early Christians have taken Ancient Egyptian tunes and added to it the Christian texts. One of these is the Golgotha Hymn that was chanted by Pharaohs during the embalming process and at funeral ceremonies.

Therefore, I think that part of this hymn is the same which Joseph and Nicodemus chanted, for they were in such a mood at the burial moments as not to be able to compose melodies, but were rather in deep grief, astonishment and wonder: how could the Life-Giver die? Thus they probably praised Him with melodies stored in the subconscious, themes which the conscious mind recalls in similar situations. Afterwards, the early fathers composed the final form in words and stanzas.

I think therefore that Glogotha is divided into two main musical stanzas:

- The first main stanza conforms to the philosopher's view that it is a Pharaoh theme quoted from Ancient Egypt by early Christians who provided it with Christian texts. Its simple construction and few tunes: only four, support the opinion that it is one of the elegies common at that time. Being of simple lyric tenor, anyone can perform it smoothly even if weeping, for the level goes up or down gradually. It is not like the low refrains which require accuracy and caution on its performance, nor like the sharp responses which require some effort to perform and where the voice is soft.

- The second main stanza does not conform with Philo's view for the following reasons:

* The musical creation and motif forms here differ from those of the first stanza.

* Its performance requires excessive care because of the perfect fifth leaps and swift tunes.

* The word expression in this second stanza and the tune are congruent; that is to say, when the tone of the words of the hymn "Avoash Evol Engi

Bi Soni”- which mean “the thief cried out” rises, voice leaps occur and tones become swift expressing the meaning of the words. This can only be realized through live musical composition which was impassable at the time when Joseph and Nicodemus were burying the body of the Lord Christ.

* The Greek words in the hymn indicate that it was translated from the Ancient Egyptian language into the Greek, then into Coptic.

* The mode of the Hymn is the “Agam Mode”, known as the “Great Tenor”, which is the simplest of the Eastern and Western Modes altogether.

* The simple rhythm of the stanza is dual (/), only two strokes: the first strong, and the second weak.

* The speed of the hymn: about beats/minute, is suitable. Had it exceeded this limit, the tune would have turned into a march and would have lost the touch of grief which spread throughout its tunes.

Further Explanation and Contemplation:

The music of this Hymn can be summed up in two small stanzas: the first basic one is composed of eight meters only and four tunes. This is to show that Joseph and Nicodemus were weeping while putting the spices over the body of the Beloved, so they could not express their grief except with these four tunes. Their vocal chords were trembling, they could not chant with fifth tune. They were looking at the Holy face in astonishment and wondering how could the Life-Giver die! How could it be that He dies whom the angels praise continually without languor, saying “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal”! Hearing this praise by the angels, they found themselves praising with a harsh voice “Fioco” crushed by

weeping. Their vocal chords were unable to utter anything except these four tunes. Thus they kept repeating them ten times.

While wrapping the body and putting spices and fragrant oils on it, they remembered the cry of the thief on the right side of the Lord on the cross, saying, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”. Realizing that such a cry has rescued the thief from Hades and eternal perdition and brought him to comfort and eternal kingdom, they tried to cry out like him in spite of the trembling “Fioco” voice. Therefore a new fifth tune is introduced that was not before in the first stanza which was repeated ten times. This fifth tune is the fruit of their struggle and labor, and of their desire to attain that elevation which the thief had attained!

Here the Praise Song takes another form by a second stanza introduced actually stronger than the first, yet softer. It begins with a flow “Glissando” that passes over the five tunes to express the meaning of the words “Avoash Evol Engi Bi Soni”, i.e. “then the thief cried out”. This rapid move to a “perfect fifth” layer is not strange because the image depicted at that moment in the mind of Joseph and Nicodemus was that of the thief who had attained the kingdom of heaven and Paradise with those words. Why then would they not lay hold of it by a leaping melody? Therefore the tune rises to attain to the heavenly orders’ tunes spreading ringing around the Golgotha.

This image of the thief made them repeat this second stanza four times, then bow in awe before the dead body full of life to entreat Him, saying, “Do we not deserve to be like that thief who was on Your right?”

We know that our sins are like crimson, but this Your holy body and the precious blood pouring from Your stabbed side are capable of making them as white as snow. Here they return again to the first gentle and soft but sad stanza of the four tunes, to implore Him, saying, “Eripa Mevei O Pa Shois”, which words mean: “O Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”. They kept repeating them four times also till they receive the voice of the meek Lord saying to that thief, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”

Indeed, they will not forget that marvelous voice. Meek, it is true, but it destroys cedar and extinguishes fire! Meek it is, but it convulses Kadish wilderness and makes barren the woods! It is the same voice which cried loudly, “Lazarus, come forth!” the voice of the Lord who raised Lazarus from among the dead by a cry and is capable of raising us from the death of sin. Yea, Joseph of Arimathea remembered his sin; how he dared to come to the Lord secretly in fear of the Jews! He should have cast fear away, and now he did. He was bold enough to stand before Pilate and ask him to take the body of the Lord Christ. Fear had no more a place in his heart. Here the tune can be higher again, and the second stanza with its five tones and Glissando can return and be repeated seven times the same way.

The tune continues the same: a mixture of quiet grief one time and strong grief another time, till the tune ends with the first stanza with its four tones when they have completed the burial of the dead body of the Living Christ. Then they bow down before the tomb with tears flowing heavily until the huge stone conceals the holy body from their sight.

Ye, who have done away with death by Your death after having suffered, let me cherish Your suffering as my treasure; Your crown of thorns as my glory; Your pains as my joy; Your myrrh as sweetness in my mouth and Your love as my honor and gratitude.

O Lord, do not allow blood and flesh to prevail over me, nor Satan strike me down! Rather, let me taste the joy and beauty with Joseph and Nicodemus of this solemn tune “Golgotha”.

The “Golgotha” Hymn

Golgotha in Hebrew;

Ikranione in Greek;

The place where they crucified You, O Lord

You stretched Your hands;

They crucified two thieves with You,

One on Your right, and one on the left;

And You in the middle, O Good Savior.

Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The thief on the right cried out:

Remember me, O my Lord;

Remember me, O my Savior;

Remember me, O my King

When You come to Your Kingdom.

**The Lord answered him gently:
Today you will be with Me in My Kingdom.**

Now and forever and ever. Amen.

**The two righteous Joseph and Nicodemus
Took the body of Christ,
They anointed Him, prepared Him for burial
And put Him in the tomb
While praising Him:**

**Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal
Who was crucified for us, have mercy upon us.**

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“The Hittenne Presvia Hymn”

- It is chanted after the Reconciliation Prayer in the Divine Liturgy of St. Gregory.
- The text is included in the Deacon’s Service Book page (in the Arabic Text).

The Language of the Hymn:

All words of the hymn are in Coptic, except the last sentence “Eleos Erines Thissea Eni Theos” which means “the mercy of peace, the sacrifice of praise”. This sentence is in Greek. In old Eucologions this sentence came separate from the words “Through the Intercession of the mother of God”, and after the deacon says “come forward according to the order”.

The occasion on which the hymn is chanted:

The congregation chants it after the “Reconciliation Prayer” in which the Lord Christ made reconciliation between the heavenly and the earthly through offering Himself a live sacrifice as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

The deacon inside the sanctuary says first “Spazist” i.e. “kiss each other”. For the kiss here is an expression of reconciliation and forgiveness, and a sign of unity of the members of the church in one body and one spirit.

During this kiss, the priest, with the help of the deacon, lifts the “Prospharine”, (i.e. the white cloth made of silk or linen and having bells fixed to it). This rite refers to removing the stone from the mouth of the

tomb where the Lord was buried. The shaking of the bells refers to the great shaking which happened at the tomb of the glorious Resurrection.

This is followed by the hymn “Hittenni Presvia” which means “with the intercession of the mother God the Holy Mary, O Lord, grant us the forgiveness of our sins.”

The Method of Performance:

The whole congregation chants it with one spirit, having felt the reconciliation following the Reconciliation Prayer and the holy kiss. Neither the cymbals nor the triangle are used.

The Mode and the Speed of the Hymn:

The hymn is of “Hegaz Agami” mode, and near the end it turns into “Hegaz Oigi” mode. It starts with active speed – approximately pulse/moment – then turns into Ad-libitum¹ mode which is not restricted by a limited fixed time. This occurs in the last sentence in Greek, which is translated: “ the mercy of peace, the sacrifice of praise”.

Explanation and Contemplation:

“With the intercession of the mother of God the holy Mary, O Lord, grant us forgiveness of our sins”. Intercession is mediation between two parties, and it is a pledge of love. It is based on the fact that God is dealing with people and are not on the personal level only but on the level of the congregation also.

¹ Ad-libitum is free performance unrestricted with regular beats. The singer as player is given the chance to perform freely.

The intercession prayer is as old as Noah, for we read, *“Then Noah built an altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake Nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.’”* (Gen)

It is as old also as Abraham, for he interceded for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, saying, *“Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked ... Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* (Gen)

And it is as old as Samuel, who said, *“Gather all Israel to Mizpah. And I will pray to the Lord for You.”* (1 Sam)

The Holy Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. The church distinguishes between those who have the right to intercede such as the holy Virgin Mary, the angels, and John the Baptist and other saints who may only ask and implore for us.

The early fathers, inspired by the Holy Spirit wanted to express their persistence in entreating for forgiveness, so they repeated the basic tune “Tonic: with an active speed along eight bars, in “Hegaz Agami” mode.

If ever there were one melody in the whole world in which one tune is repeated for eight successive bars, it would be rejected altogether by all, because the listener and singer also might get bored. However, in this hymn

we are discussing the repetition of the tune expressing persistence in imploring for forgiveness. For this is our holy faith, as the Gospel says, “*And Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily*” (Lk) and also, “*I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, he will rise and give him as many as he needs.*” (Lk)

The Lord Christ himself taught us to be persistent, for He, “*being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*” (Lk)

The Church knows well the importance of persistence, for when King Herod arrested St. Peter, as the Book of the Apostles says, “*constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church*” (Acts)

Yet, amidst the repetition of the tune expressing persistence, there comes moments of awe and worship before the Lord. Worship is not performed merely by bowing of the body downwards, but by bowing the melody down a third short distance (lowering it) at the word “Epschois” (i.e. O Lord) because “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve”.

This lowering of the tune is repeated once more for the same distance at the word “Ten Oo Osht” (i.e. We worship). It seems as if the church wants by these tunes to move our heavy bodies to bow before Christ.

The meditative pause occurs within the melody at the word “Bi-Khristos” (i.e. Christ) as if the melody calls you to pause a little to recognize who Christ is! He is the Son of Man who *“we will see coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and He will send His angels and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”*.

So the tune rises and lifts our sight up towards the cloud to see Him who we see “Coming in glory”.

The rapid music stanza lingers to give the impression of reverence and majesty to the Lord Christ, and to give a chance for meditation:

Am I, O Lord, among Your elect who You will gather from the four winds and from one end of heaven to the other? ... Here I am entreating You for forgiveness with the intercession of Your mother the holy Mary ... Here I am wishing to taste the sweetness of Your true promise *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”* (Isa)

But soon the moments of meditation cease when the rhythm of the melody takes us again to the first active speed (tempo) introducing to us the Orthodox creed: “We believe in One God”, “One essence and Three persons”, “We worship You, O Christ, with Your Good Father and the holy Spirit.”

Therefore at the words “Afkoti Emmon”, which mean “You have saved us”, one stage of the melody comes to an end, forming almost a close with

an extended ending (Crona). A new important stage begins, without any beats; for all this part is performed without being restricted by beats. It takes the form of Ad-Libitum i.e. extemporaneously.

It is the sacrifice ... the sacrifice that occupies God's heart from the very beginning of the creation. Even the first man felt that the sacrifice pleases the heart of God. That is why Abel the Righteous offered of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And God respected Abel and his offering. Thus began the offering of sacrifices in the Old Testament, and continued until the blameless sacrifice came. That sacrifice for our salvation ... The Lord Christ who came as a Lamb.

He was the prototype that abolished the symbolic sacrifice, for Michah the Prophet said, *“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”* (Mic)

So David – who deserved to be called father and savior – was the first to introduce to the Jews a new way of praise. He set a new order of worship through praise songs, and other means that surpassed the Law of Moses, which David created throughout his service. This is the reason behind the superiority of the psalms in holiness and benefit. And this is why the Jews

called the Book of Psalms “Cedra Tahllim” which means “the Book of Joyful praise”.

Chanting praise is the heavenly prayer garment which endows praise with serenity and sublimity. Chanting dresses the words of praise with the most valuable poetic rhyming. Hence the human voice comes out bearing the sacrifice of the tune in its most sublime degree. The meaning rises up high and gradually in its gentleness and deep emotions to attain utmost inspiration. With them man’s heart rises up readily even unto God’s presence, and the whole congregation with the same readiness and high familiarity surpassing any human measure to attain the utmost level of worship. And after a short time of harmonious chanting the Church attains a state of communion with the invisible heavenly host and everyone in the Church can feel it inside and outside.

The prayers of David the Prophet, therefore, were all continual praise and singing, for he said, “*Seven times a day I praise You.*” (Ps)

Actually, when the heart overflows with the action of the spirit, the tongue is loosened and utters tunes expressing the deep emotions of the heart far more than words can do.

St. Justin in his “First Defense” says that he considers prayers and praise – when offered by important persons– are alone complete sacrifices acceptable to God.

The Church often offers praise songs and hymns accompanied with incense, as if confirming that these are a true sacrifice, because the Holy Spirit descends and works in this invaluable sacrifice as David said, “*Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*” (Ps.)

From now on, there will be none but only this sacrifice which God has loved since eternity: “the sacrifice of praise”. For it He created the angels, so that they may offer it to Him continually, that is “*the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*” (Heb)

St. Justine says also in the same reference “First Defense” that the only honor that is suitable for God is not burnt offerings of animals which God gave us for food, but rather offering Him praise with songs and hymns for He created us.

And David the Prophet considered praise a true sacrifice, so he was keen on offering his praise honestly and incessantly. So many times we read words like, “*I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Your wondrous works*”; “*Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle.*” (Ps) And after being freed of his sins, David says, “*You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving*” (Ps). It is natural then that man, having obtained the forgiveness of his sins, offers a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, “*For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.*” (Hos)

The melody of this hymn thus came expressing the steps by which we prepare such a sacrifice in a way to be acceptable. These preparations are the wood, the ropes, the knife and the fire. So the melody came slow to represent the time these preparations take. Then it rises gradually the nearer we come to offering the sacrifice. As soon as it is offered to the heavenly Father it carries us from the earth unto heaven through changing the musical mode to “Hegaz Oigi”.

O our God, who accepted the sacrifice of Abel the Righteous, may You accept our sacrifice of praise! Ye who gave those on the earth to chant the songs of praise of the Seraphim, do accept also from us our voices with those who are invisible. Do count us among the heavenly host that we may sing with them with unceasing voices and mouths that never slacken and bless Your Majesty.

O my God, if you hear me crying, *“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;”* (Isa), do not leave me alone, but through the intercession of Your mother the holy Virgin Mary send a seraph to take a live coal with the tongs from the altar and touch my mouth with it so that my iniquity be taken away and my sin be purged.

The “Hittenne Presvia” Hymn

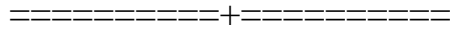
Through the Intercession of the mother of God

The Holy Mary

O Lord Grant us the forgiveness of our sins.

**We worship You, O Christ,
With Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit
Because You came and saved us.**

**The mercy of peace;
The sacrifice of praise!**



The “Arihoo Chasf” Hymn “Exalt Him High”

This hymn is included in the Midnight Psalmody and chanted at the end of the Third Hos (Canticle) after the long delightful hymn of “Hos Erof” and before the Batos Song of the Three Saintly Young Men.

The text of this hymn is included in the Annual Holy Psalmody (Page - the Arabic text).

The Language of the Hymn:

The few words of the hymn are written in Coptic language. The words and the meaning are as follows:

Hos Erof : Praise Him

Arihoo Chasf : Exalt Him high

Sha Ni Eneh : Forever

The Occasion on which the Hymn is Chanted:

This hymn is included in the Midnight Psalmody and chanted at the conclusion of the Third Hos (Canticle), and before the Batos Song for the Three Saintly Young Men.

The hymn of the Midnight Psalmody, especially this hymn, are distinguished by the lengthiness of the tunes (Melisma) which gives the impression that the singers love praising so much that they fear lest it come to an end. That is why the tunes extend, rise up and go down on their mouths endlessly.

For two words only: Hos Erof, there is a lengthy hymn that takes about a quarter of an hour! And before it immediately comes the hymn “Ezmoo Epshois”, which is another lengthy one. This is followed by this hymn “Arihoo Chasf”.

The Method of Performance:

This hymn is chanted by all performers with the cymbals and the triangle. They perform it in a joyful way, revealing on their mouths the infinite love of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and exalting Him forever. This hymn is distinguished for the lengthiness of its tunes (Melisma).

The Mode and the Speed of the hymn:

The mode of the hymn varies intensively. It begins with “Agam Mode” which is based on the “Fa Tone” with a famous musical stanza, which is so beautiful that it is repeated in other hymns, especially in the Liturgy of St. Gregory.

Then in great fluency it changes into the “Rast Mode” that is based on the “Do Tone”. After that, in a wonderful, yet complicated facility, it changes into the “Agam Mode” based on the “Do Tone” and again to “Rast Mode”. Then, yearning for the famous stanza which distinguishes the hymn, and with which it began, it returns once more to “Agam Mode”. All these extensive tunes imply no words, but only the letter “Yota” of the word “Arihoo Chasf”.

At this point, it is time for uttering the rest of the word “Hoo Chasf Sha” all at one time in a musical stanza which does not exceed seven measures.

The hymn tunes rely on the letter “Alfa” from “Sha” in order to repeat the complete hymn from the beginning with all the changes in the mode, all the lengthiness of its tunes, and all its beautiful musical stanzas once more. It seems as if the saint who composed its music by the Spirit does not want these few words to quit his lips, his ears or his heart; or as if this hymn is an endless Praise Song.

Finally, the hymn ends with the word “Ni Eneh” at which the tunes go high, the preceding modes change into a new mode called “Arak”. Then come new musical stanzas not heard of before. This is the proper express word “forever”.

For this is eternal life: when the Lord will dwell with men, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall be any more pain, for the former things are passed awayAnd He that sat upon the throne makes all things new (Rev).

Explanation and Contemplation:

Praise is a heavenly language. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as the angels of God in heaven (Mt). Thus if we want to be like the angels of God, we must praise God continually, without tepidity or weariness.

Hence, the early fathers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, composed melodies for few words, so that each letter takes lengthy tunes, rising or descending, extended or shortened, separated and linked before the following letter is uttered. It is the desire to praise forever, to be like the angels of God. Thus

we should not be surprised when we listen to lengthy tunes for few words taking about six minutes if we knew the meaning intended by these tunes. The meaning of the word “Exalt Him High” justifies the lengthiness of the tunes over the hymn. And the meaning which the word “High” bears explains the clear ascending tune. On the other hand, the meaning behind the word “forever” requires more continuity of these tunes.

The spiritual concept implied in the Melisma, with which the early fathers were inspired while composing this hymn, became afterwards a method followed by some music composers from outside the church. They composed melodies for their songs distinguished by that Melisma.

Perhaps the Egyptian musical chanting form, known as “Al Doar”, which appeared at the beginning of the 4th century, is a clear image affirming that this Melisma – the lengthening of tunes – which the early Apostolic Church created in the first three centuries won satisfaction and acceptance in the ears of the great hymnists of that time on. So they began to imitate this method i.e. by stuffing the second part of “Al Doar” with moans. They called this part “Al Hunk”, a technical term referring to the method of singing “the principal part of Al Doar” when both the singer and chanters exchange moans.

Certainly the early fathers while composing these hymns were motivated by the words of David the Prophet “*Alleluia ... Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise in the congregation of saints*” (Ps 150:1). They wanted by every tune to create a new praise song to the Lord.

Even in their beds, they are in a state of love that appears in praise singing, “*Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds*” (Ps), that is why they are awake at Midnight ... while everyone is asleep ... to praise Him and exalt Him high forever with this new song “Arihoo Chasf”.

And if we contemplate this hymn “Arihoo Chasf”, analyzing it, we will find that it begins with a musical stanza which draws in my mind the image of the monk who leaves his warm bed, at midnight in a chilly winter, to put his head under the cold water to be refreshed and energetic. Then he goes joyfully to the Monastery’s Church, stands among his brethren chanting with them the first musical stanza of this hymn, which is composed of ten measures and distinguished for its musical beauty and spiritual warmth mixed with celerity and activity derived from the verse in (Ps) “*Awake, psaltery and harp. I myself will awake early.*” And these ten measures are repeated once more to assert the former image.

In wonderful fluency the melody then transfers to the zone of low refrains when the mode changed from “Agam” to “Rast”. And in spite of the great difference between these two modes and between the two base levels “Fa & Do”, the change of modes is performed so skillfully and professionally revealing the perfect musical awareness.

Then the melody returns once more to the big Mode “Agam”, then begins to leave little by little the zone of low refrains and rises gradually until it goes back to the start point ... to the vivid stanza which depicts the image of the hymnist shaking off his laziness to sing praise at midnight.

He says with the Bride of the Song *“By night on my bed I sought him who my soul loves ... I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loves.”* He, likewise, rises and goes about amidst the tunes and the modes, seeking Him who his soul loves. So he goes with the tunes a step up towards Him who he loves, and not finding Him, he rises another step.

And when the words “Arihoo Chasf” which mean “Exalt Him High” are uttered, the attempt is repeated again by repeating the whole hymn from the beginning, as if this repetition explains also the meaning of “Exalt Him”.

When the word “Ni Eneh” – which means: forever – comes, the melody changes into “Arak Mode” flowing in the zone of sharp refrains as if he had found at last whom his soul loves, seized Him, not letting Him go. Therefore the change of modes and the use of the sharp refrains are the most truthful expression of the joyful meeting which no one can ever take away.

The various changes in modes with which this hymn is overcrowded, the wonderful celerity of moving among them all, and the perfect usage of the zone of low refrains and sharp refrains to express the few words “praise Him and exalt Him high for ever”, this proves that the early fathers who composed this hymn by the Spirit were not only saints but they were also skilful musicians. They knew the different types of musical scales and could move among them in a professional way with musical awareness and scientific knowledge. This made such changes to the ear but rather a cause of enjoyment and fascination. They knew also the musical measures of each scale, which zone to be selected to express the intended meaning, how and

when the musical stanza is to be repeated, and which one ought not be repeated. It is a mixture of spirituality and scientific musical knowledge.

O my God, who granted Your saints Your Holy Spirit in order to compose hymns ... who sanctified their gift, so their hymns lived within us all the time through ... may You sanctify also my gift so that I may present to You a new praise song. For whatever musicology I studied to praise You with are but empty vessels unless You pour Your Holy Spirit to fill them.

I wish to be like the owner of the ten talents who traded and gained another ten, not like the owner of one talent who went and hid it.

O my God, do grant me the power to overcome the devil of laziness, that I may leave my bed and join the singers and praise with David, "*At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto You because of Your righteous judgments.*" (Ps)!

I wish I would join all these persevering singers who at midnight stand around You every day praising "Hos Erof Arihoo Chasf".

The "Hos Erof" Hymn

**Praise ye Him;
Exalt Him high,
For ever and ever.**

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O Nim Nai Symphonia¹

This hymn is chanted before the Resurrection Cycle on the Easter Eve and up to thirty-ninth day of the holy Eastertide. This hymn is included in Service Book of Deacons and Hymns.

The Language of the Hymn:

The words of this Hymn are few, and they are in Coptic (O Nim Nai Symphonia). Their meaning is (Oh, these symphonies coming to my ears).

The Occasion on which the Hymn is Chanted:

This Hymn is chanted from Easter Eve up to the thirty-ninth day of the holy Eastertide after the Praxis (part of the Book of the Apostles). During chanting this hymn, the resurrection icon is prepared. Then the priests with the Crosses in hand and the deacons with candles and flags of the resurrection turn around the altar. The door of the sanctuary is then shut. At

¹ “Symphony” is a word of Greek origin, meaning a group of sounds heard at the same time. It was first known in early 17th century in Italy to describe the musical introduction preceding the lifting up of the curtains in the Operas, or between the scenes.

In mid 18th century the Symphony became a complete work performed by the major Orchestra.

The Symphony is considered the most perfect and sublime musical work. Hayden was the first to be called “the father of Symphony”, followed by Mozart. Then Beethoven improved it to perfection, and in the ninth Symphony (called Choral) he introduced singing to accompany it. It therefore became expressive of personal thoughts and human emotions in the Romantic era

this moment the priests begin to remove the roses and the spices away from the burial.

The altar closed door represents the gate of Paradise which was closed because of Adam's sin. When it is opened, this refers to its being opened by the Lord of Glory who was crucified for our justification, and rose to give us life and the inheritance of the kingdom.

Some claim closing the doors of the Sanctuary and switching the lights off is a new arrangement introduced to us from the Greek church. We knew it only from the days of Hegumen Philothaos Ibrahim the Head of St. Mark Cathedral in Cairo ().

The Method of Performance:

The deacons perform it outside the Sanctuary. They sing it without using the cymbals and the triangle. I have a personal point of view that if the hymn is performed in the form of a dialogue between a sole singer and the chorus of deacons, this will be a true representation of the dialogue that took place between Mary and the two angels when she saw the two with white clothes, sitting one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of the Lord was laid.

But she went on asking, "*they have taken away my lord and I don't know where they have placed Him.*" (John) It will represent also the dialogue between Mary and Jesus when she thought Him the gardener.

The Music Mode and Tempo:

The tune begins calm with a sad stanza in “Gahar Kah” Mode, repeated twice to emphasize the state which is inside and outside the tomb. The low tunes move within the medium refrains zone. Then the tune changes all of a sudden to “Soznak Mode” which inclines to brightness. So, the church made use of it to reach gradually the word “Symphonia”. At this word the listener feels the brightness of the melody as if it were the brightness of the light proceeding from the tomb when the stone is rolled.

Concerning the tune speed (tempo), it begins slow about beats per minute. And from the moment the tune changed into “Soznak Mode”; the percussion changes to “Ad-Libitum”, i.e. extemporaneous.

Explanation and Contemplation:

“Oh! These symphonies coming into my ears”. They are the prophetic symphonies which made all prophecies – which seemed contradictory – harmonious.

“Behold! The Virgin will be with child and shall bear a Son and they will name Him Immanuel”. How could it be that the Virgin be with a babe?

And how could it be that God who dwells in heaven comes to dwell with us on the earth? Who is He who like a lamb is led and like a silent sheep before His shearers, He does not open His mouth?

Who is He who gave Himself to death and was counted among transgressors and laid on Him many sins and handed over for the sinners?

Who is He who was laid in the lowest pit, in darkness and shades of death? Certainly it is not David; for we know his history. No one put nails in his body, nor his legs and feet were pierced, nor his garments were divided, nor a lot cast over His cloak and none of the passers by spoke against Him or shook their heads saying, “*He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him*”, and no one offered Him sour wine to drink in His thirst. It is none but the Lord Christ in whom all the prophecies are fulfilled.

Therefore, this melody was composed to express this harmony, this symphony which combined together all those prophecies though different in place and time to unite in one time only which is the fullness time and one place only which is the body of Christ laid in that wonderful tomb, with the big stone rolled over it, whilst the ranks of angels around singing praise who to Him: (O Nim Nai Symphonia).

A lot of people think that the holy hours that followed the burial of the Lord Christ were silent dead hours. Nay. They were powerful hours full of struggling and fighting with the spiritual host of wickedness. For many people after laying the stone over the tomb thought that by the death of Christ events had stopped until the very moment of the glorious Resurrection Sunday Dawn. But this actually did not happen, but the Lord Christ descended unto Hades from over the Cross to save and bring out the souls of the dead who were waiting in hope for the resurrection, to take their souls out of Satan’s mouth and set free the captive.

What a long war that began at the twelfth hour of Good Friday and ended with the rolling of the stone over the tomb and Christ's ascent from Hades carrying in His hands the souls of the righteous.

This hymn "O Nim Nai Symphonia" is indeed a marvelous hymn that declares the happenings of those hours, whether those that happened in Hades where the conflict took place, or around the tomb where the Marys and the disciples stood with their doubts.

Therefore, the tune begins calm in "Gaharkah Mode" with a stanza almost and consisting of ten bars repeated twice to emphasize the sad impression which prevails over and around the tomb. All the tunes of this stanza are low and move within the medium refrains zone. Then, suddenly, the tune changes into "Soznak Mode" which is inclined to brightness which the church fathers – inspired by the Holy Spirit and musicologists, and those who are familiar with music Modes, and making use of them to represent the abundant deep spiritual meanings implied in the few words of the hymn.

The transfer to the "Soznak Mode" with the gradual elevation of tunes to reach the word "Symphonia" gives a marvelous sense of brightness like that of the light coming out of the tomb after rolling the stone over it.

From the moment at which the tune is changed into the "Soznak Mode", the tone also changes to "Ad-Libitum", i.e. extemporaneous free from percussion restrictions. It seems as if the church wants to refer to the setting free of the captives who awaited the Lord Christ to set them free and save them from Hades.

Gradually, the tune ascends higher and higher in the sharp refrains zone unto the climax, as if wants to refer to the bringing out of the souls of the righteous who were waiting in hope for the resurrection. It seems as if we hear in this hymn their voices rejoicing in their salvation.

The joy continues moving the silent rhythm again expressing victory with a simple tune in forms repeated in rhythmic and musical sequence as if it were the joy of victory and conquering.

The “Ad-Libitum” (extemporaneous) rhythm returns back again and the Mode changes once more to a new mode “sozdlar”, then to the sad calm tune, as if expressing the concerns of those suspecting the glorious resurrection. Actually, they need to put their fingers in the place of nails and the place of the spear – like Thomas – so that they might not be unbelievers but believers.

O My Lord and God, grant me when I chant this hymn to live the joy of Your resurrection; to enjoy the victory ... victory over myself and my lusts. Let Your resurrection touch my mortal body that it may move towards You.

Lift me up with You out of Hades of my sins. Grant me to declare Your resurrection through my life to all them who have not yet got attached with You.

Remove from my heart any suspicion. Do show compassion towards me as You have done towards Thomas and made him cry out announcing his faith.

O My Lord and God, grant me that my voice accord with the voices of Your angels who sing “O Nim Nai Symphonia” that I might not be the only incongruent voice due to the accumulation of sins over the strings of my heart.

Do let my voice dissolve in their voices, and my tones be steps moving towards You, who arose from the dead.

The Hymn “O Nim Nai”

**O Ye, all the choruses I am listening to:
O for the symphonies coming to my ears.**

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Amen Ton Thanaton Hymn
(Your death, O Lord)

The congregation sings this hymn in the Liturgies of St. Basil, St. Gregory and St. Cyril after the signs of the cross are made.

It is contained in page of the book of the “The Deacon’s Service” (the Arabic text).

The Hymn Language:

The words of the hymn are all in Greek language.

The occasion in which the hymn is said:

This hymn is sung by all the congregation in the Divine Liturgy during the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ known as the mystery of “Eulogia”, “Eucharist”, or “Communion”. It is the Sacrament instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ when He said: *“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you ... For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink ... Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”* (John)

As the congregation confess and assert that what is broken on the altar is not mere bread and wine but the true Body and the true Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of our God who died, arose and ascended into heaven, they shout with this hymn, saying: “Amen, Your death, O Lord, we proclaim, Your holy resurrection and ascension, we confess”.

For that reason the hymn is said with full power, as by it the whole congregation declare their readiness to proclaim Christ's death ... that death by which the dead were risen to the newness of life.

The reason for all the congregation signing this hymn goes back to the verse said by St. Mark the Evangelist, the owner of the Upper Room – the first place where the Eucharist was administered – “*When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*” (Mark)

It is known from tradition that the Lord Excelled in memorizing psalms, and it is believed that He recited the psalms, and the disciples responded with Alleluia. This was after He had instituted the Eucharist or Thanksgiving Mystery and handed it down to His holy disciples.

Method of Performing the Hymn:

This hymn is performed by all the congregation with one spirit and one faith, as the church had received since the beginning that she should praise and pray fervently at the end of every liturgy, for the coming of the Lord. This is very clear in the Eucharist prayers recorded in the Didascalia.

In fact the coming of the Lord is fulfilled in every Liturgy, therefore, the Eucharist in the first Church was for the believers who were fervent in spirit, a time for indescribable praise and joy which extended to their houses, as the Book of Acts says: “*They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad hand sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.*” (Acts)

And the early communities were unified in Christ's Body by that mystery which is contained in practicing the Lord's command: "*Do this in remembrance of Me*", by continually celebrating the mystery of the Lord's Supper and remembering the Lord. Therefore, they were declaring their faith with indescribable fervor singing "Amen, Amen, Amen, Your death, O Lord we proclaim"; and the Lord was fulfilling His promise "*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*" (Acts)

The cymbals and triangle are not used in performing the hymn because all the congregation are in a state of supplication to God, raising their hands unto heaven and declaring their full readiness to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and because the vigor of the hymn coming out from the depth of the congregation's heart would sweep away the sound of any musical instrument, however powerful the sound may be.

Musical Scale and Performance Speed:

This hymn is in the musical scale of "hazzam" which has changed on the mouths of all the congregation, who perform it with great spiritual warmth from the depths of their hearts, into delightful power, which perhaps the greatest musical composer cannot make from the "Major Scale".

The speed of the hymn however is fast, and it is estimated to be around " beats/minute". If this speed is closed down considerably, the hymn will lose the sense of vigor and enthusiasm, which escapes the sincerity of the first fathers. Their chanting of this hymn was a kindling of the fire in their hearts, encouraging the whole congregation to proclaim the death of Him who died on their behalf.

Explanation and Contemplation:

When the priest during the Mass holds the bread in his hands, the congregation remember our Lord Jesus sitting in the Upper Room and holding bread in His hands, surrounded by His disciples who represent the whole humankind. Among them were the rash and remonstrative, like Peter, and the skeptical like Thomas. And suddenly Christ breaks the bread and gives them all saying: *“Take it; this is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me ...”* (Luke).

Oh Lord!! Couldn't the remonstrative Peter protest saying: “This is bread!! How could it be Your body, Lord?” And why did Thomas keep quiet although he suspected everything including the declared resurrection and asked to put his finger in the signs of the nails in order to believe?

They must have definitely seen the bread transforming into the body, and the wine into the Blood, so all skeptical words petrified in their mouths and instead of that they praised and went out to the mount of olives (Mark).

For that, the whole congregation shout like the disciples saying: Amen. Amen. Your death, O Lord, we proclaim; and their chanting is of the sad ‘hazzam’ scale. But couldn't He who turned the bread into body change sadness into power! That power which makes all the congregation shout praise and go out proclaiming the death of Christ and confessing His holy resurrection and ascension unto heaven!

Some churches believe that the transformation of bread into the Body, and of wine into the Blood takes place when the priest says: “And this is My Body” and “And this is My Blood”. But the Coptic Church believes that the transformation takes place when the Holy Spirit descends as the priest inaudibly prays, while kneeling down saying:

[And we ask You, O Lord, our God, we Your sinful and unworthy servants, that Your Holy Spirit descend upon us and upon these gifts set forth, and purify them change them, and manifest them as a sanctification to Your saints.] This transformation is not strange, because Elijah the prophet shouted saying:

“Answer me, O Lord, are God and that You are turning their hearts back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the word, the stones, and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench” (Kings).

Therefore, St. Ambrose in his book on the sacraments says:

[If the word of man was sufficient for fire to fall from heaven, why couldn't the word of Christ transform the elements; for I read that He ordered the creatures to come into being and they did ... therefore, could the Lord's word, which were able to create from nonbeing that which was nonexistent, not change the existing things?]

Also St. Chrysostom said:

[He who had made these sacraments in that Supper will make them now again. We are nothing but servants, and He is the One who sanctifies and transforms them in reality.] He also said,

[Now Christ attends to adorn this table, for He who adorned that table, will adorn this one also; as it is not man who transforms the subject matters into Christ's Body and Blood but Christ Himself who was crucified for our sake. The priest stands fulfilling the form and prays with those words, but grace and power belong to God who does everything.]

St. Titus, the disciple of St. Chrysostom says in one of his letters:

[A sheet of paper made of papyrus is considered simple paper, but when it accepts the king's signature, it becomes a significant and great order. As such we comprehend the Godly Sacraments, for before the priest's supplication and before the descent of the Holy Spirit, we say that the subjects are simple bread and common wine, but after that awesome call and the descent of the righteous, life giving and worshipped Spirit, we believe and we confess that the subjects placed on the holy table are not common bread or wine but the Body of Christ and His Blood which purifies from all blemish those who partake of them in fear and eagerness.]

In ancient times the altar's curtain was usually closed during the descent of the Holy Spirit, during the citation of the Orthodox Creed, and during the confession and communion. This custom is still practiced in many Eastern churches, but our Coptic Church has cancelled it.

It is known that after the Holy Spirit's descent it is not allowed to make the sign of the cross by the priest's hand or cross on the Body or the Blood.

Coming back to this hymn, I feel that the whole congregation has composed it in the spirit when they comprehended for a moment this great

mystery which transformed the bread to Body and the wine to precious Blood, and they shouted together with one soul and one spirit: “Amen, Ton Thanaton.”

For the greatest melodist cannot compose a hymn with this power from a sad scale with five notes.

The musical analysis of this hymn is summarized as follows:

- The simplest musical scale
- The simplest rhythmical forms.
- The least number of tones (five), that is, the musical scale is not in its complete form of seven tones.
- There is no utilization of the vocal areas, in that there are no tones in the area of low keynotes or the area of high-pitched responses.
- There are no scale changes

Therefore, the question is: Where did the power of this hymn come from? And wherefrom the musical notes come, those notes that are rich in meaning despite the lack of tones and rhythm?

I cannot say anything but the following:

O, my Lord ... You who have inspired Your people by the Spirit to comprehend that this broken bread which is placed in the tray is Your Holy Body, and this wine which is poured in the Chalice is Your Blood which was shed in the cross ...

O, my Lord ... who have put live coal on the mouths of Your people, so they shouted with this hymn, saying: “Amen Ton Thanaton” do move my hard emotions so that I can compose a new hymn for You; for I often hold my chords and the tones glitter in my mind beyond measure, and the rhythms move within my soul with their numerous forms ... but the chords do not yield to me ... they are stubborn, they always wait for your Holy Spirit to come and bring out of the eater something to eat and out of the strong, something sweet ... I pray that your Holy Spirit move my voiceless chords so that they chant as the whole congregation chanted saying: “Amen Ton Thanaton” when they comprehended the Holy mystery.

The Hymn “Amen Ton Thanaton”

Amen; Amen; Amen.

Your death, o Lord we proclaim;

Your holy Resurrection,

and ascension unto heaven, we confess

We praise You;

We bless You;

We thank You, O Lord;

And we entreat You, O our God.

=====+=====

The “Aripsalin” Hymn

- + It is a “ Batis Psali”¹, i.e. Praise Song, for the three young men.
- + It is chanted in the Midnight Praise, after the Third Hos (Praise Song from the Holy Scriptures)
- + It is included in the Yearly Holy Psalmody (Page – Arabic text)

A Hint on the Commencement of Hymns and Modes in the Early Church:

So many everlasting poetic works have enriched the church so far. Among these are the works of St. Gregory Nazianz who compiled over four hundred rhymed poems. Some of them are fit for singing, but most of them have not yet been used in the church due to their deep wording and difficult scales.

Someone else preceded St. Gregory, namely “Sinosis of Cyrene” in Lybia (the town where St. Mark the apostle was born). Sinosis was appointed as Bishop for the five towns, and succeeded in taking care of his country. He was also gifted in compiling poems and hymns. It is noteworthy that he was the first to compile a hymn on Christ to be chanted accompanied by the harp.

Then by the appearance of St. Ephraim the Syrian who was called “The Harp of the Holy Spirit”, the church hymns in the East commenced a new epoch of spiritual fruitfulness.

¹ It is called “Psali” from the Greek verb “psalo” which means: sing praise or play on a stringed instrument. It is mainly Coptic rhyming poems and has rhythm like poetry. It is chanted in glorification of the Lord and often arranged according to the order of the alphabet.

St. Augustine, in his “Confessions”, states that the churches of Milan were the first to use hymns according to the way of the eastern church. That was in the days of Queen Justina who persecuted St. Ambrose (A.D.)

St. Hilary of Poitiers (+ A.D.) was the first to compose the Latin melodies and their rules for the Latin Church.

St. Ambrose succeeded him and enriched the Latin melodies. He was considered “Ephraim of the West”, the prince of the Latin melodies.

Praise Songs in the Syrian Church are affected by the Jewish way of singing. This same influence is apparent in some Coptic hymns included in the Yearly Holy Psalmody. However, those of Ephraim are inclined more to grief, regret, and remembrance of the coming suffering than to the joy of salvation, comfort and hope in the coming glory.

St. Ephraim was succeeded in compiling poetic hymns by Isaac of Antioch in mid fifth century, and by Jacob the Serougi in Metoposamia (A.D.)

Scholars have proved that the music scale of the Ancient Egyptian Praise Songs are similar to those of the Hebrew Praise Songs, especially the popular ones.

Those were followed by the Jewish scholar Samuel Nawmbourg (-) who compiled a book on “the Hymns of Israel”. In this book he

pointed out the great similarity between the church hymns and the Israeli hymns.

The Language and History of the Hymn:

Actually, we notice in most cases where God bestows His Holy Spirit on prophets or ordinary people, they spoke God's words in the form of rhymed poetry. They uttered them like Praise Songs or anthems inspired and filled by the Holy Spirit. The Song of Moses and the people of Israel while crossing the Red Sea is an example. It is rich in mystic meanings referring to the salvation of the church from this world. Another example is the Song of Moses in his last farewell to the children of Israel, which is indeed invaluable. It says, *"Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain; My speech distill as the dew, as rain drops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God."* (Deut)

There is also the Song of Deborah the judge of Israel, which she chanted as a Praise Song accompanied by a music instrument. The words of its prelude are: *"I, even I, will sing to the Lord; I will sing Praise to the Lord God of Israel ... awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song!"* (Judg)

From the wording of this Song we notice that Deborah was speaking by the Holy Spirit, as if the body was asleep and the spirit was conscious and awake!

Other poetic poems, specially the Book of Psalms, the Song of Songs, and some important prophecies of Isaiah the Prophet, these reveal the poetic rhyming subject to direct inspiration. They reveal also how the prophecy conform with the anthem, and how singing and praising rise high unto a state of inspiration and utterance by the Holy Spirit.

Psali, in general, is a rhymed and rhythmic song like poetry. It differs from Hos, since the latter is a psalm with its original words without any poetic or rhyming modification. Usually the beginnings of the stanzas (the four lines) are arranged in an alphabetical order.

Psali differs also in the way of chanting. For the Hos has its fixed yearly way of chanting, whereas the tune of the Psali differs twice a week. On Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays it has a short tune, called “Adam”, while on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, it has a long tune called “Batis”.

Furthermore the “Psali” has a yearly tune, a Kiahk tune, and a joyful tune for feasts.

Aripsalin, the hymn we are discussing here, is “Batis”, and it is quoted by Cantor “Sarkis” from the story of the three holy young men “Shadrach”, “Meshach” and “Abed-Nego” who refused to worship the image of gold which King Nebuchadnezzar had set. For that King had set a big image of gold, sixty cubits in height and six in width, and he sent a word that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and symphony with all kinds of music shall fall down and worship the gold image; and

whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

Those three holy young men refused to comply to the command knowing the Lord's Commandment: "*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.*" This filled Nebuchadnezzar with rage and fury, and he gave the command that mighty men in his army bind them in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their garments and cast them into the midst of the burning fiery furnace after heating it seven times more than it was usually heated. The furnace, being exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

Having been cast in the furnace of fire, the king stood astonished because he saw four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they were not hurt, and the form of the fourth was like the Son of God. So they came out from the midst of the fire, and blessed their God who sent His Angel and delivered them from the fire (Da)

The composer of this Psali excelled in both Coptic and Greek languages. He arranged it in the Greek alphabetic order, having felt comfort, power, and blessing in the story. He thus wrote the Psali and composed its melody:
[Sing to Him who was crucified for us, buried and arose, who did away with death and disdained it .. Praise Him and exalt Him ..

Come forth, O ye three young men, ye who Christ our God has raised and saved from Satan. Praise ye Him ...

Here is Emmanuel in our midst, ye Mishael, Meshach, speak with a voice of gladness. Praise ye Him.]

Then he calls upon all to praise the Lord and bless His name, for there is no God other than Him who can save like that.

Amazing indeed also, that he did not call to praise only the angels and the heavenly host of the Lord, but he called also the sun, the moon and the stars; the rain and the dew; the clouds and the air; the souls and the spirits; the cold, the fire and the heat; the nights and the days; the light, the darkness and the lightening; the trees and every plant on the earth; every creature in the waters, on the mountains and in the thickets; the seas, the rivers, and the birds; the snow and the ice; the animals and the beasts. These all also should praise and bless and give glory to the Lord.

It is not strange to call upon the silent nature to praise, for David the Prophet also had called upon them to sing with him his Psalm ().

It is true that King Nebuchadnezzar changed the use of the music instruments that were made to praise God with and which David the Prophet used to praise God all the time. Instead he used the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltry to call people to worship gods made by human hands. It is not therefore strange that the saints quoted the story of the three young men in this regard. It is not strange that the fire which knows its Creator, and obey Him praise Him also. When the Lord commanded the fire that was heated seven times more than it was usually heated not to have any power on their bodies. The hair of their head was not singed, nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

Truly, fire knows its Creator, whereas God's people do not, as Isaiah the Prophet said, *"The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider."* (Isa)

The Occasion on which the Hymn is Chanted:

This "Psali" is chanted in the Midnight Prayer after the third "Hos" with its long extended tunes and numerous stanzas and changeable modes. Aripsalin then comes with its rapid, short and concise tunes, fixed stanzas and sole mode repeated every stanza. This shows the complete musical awareness of the Coptic Church revealed in the order and succession of the hymns. She is keen that the long numerous stanza melodies be followed by one fixed repeated stanza melody to achieve audio balance. It is the method which great world musicians adopt preparing the "Repertoire".

Mode and Speed of Performance (Tempo):

"Aripsalin" Hymn is one musical stanza only of "Agam Mode", with quadruple scale. Each stanza consists of eight bars; each of two phrases, and each phrase containing four bars.

The first phrase is in the form of a question, and the second the answer. The answer is accompanied by a fixed refrain: Hos Eroph Arihoo Chasf, which means "Praise and exalt Him"

The stanza starts usually with the preceding "Up Beat" called "Anacruse" or "Livari" which is fit as a beginning. It gives the impression of the image of the King's men taking up "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego" to cast them into the furnace.

The musical stanza in this hymn is a vivid example of the proper musical stanza with regard to the number of bars, the equality between the question (the first phrase) and the answer (the second phrase), and the sweetness and simplicity of the music, for it sticks to the ear so that the person repeats it continually without getting bored.

In the hymn “Aripsalin” this musical stanza is repeated twenty four times, and each time it ends with the fixed refrain Hos Eroph ...

The church used to sing this hymn in reciprocation between the chorus to the right of the altar “South” and those on the left “North”. They reciprocate every two quarters, whereas the common part between them is the refrain, besides the cymbals and the triangle.

Explanation and Contemplation:

The hymn of the three young men is the hymn of all creation led by the church unto eternity where every thing ends. When the church chants this hymn, she is combining in one scene her existence in the present world of suffering and her existence in the eternity with its happiness.

In spite of her existence in the midst of the furnace of the world consuming fire, she is protected by the Son of God. Fire has no power on her. In spite of flames extending cubits high, the church crossed it as if it were gentle dew. The church lives the symbols of the hymn declaring the mystery of her ability to surpass any suffering and the mystery of the kingdom she lives on the earth.

In her belief that the world is subjected under her feet with the power of the cross as the fire had been subjected under the feet of the three young men through the mystery of the power of the fourth, she starts praising as if she was given the glory of the first Adam and his power over the whole creation in the Person of Jesus Christ who was given every dominion over everything in heaven and on earth. Thus the whole creation on by one raises their voices and all take part with them:

“Praise ye Him; Glorify ye Him; Exalt ye Him forever”

as if they were predicting the new creation with its new heaven and new earth.

The melody of “Aripsalin” accompanied by the cymbals and triangle which increase its joyfulness, is a rapid melody that does not depend on Melisma. It rather depends on one fixed combined stanza based on its beauty and sweetness. Though repeated twenty four successive times, no one falls in distraction or feels bored. But its repetition rather makes it stick more and more to the ear, then to the heart. And through meditation in its meaning one gets attached to God.

I always get overwhelmed by a beautiful feeling whenever I chant this hymn with its repetitions and refrains with the deacons. Each time I repeat a stanza I rise up a step a step higher until I attain such height as described by David the Prophet in the Psalm, *“I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God; with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.”* (Ps)

The early fathers of the church, having realized the importance of repetition for lifting up the emotions gradually even unto heaven, introduced in all the church prayers and hymns such repetition, both in musical tunes and in wording.

Besides lifting up the emotions gradually unto heaven, repetition establishes the meaning in the heart and carves God's words in the subconscious. Then the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. The word "Kerie Elisoon" for instance is repeated dozens of times with varied tunes throughout prayers.

Actually, Aripsalin, with its twenty four stanzas, is a wonderful model of a simple melody by which repetition the emotions rise high and the heart gets purified.

O our God, the God of Schadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who delivered them from the furnace of fire and let not the fire have any power over their bodies, do deliver us also from the consuming fire of trial which had burnt the Virgin of the Song so she cried out "*Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me.*" (Song)

If You will ever permit the sun of trials to burn us, do come to us as You came to the three holy young men and delivered them from the burning fire of the furnace. Let Your voice within us extinguish the flames of fire.

O You the God of those three young men, who bent down the heavens and came down into the furnace to raise them up, who saved them from

Satan, do come down unto our humbleness and raise us up to praise You with them incessantly, saying “Aripsalin”...

The “Aripsalin” Hymn

**Sing to Him who was crucified for us;
Who was buried and arose;
Who has done away with death and disdained it;
Praise ye Him and exalt Him high.**

**Put off the old man,
And put on the new distinguished one;
Draw near to the great mercy;
Praise ye Him and exalt Him high.**

**O Christians, priests and deacons;
Give glory to the Lord for His is deserving;
Praise**

**Come to us, ye three young men,
Who Christ our God has rescued and saved them;
Praise**

**For the sake of your God Messiah the Benevolent;
Come to us, O Hananiah;
Praise**

**O Azariah the Zealous,
evening, morning and noon
give glory to the power of the Trinity;
praise**

**Behold, Emmanuel in our midst,
O Mishael. Speak with a joyful voice;
Praise**

**Come together and persist all of you;
Speak with the priests.
Praise the Lord, ye all of His works;
Praise**

**Behold the heavens utter God's glory unto this day;
O ye the angels who He has created;
Praise**

**Now, ye the Lord's host, bless His holy name;
Ye the sun, the moon, and the stars;
Praise**

**And ye the rains, and the dew;
Praise our Savior,
For He is the God of our fathers;
Praise**

**Give glory, ye clouds and wind;
Ye spirits and cold; Ye fire and heat;
Praise**

**Ye nights and days; Light and darkness and lightening;
Say Glory to You, O Lover of mankind;
Praise**

**Ye trees and every plant on the earth;
Every creature in waters, on mountains and plains;
Praise**

**And ye the seas and rivers,
Praise without slackness the Lord King of Kings;
Praise**

**We also, looking at them,
Let us say with all of these: Bless the Lord, ye birds;
Praise**

**Ye snow and ice; Bests and animals;
Bless the Lord of lords;
Praise**

**Praise the Lord as proper for Him,
Not as the transgressors, ye mankind;
Praise**

**Glory and honor, O Israel; Offer before Him,
with joyful voices, O priests of Emmanuel;
Praise**

**O ye the ministers of the True God,
And the souls of the righteous, The humble and loving;
Praise**

**God my God is He who saved you from danger,
O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego;
Praise**

**Make haste with all caution,
Ye the godly of the Lord and all creation He has made;
Praise**

**Coolness and repose give us all;
Without failure, that we may enjoy singing;
Praise**

**Also Your poor servant Sarkis,
Let him be without condemnation,
That he may say with those,
Praise**

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The “Agios” Hymn

The TRISAGION

+ It is chanted before the Prayer of the Gospel in the Holy Mass.

The Language of the Hymn:

All the text is in Greek.

The Occasions on which the Hymn is Chanted:

It is chanted with a joyful melody before reading the Bible on the following occasions:

- In the Holy Masses of the Lord’s Feasts (Grand and Minor)
- In the Masses that take place in the th of each Coptic month (in remembrance of the Annunciation, Nativity and Resurrection)
- In the rite of Matrimony Service.

It was said that this chant was declared as a song used by angels in heaven, through a divine revelation in Constantinople at the time of Heracles the Patriarch (-).

The Oriental Churches believe that its origin dates back to the time of our Lord Jesus burial, when Joseph and Nicodemus were enshrouding the body, they got astonished how was it possible for the Giver of life to die!! So they praised Him saying: “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal”

There are several hymns for those Holy words: During the grand festivals and matrimonies, the hymn is chanted with the joyful tune. Through normal

days (of the liturgical year) it is chanted with the joyful tune without the Melisma toning that is in the beginning. During the Good Friday and funerals it is chanted using an exceeding mournful tune in its grief and length.

The Method of its Performance:

All the congregation with the chorus of deacons chant it accompanied with the cymbals and triangle. Sometimes a pleasant dialogue takes place between a solo singer and the congregation with the chorus, especially in the Melisma toning of the first letter of the word “Agios”, which usually is started by the solo singer and then iterated by the chorus of deacons, and the dialogue continues.

Mode and Speed of Performance (Tempo):

The joyful hymn we are speaking about starts with Sika mode with a melisma toning of the first letter of the word “Agios” which means “Holy”, in a quadruple scale.

This hymn is featured by having all its musical sentences iterated twice, as if it is really the hymn that is chanted by the Seraphim and Cherubim that have the six wings: *“They cry out one to the other sending up the hymn of victory and a salvation that is ours, with a voice full of glory. Praising, singing and crying out, saying: Holy Lord of Sabaoth”*

Many churches care to divide this iteration into two groups of deacons or a solo singer and a group of deacons, to express the meaning of “crying out one to the other”

Nice to note that the first musical sentences of this Trisagion hymn, contain three measures only, this is not common in traditional form of the musical stanzas, for usually the musical stanzas are composed of two phrases, each one composed of four measures, as if the Holy Spirit set three measures to advert to the three Sanctus.

The hymn is featured also by its lively tone, its speed is approximately beats per minute, the musical stanza is fluent, velvet and lilt, inspiring people to happiness and rapture, this may confirm that this song is chanted by the angels in front of the Divine throne, for near the throne there are absolute happiness that is reflected by joyful melodies.

The musical stanzas also are animated, with high technique and cleverness; its performance requires a skillful and a trained voice, may be this also is another evidence that it is one of the hymns that are chanted by the angels - the specialized and trained choruses of praise.

Explanation and Contemplation:

This old praise that was first uttered by Joseph and Nicodemus, was passed to the Syrian church through St. Peter who directed them to chant it before reading the Gospel in the Holy mass.

Some of the old manuscripts in the church support this opinion: [When Nicodemus saw the Master Christ died, he was amazed that the chief of life dies, He who raised Lazarus from death after four days in the tomb, so he hailed Him saying: "Where is Your might, O Lord!" Immediately he heard angels chanting from heaven : "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal",

consequently he acclaimed saying : “Who was crucified for us have mercy on us”] The church arranged that this praise be chanted in the Holy Mass and all other church services, to be iterated three times confessing the Divinity of the Son. She also arranged a long beautiful hymn but mourning one for the Good Friday, in which the phrase “Who was crucified for us have mercy on us” is iterated three times, in an answer to the Jews that took council together against the Lord and against His Anointed, despising His Divinity and saying : “Crucify Him, crucify Him” three times.

This praise continued to be used in all churches until the fourth century, and when the heresy of Arius the heretic was spread, the three locutions of nativity, crucifixion and resurrection were omitted, but our Orthodox Church continued to use it, in its complete form to the present time.

Some western Christians refused this praise assuming that it gestures to a crucifixion of the three Hypostasis. The church intent in iterating the word “AgiOS” or “Holy” in each sentence, is to glorify the Word incarnate in His three acts in the plan of salvation (Nativity, crucifixion, & resurrection). If each word “AgiOS” is meant to indicate a Hypostasis then the result will be nine Hypostasis since it is iterated nine times.

In this hymn the dialogue is graduated between the solo singer and the group in a musical sentence, around the letter “Alpha”, the first letter of the word “AgiOS”.

This hymn is featured by a musical sentence so beautiful, spiritual, warm and mighty. In my personal opinion it is one of the most beautiful hymns

that touched my heart, I usually care to finalize the praising ceremonies with it, making it the last hymn that enters to the ears and hearts of the chanters as well as the listeners.

I can not forget the Swedish audience insisting on the repetition of this hymn in the “Orient” ceremonies in Stockholm, as if it were also revealed to them with a Divine revelation that it is a praise used by the angels in heaven.

The hymn ascends gradually by iterating each sentence twice between the singer and the chorus, to the appropriate time for uttering the word “Agios”, as if all the previous singing was just a musical and spiritual prelude for uttering the divine word “Agios”, at which all the congregation bow in devoutness.

Then the hymn continues in the normal way (as used through the liturgical year) in another new mode (Agam), another new dual measure, and different rhythmic forms less in motion compared to the melisma toning used in the letter alpha, in a lesser speed than the beginning, this slowdown proceed from the Congregation’s feelings of the Sanctifying word, as they bow at the word “Agios” which is iterated nine times.

Agam Mode is a strong musical mode, melodies are covered with dignity, rhythmic forms started to move lively, the early joint delightful hymns “Legato” became sporadic “Stacatto”, expressing the reverence in front of the Divine presence, glorifying the power of the Holy Immortal.

I also cry out to You the Holy Immortal, asking You to make me die for Your sake all day long.

O You, who abolished death by Your death, and broken its thorn;

O You, who killed sin by the tree of the cross, and by Your death You made alive the dead man, whom You created with Your own hands, and had died in sin; put to death our pains by Your healing and life-giving passions.

Grant me, O Holy Mighty, who manifested resurrection by Your resurrection, that I may know You and the power of Your resurrection, and that my weakness and faults may be perfected by Your strength.

Grant me, O Holy Immortal, a life with you: *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the Only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”* (John)

Put in my mouth, the Cherubim chant to shout with them continually.

Grant me, O Holy, to be worthy to stand on the sea of glass, and to hold Your harp singing with the victorious gathering: “AgiOS O TheOS” “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal”

The “Agios” Hymn

**Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal;
Who was born from the Virgin,
Have mercy upon us.**

**Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal;
Who was crucified for us,
Have mercy upon us.**

**Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal;
Who arose from the dead and ascended unto heaven,
Have mercy upon us.**

**Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;
Now and for ever and ever,
And for the age of ages. Amen.**

**O You Holy Trinity,
Have mercy upon us.**

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