

THE ROOTS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN MUSIC: AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF
THE INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED THE MUSICAL PRACTICES OF THE
EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

by

Jade Brooklyn Weimer

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Defended on August 20th, 2008

Department of Religion

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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Of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the historical influences on early Christian music and how those influences affected the early Christian position on music. The two most prominent influences are various Jewish and Greek traditions. Music was an important part of both cultures and this thesis argues that assorted Jewish and Greek communities played a significant role in shaping the emerging Christian identity. A Christian hymn from the Third Century CE is used to illustrate this point. The hymn is written in Greek musical notation but displays certain features found in Jewish music of the same time period. This conclusion is significant because most scholars have argued that this hymn demonstrates either a Greek influence or a Jewish influence, but they fail to acknowledge that elements of both cultures and traditions have shaped early Christian music.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people that have directly and indirectly aided me in writing this MA thesis. I would like to acknowledge my peers and classmates, who facilitated many interesting and productive discussions in seminars over the past three years. I would also like to thank the following professors that significantly influenced my academic path and provided me with the tools required to complete this thesis: Dr. Brenda Cantelo for piquing my interest in religious studies, Dr. Dawne McCance for providing me with invaluable guidance through the complexities of academia, Dr. Kenneth MacKendrick for helping me understand what it means to be a critical scholar, and Professor Laurence Broadhurst for going above and beyond and helping me find a way through the maze of scholarship that constitutes the discipline of Christian Origins. Without Professor Broadhurst's guidance and assistance, this thesis would not have been possible. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. James Chlup for generously agreeing to sit on the defense committee. I am also grateful to Rose Fiorillo for her ability to solve any administrative problem and her constant willingness to help the students in our department. Last but certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge my parents Rosella and Bruce Weimer, and my husband Alex Bainov, for their support and encouragement. Their never-ending optimism pushed me through the difficult moments of thesis-writing and to them I will be forever indebted.

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INTRODUCTION

The historical roots of early Christian music are relatively unresearched and few scholarly works have been written on the subject. The two foremost reasons for this gap can be attributed to a lack of primary source material and the fact that such a study requires not only detailed historical and linguistic knowledge but also some level of both practical and historical musical competence. The lack of source material is still an issue; however, with relatively recent archaeological finds, such as the Nag Hammadi papyri collection in 1945, we have access to more diverse historical accounts from the early Christian period. Inscriptions, papyri, and manuscripts, such as those found in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, provide further insight into the musical content of early Christian ritual as well as further socio-historical contextualization of early Christian communities in general. Some of these documents are admittedly fragmentary but even a small piece of the puzzle can provide new points of analysis in the overall portrait of the early Christian communities. The interdisciplinary nature of such a project has also contributed to a lack of scholarship in this area but a renewed interest in ritual and novel socio-historical methodology has expanded the field of early Christian studies to include a broader range of inquiry.

The following work will thoroughly describe the lacunae and impasses that exist in current scholarship regarding the historical emergence of early Christian music. Most scholars in this area situate themselves in one of two positions. Scholars, including E.J. Wellesz and Eric Werner, argue that the roots of Christian liturgical music are derived solely from Jewish sources and practices. Werner states that the earliest Christian communities were made up of Jews, as defined by common geography, language, and

ritual cultic practices. Yet other scholars, including M.L. West and Günther Wille, argue that the musical forms of the earliest Christian hymns are clearly derived from Greek sources. Their arguments are based on in-depth studies of structural analyses and ancient Greek musical notation. Both approaches are well-argued and convincing; however, in my view, both sides are at fault for a reductionistic and over-simplified source-critical analysis. When the available source material is placed that within the socio-historical context of the early Christian communities, it becomes quite clear that the musical practices of early Christians were influenced significantly by both various Greek and Jewish sources. The division present in the scholarship may correspond to the various areas of specialization with which each group is most proficient. Wellesz, for example, is a musicologist from a Jewish background and composer specializing in Byzantine musical history. Werner, also a musicologist from a Jewish background, taught at Hebrew Union College. Dissimilarly, West is a Classicist who has written extensively on ancient Greek music. This classification is in no way to be taken as a general overarching principle in the field of Christian music; however, this brief survey of prominent scholars in the field illustrates the different perspectives from which each group is writing.

This thesis argues that both of these historical influences are of equal importance and that neither may be privileged nor discounted. The field of early Christian music is a relatively new discipline and may be prone to the premature errors to which any novel area is subject. For that reason, one must not rule out specific influences without further study and a sharper focus. In order to undertake such a task, methodological approaches employed by both socio-historians and ethnomusicologists need be used. The socio-

historical approach analyzes various social structures as well as ancient texts situated within their historical context. Scholars ought to avoid using modern social models that are not applicable to ancient societies in antiquity in order to formulate an accurate depiction. For example, one cannot analyze various cultural groups in Antiquity through a Marxist lens because they did not live in an industrial society. Scholars may attempt this type of analysis but there are inherent methodological problems that are present in such an examination. Moreover, Edward Foley argues that modern categorizations or created dichotomies, such as distinctions between music and speech, were not necessarily employed in the ancient world. These are important considerations to take into account because analyses may end up skewed as a result of overlooking such problematic categories.

The first chapter of this work provides a summary of current scholarship on both Jewish and Greek music. I examine key scholars in their respective fields, including Werner and West. This chapter has two main sections. The first section addresses Jewish influences in early Christian music, with a specific focus on Jewish liturgical practices in the synagogue and Temple, Psalmic forms, and early hymnody. As Werner illustrates, there is a clear connection between established Jewish liturgy in the Temple, music in the synagogue, and the musical ritual in the emerging Christian community. The liturgical components found in the Jewish tradition must also be re-examined in this study in order to gain a better understanding of the worship rituals that are evident in early Christianity. Also, the importance of the synagogue cannot be overlooked, as this is the institution most usually associated with the birthplace of Christian liturgy. Werner argues this point convincingly and this connection likely had a very strong influence on the development

of Christian ritual as a whole.

The second section summarizes the scholarship on Greek musical practices in Antiquity. West thoroughly details Greek musical practices and ancient Greek musical theory. This section focuses on the role of music in public and private life in Greek social circles in Antiquity. It examines how music was utilized in ritual cultic worship, and also in ceremonial rituals such as funerals. It also provides an introduction to the theoretical practice involved in Greek musical composition, including a brief description of scales, modes, rhythm and metre, and melody.

The second chapter illustrates the problems associated with limiting influences in early Christian music to either Greek or Jewish. As Johannes Quasten argued in 1973, “pagan” ritual greatly influenced early Christian communities, both in terms of adopting certain practices as well as denouncing others. Quasten refers to “pagan” ritual, meaning ritual practices performed by various Greek polytheistic sects. This is an important distinction, since the term “pagan” is now seen as a loaded term because it implies that polytheism is somehow inferior to the Christian tradition. Quasten argues that pagan influence definitively shaped early Christian views on music and significantly impacted the way Christians viewed singing and musical instruments within a sacred context. Yet, he also notes that pagan influences had an impact on early Jewish communities, leading to certain practices being transmitted from the Egyptians, for example, to the Jews and on to the Christians. This builds on the introduction of the problem as outlined in the first chapter. As stated in this introduction, Judaic cultural and ritualistic practices cannot be overlooked because of the direct genealogical relationship between Judaic tradition and the early Christians. Other ritualistic aspects of Judaism were clearly points of contention

among early Christians. Numerous examples can be seen in New Testament writings but there are not an abundance of references specifically to music. Upon further examination of Greek traditions, one can see a direct correlation between various uses of musical ritual in that tradition and the Christian communities as well. Quasten's study provides numerous examples of Greek ritual, both private and public, that influenced the early Christian tradition. A particularly good example of such influences is Greek funerary rituals. Greeks used music to accompany lamentations at funerals, which included both singing and the playing of musical instruments. Quasten aptly points out that this practice was common among the Babylonian communities, and more important, in the early Christian communities. Examples of this type of ritual practice can be seen in such diverse sources as Gospel of Matthew and in the works of Josephus. Yet, it is also evident that early Christians viewed particular Greek practices that were associated with music in direct opposition to their social and religious prescription. For example, music was often associated with idolatrous festivals, drunkenness, and promiscuity. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he warns the Christian community to avoid such behaviour; this indirectly opposed certain Greek musical practices. Therefore, various Jewish and Greek influences helped to shape and formulate the early Christian position on music as well as their liturgical musical practices.

The third chapter outlines the references to music in early Christian literature and provides a commentary on the specific ancient document Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786, (hereafter POxy 1786). This is the so-called "earliest Christian Hymn" on record and is an extraordinarily useful source in making several important, possible determinations. First, this is a vital source for any discussion on the history of early Christian music. It

provides insight into the historically religious themes that we can hypothesize as being prevalent in early Christian music. Second, it is useful from a music theory perspective with regard to determining form and structure. Third, and perhaps most important for this study, this source provides evidence to help determine what ancient sources were influential in the writing of early Christian music. One can analyze the hymn, specifically with regard to the aforementioned traits of form, content, and musical structure, in order to argue that this hymn was influenced by other particular ancient documents. As West and Egert Pöhlmann illustrate in their invaluable anthology, *Documents of Ancient Greek Music* (2001), both sides attempt to argue that this document is concomitant with their respective positions. Consequently, this chapter argues that indeed both sources are influencing this early Christian hymn. As A.W.J. Holleman argues, despite a clear correlation between the rhythmic and melodic structure of POxy1786 and various examples of Greek music, certain aspects of the hymn can be considered distinctly Jewish in nature. Wellesz illustrates that there are clear connections between this Christian hymn and Jewish or Syriac hymnody. Wellesz, on the other hand, goes further than Holleman and separates this hymn from all other Greek musical documents, which is just not possible. As a result, this early Christian hymn is a particularly useful example because it demonstrates musical characteristics of both Jewish and Greek origin and therefore one can argue for a syncretistic relationship in the earliest documented Christian music between these two sources.

The concluding section provides a recapitulation of the arguments presented and reaffirms the importance of not discounting either historical influence on early Christian music. This analysis provides a basis for further study regarding the role of music in the

early Christian community. The section elaborates on why it is necessary and prudent to account for all historical influences. Various Greek and Jewish traditions and rituals influenced the Christian movement and once we gain a better understanding of how they influenced early Christianity, we can then focus on how the Christian community utilized these traditions and rituals within their daily lives and altered them to suit their own purposes. In other words, if we can determine how specific groups directly impacted the development of Christianity, we can then examine early Christian ritual in a new way and use those findings to explain how this movement gained new followers and became a very successful social movement. Music is a key point because it can be used as a persuasive tool that can be manipulated in a number of different ways. For example, if the use of vocal or instrumental music was commonplace in a specific Mediterranean or Palestinian society, then it becomes a shared commonality between the “other” groups and the Christians, which can be used as a point of similarity to identify with the “other” social group. Therefore, if Greek or Jewish music had a direct influence on Christian music, then that influence could be reversed and used as a tool of Christian propagation. Thus, this study will act as an important stepping-stone to further socio-historical analysis of the early Christian community.

Theory and Method

In order to undertake this project, I have employed the methods and theories of various academic disciplines, including musicology and religious studies. This study intersects with several different interdisciplinary fields including religion, history, music history and analysis, and cultural comparative analysis. Consequently, it is necessary to use the methodological tools that apply to each area. From the historian’s point of view,

one must examine these ancient documents and papyri with a critical eye and remain detached and objective. Complete objectivity is nearly impossible but the historian must always remain self-critical and continually question his or her own reasoning so as to account for possible biases. Anton Baumstark refers to the method of comparative study by stating that this type of inquiry pertaining to religion is “theological only in its subject matter” but the method of analysis is “entirely empirical.” Moreover, “[t]he scrupulous establishment of the factual data underlying the problems should precede every attempt at explanation.”¹ Nevertheless, the data and the theory are dialectically related in the sense that one formulates a theory or hypothesis and then examines the data, which then alters the theory from its original state to a hybrid that incorporates the data.

Werner illustrates a problem specifically pertaining to the study of ancient musical documents. He argues that although ancient musical documents are not necessarily open to ideological interpretation, their interpretation is subject to other difficulties. Werner states, “[a]part from the problem of the proper transcription of ancient and primitive notations, reliable criteria are to be established by which the authenticity of written, and especially of oral, traditions can be gauged.”² This is a very difficult task and authenticity is equally difficult to establish when original documents are lost or destroyed. This is a common problem in Biblical studies generally speaking because various books in the Bible have been so edited, revised, copied, and forged. Also, the Bible is a collection of documents that were written over an extended period of time by many different authors. The authorship, provenance, and dates are debatable and these points of contention are the basis for many scholarly arguments. However, if the

¹ Anton Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy* (trans F.L. Cross: London: A.R. Mowbray, 1958), 3.

² Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge: Liturgical Parallels in Synagogue and Early Church* (New York: Schocken, 1959), xvi.

discipline declared that the authorship or provenance of ancient documents can never be discussed, then the discipline would cease to exist. We accept that many of these analyses are simply complex guesswork or hypotheses but that there remains value in conducting such investigations. Also, though Biblical scholars have a finite set of texts with which to work, numerous archaeological finds in the past century have turned up newly discovered ancient documents from the early Christian period, including non-canonical and epigraphic sources that shed additional light on the early Christian tradition. These important discoveries provide scholars with new points of inquiry and analysis that can influence the field in interesting ways. Newly found documents can provide points of departure for novel areas of research but they can also fill in missing pieces relating to information that we already have. The Dead Sea Scrolls and the aforementioned Nag Hamadi collection are two examples of extraordinary archeological finds that have enriched our current understanding of certain ancient communities. These texts have also started new academic discussions regarding the Jewish sect(s) in Qumran and early Christian and so-called Gnostic communities³ in present-day Egypt, respectively.

The study of religion is interdisciplinary by nature but there are certain methods scholars employ when conducting research in this area. One cannot lose sight of the fact that both the Christian and Jewish traditions have greatly evolved since Christianity emerged as a distinct and separate group. It is highly inaccurate to assume that ritual practice in these traditions has remained unchanged as though these groups were static and isolated. Werner concurs with this position when he states “These changes [to liturgical practice] were often the results of apologetic, or polemical attitudes, held by

³ The term “Gnosticism” as a definitive category is debatable as it is difficult to use any categorical classifications to denote exactly what is meant by “Gnostic.” For a more complete overview of this problem, see Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Church and Synagogue in their relation to one another.”⁴ Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that these two monotheistic traditions altered or modified certain aspects of their religious identity in response to theological or social issues raised by the other.

A main component of this study is musical analysis and this type of inquiry has its own methodological forms. Werner argues “[f]or comparison and analysis of the liturgies themselves the *formgeschichtliche* method seems to us more conclusive in its results than the simple juxtaposition of individual texts or tunes.”⁵ Although Werner is referring to the comparison of Jewish and Christian liturgy and music ritual, this same theory applies to the comparison of Christian music and Greek cultic ritual. In other words, one must examine the musical forms and structures as a whole rather than finding one minute point of similarity. Yet, one must account for each influence, no matter how minute it may be; thus, seemingly minor similarities in musical structure, form, notation, or any other point of analysis may not be discounted just because they do not fit into the structure as a whole.

Curt Sachs, a well-known ethnomusicologist, outlines some important methodological rules when studying ancient music in his monograph *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World* (1943). The two basic rules Sachs articulates can be applied this study. First, when studying ancient music, one must avoid interpreting ancient sources through the lens of modern Western music. Sachs reiterates this point by referring to nineteenth-century German explorer Georg Schweinfurth, who claimed to have heard a melody sung in Africa. Schweinfurth had no musical background or expertise and upon his return home, he whistled the tune for his cousin who transcribed it into musical

⁴ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, xvii.

⁵ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, xvii.

notation. During further analysis, it was determined that this melody was in fact a European tune that was brought to Africa by sailors.⁶ This anecdote reveals the problem with falling into the trap of anachronistic analysis. Schweinfurth assumed what he heard was an African composition without acknowledging that the composition was really a genealogical reflection of his own European history. One may find a clear parallel between modern music and ancient music but the trend cannot go in the reverse direction.

The second rule Sachs mentions is that any critical sense that a scholar possesses “should never be guided by seeming similarity, nor by any other prejudice.”⁷ A scholar should allow the text or musical notation dictate the direction of the hypothesis. For example, one should not interpret the evidence to fit the theory but rather adjust the theory to fit the evidence. Further to this point, a scholar must recognize his or her own susceptibility to approaching any academic field with certain biases or preconceived notions regarding the texts or music that they study. Musical notation is a perfect example of this type of problem. Western musical notation is a written language constructed of symbols that we interpret to mean certain things and the difficulty arises when we try to express other ideas with the symbols and notation we use to express our own. Symbols are dependent on their context and cannot necessarily be transposed from one place or time to another. A parallel example would be transliterating a phrase from another language that utilizes a different alphabet into an English sentence. For instance, there are sounds in the Cyrillic alphabet that are impossible to convey using the Latin alphabet. For example, the Cyrillic letter “Ѣ” has no equivalent sound in the Latin alphabet. Therefore, if one tries to write the sentence using familiar letters, something is

⁶ Curt Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1943), 25.

⁷ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 25.

lost in the transliteration. The same rule applies to musical notation and transcription. This process is very complex and requires a highly trained musical expert. As Sachs notes, scholars are “never free from adapting ancient melodies to their own musical language.”⁸ We must, therefore, acknowledge this inherent short-coming and recognize this bias in order to permit as little influence as possible and to maintain that self-critical eye when conducting such research and analysis. Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl describes his theory of transcription thoroughly in *Theory and Method in Ethnomusicology* (1964) but I will refer to Nettl’s work more broadly in relation to theory and method in the field because the specific nature of his transcription theory is very technical and not integral to this discussion.

One of the most important points that Nettl argues in his influential monograph is that the structure of a musical composition and the cultural context in which the piece was composed are of equal importance when conducting any investigation into the history of any particular type of music. Thus, Nettl outlines six areas of study that are pertinent to any such investigation. First, one must examine the instruments used in the cultural group that is being studied. Second, the lyrics or words found in any composition must be examined to provide further meaning and social contextualization of the piece itself. Third, a scholar must look at the native typology and classification of the music. Fourth, the role and status of musicians within a specific culture is important when conducting any sort of musical investigation in a community. This point serves the dual purpose of informing the scholar about the role of music in a society as well as providing greater insight into the piece that one is analyzing. Fifth, the function of music in relation to other aspects of culture must be examined. For example, in the early Christian context,

⁸ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 26.

Greek converts often sang songs and played instruments at various cultic festivals. This point is probably the most important to this study because if we can understand the function of music in the various cultures that influenced early Christian communities, it provides a clearer picture of the role of music within Christianity and its expansion. Last, Nettl views the creation of music in these contexts as a creative endeavour.⁹ These are relevant points relating to this study of early Christian music and they provide a very good overview of the main areas one must address in any such investigation.

Orality in Antiquity

Further to this discussion on methodology, it is important to note the perception of what is considered “music” in ancient societies. As previously stated, it is very difficult to draw a distinct line between the spoken word and singing in antiquity. It is incorrect to presuppose that the ancient Greeks, Jews, or early Christians had the same concepts of music that modern Western society maintains. Edward Foley’s study (1996) on the foundations of Christian music addresses this precise problem. Foley begins his study by tracing the roots of the oral tradition, from the prophecies of the prophets to the later written tradition in ancient Israel: “The creation of the Hebrew alphabet, the rise of scribalism, and the convergence of oral prophecy and scribal transmission all illustrate the emergence of a proto-literate society in ancient Israel.”¹⁰ Yet, this does not mean that oral transmission, particularly in the area of education, was not still the primary mode of communication. Foley notes that in the Hebrew Bible, divine visions are often obscured but that auditory images are dominant in those texts. Also, the Hebrew Bible emphasizes

⁹ Bruno Nettl, *Theory and Method in Ethnomusicology* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 9.

¹⁰ Edward Foley, *Foundations of Early Christian Music: The Music of Pre-Constantinian Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical), 15.

the need for hearing in order to have what Foley terms “an authentic relationship with God.”¹¹ Foley does note, however, that the Greeks and then later the Romans played an important role in orality in early Christian culture. Yet, the Greeks placed more emphasis on seeing rather than hearing. Despite this difference, the Greeks maintained a highly oral environment as well. As Foley points out, all written texts were read out loud; even those who read to themselves, audibly spoke the words. Despite this “minor” influence, Judaism, and in particular Judaism in the Mediterranean, continued to remain a culture of “high residual orality.”

Foley argues that the Jesus tradition emerged out of Jewish cultic practices. For example, they placed a distinct emphasis on auditory transmission, specifically pertaining to things of a religious nature. Although Greek was used by many Jews, Foley points out that Jesus was from rural Palestine and his first language was Aramaic, thus “the Hellenistic tendencies to prize the visual over the auditory were somewhat muted.”¹² Education was important in this context because most teaching was done via oral transmission and not so much by the reading of texts.

Foley’s position on the orality in the Greek context, however, seems to be somewhat dismissive and in fact sound was very important in Greek culture and Greek language. Warren D. Anderson notes that the Greeks used accent marks to denote pitch within the spoken language. He contends that despite a lack of physical evidence in a variety of inscriptions, spoken Greek contained variant pitch levels, particularly during the Hellenistic period. The three vocalic signs that were used were the acute accent, the grave accent, and the circumflex. Anderson notes that the *oxeia*, *bareia*, and the

¹¹ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 17.

¹² Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 21.

perispomenon, refer to “high-pitch”, “low-pitch” and “turned around pitch”, respectively.¹³ This form of accent is also identified as “singing in accompaniment;” thus, as Anderson rightly claims, the terminology referring to everyday spoken language has an inherent musical connotation.

Consequently, Foley argues that in the first Christian communities, “Jesus’ eschatological message was a dynamic and revolutionary speech-act that eschewed writing.”¹⁴ Further to that point, Foley states that Jesus’ primary mode of communication was preaching and his disciples preached also, not simply repeating everything Jesus said. This type of communication had very little in common with traditional Rabbinic discourse in that time. Thus, “despite the emergence of written forms like the gospel, a primacy of audition continued to characterize the developing Christianity. For the early Christians, hearing was believing.”¹⁵ Thus, the two primary influences on early Christianity, the Jewish tradition and the Greek traditions, both placed an emphasis on orality within the social context. The Christians, in their attempt to distinguish themselves as a distinct and separate entity from other religious groups around them, were clearly shaped by these surrounding communities, particularly in their development of music, both in the private and public sphere.

Christian Origins as an Academic Discipline

The study of religious history should encompass and utilize methodologies from various fields of study if it is going to provide an accurate and rigorous analysis. The religion scholar in the modern setting must attempt the highest degree of objectivity and

¹³ Warren D. Anderson, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 44.

¹⁴ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 22.

¹⁵ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 26.

critical analysis in order to engage in a hermeneutic investigation when examining ancient texts. Thus, in the case of early Christian music, one should not make any blind assumptions regarding its origin and the influential factors that affected its beginnings and development. Since there are relatively few historical documents containing early Christian music of any sort, one can rarely “prove” this type of argument beyond reasonable doubt. What, then, is the point of such inquiry? Early Christian scholarship faces this problem on a regular basis. Scholars cannot produce incontestable results and they need to question the historical accuracy of their sources. Nevertheless, further investigation is never futile because novel interpretations or analyses of ancient documents allow us to open new avenues of research that otherwise may have remained closed.

The field of Christian Origins has been exceptionally prolific in its development in the preceding century but there are still many areas that remain relatively unexplored and unexplained. Early Christian music is an area that still prompts many unanswered questions. This thesis will provide a review of current scholarship but also illustrate glimpses of the various missing pieces that can be glaringly apparent. As previously stated, the origin of Christian music is not only important in the area of musicology but it may also have many implications in other related areas such as the social history of Christianity. Socio-historical inquiry in Christian Origins has become exceedingly vibrant in recent times. The economic, political, and educational systems present in early Christian communities have been extensively documented and this type of study has certainly provided a greater depth of knowledge regarding early Christians. Music was an extremely important issue in the emerging Christian tradition, as this thesis will

demonstrate, and the influences on the early Christian music must be thoroughly examined in order to gain a better understanding of the early Christian communities.

CHAPTER 1 – AN OVERVIEW OF JEWISH AND GREEK MUSICAL PRACTICES

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of scholarship with regard to various Jewish and Greek musical practices. It outlines the main theorists in each area and contextualizes ancient music within these different cultures. This chapter also examines Greek Classical music theory and notation as well as common musical technique found in the Jewish tradition. This overview illustrates how both Greek influences and Jewish influences contributed to the developing Christian doctrine on music in the church. It also contextualizes the prevalent attitudes toward music in Antiquity, which helped shape the Christian position on music as well as their mode of musical documentation.

Jewish Liturgy

The subject of Jewish or Christian music cannot be thoroughly discussed without examining a brief history of Jewish liturgy or worship ritual generally speaking. The term “liturgy” is derived from the Greek term λειτουργία meaning public work, but as Eric Werner points out, this term would have meant something quite different in the early Christian milieu. This term did not always have strict theological connotations. Originally it referred to public service or office in the ancient Greek context and it was only after the spread of the Septuagint that “the term liturgy narrowed to fit a strictly religious activity.”¹⁶ There were several Hebrew terms that translated to denote liturgy as well but contained finer nuances than the Greek. Liturgy, or religious ritual, took place in both the Temple in Jerusalem and the synagogues scattered around the various Jewish communities in Palestine and the Diaspora. The Temple was both the geographical and

¹⁶ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 1.

religious centre of the Jewish tradition. James McKinnon notes that Temple liturgy has been well-documented and that Jews regularly traveled to the Temple to worship, celebrate festivals, partake in sacrifice rituals, and listen to the teachings of the High Priests.¹⁷ Yet, it was the synagogue that housed both religious and secular gatherings. The Talmud reports that at the time of the destruction of the Temple (70 CE), there were approximately 394 synagogues in Jerusalem alone.¹⁸ These were the community centres where Jewish people gathered to engage in numerous activities, including prayer and worship but also buying and selling commodities. After the destruction of the Temple, ritual sacrifice was fully replaced by devotional worship and prayer in the synagogues and it is during this time period that both Jewish and Christian liturgy more fully developed. Ferdinand Hahn contends that the synagogue operated as a local centre where Jewish laws were read.¹⁹ The regional Pharisaic priests acted as both religious advisors and also as political leaders. The synagogue was the medium through which these leaders exerted their power and influence and “cultivated a strict ritualism like that expressed in the Sabbath regulations and laws governing ritual purity.”²⁰ In fact the two facets of Jewish life, the political and the religious, cannot be considered distinct from one another. As previously stated, the Temple was the epicentre of Jewish life and a power centre for the High Priests but after its destruction the role of the synagogue became increasingly more important in dictating religious and secular social practice. As early Christian groups began to emerge as distinct entities from the Jewish tradition, it is clear that

¹⁷ James McKinnon, “The Exclusion of Musical Instruments from the Synagogue.” *Proceedings From the Royal Music Association* 106 (1979-1980), 78.

¹⁸ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 2 citing *B. Ket* 105a.

¹⁹ Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church* (translated by David E. Green. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 11.

²⁰ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 10.

worship ritual in the synagogue had a direct influence on the newly forming Christian sects. This was relevant both in Palestine and in the emerging Judeo-Christian communities outside of Palestine. Werner articulates this point well when he states “[w]hile early Christianity found its first articulate expression in the synagogues of Palestine, those of the Diaspora constituted the first debating forums for Judeo-Christianity.”²¹ Therefore, both Palestinian synagogues as well as those in the Diaspora helped shape the emerging Christian liturgical practice.

There were various components of Jewish liturgy that emerged in the synagogue in the century preceding the birth of Jesus. According to Abraham Idelsohn, there were two main components to a Jewish liturgical service: praise and prayer.²² There were certain types of prayer that were used in the synagogue and Werner argues that these various prayer types can be categorized into several groupings. There were prayers of praise and exaltation of God, there were prayers of thanksgiving, and last there were prayers of “individual petition,” which Werner ranks at the bottom.²³ There were also specific liturgical forms for important events, such as the Sabbath, Passover, and the festival of the Tabernacles. Various components of these liturgies included the pouring of water, prayer, reading of the Torah, and the preparation and sharing of special meals. Therefore, preliminary comparisons may already be drawn between Jewish ritual and early Christian ritual. For example, the *Hallel*, otherwise known as the Great Praise from Psalms 113-118, was chanted on the eve of the Sabbath. Werner argues convincingly that there was a clear musical structure to this chanting and that it influenced Christian liturgy

²¹ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 2.

²² Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), xv.

²³ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 4.

right up until the present day.²⁴ Idelsohn contends that “[t]he singing of psalms during the service dates back to the very beginning of Israel.”²⁵ These Psalms are included in Christian liturgy even today and they have also been sung and accompanied by various instruments. Thus we see the first of several connections in this area that one may draw between the two traditions.

Werner outlines four distinct components in Jewish liturgy and early ritual that emerged within the first Christian communities. First, liturgical texts were common to both traditions. Priests read from the Torah in both the Temple and the synagogue and this form of teaching and prayer was present from the earliest Christian texts. Second, the Jewish hierarchy in the Temple was adapted in the earliest synagogues and eventually a similar system was employed by the early church fathers once a more organizational structure was implemented. Third, the Temple and the synagogue were the birthplaces of religious ceremonies and rituals. Such examples may include ritual sacrifice in the Temple and later on prayer and daily worship in the synagogue after the destruction of the Temple. Fourth, music in the Christian context was influenced but more so by the synagogue than the Temple.²⁶ In a broader sense, Hahn argues that “primitive Christian worship was constituted in the form of a new synagogal institution associated with the Temple cult . . . [and] may have resembled a special synagogue.”²⁷ Hahn does not elaborate on this to any extent but the point is that early Christians may have adopted liturgical practices associated with music from both the Temple and the synagogue. It is difficult to analyze the extent of the Temple influence because of its destruction early on

²⁴ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 12.

²⁵ Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy*, 9.

²⁶ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 20.

²⁷ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 41.

in the Christian tradition but it must have played some role in the developing Christian liturgy.

The relation between liturgical music in the Jewish context and the emerging Christian church can be further connected. Scripture readings were read or recited in the Temple, the synagogue, and the new church. These types of public readings were usually set to some sort of melody or what Werner refers to as “primitive musical notation.”²⁸ Also, there is clear structural evidence, according to Werner, in the organization of the Psalms that indicates they were set to a particular tune. Again, Werner does not provide an explicit example and so it is difficult to determine what this structural evidence would be. This was most likely along the lines of chanting rather than a complex choral arrangement but possessed a musical aspect nonetheless. Anton Baumstark, however, argues that psalm-singing and scripture readings were certainly present but in the later Christian context, the use of psalmody “has far overrun the limits by which it was confined in the offices of the Synagogue.”²⁹ Nevertheless, both Baumstark and Werner concur that congregational prayers “have also been used as important media of musical and religious expression.”³⁰ As Werner notes, these commonalities were present both in the Temple as well as in the synagogue.

Another important point that relates to the similarities between early Christian and Jewish liturgy is the emergence of two divergent Christian groups. The early Christians proselytized amongst Jews in Palestine and non-Jewish communities in other geographical regions. Therefore, until the final Jewish-Christian split was confirmed in

²⁸ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 26.

²⁹ Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy*, 111.

³⁰ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 26.

325 CE after the Council of Nicaea,³¹ there were many similarities between Christian liturgy and Jewish religious practices. Hahn argues that the official separation took place much earlier than 325 CE and identifies Jewish petitions from the end of the first century that argue against various Christian practices and theological positions,³² however, this debate is not the focus of this study. More important is the fact that these similarities were present in regions outside of Palestine. Werner cites the Armenian Church as an example. Armenia was the first place where Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the reigning government in the fourth century.³³ Werner notes that the Armenian Christian liturgy included several Jewish practices such as the sacrifice of animals, certain dietary laws applicable to the clergy, and specific Hebrew terms that describe various Armenian ceremonies. In fact, Werner cites several epistles that were exchanged between the Armenian patriarch and neighbouring Syrian patriarch; these outline various debates about the Eucharist. For example, the Syrians accused the Armenians of using unleavened bread and drinking pure wine for the Eucharist as well as sacrificing a lamb on the day before the celebration of the resurrection. These practices all indicate the knowledge and practice of Jewish rituals in the synagogue and the Armenians countered that the Syrians were using unclean food for the Eucharist, thus ignoring certain aspects of Jewish law.³⁴ Therefore, it becomes logical to conclude that until the definitive split between Jews and Christians, the early Judeo-Christians did not necessarily see themselves in conflict with “normative” Judaism and these similarities also clearly extend to the use of music in the liturgical context.

³¹ Though Hahn seems to indicate that this is the commonly accepted date, this assumption is highly debatable.

³² Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 33.

³³ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 38.

³⁴ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 39-41.

Throughout the liturgical development in the synagogue, there were popular acclamations that were expressed during various components of the liturgy. Though the early Christian community did not necessarily have an organized worship service: “its spontaneous acclamations represented the active part that the congregations played during the first two centuries, when no more than the core of the liturgy was in existence.”³⁵ These acclamations could be spoken, sung, or a combination of both. As the Christian community expanded, there is evidence of this unified response among various congregations including Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome. Various church fathers refer to the specific acclamation *Amen* in their collected works. For example, Jerome referenced *Amen* in his theological writings. These types of acclamations served three major purposes according to Werner. First, they served as a spiritual outlet through which one could demonstrate their active participation within the Christian community. Second, it was a loud confirmation of faith that allowed the congregation to express and profess their belief in Christianity. Third, these phrases also allowed for spontaneous flashes of religious emotion or ecstatic experience.³⁶

There are several important examples of acclamations present in the early Christian liturgical rituals that are derived from Jewish sources. Werner outlines some of these in his chapter on “Liturgical Acclamations.” The first important example that demonstrates a clear liturgical correlation between early Christians and Jews is the acclamation *Amen*. According to Werner, the ritual meaning of this word is “affirmation of oath” or “acceptance.”³⁷ It can be located in the Pentateuch, specifically in the Book of

³⁵ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 264.

³⁶ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 265.

³⁷ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 265.

Deuteronomy, where it is found in the passage 27:15.³⁸ It is also present after other religious rituals such as eulogies at funerals, praise to God, or general prayer. In First Chronicles and Psalms, it is usually present as an expression of acceptance. Werner notes that in the Jewish context, *Amen* was extremely important when ending a prayer and in fact the precentor in the synagogue was not permitted to carry on with the liturgy until the congregation had responded with an *Amen*. This same usage was carried over to the early Christian church where it was used to conclude formal doxologies.³⁹ Also, this acclamation is especially prevalent in apocalyptic literature such as the Book of Revelations.⁴⁰ Werner argues that even this usage strictly follows the rabbinical tradition and usage within the Jewish context. The second acclamation that links the early Christian community with the Jewish liturgical tradition is the term *Hallelujah*. This word generally appeared at the end of Psalms in the Jewish context and the usage was quite similar to the *Amen*. Werner points out that this term was already known to Tertullian (155-222 CE) but that its usage in the Eucharistic portions of the service does not occur until the late fourth century in Palestine where the Christian incorporation of this term into liturgy first began. One other similarity that must be noted is the esoteric meaning of this acclamation in both the Jewish and early Christian usage of the word. This characteristic of the term was only enhanced by its ecstatic musical expression present in both traditions.⁴¹ One last liturgical term that illustrates a clear correlation between Jewish and early Christian liturgical practices is the term *Hosanna*, which

³⁸ "Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol – a thing detestable to the Lord, the works of a craftsman's hands – and sets it up in secret. Then all the people shall say, 'Amen'."

³⁹ Abraham Idelsohn, *Jewish Music* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 109.

⁴⁰ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 266.

⁴¹ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 303.

translates to mean “save now.”⁴² In the Jewish context, this term had a twofold purpose. First, it was an acclamation that could be expressed with emotion to a king, which was essentially demonstrative of reverence or respect to the authority figure. Second, it was also a cry or plea for salvation from God. Both of these uses are well-documented in the Hebrew Bible. The early Christians originally used this term in very similar contexts. For example, in Mark 11:9-11, John 12:13, and Matt. 21:9, it is clear that the acclamation *Hosanna* is being used to appeal to royalty and also as a plea for salvation.⁴³ Werner argues for a gradual sublimation of these meanings in the Christian liturgy, which will not be outlined here, but *Hosanna* was eventually utilized in the same context as the *Hallelujah* acclamation, especially in a musical framework. Hahn also notes the connection between these three terms and takes a similar approach to Werner. He argues “[i]n the context of prayer the liturgical formulas *amen*, *allelouia*, and *hosanna* were borrowed from Judaism, as well as the use of doxology.”⁴⁴ Further to this point, Hahn contends that specific prayer formulations were probably formed very early on in the Christian tradition and “even the composition of hymnic texts can be traced back to this early epoch.”⁴⁵ Edward Foley is another scholar who agrees with this position.⁴⁶

Jewish Music

Jewish music in Jesus’ time was a tradition that developed over a long period and was influenced by various non-Jewish groups. According to Abraham Idelsohn, it is

⁴² Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 267.

⁴³ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 267.

⁴⁴ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 47.

⁴⁵ Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*, 48.

⁴⁶ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 72.

“essential to consider the music of Israel’s ancient neighbours.”⁴⁷ Thus, Jewish music was influenced greatly by changing political and social conditions. For example, in the Egyptian tradition, music was seen as sacred and was strongly associated with cultic ritual. The Egyptians also thought that music had its own divine power or ethos, an idea that took root in the Greek context as well. The Egyptians also used instruments in their musical performances, including the kithara, a stringed-instrument similar to a lyre, which would later make its way to ancient Palestine.⁴⁸ Music in Babylonia and Assyria also had a similar flavour. These cultures incorporated instruments like the lyre and harp but here there was more of a percussive flair. Babylonian and Assyrian communities integrated the use of various rhythmic instruments such as the drum and cymbals. Idelsohn argues that the Assyrian and Egyptian influences were the most prominent in the development of Jewish music.⁴⁹

Jewish music evolved over many centuries, but according to Curt Sachs, it was always an important component in the Israelite identity. During the earliest recorded histories in the Septuagint, there are numerous references to music and song. Singing was part of worshipping God and it was quite common for people, particularly women, to learn how to play the lyre. One example that Sachs points to is Saul and David’s return from the battle with the Philistines. They are greeted by women who are singing, playing, and dancing. Yet, there is no mention of professional musicians at this point.⁵⁰ This change occurred during the time of David and Solomon around 1000 BCE. There are foreign instruments mentioned the texts and the Jewish aristocracy began to implement

⁴⁷ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 3.

⁴⁸ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 4.

⁴⁹ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 5.

⁵⁰ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 59.

professional musicians in their court and also subsequent musical organizations. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe King David ordering the appointment of musicians from the Levites and the number of musicians greatly increased when King David began constructing plans for the Temple in Jerusalem before his death. When Solomon later consecrated the Temple, there was joyous celebration, which involved singing, playing, and praising the Lord. There are several instruments mentioned in First Chronicles that were used, such as trumpets, cymbals, and stringed instruments.⁵¹ Therefore, there is sufficient textual evidence to argue that music was an important religious component in Temple activity as indicated by the numerous examples found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Talmud describes the music as part of daily worship in the Temple. Yet again, the Levites were the chosen group to sing during daily worship rituals and the chorus had a minimum of twelve singers, most often men between the ages of thirty and fifty. Sachs notes that the Talmud states that boys were allowed to join the choir also but that it took over five years of training to become an official member. There were also musicians who played in an orchestra of sorts and this group included those who played the harp, the lyre, the oboe, and the cymbals.⁵² Idelsohn concurs with Sachs on these details but also notes that, initially, the number of choir members was equivalent to the number of instrumentalists but later, toward the time of the second Temple, there was an emphasis placed on vocal music and the Jewish authorities argued that “the importance of music lies in the singing.”⁵³ This is an interesting trend to note but Idelsohn fails to provide any sort of textual data to support his claim.

The Temple is an important point of departure in the study of Jewish music

⁵¹ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 60.

⁵² Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 61.

⁵³ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 18.

because the Temple was the religious epicentre of Judaism. According to 1 Chronicles 15, there were 288 musicians appointed to serve in the Temple. They performed mainly in groups and may have been both vocalists and instrumental players. Foley notes that it was often the Levites who were appointed to these positions and they were often hereditary. Yet, further to this, “the training for Temple musicianship developed beyond familial tutoring.”⁵⁴ As Foley argues, Rabbinical sources report that the training of such musicians took about five years to complete. This suggests an intensive and sophisticated training process that took place among this group. Regarding the Psalms, Foley states that they are clearly related to “Israel’s cult” but in no direct way can they be linked to worship in the Temple. According to certain references in the Mishnah, some of the Psalms were sung on specific days in the Temple, not that all of them were sung in the Temple at all times. Since there is very little evidence for specific songs sung in the Temple, Foley argues that there are in fact certain structures embedded in the existing texts.⁵⁵ One example he provides comes from Psalm 44, which suggests that individual singers, a choir, or even a larger assembly may have joined in the singing. Also, strophic forms existed, such as suggested by Psalm 119. This Psalm is symmetrical and is grouped into twenty-two stanzas, each containing eight lines.⁵⁶ J.A. Smith also notes that some of these practices were adopted from the Temple liturgy and incorporated into synagogal worship. Smith does not, however, provide specific evidence for this trend. He only states that the Mishnah provides such examples.⁵⁷ This point is somewhat contentious and the differences between synagogue and Temple liturgy specifically relating to music is

⁵⁴ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 37.

⁵⁵ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 38.

⁵⁶ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 39.

⁵⁷ J.A. Smith, “The Ancient Synagogue, the Early Church and Singing,” *Music & Letters* 65 (1984), 2.

discussed in the subsequent section.

There are at least nineteen instruments named in the Septuagint and the trumpet, for example, was certainly employed in Temple worship. Foley claims that “professional musicians dominated the Temple’s music.”⁵⁸ He also notes that vocal music was the dominant form and that instrumental music was used less frequently. Also, though there may have been some solo performance but Foley postulates that choral music was the most prevalent form of singing. The singing of religious texts often followed sacrifice, which took place in the Temple, but trumpet blasts also occurred after sacrifice. Foley contends that Jesus’ experiences in the New Testament were often dominated by occurrences in the Temple. He argues that “Temple music exerted little direct influence on the music of emerging Christianity and professional guilds of musicians, instrumental accompaniment, and music designed for sacrifice were foreign to the early Christian experience.”⁵⁹ Temple ritual illustrated that music was very important in the Jewish tradition, and Foley states “the music of the Temple contributed to the awareness in emerging Christianity that worship was, by its very nature, a lyric event.”⁶⁰ Therefore, this lyrical aspect of worship shaped the liturgical components incorporated into Christian worship.

The origins of the synagogue are still contested in the academic forum but despite this debate, there is both written evidence and archaeological remnants to confirm that the synagogue was an established institution by the first century CE.⁶¹ Idelsohn contends that the synagogue employed praise and prayer just like the Temple but the main difference

⁵⁸ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 40.

⁵⁹ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 41.

⁶⁰ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 41.

⁶¹ For a complete overview on the origins of the synagogue, see Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

was the lack of sacrificial rites.⁶² Foley contends that the use of music in the Temple was much more clearly defined than in the synagogue. He claims that the synagogue was devoid of music, both instrumental and choral, in terms of an organized presence.⁶³ Yet, the performance of word-centred worship was always oscillating back and forth between the spoken word and song. Therefore the precise role or measured existence of music in the synagogue is ambiguous. Foley points out the absence of an appointed high priest, like those who were present in the Temple, and describes the synagogue leaders as volunteers, otherwise known as *sheliach tsibbur*, or the emissary of the people.⁶⁴ Consequently, there was no designated musician present in the early synagogue but that did not mean that musical forms were not present through other means such as prayer and recitation of various Jewish texts.

According to Foley, it is often suggested that the Psalms played a central role in the worship that took place in the early synagogue. Calvin Stapert states that Judaism was very much aware of the important association between praising God and making music. He demonstrates that this is clearly evident in the Psalms and illustrates certain themes that are connected to music throughout the Hebrew Bible. For example, musical themes of singing and playing are associated with salvation, redemption and rescue. In Exodus 15:1-2, Moses and the Israelites sing praises to God for rescuing them from the Egyptians. In Luke's gospel, Mary and Zechariah sing about salvation and redemption at the hands of God.⁶⁵ The themes in both examples are very similar and there is a clear contextual correlation between the two musical passages. They are written at different

⁶² Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 24.

⁶³ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 49.

⁶⁴ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 50.

⁶⁵ Calvin Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2007), 16.

times, of course, but the premise of worship is nearly identical. Yet Foley notes that the sources from that period do not indicate such a presence, a point with which Werner even concurs. For example, there are virtually no references in the Mishnah and the Talmud regarding scriptural reading and Psalmic responses. Thus, the presence of psalmody in the synagogue is not proven in any respect, except perhaps, as “parts of the Holy Scripture, of the authorized and inspired canon, for reading, just like the other biblical books, which were read in the synagogues as holy words of God.”⁶⁶ Later in the Rabbinical period, there was a distinct mode or formula for chanting various texts, such as the Torah and the writings of the prophets. Since volunteers were leading the services in the synagogue, it seems only logical that a fairly simplistic formula would develop over time to follow during the service. Foley also illustrates the increasing importance of textual readings within the synagogue service after the destruction of the Temple. Thus, a more regulated method of recitative chanting was needed. Instruments, as noted previously, were not present in the early synagogue. Werner posits several possible reasons for this phenomenon. People were mourning the destruction of the Temple and along with that came a rabbi-instituted prohibition on instruments in the synagogue. Werner notes that various legal rabbinical commentaries that were produced over the following five centuries worked on building a framework to eradicate instruments in worship altogether.⁶⁷ Therefore the music in the synagogue was solely vocal, except for the *shofar*, or ram’s horn, which only served as a signal instrument and never accompanied any vocal recitation. The *shofar*, despite not having much variation in pitch, was very important because in the earlier Jewish tradition it was thought that “[t]he

⁶⁶ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 53.

⁶⁷ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 25.

blowing of the *shofar* was even attributed to Yahve himself, in order to frighten his enemies and to gather the scattered remnants of his people to his sanctuary.”⁶⁸ Idelsohn notes that this was the only instrument that retained its place in Jewish liturgy in the synagogue. Yet Foley suggests that music was more of a solo activity followed by a group response as opposed to the Temple, where there were organized groups of choral musicians who performed regularly as a paid consortium. Foley concludes, “[f]rom a musical perspective, the synagogue was especially influential on the emerging Christian practice of public reading and publicly reciting prayer texts.”⁶⁹ Though Foley may be correct, this conclusion is somewhat vague and it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what he is trying to establish.

Musical Systems in the Jewish Tradition

Jewish music was transmitted orally and not recorded on paper. However, Idelsohn⁷⁰ found exact counterparts of several Gregorian melodies in remote Jewish congregations in Yemen, Babylonia, and Persia, which were separated from Palestine and the further development of Jewish ritual music after the destruction of the First Temple in 597 BCE. Thus, these melodies must have existed in Palestine before 600 BCE. Various groups of Jews, including Oriental, Sephardim, and Ashkenazim all have different melodies now but there is still a prevalent similar style throughout. The oldest musical forms are best preserved in modern-day Middle Eastern areas, such as Iran, because those Jews refused to allow worldly music to enter their synagogue and they also did not allow their cantors to improvise. They are different from other Jewish groups because they did

⁶⁸ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 9.

⁶⁹ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 58.

⁷⁰ See Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*.

not have musical accompaniment, although there may have been certain exceptions on holidays such as Passover and Tabernacles.⁷¹

Sachs poses the following question: How did the Jews actually sing? Many have argued that the Psalms, for example, were sung in a fortissimo style (Luther, for example, translated the style to the German *schreiet*) but Sachs disagrees and argues that the Hebrew verb *zā'aq*, found in Psalm 22:5, translates to “crying” at best.⁷² This small insight provides very little information on the style of Jewish song but a lack of historical data, including manuscripts from this period, makes it difficult to make progress in that area. Idelsohn contends that vocal music, in particular, was an oral tradition; there are no records of Temple music that indicate the scales or rhythms that were used, nor is there any specification of melody. During the Temple period, music was not only preserved in an oral form but it was also taught by the same means.⁷³ Therefore, it is difficult to speculate with any degree of certainty on such aspects of Jewish music, particularly in the Temple setting.

Sachs also points out that the Talmud scorns those who read the scripture without melody and study the words without signing. He claims that the Jewish liturgy was musical throughout and that it alternated between the cantor’s chant and the tunes of the congregation. This form was comparable to the later Gregorian melodies in fluency. These melodies were composed out of “ready-made” melodicles or small bits of melodic phrasing.⁷⁴ In fact, he argues that it is probable that before they were assigned definite places in the liturgical scheme, they were sung to variable melodies that were possibly

⁷¹ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 79.

⁷² Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 80.

⁷³ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 18.

⁷⁴ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 83.

derived from folk tunes. Also, musical script was highly varied. The various symbols that they eventually used denoted groups of notes, melodicles, and tropes. For example, in ancient Greece, the accents (grave, acute, circumflex) developed into punctuation marks and phonetic symbols, whereas in the Jewish and Christian traditions, the opposite occurred. Since “the Bible was chanted and illicit changes of melody endangered the meaning and power of its verses, the accents were multiplied and converted into neumes, which are notes sung on a single syllable, in order to denote all possible steps and melismatic groups.”⁷⁵ The problem was that the notation which was conserved very reliably in most Jewish sects and identically applied to the holy texts stood for different melodies. For example, a *pashṭā* in the Babylonian context denotes a step downward; the same notation indicates a step upward in the Sephardic tradition.⁷⁶

Idelsohn provides several distinguishing features of Jewish song that are characteristic of other near eastern genres. This form of music utilizes modes, similar to the Greek context, but of course different in the tone, pitch, and starting/ending point. This type of music is also highly ornamental in nature. For example, it is usually constituted by short notes but those that are held are usually decorated with a tremolo or turn. Rhythmically speaking, there is no strict metre that is followed, thus making this music relatively free and unrestrictive. The tonality is based on a quarter-tone system rather than the modern half-tone. Therefore, the “Semitic-Oriental” octave contains twenty-four steps rather than twelve.⁷⁷ According to Sachs, Hebrew melody follows the quantitative long-short principle. As a whole, Hebrew rhythm is free and does not follow any pre-set metric pattern or the measure of beaten time. Sachs claims that Jewish music

⁷⁵ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 86.

⁷⁶ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 89.

⁷⁷ Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 24-25.

in nomadic times before 1000 BCE was more restrained than in the later liturgy. He argues that two reasons seem to confirm this conclusion. First, almost all musical episodes up to the time of the Temple describe choral singing with group dancing and drum beating. Second, this kind of singing was to a great extent considered women's music.⁷⁸ As certain restrictions in the musical scheme became more evident, some Jewish groups began to follow a more responsorial form, particularly in the Temple. Sachs describes the four basic forms that emerged around the destruction of the Temple and then prevailed in the synagogue:

- 1) The soloist sang the entire melody and after each half-verse the congregation answered with the same half-verse as a refrain. This form was used for the *Hallel*;
- 2) The soloist and the congregation alternated half-verse by half-verse. This was the traditional form of the *Shma Israel*;
- 3) In school, the children repeated the teacher's cantillation half-verse by half-verse;
- 4) "And all the people shall say Amen"⁷⁹.

Music in Greek Life

Music played an important role in ancient Greek culture in antiquity: "Music, song, and dance were seen as being, together with orderly sacrifices to the gods and athletic facilities for men, the most characteristic manifestations of a civilized community in peacetime."⁸⁰ Although Greeks used music for things other than joyous occasions, such as lamentation or grief, it was most often present at celebrations. Music was strongly associated with the public worship of various gods and there were many religious

⁷⁸ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 90.

⁷⁹ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 94.

⁸⁰ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 13.

festivals that included musical components, such as performances and competitions. M.L. West also includes other musical elements in these festivals, which he classifies as singing processions, choral dances, and sacrifices accompanied by ritual hymns.⁸¹ Preparation for these sacrifices was carried out with musicians in attendance, most often a piper. In some Greek cults, there were specific melodies or traditional hymns, as West calls them, which were sung when the sacrifice was being carried out at the altar. There were various musical forms but the two most common were the paeon and the dithyramb. The paeon encompassed a broad range and size of melodies. Paeans also were generally well-known by the surrounding populace and this form of music was quite common at private social functions such as meals, weddings, or symposia. The paeon also had a prominent place in many public worship festivals – for example, the Panathenaea at Athens.⁸² The dithyramb, an ancient Greek hymn, was also dedicated to the gods, Dionysus for example, but West argues that it became secularized in most venues. He notes that though it may sound like more of a spontaneous alcohol-generated type of song, it was normally sung at public events and festivals. Yet, it eventually evolved into “a spectacle and a sophisticated art form, no mere alcoholic knees-up but a genre as articulate and intellectually demanding as any other put before the public.”⁸³ There were annual music competitions that drew various choral groups that had up to fifty members each. They also included instrumentalists, usually a piper, and often a choreographed dance was also part of the performance.

Music competitions were fairly numerous, particularly in various parts ancient Greece. Musical elements were also of key importance in drama performance. The

⁸¹ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 14.

⁸² West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 15.

⁸³ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 16.

choruses that West describes are mostly male groups but he also mentions girl's choruses. Hymns celebrating Apollo were often sung by young girls and these festivals took place in numerous geographical areas, including the island of Delos and the great Apollo cultic centre in Delphi,⁸⁴ the former of which can be traced back to the eighth century BCE.⁸⁵ The purpose of music and dance at religious festivals was to provide amusement and pleasure to the audience and West notes that only solemn moments like a sacrifice were meant to be serious and reverent. Naturally, there were other motivations, specifically for the performers. First, there was often some sort of monetary compensation for performing at a festival. Sometimes the performers would also be provided a place to stay during the festivities. Second, there was much prestige associated with being awarded the top prize at a competition. One example West cites took place at the funeral games in honour of the Chalcidian king Amphidamas in the eighth century. Performers had to compose a song in hexametre form and the winner was awarded a prize for best composition and performance.⁸⁶ Other festivals also held competitions, which sometimes included instrumental performances as well. For example, in sixth-century Athens, there was a competition held for various instrumentalists, which included those who played the citharode, or lyre, the aulos, or pipe. These competitions are depicted on ancient vases which show the player standing on a podium before a seated judge.⁸⁷

A typical festival that included a musical component was the Laconian festival, which mourned the death of the mythical figure Hyakinthos. The first day of mourning was silent and thus unaccompanied by music but the second day of the festival was filled

⁸⁴ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 17.

⁸⁵ Anderson, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Greece*, 26.

⁸⁶ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 19.

⁸⁷ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 19.

was musical performances. A boy's chorus sang a paean dedicated to Apollo, which was supplemented with dancing and marching, as well as instrumental accompaniment by the lyre and the aulos. West also indicates that various sources cite a specific paean sung by a chorus of men that was a central event at the festival.⁸⁸ Therefore, music in this context was an highly organized festival component that played an important role in the festivities.

Music also played an important role in relatively private festivities, such as weddings or funerals. Yet, the celebrations usually involved the immediate community and thus could be classified as semi-public. Both weddings and funerals included musical components but of varying sorts. Men and women participated in wedding paeans and these songs were compositions of celebration and generally continued on throughout the evening even after the wedded couple had left the party. Funeral songs could be classified more as lamentations and West argues that the evidence indicates that trained singers were hired to perform at such occasions. Different Greek cults had varying ceremonies and Delphi, for example, prohibited singing until the funeral procession had reached the tomb.⁸⁹ Singing also took place at private dinners and gatherings in people's homes. There was singing, dancing and musical accompaniment. Instruments may have included the aulos or pipes. Even the Greek gods played instruments and sung songs. For example, West cites several Homeric hymns that mention Apollo playing the lyre and the muses singing along.⁹⁰

Both men and women had their venues for song in public and private places. West mentions children's songs that are cited in Homer's *Odyssey*, where the children are

⁸⁸ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 21.

⁸⁹ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 23.

⁹⁰ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 25.

singing and playing ball simultaneously. Music also accompanied various other activities such as marching into battle, rowing on a ship, and working as labourers in the fields. In addition, athletic events were venues for musical performance and often athletes would have pipers in attendance while training or competing.⁹¹ Greeks were very aware that music could change one's disposition and they understood music to hold the power to evoke various emotions in a person or group of people. Greek music in funerary processions will be discussed in the following chapter in relation to the direct influence on early Christian death rituals.⁹²

In the Septuagint, music was thought to aid in medical healing and the Greeks for the most part disagreed with this but West notes that, on the "fringes," certain Greek groups also believed in the healing power of music. One important example of this is ancient Greek midwives. They used certain incantations to "induce and facilitate labour."⁹³ This illustrates a connection between a ritual practice used by both Greeks and Jews that influenced the Christian tradition as well.

Greek Musical Education

West insists that popular repertoire did not require formal training and was most often learned "on the fly." Yet, those who mastered the musical techniques of various instruments were usually instructed on a more formal basis. By the beginning of the fifth century BCE, Athens had an organized musical education system. This included instrumental instruction, vocal training, and dance lessons. Charles Cosgrove notes further the importance of musical education in the Greek community and the early

⁹¹ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 30.

⁹² See Johnannes Quasten, *Music & Worship in Pagan & Christian Antiquity* (Washington: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983), 149-175.

⁹³ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 32.

Christian milieu. Dating back to Classical times, the Greeks included some musical training in their educational system.⁹⁴ This education included several aspects, such as vocal training, instrumental instruction, and basic music theory. At a higher level of training, one would also examine theoretical rules for composition, such as scale modes, metre, and ethical qualities present in various melodic lines. Curt Sachs argues that the importance of musical education was not entirely Hellenic, as concepts surrounding the “moral qualities” of music were also present in China and Egypt.⁹⁵ Sachs, however, contends that the Greeks were the first to organize these concepts into a pedagogical system. Therefore music, like any other educational component, was obligatory in the Greek educational system. For example, all citizens in Arcadia were educated in music starting in their early youth and continuing to the age of thirty. In Sparta, musical education took priority over grammar.⁹⁶ Music was clearly an important educational component in the Greek paedagogical system. Cosgrove notes that despite a reduction in the central educational role present in the Greek system, the Romans still had a musical element present and therefore one can conclude that the early Christians also had some sort of musical education in place.⁹⁷

The Importance of the Voice in Greek Music

Instruments were occasionally played in a solo performance but most often were used to accompany a single vocalist or choral group. Even a larger choral group of fifty members or more were only accompanied by one piper, as was the case in the Athenian

⁹⁴ Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music,” *Journal for Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006): 257.

⁹⁵ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 254.

⁹⁶ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 254.

⁹⁷ Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music,” 257.

dithyramb.⁹⁸ The various songs that choral groups sang were usually quite often “highly sophisticated poetic texts with little verbal repetition.”⁹⁹ Thus, West speculates that it was important not to overpower the vocalist(s) with loud instrumental accompaniment so that the words could be heard clearly throughout the performance. Choruses varied greatly in size depending upon the type of performance and the setting. West mentions references to choruses as small as four members to ones as large as one hundred. The Greek chorus was made up of dancers, chorus members (male or female) and a chorus director called a *choregos*.¹⁰⁰ There were also special guidelines for the singers to follow in order to prepare for competitions, such as sticking to a certain diet or fasting altogether because certain foods and alcoholic beverages were thought to impair the vocal abilities.¹⁰¹ There were specific traits that the Greeks held in high regard with respect to a choral performance. For example, a good blend of voices was imperative. West references the works of Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE), which state that voices in a choir should be heard as one, not as a group of individuals. This reference, it is true, refers to a Roman source and not to a Greek example. Nevertheless, the Greeks also promoted vocal clarity, both in diction and in tone.¹⁰²

Claude Calame provides a very thorough description of the Greek chorus in his work *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece* (1997). He notes that in dramatic presentations, either comedies or tragedies, there were a fixed number of chorus members. For example, a comedic chorus contained twenty-four members, while a

⁹⁸ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 39.

⁹⁹ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ Claude Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their Morphology, Religious Role, and Social Functions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 19.

¹⁰¹ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 43.

¹⁰² West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 45.

tragedy required fifteen.¹⁰³ Calame fails to mention if there is any significance to these numbers so it is difficult to determine if there is meaning or consequence to these figures. Also, various cultic choruses had a designated number of members. Calame does not explain how the chorus sizes were chosen but he does note that smaller choruses were generally attributed to restricted performance space. Regarding the gender of the chorus members, Calame contends that exact ratios are not attainable due to a lack of evidence but notes all female choruses did seem to perform more frequently than men's choruses. Age was also a variant factor among choruses but each chorus was established by the common age of its members. There were adult male groups, adult female choruses, and then children's choirs, which were often also divided by gender.¹⁰⁴

The chorus also created between its members social bonds that were unique. There was a camaraderie that existed between chorus members and, according to Calame, this was most evident in the choruses of young girls. However, there was also a dual nature in this relationship because the chorus leader was in a position of authority. Thus, the leader was an authoritative figure but also a friend and companion. The responsibilities of the leader were quite significant. He or she was in charge of instructing the chorus, securing the financial means to run the chorus, and signaling the commencement of the performance. As Calame points out, it was the director who received payment for the performance, not the chorus members themselves.¹⁰⁵ Thus, it was important for the director to have a good working relationship with the chorus members. The chorus played an important role in Greek social life and their performances in various social settings would greatly influence the emerging Christian

¹⁰³ Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece*, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece*, 44.

perspective on song and vocal performance.

Greek Music – Instruments and Theory

Significant scholarship has been published on ancient Greek instruments and music theory in the past century and the purpose of this section is two-fold: first, to provide a brief overview on this topic in order to introduce the basic musical vocabulary required to engage in a discussion regarding specific musical compositions; second, to relate the Greek musical traditions with those found in the early Christian context. Thus, we turn to West for an overview of Greek musical instruments and theory as outlined in his monumental work *Ancient Greek Music*.

West divides ancient instruments into the following categories: stringed, wind, and percussion. The two most prominent groups of instruments were the strings and the wind instruments. The first stringed instrument used by many different geographical communities was the lyre. The lyre appeared in Israel in about 3100 BCE and was used by various groups including the Sumerians. The earliest archeological finds indicate that the first lyre contained eleven strings and was quite large in stature. In later periods, a smaller version was developed by Semitic groups in western Palestine and this form of the lyre eventually made its way to Egypt and Babylonia. These lyres were usually asymmetrical and contained seven or eight strings of varying lengths but other archaeological evidence suggests that different types of lyres could also have three or four strings as well.¹⁰⁶ These can be further classified into several groups. First, there were box lyres, which included a round frame (phorminx), a square frame (concert kithara), a horn-armed frame (Thracian kithara), and a rectangular frame (Italiote

¹⁰⁶ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 48.

kithara). Second, there were bowl lyres, which consisted of either the standard type (lyra or chelys) or the long-armed version (termed the barbitos).¹⁰⁷ Many of these varying types of stringed instruments are depicted in vase paintings or are mentioned by various poets. The strings of these lyres were fastened to a crossbar and the tension of the strings could be adjusted, thus constituting a method of tuning the instruments.¹⁰⁸ The strings were most often arranged in order of pitch. The “bottom” string was the highest in pitch and the “top” strings was the lowest. Other stringed instruments included the harp (after the fifth century BCE), the zither, and the lute. These instruments all vary in certain ways, including the number of strings, the shape, and the method of fastening the strings to the frame. Warren D. Anderson posits that based on vase paintings, the height of the lyre could range from approximately two to three feet.¹⁰⁹

The wind instruments were equally important and also used very often in different social settings. The aulos, meaning tube or duct, “was a pipe with finger-holes and a reed mouthpiece.”¹¹⁰ They were often played two at a time. According to West, it is unclear how these instruments came to Greece. Anderson notes that vase painters do not portray the aulos until the beginning of the Attic period in the late eighth century BCE.¹¹¹ A comparison to a modern equivalent is difficult to make but the most likely link is with the oboe. Yet, it appears as though some auloi were single-reed instruments, thus classifying them like something more comparable to a clarinet. Anderson, however, points out the potential problems with these two comparisons. First, the double-reed auloi had the reed in a different position than the oboe. Second, the reed was placed in the mouth, not

¹⁰⁷ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 50.

¹⁰⁸ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Greece*, 36.

¹¹⁰ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 81.

¹¹¹ Anderson, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Greece*, 33.

gripped between the lips as it is done today, giving the aulos a different pitch than one might expect.¹¹² West classifies five types or sizes which would be somewhat comparable to the modern categories of soprano, treble, tenor, baritone, and bass.¹¹³ In this case, pitch is affected by several factors, including length of the aulos, the position of the reed, and the size and positioning of the finger holes.¹¹⁴ There were numerous other pipe instruments, including the flute, the panpipe, the pitchpipe, and the trumpet. Many of these other examples did not utilize reeds.

Rhythm and tempo in Greek music and poetry was extremely important. West articulates six main types of rhythmic movement found in the Greek system. The Greeks were quite familiar with the practice of beating time to music and theoreticians classified various rhythms based on ratios.¹¹⁵ They often used repeating note patterns,¹¹⁶ which were subject to change, but as he notes, adding measures when transcribing is appropriate in some cases. Scholars, however, must realize that the Greeks did not have the same concept of a time signature as is found in contemporary Western music. Therefore, the length and rhythm in a “measure” here is not necessarily consistent or strict in any way.

1. Dactylic and Anapaestic – The dactylic hexameter (-uu-uu-uu-uu-uu-)¹¹⁷ was the most common in Antiquity and many epic poems were put in this metre.

Anapaests were usually associated with “parading choruses, who chanted verse in

¹¹² Anderson, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Greece*, 24.

¹¹³ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 89.

¹¹⁴ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 95.

¹¹⁵ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 135.

¹¹⁶ R.P. Winnington-Ingram, “Ancient Greek Music: A Survey,” *Music & Letters* 10 (1929: 326-345), 328.

¹¹⁷ In West, the (-) refers to a down-beat with length equivalent to a modern quarter note and the (u) refers to an up-beat with length equivalent to an eighth note.

this metre with an aulete playing an accompaniment.”¹¹⁸ (POxy 1786 is in this form but illustrates the later addition of placing rests on beat one.)

2. Iambic, Choriambic, and Trochaic – Iambos was applied to the metre (u-). Yet, the normal unit is (u-u-) or can also be constructed of several other variants. Iambic hexameter can actually be classified as trimetre instead because only every second unit is accented.¹¹⁹ West notes that the ratio of arsis to thesis is 1:2, meaning that the “up” or “lift” portion is half the length of the “down” portion. Trochaic is the opposite of the iambic (-u-u), where the long notes is in the last place instead of the first.¹²⁰ Arsis denotes the raising or lifting of a rhythmic unit in prosody, or metre, and occurs before thesis, which indicates the falling or descending portion of the unit.
3. Paeonic – This form of rhythm is in quintuple time, expressed by the modern time signature 5/8. The paeon metre was associated with an energetic dance form. West notes that the thesis to arsis ratio is in this metre is 2:3. The three most common rhythmic patterns were: QEQ, QEEE, EEEQ¹²¹ and these sequences were most often utilized in comedy.¹²²
4. Dochmiac – This metre is more complex than the others in that it corresponds to a 3+5/8 time signature. One equivalent measure would contain eight short notes, divided unequally in groups of three and five. Dochmaic metre was often used to express urgent emotions and could be found most frequently in tragedies.

¹¹⁸ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 136.

¹¹⁹ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 137.

¹²⁰ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 137.

¹²¹ Where Q denotes a modern quarter note and E denotes a modern eighth note.

¹²² West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 140.

Sometimes this metric form was inserted between others rhythms and so West classifies it as fragmentary.¹²³

5. Ionic – This pattern usually consists of two short notes followed by two longer notes. This could be considered 3/4 time with two eighth notes preceding two quarter notes.¹²⁴
6. Aeolic – This was a metre used in the poetry of Sappho (630-612 BCE) and Alcaeus (620 BCE-unknown). It is characterized by the coexistence of single short notes and paired short notes.¹²⁵

These various tempi were commonly used both in poetry and in music. The Classical Greeks placed a great importance on rhythm and metre and their association with various emotions.

There were also various tempi used in ancient Greek music. A celebratory song or a dramatic chorus may have had a quick tempo, while a more solemn hymn would have been much slower. West notes that several Greek writers recognized tempo as one of the variable elements in composition that could change the overall effect of the piece. The trochaic rhythm, for example, had more of “a running or tripping effect” than other rhythms.¹²⁶ Of course, there was no such thing as a metronome marking but according to West there are other ways of determining what an appropriate tempo might have been. He contends that the Greek would use shorter syllables for faster songs and longer syllables for slower songs. Furthermore, it would have been unlikely that they would

¹²³ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 144.

¹²⁴ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 145.

¹²⁵ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 147.

¹²⁶ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 153.

have sung any songs much faster or slower than normal speech rates would allow.¹²⁷

Based on this claim, one could conclude that there were relatively few changes in tempo during one song. West concedes that some expressive liberties may have been in place but that any sort of significant *rubato* was unlikely.

The octave was of utmost importance in Greek musical theory. They place primacy on concordant intervals, such as the fourth, fifth, and octave. All other intervals were considered discordant but could certainly be used in a fitting melodic line. Modern Western scales are diatonic, meaning that they are constructed of steps that are neither larger than a tone nor smaller than a semitone. The typical major scale follows this scheme: T T S T T T S.¹²⁸ The Greeks employed this type of scale but they also used other non-diatonic systems. In these alternative forms there is only one whole tone step in the entire octave. Examples of these alternative forms include enharmonic and chromatic scales. The enharmonic scale had several notes at the bottom that were separated by less than a semi-tone, which left a larger gap at the top of almost two whole tones. The chromatic, similar in the sense that the lower notes were bunched together, had gaps of about a semi-tone at the bottom and the larger upper gap was approximately equivalent to a minor third.¹²⁹ West notes that in the fifth century BCE, the enharmonic form was most prevalent but in the second and third centuries BCE, there was shift toward the chromatic and diatonic. By the time the Roman period began, the diatonic scale was the most frequently used.¹³⁰ This coincides with the scale form used in the POxy 1786 that will be examined in chapter four. Of course, there are also the ancient modes, such as the Dorian,

¹²⁷ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 154.

¹²⁸ Where T denotes a whole tone and S denotes a semi-tone.

¹²⁹ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 162-163.

¹³⁰ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 165.

Lydian, Phrygian, and Ionian. The origin of these modes is not completely clear and they will not be discussed at length here unless mentioned in the specific context of POxy 1786.

The character of melody is the last aspect of Greek music that will be discussed in this section. Despite a small pool of extant melodies to draw on, West argues that one can still make certain general conclusions regarding the melodic features of ancient Greek music. First, according to Aristides Quintilianus (*De Musica libri tres*, Third Century CE), a composer should pick the starting-point of the scale and then decide on the structure of the scale. The composition of the actual melody has three stages: duction, plaiting, and deployment. Duction refers to moving through the successive keys of the scale, which can occur in either an ascending or descending fashion. Plaiting refers to jumping to non-adjacent notes, which can either jump to a higher pitch or a lower pitch. Deployment refers to the first and last notes as well as choosing which notes to use and with which frequency.¹³¹ This is quite different from modern classical composition in the sense that the Greeks did not view the papyrus as a blank sheet with measures to fill at will with whichever notes one deems necessary. This is not to say that Western composition lacks form because this is most certainly not the case as any student of music theory will attest to that fact but the Greek melody had less freedom.

Conclusion

This chapter details the most important scholarship in the areas of Jewish and Greek music. However, it is evident from current scholarship that much more is known about Greek music in terms of technique and theory, whereas the scholars examining

¹³¹ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 191.

Jewish sources tend to rely more on historical accounts as opposed to extant musical documents. This can be explained by the lack of actual source material documenting Jewish music but there are enough historical accounts to provide at least a basic picture of what Jewish music actually was. My summary offers a brief history of each and provides an introduction to the musical terms that will be used in chapter four to discuss the early POxy 1786. From this preliminary discussion, it is already evident that there are various characteristics of each tradition that correlate to certain Christian traditions in the early Church, both musically and ritualistically. The following chapter elaborates on these correlations and provides further details about how Jewish and Greek musical practices either positively or negatively influenced the early Christian usage of music, both in the liturgical sense and in other social contexts.

CHAPTER 2 – EMERGENT MUSICAL PRACTICES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Introduction

The Christian musical tradition developed out of constant controversy surrounding the proper usage of music, appropriate setting for performance, and, most important, issues of lyrical content. As the previous chapter outlined, both the Jewish and Greek traditions had strong musical components that were well-established at the time the earliest Christian communities were defining their identity through religion, geography, and liturgy. After examining these two main influences on early Christianity, it is clear that both traditions had an impact on the emerging musical perspectives. It would be incorrect to conclude that only Judaism or only the Greek cultic tradition really affected the way Christians viewed music. This chapter expands on that argument and illustrates precisely why one cannot ascribe to only one position or the other. The arguments presented will demonstrate that both traditions exerted enormous influence over the early Christian communities.

In his significant monograph *Music and Worship in Pagan & Christian Antiquity* (1973), Johannes Quasten notes that in the early Christian tradition, various instruments and vocal choruses were used to praise God, not to worship “idols.” Quasten states the “rich heritage which the young church received from Jewish worship” but argues that “she opposed and held back completely from the elaborate musical embellishment of liturgy which was part of Old Testament tradition.”¹³² The reason for this divergence from Jewish tradition was the close association of music with various “pagan rituals.” Quasten argues that this rejection of cultic ritual music led to the production of musical ritual associated with devotion rather than what he refers to as a form of magic.

¹³² Quasten, *Music and Worship*, iii.

Therefore, one must examine Christian music within this context.

Music and Singing in the Christian Liturgy of Antiquity

The Gospel of Luke in the New Testament opens with song. As previously discussed, there are several hymns in the opening chapters of the Gospel of Luke and, as Calvin Stapert notes, this is significant because those hymns mark and announce the birth of Jesus. Stapert associates this New Testament reference to music with a strong connection between Christians and rejoicing.¹³³ This is clearly evident in the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible. Quasten argues that changes in Greek philosophy certainly influenced the developing ritual of early Christianity. He notes that in Paul's letter to the Ephesians,¹³⁴ Paul encourages his followers to greet each other with psalms and hymns as well as singing praises to the Lord in one's heart. This illustrates Paul's view on religious music and Quasten rightly states that Paul sees this sort of musical expression as an appropriate way to honour God.¹³⁵ Yet, one must also be aware of the way Paul articulates his letter. One may sing in his or her heart but this does not indicate the sort of ecstatic nature Quasten described earlier with regard to certain Greek cultic ritual. Therefore, Paul is not encouraging people to sing for their own pleasure but rather to use hymns and psalms as a more reflective and internal method of praising God. Quasten sums up this point nicely when he states that "[o]nly insofar as singing is the expression of an inner disposition of devotion does it have any meaning."¹³⁶ William S. Smith disagrees with Quasten on this point when he argues that it is through this type of

¹³³ Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 15.

¹³⁴ One must note that the authenticity of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is contested by the majority of scholars.

¹³⁵ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 59.

¹³⁶ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 59.

liturgical recitation that the congregation is filled with the spirit.¹³⁷ Smith contests Quasten's argument that music should be solely an expression of inner faith and only in that context does it have any religious meaning. He claims that the musical praise expressed by the early Christians was not meant for an internal feeling but rather "the musical part of the worship service, instead of being a mere rendition or performance, is to be conceived in terms of sacrifice, an offering, and that not of some mere thing, but of *self* in the praise of, and thanksgiving to, God."¹³⁸ The meaning behind singing praises to God takes on more significance in Smith's interpretation. This once again solidifies that connection between "Christian spirituality" and the nature, or more accurately, the purpose of music in Christianity.

Further to this point, there is a multi-directional orientation to music based on the content of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The primary direction would be singing or rejoicing toward God. As Stapert points out, one must note that Paul asks the Christians to address one another with song. He argues that the importance of this passage stems from the fact that "edification is an essential ingredient in Christian life and worship."¹³⁹ Consequently, this type of musical exchange served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it incorporated musical ritual already present in pagan societies, from which new converts had come. Therefore, it made the transition to Christianity a bit less foreign ritualistically. On the other hand, it helped solidify the Christian community. Despite Christianity's developing inclusivity, these types of rituals served to distinguish Christians from non-Christians and aided in community bonding, while placing primacy on worship and the importance of the spirit.

¹³⁷ W. Smith, *Musical Aspects of the New Testament* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1962), 166.

¹³⁸ Smith, *Musical Aspects of the New Testament*, 163.

¹³⁹ Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 21.

The problem of incorporating pagan ritual into emerging Christian liturgy spread as the Christian community expanded. Quasten argues that the early Christian apologists like Clement of Alexandria (150-216 CE) had to discourage people from practicing rituals that they not only enjoyed but those they had practiced ritualistically their whole lives. Clement writes about the frivolities of musical instruments in *Paidagogos* 2, 4, as well as the association of music with idol-worship. Quasten refers to the “enticing artistry” of the music that was played at various cultic feasts and that new converts would often return to cultic celebration on specific feast days.

Another problem that the early church faced in its attempted elimination of liturgical music was the fact that the other major influence, Judaism, used musical components in its liturgy. The Jewish liturgy, as described earlier, also celebrated feast days and holy festivals with music, even in the Temple in Jerusalem. Quasten cites 2 Chronicles 29:25-26¹⁴⁰ as a good example of how music was used in the Temple. Not only was music an integral component but it was also in fact decreed by God. In this passage, there are instruments used, such as the cymbals, harps, kitharas, and trumpets. The early Church Fathers, however, spun these types of references to show that God was really just permitting a lesser evil by allowing the music instead of having the Jews worship idols.¹⁴¹ In other words, God accepted the musical affectation in order to stop the Jews from worshipping other gods in the same manner. The Jews learned this type of behaviour from the Egyptians and modern scholars, including Quasten, agree that the ancient Egyptians had a significant influence on early Jewish music. Various instruments

¹⁴⁰ “He stationed the Levites in the temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king’s seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the Lord through his prophets. So the Levites stood ready with David’s instruments, and the priests with their trumpets.” (NRSV)

¹⁴¹ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 63.

came from Egypt, including the tambourine, the trumpet, and the flute.¹⁴² Jewish tribes were also surrounded by “pagan cults” and Quasten argues that “[t]he magnificent ceremonial of the pagan religions with which Israel was surrounded demanded some concessions to the sensuousness of the Jewish people so that there would be in no danger of their giving in to an idol worship more pleasing to the eye and ear than their own cult.”¹⁴³ This is an interesting argument because it points to the fact that the early Christian community was experiencing some of the same issues that the early Israelite tribes faced. It also shows, however, that the early Church fathers reacted differently and possibly viewed themselves as more spiritually disciplined than their Jewish counterparts because they did not approve the aforementioned “concessions,” which included God allowing the Jews to sing and play instruments in order to avoid “idol” worship. This position illustrates the emerging divergent views among the early Christian and Jewish religious leaders.

Quasten outlines another important reason why the early Christians rejected ecstatic singing. The Greeks had some polyphonic melodies in their compositions. Christians retained various dualistic concepts such as good-evil, right-left, light-dark, etc. Unity was considered good and non-unity or duality was bad. This is somewhat ironic considering that they had these types of dualisms in the first place but this translates to music as well. Unity and harmony, therefore, were desirable and Quasten argues that they rejected any sort of heterophony or polyphony. Thus, singing with one voice, *una voce*, was a musical expression of the union of Christian souls, according to Quasten.¹⁴⁴ Further to this point, monophonic singing also represented the unification of earthly Christians

¹⁴² Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 65.

¹⁴³ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 65.

¹⁴⁴ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 67.

with the angels up in heaven. Singing as one single unit was also viewed as an opportunity to unite Christians on earth and in essence to separate them from non-Christians. This action would serve to strengthen the community and unite them in their common goal of achieving salvation through God's glory and gift of grace.

However strongly the early Church felt about the use of instrumental music in liturgy or even private settings, Quasten argues that theory and practice often diverge and this case is no different. Quasten cites an exception found in Clement of Alexandria, where he writes in *Paidagogos* 2, 4 that if one wants to sing praise to God accompanied by a lyre or kithara, one is not blameworthy.¹⁴⁵ For whatever reason, these two instruments gained more acceptance than others and were permitted at the agape meal during Clement's time. Other instruments such as the flute, tambourine, and cymbals were much more closely associated with cultic ritual by other groups and those instruments were not tolerated in the liturgical setting or a home. However, this seems somewhat questionable as the kithara and lyre were used often in the Greek context. One ought to question the acceptance of certain instruments and not others without sufficient explanation.

Music and Christian Worship – From the Synagogue to the House-Church

The earliest Christian communities were formed, and thus initially met, in the synagogue. Foley notes that prayer and worship were not confined to the Temple of the synagogue. A pious Jew was expected to worship and honour God at any and every possible opportunity. Therefore, the home was also considered to be a place for worship and prayer. Foley discusses what he terms "prayer-actions" that were performed by

¹⁴⁵ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 73.

various members of the first Christian communities that were not necessarily appointed by any specific authoritative body. Such actions included speaking in tongues, prophesying, interpreting scripture, responding as a congregation to a prayer leader, singing, and reading.¹⁴⁶ Foley, however, disputes Werner's claim that Jewish chant was spread by cantors present in the synagogue. First, Foley argues that there were no designated cantors in the early synagogue. Second, he states that Werner does not substantiate his claim with archeological evidence with physical examples. Last, the epigraphic evidence that can be located cannot be dated to the first century, making it difficult to support Werner's claim. While synagogue "music" may have influenced the early Christian community, Foley argues that it seems unbecoming to identify a permanent musician, such as a cantor, as a transmitter of such influence.¹⁴⁷ Foley's argument here, however, is not convincing. There is no logical reason why a permanent musician, in whatever capacity, would not be that "transmitter of influence."

In early Christian writings, there are often short standardized phrases which praise God. Foley identifies these as *kurze Lobsprüche*, which in the Jewish context are referred to as *berakoth*. Originally, these were short Jewish prayers that Christianity adopted as formulaic praise elements. Foley cites three such formulae, including the doxology, the eulogy, and the thanksgiving. The first two categories are arguably adopted from the Jewish context, according to Foley, but he notes that the thanksgiving, which can be found in the Pauline Epistles, is a mixture of various Greek and Jewish components.¹⁴⁸ Other early Christian song formulations include the infancy canticles, Christological hymns, psalms, and responsorial readings. The infancy canticles are found in the Gospel

¹⁴⁶ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 70.

¹⁴⁷ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 70.

¹⁴⁸ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 71.

of Luke. There is the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), the Benedictus (Luke 1:67-79), and the Nunc dimittis (Luke 2:29-32). Foley posits that these hymns were most likely not Lukan compositions but rather pre-Lukan musical works that originated in a Jewish-Christian context. Based on this argument, Foley concludes that the lyric character of these hymns “suggest [their] cultic employment at an early stage in the development of Christian worship.”¹⁴⁹ Despite the evidence found in Luke, Foley remains skeptical in regard to the historical usage of these types of New Testament passages as “musical components” in the early worship context. Because of a lack of physical evidence, Foley’s concerns may be valid but again, they are difficult to confirm with any real certainty. The actual frequency upon which these hymns were used or how they actually sounded can only be speculated. Nevertheless, one can infer that the early Christians did use this type of musical component in their worship, however informal it may have initially been.

With regard to instruments, Foley opposes Quasten’s position on the acceptance of instruments into the Christian worship context. He notes that aside from the references found in the Book of Revelations, there are no direct references pertaining to instrumental use by the Christian community in the first century. The reason is twofold: first, there was very little instrumental music in the synagogue, where the earliest Christian communities may have formed. Second, there was a primacy placed on vocal music. Foley argues that the “word-event” was the central component to the emerging Christian doctrine. As a result, the role of instrumental music would have been relatively insignificant.

The second and third centuries led to the organization of a more formal Christian Church. Foley notes that the gathering of Christians in houses in the second and third

¹⁴⁹ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 73.

centuries was not a new phenomenon because this had occurred from the very start of the Jesus movement. Rather, the novelty lies in the fact that specific houses were designated for such meetings. These settings became the only place for Christians to congregate and worship together because the synagogue was no longer an option and the Temple had been destroyed in 70 CE.

Psalmody in Early Christianity

Psalms in early Christian worship ritual have become a point of contention in more recent scholarship. Foley, for example, argues that the role of the psalm-singing in the synagogue is not entirely clear. He concludes that “while the spirit of prayer embodied in the Psalms may have influenced synagogal prayer in the first century CE, it is questionable whether psalms were commonly sung in the first-century synagogue worship.”¹⁵⁰ The ambiguity extends to the Christian context. If the synagogue was so influential in the emerging Christian liturgy, then what role did Psalm-singing play in early Christian worship? The Psalms are frequently cited in New Testament writings. The numerous citations could lead to two possible conclusions. First, the Psalms were so well-known in the Jewish context that their popularity carried over into the Christian milieu. Second, early Christians did not see any doctrinal conflict within the Psalms and thus saw no reason to exclude them from worship services. Foley argues that there is no mention of Psalms in a liturgical forum until the end of the second century. It is also possible that the Psalms served as a book of readings in the early Christian Church.¹⁵¹ Despite the lack of evidence, Foley does speculate on the possible performance of Psalms. He notes the various arrangements that may have occurred. For example, the

¹⁵⁰ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 74.

¹⁵¹ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 75.

Psalms could have been led by one individual singer with the congregation joining in after each refrain. It is also possible that the Psalms may have been punctuated by the aforementioned short acclamations, such as “halleluia,” as Idelsohn claims.¹⁵²

As Christian communities began to gain a greater degree of formal organization, they met in people’s homes to worship as a group.¹⁵³ Unlike the first century CE, there is evidence to suggest that Davidic psalms were sung during Christian liturgy. Yet, Foley argues that despite this certainty regarding Psalm-singing, there is still no evidence that there were permanent musicians in the Christian church, such as a cantor or psalmist.¹⁵⁴ One exception that Foley notes is an epitaph from the time of Hadrian’s rule (117-138 CE). This inscription commemorates a young man who was remembered for his Psalm-chanting and reading of holy books.¹⁵⁵ This example is by no means conclusive and cannot affirm with any degree of certainty that this inscription referred to a permanent position within the early church. The inscription, however, provides evidence that there was a strong link between reading scripture and singing Psalms. This correlation agrees with the argument presented in the introductory chapter. There was a high degree of orality in Antiquity and therefore it seems doubtful that a notable distinction was made between the spoken word and song, particularly in the liturgical setting. Despite the evidence that suggests Psalm-singing in this time period, it remains difficult to define a pattern of usage. Nevertheless, Psalm-singing was part of the regular liturgy and Foley posits several reasons why this occurred. First, the Psalms may have acted as an “antidote” to more contemporary compositions. In other words, the developing Church

¹⁵² Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 61.

¹⁵³ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 75.

¹⁵⁴ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 95.

¹⁵⁵ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 95.

reverted to a potential earlier usage to combat newly emergent compositions that did not fit with the evolving liturgical scheme or church doctrine. Second, the organization may have been a logical culmination of earlier usage that was more spontaneous than systematized. Foley concludes that this is the most plausible explanation because he contends that there was a general move in the Christian Church toward a more standardized worship forms, such as creedal and prayer formulae.¹⁵⁶ This conclusion is correct but Foley does not provide any evidence or specific examples to argue the point.

Musical Participants in Antiquity

From the Greek perspective, women held special positions when it came to singing in processions that were in honour of the gods. Quasten provides numerous examples where female choruses are featured. In the Homeric Hymns, there were all female choirs that sang praises to the gods during the spring sacrifice on the island of Delos. Also, at Olympia, virgins and matron sang hymns to honour the gods.¹⁵⁷ Calame's aforementioned example of music in Pindar's poetry also discusses the role of female choruses. At the sacrifice to Apollo, there would be a chorus of young girls singing, dancing, and playing the pyre or pipe.¹⁵⁸ Calame also notes that there were numerous festivals held in honour of Artemis. The goddess herself danced with groups of young nymphs but festivals held in her honour were very musical in nature. There were often choruses of young women who performed elaborate musical compositions and choreographed routines. These festivals in honour of Artemis were held in many places

¹⁵⁶ Foley, *Foundations of Early Christian Music*, 96.

¹⁵⁷ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 76.

¹⁵⁸ Calame, *Choruses of Young Women*, 90.

including Athens, Ephesos, and Samos.¹⁵⁹ The purpose of this ritual pertained not only to cultic celebration but they were also a rite of passage in a young girl's life.

The significance of the female chorus in the Christian context is not really articulated and no scholar in the field addresses this point. Similar to the Greek milieu, Quasten notes that the Jewish context was comparable in the sense that women played a special role in the performance of religious songs. For example, in Exodus 15:20-21, Miriam leads the choir after a thanksgiving service. Philo also writes about women singing, specifically in the community of Therapeutae. The female choir would sing hymns to God that were of varying rhythm and metre. A dance would also accompany this singing, according to Philo, and they would sometimes sing in unison or occasionally in an alternating style. There is little evidence from the first two centuries to piece together a definitive Christian attitude toward women singers but Quasten does point out that the exclusion of women singers would be in opposition to the Patristic view of unity of souls in song.¹⁶⁰ Quasten cites many examples in early Christian writings that discuss women singing. Theodoret of Cyrus (395-457 CE) talks about a choir of virgins who sang the praises of God and mocked the evils of idolatry in *Church History*.¹⁶¹ Yet, this positive view of female choruses was not prevalent throughout the entire Christian community. Quasten mentions Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386), who advocated the silent singing by women, particularly virgins. Further to this position, Cyril thought that women should not speak in the church at all, let alone raise their voice in song.¹⁶² This position may be attributed to the fact that some church fathers associated a woman's voice with

¹⁵⁹ Calame, *Choruses of Young Women*, 97.

¹⁶⁰ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 77.

¹⁶¹ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 80.

¹⁶² Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 81.

sensuality and thus was something to avoid. Quasten, however, does not attribute this episodic negative attitude toward women singing in the church to pagan influence. He argues that the exclusion of women only came at a much later date and that this exclusion was not uniform enough throughout the early community to gather unanimous support.¹⁶³

Youth choirs in Antiquity were very popular in cultic practice, particularly choruses of young boys. The vocal quality was thought to be unique and it was thought that the innocence of young boys would have a particularly influential effect on the gods. Choruses comprised solely of young boys often performed at religious festivals. Quasten notes that despite the lack of historical evidence to show the same position was held by the early Christians, the church fathers did encourage the participation of youths in the liturgy.¹⁶⁴ Also, the initiation of boys into a church chorus was a significant stepping stone to becoming a religious official, such as a cantor or lector. Quasten argues, “[t]he Church made use of boy’s singing and gave it a liturgical character [and] the employment of choir boys as lectors, moreover, strengthened this development and gave the young singers an ecclesiastical consecration.”¹⁶⁵ This was a very efficient way to get youth involved in the church as an organization. Not only did the choir “groom” new members of the church but it also gave the youth an official position within that organization.

Music and Singing in the Christian Home

The close relationship between domestic and public cultic musical ritual in the pagan setting caused Christians to view music in private Christian homes in a negative light. The early Christian community often met in houses to worship together. They did

¹⁶³ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 85.

¹⁶⁴ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 88.

¹⁶⁵ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 92.

sing in this context but the pagan songs were replaced with psalms and hymns. Secular songs most often contained references to Greek deities, which Christians were forbidden to discuss.¹⁶⁶ As previously mentioned, however, the lyre and kithara were the instrumental exceptions and were sometimes used in the home during prayers or group worship. Eventually, this practice was forbidden altogether. Quasten relates this problem with music in the private sphere to pagan table etiquette. Banquets in the home of a Greek were often accompanied by instrumental performance as well as vocal accompaniment. Once again this association comes back to the notion of overindulgence and general licentious behaviour. It was also related to idol worship. Quasten puts it quite simply when he states “Christians were forbidden to sing pagan songs because by them they were inviting demons rather than Christ to the meal.”¹⁶⁷ In a similar way to the liturgical psalms and hymns, Christian songs at meal time were meant to replace the polytheistic traditions. Clement of Alexandria had concerns regarding music at dinner parties, indicating that some Christians, specifically in Alexandria, sang to stringed instruments such as the aulos at such functions.¹⁶⁸ Charles Cosgrove concludes these types of concerns were based on the fact the early Christians associated instrumental accompaniment at dinner gatherings “with the arousing of the passions to drunkenness, eroticism, sensuality, and violent aggression.”¹⁶⁹ This is the reason for their apprehension to include music at such events.

Dinner parties were venues of particular importance because the early church fathers viewed this as event where one should conduct oneself with self-restraint and

¹⁶⁶ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 122.

¹⁶⁷ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 130.

¹⁶⁸ Clement, *Paidagogus*, 3.11.80.

¹⁶⁹ Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria,” 258.

demonstrate a high degree of morality. Music is connected in two ways to table etiquette according to Cosgrove. First, music has a pedagogical element and can be used to teach moral lessons; this in turn can be translated to a certain standard of etiquette. Just as concordant music was pleasing to the ear of the early church, harmonious behaviour at social functions was considered to be of similar importance. Second, both musical performance and table etiquette held a connection between rational and proper behaviour. Cosgrove argues that these behavioural aspects were interpreted according to the Christian doctrine of peace.¹⁷⁰ There is one notable exception found in Clement, where he allows the lyre or kithara to be played at dinner parties. Scholars disagree on this point in terms of the social implications. Cosgrove opts for a literal interpretation, while James McKinnon¹⁷¹ argues that Clement's allowance is allegorical. Cosgrove is the more convincing of the two. He provides other examples in Clement where allegory is clearly present and notes that the tone of the passage in *Paidagogus* is concessionary, trying to clarify a point of contention. Clement states "if you wish to sing or play the kithara or lyre, this is not a disgrace; you would imitate the righteous Hebrew king in his thanksgiving to God."¹⁷² Cosgrove's point about the cautionary nature of Clement's discussion is certainly a plausible one.

Musical education for young children was also a point of discussion in the early church. Quasten argues "Christianity inherited Antiquity's appreciation for good music in children's upbringing."¹⁷³ Musical education was promoted if it was the "right" type of education, meaning that only Christian hymns and psalms should really be the basis for

¹⁷⁰ Cosgrove, "Clement of Alexandria," 259-260.

¹⁷¹ McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 28.

¹⁷² *Paidagogus* 2.4.43.3.

¹⁷³ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 137.

musical training. According to Cosgrove, musical education was also useful for promoting Christian values and theological messages. Cosgrove argues that the early Christians thought that children could be taught “positive moral values and restraint” through music.¹⁷⁴ Music, therefore, was viewed by the early church as an educational tool through which they could teach core Christian beliefs to the next generation of Christian adherents.

Music and Sacrifice in Pagan Worship & the Effect on the Christian Church

Greek polytheistic cults used music in their sacrifice ceremonies and this was an important aspect to this ritual practice. Quasten notes “the legends and myths of nearly all pagan peoples have sought to explain the elaborate use of music in their worship by indicating that the art of music was a gift of the gods to men.”¹⁷⁵ While this seems like a fairly broad generalization, he is certainly correct on the Greco-Roman context. It has already been demonstrated in the second chapter that the Greeks played music and sang at festivals to worship certain gods. This action indicates that this cultic practice was meant to please and appease the gods by demonstrating a talent that the gods themselves had bestowed upon the people. Therefore, Quasten’s argument in this case would be concomitant with the evidence already presented. He provides an example from a Greek hymn found at the temple of Zeus Diktaios on the island of Crete, which includes a verse that refers to rejoicing with gladness while the musicians play their harps and stand around an altar.¹⁷⁶ Claude Calame also agrees with this interpretation when he argues that, according to the poetry of Pindar, one can live in perpetual bliss by holding banquets

¹⁷⁴ Cosgrove, “Clement of Alexandria,” 258.

¹⁷⁵ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 1.

and sacrifices dedicated to Apollo, which were accompanied by singing choruses and instrumental complement. Calame notes that in Greek poetry “music is the pleasure of the gods.”¹⁷⁷

The Greeks used instruments in sacrifice as early as 1300 BCE. The sarcophagus at the Hagia Triada on the island of Crete displays sculptures that depict a flutist playing standing by a bull which is to be sacrificed. Another sculpture illustrates a kitharist playing next to women who are offering libations.¹⁷⁸ This is not to say that some sacrifices were not accompanied by musical instruments. Quasten cites one particular sacrifice to Zeus in Hierapolis where practitioners did not use music in their cultic sacrifice. Other cults, however, often used music in sacrifice ritual. The cult of Apollo, for instance, habitually used music in their ritual sacrifices. The Apollo cults in Delphi and on the island of Delos held yearly festivals in honour of Apollo and worship ceremonies included not only flute playing and singing but there were also elaborate dances choreographed for such an event. Because of the artistic nature of this cultic worship, many Greek poets, musicians, and singers chose Apollo as their cultic deity.¹⁷⁹ Delphic cults were particularly musical and their music rituals had influence on other cultic musical practice in various geographical locations. Other instruments were also used in Delphi, including tambourines; these acted as rhythm markers. Quasten also cites the Parthenon in Athens as a good indicator of musical usage in sacrificial processions. The frieze on the Parthenon depicts three flutists preceding a sacrificial animal and one other point of interest is that there are also kitharists present but they always follow behind the flutists. One possible explanation for this hierarchy is chronological. Quasten

¹⁷⁷ Calame, *Choruses of Young Women*, 90.

¹⁷⁸ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 2.

¹⁷⁹ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 3.

argues that the flute was historically present at animal sacrifice earlier than the kithara.¹⁸⁰

Quasten makes an important point regarding music in Antiquity when he discusses the relationship between music and libation offering. In the Greek context, libations were often offered at symposia. There were three libations offered: the first to the Olympic gods, the second to the Heroes, and the third was for Zeus Soter.¹⁸¹ Each step of the offering was very important and followed a strict protocol. The liquid and cups were prepared and then the liquid was poured. During the actual offering, solemn flute music was played or sometimes a paean was sung accompanied by the flute. Therefore, the flute not only had ornamental value but was also essential to cultic ritual sacrifice. Quasten attributes the early Christian anti-instrumental sentiment precisely for this reason. He argues that this integral form of praise utilized by the Greeks resulted in the prohibition of instrumental music during various Christian rituals, such as meals, because of that strong connection to polytheistic worship.¹⁸²

It was important during these ritual sacrifices that the musicians not be interrupted. In certain contexts, the music was supposed to cover the sounds made by the animal during the sacrifice but it was also viewed as a necessary component to placate the gods. So, if a flutist was interrupted, it would have an adverse effect on the ritual in the sense that devotion was impaired somehow and that the gods would be angered by this disturbance. Quasten notes that not only was the music used to cover the unpleasant sounds that accompanied a sacrifice but that it was also used to drive out the demons that could be present at the ceremony. The importance of this connection to the early Christian community comes precisely from this notion. Quasten argues that “this

¹⁸⁰ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 4.

¹⁸¹ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 14.

¹⁸² Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 15.

superstition was so deeply rooted that Christian mothers also hung little bells as talismans around their children's necks and on their wrists to keep away the harmful influence of the demons."¹⁸³ He cites John Chrysostom (347-407 CE) as evidence for this practice. Chrysostom felt that he needed to address this superstition when he wrote in *Homilia* 12 (in *Epist. 1 ad Corinthos*) that only the cross could provide such protection, not bells and ribbons. Quasten also points out that this practice of children wearing bells was also found in the Jewish context; he argues that the Talmud contains reports of parents tying knots around their children's necks with bells attached to protect the children.¹⁸⁴ Yet, this practice also extended to protection against demons who brought sickness. It was commonly accepted that wearing these bells would disturb the peace and quiet the illness-bringing demons liked, preventing any sort of sickness or infection. This also relates to the *epicletic* nature of both pagan and Christian music. In the pagan sense, music exhibited a type of magical influence over the worshippers who were singing to the gods. Therefore, music had a sort of power in the sense that it appealed to the gods in way other actions could not. Stapert contends that the *epiclesis* of Christian music was different insofar as it lacked the magic or power of pagan music. Essentially, "Christian *epiclesis* is petitionary, not manipulative, and in a peculiar way it asks for what is already granted."¹⁸⁵ Further to that point, Stapert notes that there is a clear relationship in the New Testament between music and "spirit-filling." The spirit is filled first and singing is the response to the joy that this brings.

Music was also used in various mystery cults to aid in the induction of an ecstatic state. Lucian (125-180 CE) describes an occasion where a specific day at the temple

¹⁸³ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 16.

¹⁸⁴ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 29.

¹⁸⁵ Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 19.

results in such behaviour. He depicts a scene of ecstatic dancing, hair-pulling, whipping, and self-mutilation, which is all set to flute music accompanied by cymbals and the singing of holy songs (*De Dea Syria* 50). People would rip the clothes from their body and Lucian cites an example of one young man who, in his religious ecstasy, castrates himself with a sword that was standing by, ready for such a purpose. Quasten uses the cult of Cybele to illustrate that this type of behaviour occurred on a regular basis. Musicians who belonged to this cult often played the horn, cymbals, tambourines, and Phrygian flute. There are numerous artistic depictions that show lively processions accompanied by various musicians.¹⁸⁶ Music was a very important factor in divination. Musical expression in some cases resulted in a religious catharsis or release that, as Quasten argues, resulted in a “transfer to a state of prophecy.”¹⁸⁷ Again, Quasten relates this association of music and prophecy to practices found in the Hebrew Bible. In 2 Kings 3:15, Elisha proclaims, “Bring me a harpist!” And when a harpist played, the hand of the hand of the Lord came upon him.

Quasten describes the Greek philosophic doctrine of “spiritual sacrifice,” which rejected the bloody sacrifices of ancient cultic worship. Changes in cultic ritual generally speaking began to take place. Philodemos of Gadara (100-28 BCE) was one such philosopher who repudiated the use of music in cultic practice. Quasten argues “Philodemos dismisses the notion that music is an indispensable component in the cult of the gods, necessarily bound up with piety.”¹⁸⁸ Philodemos did not ascribe to the view that music could induce ecstasy and he thought that the crashing sounds of the cymbals and tambourines were a disturbance more than anything else. Philo, a well-known Jewish

¹⁸⁶ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 38.

¹⁸⁷ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 39.

¹⁸⁸ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 51.

philosopher who was educated in the Hellenic system, was also in agreement that music represented unnecessary excess and that it was associated with the overindulgence of food, alcohol, and other frivolity (*De specialibus legibus* II, 93). Philo (20 BCE-50 CE) was also against singing as a form of praise or worship because his ideal is silent prayer, which is only tainted by the use of liturgical music. The problem with music for these philosophers, according to Quasten, is that people “looked only for their own pleasure in music.”¹⁸⁹

Music and Singing in the Pagan and Christian Cults of the Dead

Quasten notes the intense conflict within the early Christian community regarding funerary rituals. Some Christians were trying to separate themselves from all pagan rituals associated with the cult of the dead. The mourning rituals of the Greeks certainly did not fit with the Christian concepts associated with death. Quasten outlines the “pagan mourning ritual,” which began with a wake in the presence of the corpse. Words of lamentation were spoken during this period and friends and family gathered to mourn the deceased. In later times, however, professional female mourners were hired to sing various lamentations. The hired mourners and the family would conduct a responsorial vocal exchange. A lamentation would be sung and the family and friends would answer in as singing style. Greek female mourners would also cry out in anguish or sorrow and display their grief through physical manifestations such as hair-pulling or cheek-scratching.¹⁹⁰ The Greeks had musicians present at such an event and they accompanied the songs of lamentation with instruments like the kithara and lyre. The most common instrument, however, was the flute. The flute was used in mourning rituals in other areas

¹⁸⁹ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 52.

¹⁹⁰ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 149.

such as Egypt. Therefore, this tradition also carried over into the Jewish context and Quasten cites Matthew 9:23 as an example which illustrates that flute playing was commonly practiced at a wake.¹⁹¹

The procession to the grave was accompanied by musicians and lamentations were sung again at the grave site. Once the corpse was buried the mourners would often have a meal at the grave. This portion of the funeral was accompanied by music but the tone was less solemn and more celebratory. Quasten argues that the purpose of the graveside meal was to refresh the dead. After this meal, they would place a wreath on the grave and leave jars of ointment. The people present at the meal would eat the food but some food would be burned in an offering to the deceased.¹⁹² These scenes were often depicted in paintings and sculptures in ancient Greece. Sometimes the dead person was holding an instrument in the picture, which signified that they had moved on to another place. Other times, the people visiting the dead were holding instruments but Quasten notes that the living were never depicted as playing their instruments. He explains this oddity by claiming that the instrument was used as an offering to the dead. In Antiquity, people who had the ability to play instruments, sing and dance were considered blessed by the gods and Quasten compares the offering of an instrument to the dead like an initiation or rite of passage into the world beyond. He cites many examples of grave paintings that depict various instruments. Essentially, these are what he describes as portrayals of human souls enjoying music in the afterlife.¹⁹³ The musical performance at the funeral was what Quasten deems apotropaic. In other words, music had the effect of warding off evil spirits or bad luck. This purpose is analogous to the aforementioned musical

¹⁹¹ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 150.

¹⁹² Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 153.

¹⁹³ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 157.

performances at sacrifices. The nature of the performances, although possibly quite different in melody and metre, had a similar purpose. The music not only was meant to entertain the deceased but it was a protective measure taken by the family to ensure the dead person would be guarded against any danger that he or she may face in the afterlife.¹⁹⁴

Christianity wanted to avoid many of these traditions simply because many of them fell under the rubric of “idolatry.” The Christians, however, had very different ideas regarding concepts of death and so the music associated with pagan death ritual became something to avoid and denounce. The main religious or philosophical difference between the Christian and pagan concepts regarding death is based on the idea that pagans viewed death as something evil. The Christians, on the other hand, viewed death as deliverance from evil and a blessing from God. Thus, lamentations were replaced by psalms and hymns, which reflected joy and happiness. There was no breast-beating, wailing, or hair-pulling. The Christians saw this type of behaviour as needless because death represented a deep sleep, in which the person had conquered death and received ever-lasting life from Jesus.¹⁹⁵ Some church fathers, such as Tertullian, argued that music was only a disturbance to the dead, when the deceased are awaiting the angel’s trumpet.¹⁹⁶ The ritualistic meal at the grave site was replaced by the Eucharist, which was celebrated the third day after the person died. There was singing at the meal but instead of the traditional pagan lamentations, psalms once again replaced those mournful songs. Yet Quasten notes an important similarity between the two groups. Despite the

¹⁹⁴ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 158.

¹⁹⁵ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 162.

¹⁹⁶ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 165.

differences in ritual, they both had the ultimate well-being for the deceased in mind.¹⁹⁷

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that both Jewish and pagan traditions of Antiquity greatly influenced emerging Christian thought on the subject of music. Music was integral in both traditions and early Christianity was shaped by these various ritualistic musical practices. Jewish liturgy was an undeniably important factor in Christian liturgical development. The majority of modern scholarship agrees that the earliest Christian communities developed in the Jewish synagogue; therefore, it is impractical to underestimate the Jewish influence on early Christianity as a tradition. Many liturgical practices were adopted by the early Christian communities. This argument becomes strengthened by the claim that early Christians, particularly in Palestine, did not see themselves as anything but a distinct Jewish sect. W.H.C. Frend argues that in the early part of the first century, “[b]ack in Jerusalem the Christians now established themselves as an active sect among their fellow Jews.”¹⁹⁸ For example, up until the destruction of the Temple, Christians in Jerusalem paid taxes to the Temple and continued attending services there. Even the Roman authorities viewed the early Christians as a dissident Jewish sect.¹⁹⁹ After the first century, however, this view no longer held. The split between Jews and Christians was most likely becoming more apparent and Christianity had spread beyond the Temple and synagogues of Palestine. Regarding musical practices of the early Christians, Schirmann argues that “[t]he authors of Christian hymns did not

¹⁹⁷ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 167.

¹⁹⁸ W.H.C. Frend, *The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 25.

¹⁹⁹ M.L.W. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire: Together with an English Translation of John Chrysostom's Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951), 25.

consciously and accurately follow Jewish patterns the same way as the ancient Romans had imitated the Greeks.”²⁰⁰ Yet Judaism was going through similar changes in the post-Temple aftermath. Both traditions had to (re)define themselves as certain issues arose within the various communities.

Additionally, one must note that the early Israelite religion was influenced by neighbouring communities, specifically with regard to their musical practices. The Egyptian and Assyrian musical influences on Jewish music were significant and the Christians were influenced in a similar fashion by their neighbours. The Greek influence was strong on the early Christians and this was not only because of geographical proximity but also because many converts in the Mediterranean region were both ethnically and religiously what the Jews had previously classified as polytheistic. It is only logical that Christians would have to address numerous discrepancies between Greek cultic religion and Christian religious doctrine. Music was an important point of intersection because of the way it was used in Greek cultic practice. We have already seen the correlation between boisterous song and “inappropriate behaviour” in the letters of Paul. More important, Greek music was also used in sacrifice and worship to the gods and one could argue that this was the most contentious point from the Christian perspective. Though Christian monotheism was completely contradictory to Greek cultic polytheism, the Christians still incorporated ritualistic practices into their everyday existence. The use of music at meals, for example, was debated in the early Church but still incorporated. Thus, we see concessions made in order to include familiar practices that appealed to Christian converts. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge the

²⁰⁰ Jefim Schirmann, “Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnology,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 44 (1953), 125.

influences on Christian music as having equal importance. One cannot ascertain an exact ratio of impact and it would be unproductive to do so. The main point is that early Christian music takes shape based on the Jewish and Greek traditions, in the content, form and usage. The following chapter will provide an example of this by analyzing the earliest known Christian hymn, POxy 1786. The analysis will illustrate that the hymn is a product of combining Jewish melody and Greek metre and form.

CHAPTER 3 - POxy. 1786: THE EARLIEST CHRISTIAN HYMN

Introduction to POxy 1786

POxy 1786 is the earliest documented Christian hymn. Physical evidence from this early Christian period pertaining to musical writings is scant; therefore this document is invaluable because it provides some basic, direct data regarding hymnody in the early church. My analysis of this hymn illustrates the main point of this thesis, which is that early Christian music was syncretistic in the sense that various influences contributed to its style and form. Christian hymnody was not solely derived from various Jewish or Greek works but rather from a permutation of these outside sources. This chapter provides an overview of current scholarly interpretations and argues that the theoretical components of this hymn clearly contain both Greek and Jewish influences.

The hymn was discovered by the Egypt Exploration Society in Oxyrhynchus and published in 1922. Quasten dates the piece of papyrus itself to the first half of the third century based on text that is on the other side. On the back of the papyrus, there is a grain invoice, which Quasten argues can be dated around the time of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 CE. The text and melody use Greek language and Greek musical notation; Quasten places this piece at the end of the third century.²⁰¹ Most scholars agree with this timeline but provide little evidence to thoroughly argue their case. The first point of interest regarding the text is that there is only Greek vocal notation without any addition of instrumental notation, which supports Quasten's theory that many early Christians did not approve of the use of instrumental music in worship. Quasten, like other scholars, including Wellesz, notes that Theodore Reichnach's transcription adds instrumental notation, which is absent from the original document. Also, the diatonic

²⁰¹ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 71.

scale that Clement of Alexandria deemed appropriate in *Paidagogus* 2, 4 is present. There is no evidence of any chromatic passages, which also correlates to Clement's notion of "proper Christian musical composition."²⁰²

The hymn is currently stored in the Papyrology Rooms at Sackler Library at the University of Oxford. POxy 1786 was written on a reused scrap of papyrus to a complete column width of approximately 30 cm.²⁰³ William A. Johnson suggests that the copying of musical papyri went against the normative transcription procedures of poetic texts.²⁰⁴ So, wider column widths of papyri were used for musical notation. This could potentially indicate a specialized group of musical experts, according to Johnson, with a meticulous and precise style. This could also imply the presence of musical guilds and though the evidence is scant, Johnson's claim is certainly a plausible one. This point, however, will be discussed further later in the chapter. West offers the following translation:

...Let it be silent, let the luminous stars not shine, let the winds (?) and all the noisy rivers die down; and as we hymn the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, let all the powers add 'Amen, amen'. Empire, praise always, and glory to God, the sole giver of all good things. Amen, amen.²⁰⁵

The Christian Trinity is cited and the acclamation "amen" is used four times. The hymn praises God and emphasizes that God is the "sole giver" of all good things. Therefore, one can see the early predominant Christian themes of praising God, declaring that all good comes from God, and the conviction that singing God's praises should be heard above all else. This is an undeniably Christian artifact.

²⁰² Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 71.

²⁰³ William A. Johnson, "Musical Evenings in the Early Empire: New Evidence from a Greek Papyrus with Musical Notation," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120 (2000), 67.

²⁰⁴ Johnson notes that poetic texts were usually written on narrower pieces of papyri than musical documents.

²⁰⁵ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 324.

A Musical Analysis

West argues that this hymn is probably the latest in date of the known musical pieces that were recorded in ancient Greek notation but is also the earliest example of Christian hymnody. West does not, however, provide any further detail how he arrives at this conclusion, so it is difficult to confirm or argue against his position. Wellesz contends that the melodic patterns are modeled after those found in various Oriental sources, which may have been adapted from Syriac forms of the hymn. Wellesz also argues that this hymn has no relation to Greek musical notation that was used in late Antiquity. Yet, West opposes this position and in fact argues that he “sees no feature of the music that cannot be illustrated from the foregoing documents of the art as it existed in second- and third-century Empire.”²⁰⁶ West correctly classifies the metre as anapaestic, which was a popular musical form in Antiquity but he does not acknowledge the metrical irregularities in any significant detail. The melody, which is diatonic in nature, encompasses the range of an entire octave. One point of interest is that several measures commence with a rest; this is an unusual feature of music at this time. Yet POxy 3704, which is a Greek musical document from the same time period which is also extremely fragmented, contains rests at the beginning of several measures. The key of POxy 1786 is Hypolydian. The Hypolydian mode consists of a rising single tone followed by two tetrachords. In other words, on a piano this mode begins on the F key and the scale ascends to the next F, using only the white notes. West classifies the melodic features of the tune in the following manner:

The tonal foci are d and g; the final Amen descends from g to d. The two notes next above g are much used, but the outer notes of the octave, c and

²⁰⁶ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 325.

c', only transitorily. Accord of melody and accent is only partial. We see the standard manifestations of the florid style: occasional division of monosemes into (2 sixteenth notes), more frequent division of disemes into (2 eighth notes) or (1 eighth note and 2 sixteenth notes).²⁰⁷

West's technical explanation gives a good overview of what theoretical aspects are present in the hymn. This section, however, uses very specialized musical terms and West assumes that his reader is proficient with such terminology, offering little explanation of what this analysis really means in terms of contextualizing this hymn generally within ancient Greek music.

Musical Influences

Wellesz, the scholar with whom West most strongly disagrees, argues that various Patristic writings indicate the importance of hymns in the early Christian communities. Prior to the discovery of POxy 1786, most of this evidence was based on documents containing solely the texts but no examples of musical notation. In 1922, however, A.S. Hunt edited a fragment of a hymn written in Greek that was part of the fifteenth volume of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*.²⁰⁸ The discovery of this piece was an extraordinary find because it provided the first insight into the type of music these early Greek-speaking Christians in Egypt were singing. Wellesz charges previous scholars with unsatisfying interpretations of the music. He argues that earlier attempts to classify the music as "Greek" fall prey to several inconsistencies. First, he notes that Theodore Reinach manipulates the lacunae found in the document in order to "present the reader with a coherent piece of Greek music."²⁰⁹ Wellesz also charges Reinach with incorrectly attributing lacunae in the piece to musical rests, which would present the overall structure

²⁰⁷ West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 325.

²⁰⁸ Hunt, A.S. and B.P. Grenfell, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri: Part XV* (London: Oxford University Press).

²⁰⁹ Egon Wellesz, "The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody," *Classic Quarterly* 39 (1945), 34.

of the piece in an entirely different form. He notes that R. Wagner's transcription²¹⁰ of the music is correct but then states that Wagner's rhythmical interpretation is biased by his own theories of metre but Wellesz fails to explain exactly what those theories expound. This weakens his argument.

According to Wellesz, the melody is constructed of eight tones, for which he designates the following characters: ρ, φ, σ, ο, ξ, ι, ζ, ε. The notes provided by Wellesz correspond to the F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F starting on the bass clef F. In addition to these notes, Wellesz describes five other symbols that are used to denote rhythm and "execution of melody."²¹¹ The five symbols are classified in the following manner:

1. (-) A horizontal stroke above a note indicates the duration of the note. This line is found above one, two, or three consecutive notes.
2. (u) The *hyphen* acts as a slur marking indicating that two or three successive notes should be played smoothly, or in *legato* form.
3. (n) The *leimma*, or interval, refers to a rest or break in sound. The length of the rest can be altered by adding a horizontal line over top.
4. (:) Wellesz notes that the meaning of the colon has been widely debated. It denotes a point of division in the music but he argues that this division refers only to the melodic line and not to the metre of the piece. The break comes at the beginning of a word or syllable and could possibly indicate a breath mark for the singers. Wellesz states that this musical notation would most likely correspond to the modern apostrophe ('), which also indicates a breath mark.

²¹⁰ Rudolph Wager, "Der Oxyrhynchos-Notenpapyrus," *Philologus* 79 (1923): 201-221.

²¹¹ Wellesz, "The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody," 36.

5. (·) This dot is either placed above the note directly or above the horizontal stroke.

According to Wellesz, it indicates arsis.²¹² Arsis denotes the lifting of a rhythmic unit in prosody, and occurs before thesis, which specifies the falling or descending portion of the unit.

William Johnson notes that a diseme is a multiple note sequence written over a long syllable and joined by a hyphen, but that a diseme is usually omitted when preceded by a colon or break in melody. This can be seen in POxy 1786 in lines 3 and 4.²¹³ The leimma, which is also present in POxy 1786, carries the stigma, or arsis-dot. Therefore, the leimma could indicate a rest or prolonged note but it can not indicate a downbeat.

Based on transcriptions done by Wagner,²¹⁴ Wellesz argues that the construction of distinct time units (or measures) is incorrect. He notes that breaking the melodic line distorts its nature. This is precisely one of the methodological problems introduced in the first chapter. On the one hand, it is useful to transcribe the Greek musical notation into terms that are more comprehensible to those familiar with modern Western musical notation. Yet on the other hand, as Wellesz points out, “the introduction of bars into compositions of an age which had no notion of them is a misconception.”²¹⁵ Wellesz also discusses the complexities of the metre but concludes that the following agreement can be made: the metre is anapaestic but some verses are in a freer time, meaning they do not follow a particular rhythmic scheme. This point is significant because this departure from

²¹² Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 37.

²¹³ Johnson, “Musical Evenings in the Early Empire,” 80.

²¹⁴ Wagner, “Der Oxyrhynchos-Notenpapyrus,” 201.

²¹⁵ Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 39.

normative anapaestic rhythm is uncharacteristic of Greek music, according to Wellesz.²¹⁶

Wellesz uses this discussion of metre and rhythm to formulate his argument regarding historical influences on this piece of music. He argues that this sort of departure from strict anapaestic metre is indicative of other sources besides Greek influence. In accordance with A. Baumstark,²¹⁷ Wellesz claims that this type of lyric can be traced back to Psalms present in the Jewish liturgy of the same period. He contends that “[a]ll of these invocations are composed in an exalted rhythmical prose, characteristic of many hymns of that age.”²¹⁸ More important, the main difference Wellesz notes is that the purpose of the Christian hymn writer is very different from that of a Greek poet. Hymns were always sung, according to Wellesz, and “the composition of a new hymn consisted in adorning passages taken from psalms or songs of praise by the addition of some new passages, or even only a few words, and singing this new text to the melodic phrases of the original chant which was well known to all.”²¹⁹ The main point of Wellesz’s argument is that the metre of this particular piece “is not as a result of the archaizing tendency of an individual poet but of an elevated diction to which the Hellenistic hymn-writer was accustomed from other hymns of the service.”²²⁰ The Greeks would translate a Jewish or Syrian hymn into Greek or often they would write a new one using a pattern or melody that would be well-known among the general populace. Yet Wellesz notes that when the doxological formula had to be entered into the composition, the wording could not be significantly altered and therefore “was to be sung to a stereotyped cadence” and so the anapaestic metre no longer fit the melody. Thus, Wellesz argues that the translator

²¹⁶ Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 40.

²¹⁷ See Baumstark’s *Liturgie Comparée*, 69.

²¹⁸ Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 41.

²¹⁹ Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 41.

²²⁰ Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 42.

had to discard the metre he had been working with and adopt a freer rhythmic feel.

Wellesz does not, however, explain why the wording could not be altered. The lyrical content definitely had to expound Christian theology and doctrine but Wellesz fails to provide any conclusive reasoning as to why the wording could not be changed or altered.

Regarding POxy 1786, Wellesz argues that the metre is not strictly consistent with that used by the Classical Greek style of composition. He notes the short syllables are often set to lengthened notes and also points out that the accented syllables are not always related to the “musical ictus,”²²¹ which refers to the moment when a beat occurs. The longer notes are denoted by vertical strokes and the accented notes have dots above them. Wellesz also points out that the repetition of small melodic fragments is not characteristic of Greek music but is documented later in early Byzantine melodies.²²² The Byzantine hymns that Wellesz is using for his comparison come from a collection that was written in approximately the sixth century CE: “The connexion of certain melodic formulae, linked together by varying short passages in the manner of a recitative” is found in many Middle Eastern compositions from this time period but is unknown in the Greek context.²²³ Wellesz concludes by stating that we cannot follow the interpretation of early scholars. He disputes those early claims that this hymn is Greek in character. Despite its Greek notation, he argues that this hymn “is an example of the new kind of ecclesiastical music, modeled on patterns deriving from Oriental sources and used for the Greek text.”²²⁴ Wellesz, however, does not define what he means by “Oriental”, though he seems to mean “Near Middle Eastern”. One must take into account the signs and symbols

²²¹ Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 41.

²²² Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 44.

²²³ Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 44.

²²⁴ Wellesz, “The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody,” 45.

in the music that denote metre and rhythm. Wellesz notes that the melodic structure of the hymn features obvious characteristics present in the many examples of Byzantine ecclesiastical music. Wellesz does argue convincingly that there are irregularities in this hymn if one were to classify it solely as “Greek” but he does not sufficiently address the trends in Greek music at that time that would possibly explain these irregularities in the Greek context.

A.W.J. Holleman introduces the subject of early Christian music by illustrating the various controversies that surround research in this field. For him, the commonly held position was that Christian music was derived from the music theory principles of ancient Greece. Holleman, however, cites Werner’s position that the concept of eight modes is in fact derived from the “old Babylonian calendaric principle of the pentecontade (7+7+1) of the liturgical seasons.”²²⁵ Therefore, the origin of Christian music, as previously noted, is a highly contested topic. Idelsohn discovered Jewish music in various Yemenite and Babylonian communities in the early nineteenth century²²⁶ and this discovery has greatly aided the argument that Christian music is in fact a derivative of old Jewish sources. Idelsohn found striking parallels between these sources and early Christian hymns. Thus, an apparent parallel between early Christian practice and Jewish synagogue ritual was drawn. Günther Wille, however, does not concur with this position but, as Holleman points out, Wille wrote his monograph *Musica Romana*²²⁷ in 1967 but failed to address any scholarship on POxy 1786 that was written after 1935.

Holleman partially follows Wellesz’s conclusions when he argues that “[w]hen he

²²⁵ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786 and the Relationship between Ancient Greek and Early Christian Music,” *Vigiliae christianae* 26 (1972), 1.

²²⁶ See Abraham Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*.

²²⁷ See Günther Wille, *Musica Romana* (Amsterdam: Schippers NV, 1967).

[Tertullian] speaks of the impossibility for them [pagans and Christians] to sing together, this does not prove the incompatibility of Christian and pagan music, but it certainly is a strong indication of the difference between them.”²²⁸ Nevertheless, Holleman does not entirely shut out the possibility of Greek influence. Yet there is an important distinction to be made with regard to the influence of Greek music: the words or lyrics of Greek music were certainly not in accordance with the Christian practice of monotheism but the music itself was not necessarily a threat.

The other distinction that one must make pertains to the setting in which certain forms of Greek music were used. Holleman notes the “licentious atmosphere” in which Greek music was performed or sung. The preceding chapter outlined the social settings during which musical performances took place and many of these events were not concurrent with Christian practices. For example, it was mentioned that Greeks would sing at religious festivals honouring specific deities. Also, Greek music was associated with secular festivals where other acts took place, such as alcohol consumption and promiscuous behaviour. This is precisely the behaviour that Paul warns his congregation against in his first letter to the Thessalonians.²²⁹ Therefore, given Paul’s authority, it is not surprising that the early Christian community in the Mediterranean, even decades later, would have a problem with Greek music, or more specifically, with the ritual practices associated with Greek music. Holleman goes so far as to argue that “pagan music itself was not only frowned upon but even was considered instrumental for losing one’s Christian soul and salvation.”²³⁰ Holleman, however, does not provide textual

²²⁸ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786 and the Relationship between Ancient Greek and Early Christian Music,” 2.

²²⁹ First Thessalonians 4: 3.

²³⁰ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 3.

examples to support his claim.

Werner argues that “we encounter the typical final *melismata* of Jewish psalmody although, in melody and structure, the piece is distinctly Hellenistic, even written in Greek letter notation.”²³¹ *Melisma* refers to multiple tones sung to only one syllable of text. For example, this is done most often in the Gregorian chant. Egert Pöhlmann, however, disagrees with Werner’s concept of what constitutes the “distinctly Hellenic.” Pöhlmann argues that the composer of the hymn follows the classical Greek model but does not have an ear for the Greek language.²³²

Holleman’s own position develops further when he argues that this hymn is in no way representative of Greek music as a whole. He concedes that “there might be a certain amount of melodic congruence with certain Hellenistic melody-building, but, honestly, we do not have any certainty about intonations, neither in Greek nor in any other contemporary music.”²³³ Holleman disagrees with Sach’s claim regarding the musical style of the piece. He argues that one can say much more about it than its lack of “dissolute and voluptuous” nature and concludes that this hymn represents a failed attempt in applying Greek notation to an already existent Christian hymn.

Wendy Porter, a professor at the McMaster University divinity school, offers a more encompassing explanation regarding the various influences on this earliest Christian hymn. In an essay published in 2000, Porter illustrates the problems present in both sides of the argument. For example, she notes that there are certain *melisma* present in POxy 1786 which would initially support the arguments put forth from scholars such as

²³¹ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 339.

²³² Egert Pöhlmann, *Griechische Musikfragmente: Ein Weg zur altgriechischen Musik* (Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1960), 31.

²³³ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 7.

Wellesz and Werner. Porter, however, convincingly contends that the Greeks were becoming increasingly ornate in their compositions at this time; this supports the position of scholars such as West.²³⁴ Porter certainly advocates a more balanced approach when discussing influences on early Christian music, particularly regarding POxy 1786. She tends to denounce the one-sided approach in favour of a more syncretistic outcome. More important, Porter also points out that scholars who favour the Jewish influence take a more narrow approach in the sense that they almost entirely disregard any possible Hellenistic influences, whereas the proponents of the Greek influences tend to be a bit more accommodating in their position.²³⁵ Further to this point, one also cannot discount the earlier Egyptian and Babylonian influences on early Judaic music.

Notation and Metre – The Final Point of Analysis

The remaining controversy, according to Holleman, stems from the rhythmical interpretation of the hymn. He contends that this is a significant divergence from polytheistic music. This was one the main points of contention in scholarship on Christian and pagan music. Not only were the lyrics in pagan music idolatrous according to the early ecclesiastical authorities, but the “beat-character” of the music was also problematic for other reasons. These various instruments, namely the drums and cymbals, were often used in what Holleman deems orgiastic rites.²³⁶ This beat music was associated with the endangerment of losing the Christian soul and submitting to the temptations of the flesh by some Christians. Thus, the long-disputed position of music in Christian liturgy was difficult to resolve because Jewish Psalmody was a key influence in

²³⁴ Porter, Wendy. “Misguided Missals” *Christian-Jewish Relations Through the Centuries* (ed. Stanley Porter & Brook Pearson: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 202.

²³⁵ Porter, “Misguided Missals,” 226.

²³⁶ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 10.

Christian ecclesiastical chanting. This chanting could be slightly modified based on the geographical location of the congregation. Holleman argues “[t]he rejection of contemporary pagan music was that much total that the existing Greek notation-systems were not really considered for the transmission of Christian music.”²³⁷ Therefore, he contends that Greek notation was highly specialized and used only by educated theoreticians, which is contrary to Pöhlmann’s position that there was a less specialized system of musical notation which utilized simplistic punctuation to denote melody.²³⁸ Pöhlmann uses evidence from vase paintings to argue this point but Holleman counters that the early Christians needed to find a new style of notation in order to establish a key liturgical component that would define Christians from other groups.

Clearly POxy 1786 is written in Greek musical notation; thus further explanation is required. Holleman asserts that if the rhythmical notation is interpreted in conjunction with evidence present in other examples of Greek music, there is a considerable amount of “metrische Verstösse.”²³⁹ If one also takes into account Holleman’s earlier claim that this composition was the work of a specialized theoretician, then is it possible that the Greek notation system contained inherent short-comings for Christian music? According to Holleman, the “Greek melodic signs did not denature the flow of the melody.”²⁴⁰ This position is in line with Werner who argues that the Greek system had to define each note because it was based on rhythmic and syllabic structure. Further to this point, Werner contends that the church needed a notational system that could fix the “most venerable elements of liturgical music” and that the Greek system “with its minute description of

²³⁷ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 10.

²³⁸ Pöhlmann, *Griechische Musikfragmente*, 82-83.

²³⁹ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 11.

²⁴⁰ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 11.

every tone, would have proved very cumbersome had it been applied to the new task.”²⁴¹

Holleman claims that the hymn provides evidence for the impetus to create a new system of notation instead of serving as verification for the continuity between Greek and early Christian music.

Turning to hymnody in general, church authorities thought that its very musical structure connected it to polytheism but Holleman maintains that it was also very popular for that very reason and that hymnody became the “preeminent vehicle” for heretical movements and therefore the church became even more skeptical of liturgical music. He claims that “real Christian hymnography presumes real Christian style, and what is meant by this is well exposed by an interesting observation about the *Ison*, the most important neume, being the indicator in the melodic tenor . . . [and] the body of Christian ecclesiastical music was “derhythmed” or denuded of rhythm.”²⁴² This is a progression, he argues, that is found within Jewish liturgical music. Curt Sachs notes that early Jewish music also contained a more strict rhythm and the beating of drums, for example, took place in the Temple. Post-Temple music, however, had a much freer rhythm that does not follow a specific “metric pattern or the measures of beaten time.”²⁴³ Interestingly enough, Holleman explains this phenomenon by arguing that the Jewish Diaspora was also fighting the influence of pagan beat music outside of Palestine.²⁴⁴ This is a plausible explanation since the Post-Temple Jews were also dealing with similar problems or questions that the early Christians were facing. Holleman provides various examples to support his claim and concludes that early Christian music was “neither a

²⁴¹ Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 358.

²⁴² Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 13.

²⁴³ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 90.

²⁴⁴ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 13.

return to allegiance to the venerable Greek classic music, nor amalgamating with Hellenistic pagan music on the basis of Greek musical theory, while the hymn of Oxyrhynchus can be accepted as settling that.”²⁴⁵

Consequently, one nagging methodological problem can be seen with Holleman’s thesis. How does one differentiate between rhythm, a free rhythm, and a lack of rhythm altogether? This is an extremely difficult question to answer because there is no unanimous determination but Holleman anticipates it. His suggestion is that rhythm can be determined based on the “union” between the melody and the corresponding words. This relationship, according to Holleman, is not based on any metric consistency but rather on the *Bedeutungszusammenhang* of a group of words. The only relationship between Greek and early Christian music Holleman concedes is the similarity in the Neo-Platonic concept of ethos, which, according to him, is not important because “that is not the material out of which music has been made, whether Christian or Greek.”²⁴⁶ This analysis, however, fails to explain the Christian apprehension toward incorporating certain pagan musical practices into their own rituals. For various Greek cults, music possessed a certain power to invoke particular feelings in the performers, the listeners, and the gods. The melody and metre of a specific piece had its function contained in these musical facets. From the Jewish perspective, music was also used to display acts of worship, thus indirectly creating a similar environment. Instrumental and vocal worship, at least before the destruction of the Temple, was certainly a key liturgical component in Jewish worship ritual and therefore also possessed a certain form of emotional display. Holleman is correct in saying that music is not directly composed out of emotion. From a

²⁴⁵ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 15.

²⁴⁶ Holleman, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786,” 15.

practical perspective, Greek music was composed based on a series of rules and conventions but the purpose of the music was clearly broader than a purely scientific exercise. Why would the early Christians then dispute the use of certain instruments or vocal performances at specific events? This prohibition is linked to this association that music had with various rituals and practices.

According to Foley, this early Christian hymn has its roots in both Greek and Jewish musical practice. He argues, “[w]hile Judaism provided the models for development of hymnodic psalmody in emerging Christianity, it was the classical poetry of the Greco-Roman world that provided models for the emergence of metrical hymnody.”²⁴⁷ Thus, the metrical organization present in Biblical poetry was not the basis for this hymn. Foley uses a hymn written by Clement of Alexandria (150-216 CE) as the basis for his argument. Clement wrote a sixty-five-line hymn in anapaestic metre, which appears in *Paidagogus* 3.101.3. It is unknown whether or not the hymn was actually used in early Christian liturgy but Clement used classical Greek metre in his composition. Wellesz disregards this evidence as an attempt by educated people to conserve the Classical Greek civilization.²⁴⁸ Foley refutes this dismissal and argues that Christian hymnody is not entirely or exclusively dependent on what he terms “Semitic proto-types” but rather possesses a deep-rooted connection to Classical Greek forms. More important, Foley notes that this single example of Christian hymnody may or may not have been employed in early Christian worship. Because this is the sole example of documented Christian music in Antiquity, one cannot determine with any degree of certainty that this example is representative of early Christian music generally speaking. Yet despite this

²⁴⁷ Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music*, 98.

²⁴⁸ Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music*, 149.

fact, it certainly illustrates at least one example of early Christian music that contains various Jewish and Greek polytheistic influences.

Conclusion

POxy 1786, the earliest of Christian hymns, provides scholars with a very important artifact that sheds some light on early Christian music. This document epitomizes the synthesis of various influences on Christian music and illustrates why one cannot attribute early Christian music solely to one source or another. The notation and metre are derived from the Greek Classical style and the content and melodic irregularities display parallels with Jewish sources. Though certain features are debatable in terms of origin, it is clear that there is more than one influence at work here. This hymn does not provide indisputable evidence for a type-casting of early Christian music, nor does it offer any verification of its performance in an actual liturgy. Quasten correctly maintains that this hymn provides no clue as to the location of its performance and that it remains very difficult to determine if the hymn was for liturgical worship in a more formal context or for private devotion at home.²⁴⁹ It does, however, offer an important starting point for the field of early Christian music.

In Curt Sachs's discussion of Greek and Roman music, he argues that this hymn defied the ethos theory through its unifocal nature without tension between the two foci. Sachs explains this theory of ethos when he states "the famous term ethos denotes the emotional power of melodies according to their scales."²⁵⁰ Yet, nineteenth century musical scholars were unable to make a scientific connection between emotion and a specific scale mode. Sachs, however, stresses the importance of pitch. The high, middle,

²⁴⁹ Quasten, *Music and Worship*, 72.

²⁵⁰ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 248.

and low pitches and their so-called ethical qualities were also important in other forms of music, such as Islamic music. Sachs lists several other key qualities which characterize this ethical quality, including step (semi-tones, whole tones, etc.), their arrangement and sequence, the position of the scale, melodic turns or ornaments, and last the tempo and mobility.²⁵¹ Sachs argues that “[t]he Oxyrhynchus Papyrus, an early Christian hymn, was certainly not “dissolute and voluptuous,” in spite of its Hypolydian key and mode.”²⁵²

This five-line hymn displays both Jewish *melismatic* characteristics but also Classical Greek metre and musical notation. Based on this conclusion, one can speculate on other aspects related to this hymn. For example, it may well have been an earlier Christian hymn that was written in Greek musical notation, in which case certain features may have been adapted to fit the Greek musical style. In this case, it is still plausible that Greek melody may have also influenced the composition, depending on where it was originally written. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that a Greek convert may have composed *and* written the hymn. Judaic influence may still have shaped the content and melody, again depending on exactly when and where the hymn was written. Both explanations require a syncretistic approach and both scenarios accept influence and input from varying sources.

Returning briefly to Johnson’s point regarding the abnormality of musical papyri in relation to poetic writings, this conclusion suggests that music composition or transcription was a more specialized discipline in Antiquity. This is a point of interest on a broader scale because it is suggestive of several things. There is no direct historical evidence of organized musical groups involved with the early Church; however, if Greek

²⁵¹ Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 249.

²⁵² Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, 251.

musical writing and composition was an activity reserved for experts, then it would be logical to conclude that those people were educated together and therefore ran in the same social circles. If the early Christian church possessed such groups, then there are several possibilities that present themselves. It becomes more plausible that there are other extant musical documents that existed from this time period but were either destroyed or have not yet been located. It is also possible then that the musical tradition in the Christian church emerged earlier than previously thought. Of course these speculations are by no means conclusive or historically valid because of a lack of evidence but these small clues provided by POxy 1786 do allow for more confident speculation on the early musical tradition within Christianity. One should also note, however, as J.A. Smith does, that this is an isolated example of Christian music and “there is no way of knowing to what extent its features are typical.”²⁵³

The one-sided approach clearly does not work. Porter argues that this field of study is highly complex and that one can attribute this debate to several issues. She notes that there seems to be a trend in the scholarship, particularly that of Werner, to argue against other scholars, rather than their scholarship. Porter also points out that “[t]here is resistance to acknowledging multiple influences, perhaps inversely proportionate to the resistance that Werner felt in the past towards Jewish influences and Jewish scholarship.”²⁵⁴ On occasion, scholarship has a tendency to overcompensate for past misconceptions and this is exactly the type of thing to which Porter is referring in this situation. One cannot discount the enormous contribution that Werner, for example, has made to the field of Jewish music but it becomes apparent in his work that he discounts

²⁵³ J.A. Smith, “First-Century Christian Singing and Its Relationship to Contemporary Jewish Religious Song,” *Music & Letters* 75 (1994), 2.

²⁵⁴ Porter, “Misguided Missals,” 226.

relevant evidence in order to advocate his position more strongly. Porter also notes, as I have already done, that the multi-disciplinary field of early Christian music requires one to be an expert in many areas. Therefore, taking multiple sources and influences into account requires specialization in numerous areas. Such an endeavour requires knowledge of several ancient languages and one must also be well-versed in a large body and range of primary sources. Scholars must broaden the level of inquiry regarding early Christian music and accept that Christian music, doctrine and liturgy were all shaped at least by the surrounding Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures. This hymn illustrates precisely this multi-influential aspect of the Christian tradition. Christianity emerged out of the Jewish community and culture; this is accepted by the vast majority of scholars. However, the same Hellenistic influence that shaped the emerging rabbinical tradition also impacted the early Christians and this is clearly evident in the literature. Porter sums up the main point here very nicely when she states:

The current view sees the influence on the music of the early Christian church as Jewish, with a majority of New Testament scholars promoting this view, and it is futile to argue that there was no influence of Jewish culture and belief on early Christianity, for it grew to some degree directly out of Judaism. On the other hand, to argue against Greek influence is equally unfounded, for the young church was situated fully within the Hellenized culture of the Graeco-Roman world.²⁵⁵

Therefore, Porter provides the more accurate picture of the early Christian communities. She acknowledges that the early Christian tradition was influenced by its surroundings, which undeniably included various Jewish and Greek communities. There are numerous cultural aspects that affected the emerging Christian doctrine and theology and these ritual practices of diverse Greek and Jewish groups definitely shaped the ritual world of

²⁵⁵ Porter, "Misguided Missals," 203.

the early Christian communities.

CONCLUSION

One can argue confidently that early Christianity was influenced both by its Jewish roots and its neighbouring polytheistic communities. Greek cultic ritual and developing Jewish synagogal liturgy played a vital role in shaping the ritual practices of the early Christians. This influence reached all areas of Christian life and early Christian leaders and church authorities would eventually have to address these emerging issues on a broad scale. Once the Christian community distinguished itself as a separate entity from its Jewish parent, the Christian identity began to take a unique shape and as the Church formed a formalized hierarchy, that identity became more clear-cut. Yet, in the early stages it becomes apparent that during this period of development and growth, Christians struggled with this question of identity in relation to their neighbours. Jewish-Christians wrestled with practical issues regarding interpretation of law in the Hebrew Bible and how that fit into their new identity. Non-Jewish converts left various polytheistic rituals and practices behind in order to profess their faith to Christianity's one true God. This often meant a significant alteration to one's lifestyle. Yet, as Christianity's new members were leaving one identity behind, they were adopting a new one that possessed shades of the old.

Why is it important to examine early Christian communities and the influences that shaped their emerging identity? There are several answers to this question. First, if scholars are able to gain a greater understanding about the social, political, and religious world out of which Christianity emerged, we can obtain further insight into why Christianity developed and grew in the manner it did. Not only is this historically important, but it provides new avenues of research in various other disciplines such as

sociology and anthropology. Second, studies in comparative analysis are greatly aided by such research. By examining early influences on Christian ritual, one can engage in useful comparative exploration, which once again leads to greater understanding regarding specific religious traditions. Third, ritual practice is very important in developing an identity, particularly a religious identity. If scholars can determine the basis for that formation, that determination provides a glimpse into the bigger socio-political picture in the early Christian communities and then scholars can start to ask broader questions. For example, why was Christianity so appealing in its early stages and what sort of attraction did it hold for new converts? How did Christianity spread so quickly and why did it appeal to such a broad range of people from different ethnic and geographical backgrounds? What made Christianity such a successful social movement? It also allows for further comparative analysis. One can ask such questions of other religious traditions, such as Islam, and examine how music played a role in the development of these other traditions.

These are all questions that may be very difficult to answer but academics have started to engage these questions in their scholarship. For example, social-scientific analysis has painted a more vivid picture than ever regarding the social situation of the early Christians. There has been a good deal of scholarship published in the last forty years²⁵⁶ regarding the existing political, social, and economic structure present in these early Christian communities, which have provided a very rich historical depiction of the social setting of the early Christians. In these ancient communities, however, “religion” was not a separate sphere from the political or social realms. It is imperative not to view

²⁵⁶ For a thorough sampling, see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: Who the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996.

any religious tradition in Antiquity in this way. Since religious tradition was completely woven into the lives of its adherents, converting to a new belief-system, particularly from a polytheistic setting to a monotheistic one, could be a difficult transition.

Early Christianity had to maintain a fine balance between establishing itself as a distinct group and retaining some degree of familiarity to other traditions, from which its first converts came. Despite Christianity's denunciation of polytheism and the Christian affirmation of Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, Christians could not completely dismiss all ritual practices of their Jewish counterparts and Greek neighbours. Therefore, there were certain rituals that could be classified as syncretistic.²⁵⁷ The incorporation of certain ritual practices into the Christian tradition served two purposes. First, it provided that aforementioned sense of familiarity to converts who wanted to retain some of their old lifestyle practices. Second, it allowed Christianity to appeal to a wider base of potential converts in the first place. By utilizing practices from other traditions, Christian authorities could put a so-called "Christian" slant on it, while still maintaining that familiarity. The various Jewish traditions and cultural practices, however, had an undisputable influence on the early Christian communities. In fact, early Christianity was certainly considered to be a sect of Judaism until the two diverged to a point where they could no longer be considered the same tradition.²⁵⁸ The early Christians were caught in an identity crisis, which revolved around many of the same issues that the first Israelite communities also faced. For example, "idol-worship" was problematic in the Septuagint and this was also an important question that Christians faced, particularly the non-Jewish

²⁵⁷ The term "syncretistic" may be problematic in the sense that all traditions can be considered syncretistic. In this case, the term here only refers to the usage of various Greek and Jewish ritual practices that were incorporated into Christian ritual.

²⁵⁸ The actual date of a confirmed split between Christianity and Judaism is highly debatable and has not been definitively resolved among the majority of scholars.

converts. For example, idol-worship was problematic enough that this issue was addressed in the Ten Commandments. On the one hand, they were trying to differentiate themselves and their practices from their Jewish past. On the other hand, they proselytized in polytheistic communities where they had to change the everyday lifestyle of various Greek groups. The identity that emerged was shaped by both influences in different ways. For example, various practices and rituals were both affirmed and incorporated into their tradition or they were negated and denounced by the Christians. Yet, despite the Christian reaction to various influences, they all affected and shaped the Christian identity that developed.

The Difficult Nature of the Discipline

The main problem with studying early Christian music is certainly the lack of source material. As W.S. Smith points out, there are an abundant number of references to music in the New Testament.²⁵⁹ James McKinnon, in fact, provides several of these examples in his work *Music in Early Christian Literature* (1987). He cites nineteen New Testament examples where music is explicitly mentioned.²⁶⁰ This, however, does not provide sufficient evidence to make any far-reaching conclusions regarding music in the earliest Christian communities. Therefore, with a limited number of original sources to examine, one can easily get caught making inappropriate assumptions based on very little tangible evidence. Another major issue regarding musical notation in general is the fact that the Jewish sects at the emergence of Christianity had no known style of written musical notation. This becomes problematic because any comparison of musical scores between POxy 1786 and a particular example of Jewish music is not plausible. The

²⁵⁹ Smith, *Musical Aspects of the New Testament*, 64.

²⁶⁰ McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 13-17.

earliest Jewish musical sources are from many centuries later and therefore it becomes very difficult to engage in the same comparative analysis one can do with the Greek sources. Despite this obstacle, meaningful comparative analysis may still be carried out in relation to historical texts that discuss, explain, and describe Jewish music.

The other main problem present in the field of early Christian music is the interdisciplinary nature of the subject. This was briefly touched on in chapter three but further to that discussion, there are several other reasons for the inherent complexities. There is an extremely broad range of scholarship and source material in which scholars must be proficient in order to be able to make these types of comparisons and engage in a detailed comparative analysis. One must be a musicologist, an historian, and a religionist all at the same time. Each discipline has various methodological practices to which scholars should adhere and sometimes these methods are slight variants from one another. Methodology in each area, however, also shapes one's scholarship. History, religion, and music are all highly specialized disciplines and all necessitate many years of study. Therefore, a multi-disciplinary area requires the mastery of several subjects. This problem may also explain why the theories regarding the influences on early Christian music are polar opposites. Scholars of Judaism and Jewish music are not necessarily expert in the field of classical Greek musical notation and of course the opposite is also the case. Thus, it appears as though the discipline in which scholars are most knowledgeable significantly shapes their own view on early Christian music and its major influences.

Music in the Christian Context

The Christian position on music and musical practice was influenced by Jewish sources as well as by Greek sources. Early Christian liturgy certainly developed out of the liturgy present in the Temple and the synagogues at the time. It is debatable what role musical instruments and psalm-singing played in the regular liturgy of the synagogue but the role of music in the Jewish tradition, particularly in the Temple, cannot be overlooked. The first Christian communities were already formed in Palestine before the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE; thus, the liturgy present in the Temple also played a role in the development of emerging Christian liturgy. Numerous Jewish liturgical practices were adopted by Christians, such as reading Hebrew Bible texts during the worship service and engaging in vocal responsorial interaction between the leader of the service and the congregation. In the Temple, the role of the leader was assumed by one of the high priests, but in the early synagogue, there were no designated liturgical leader. The Christian church followed in much the same manner, at least initially.

Similarly, various Greek communities had an impact on the emerging Christian position on music. The Greek influence, however, was controversial in a different way. The Christians were trying to distinguish themselves from their Jewish counterparts once it became apparent that the two groups were no longer compatible. With the Greek polytheistic groups, there was no compatibility in doctrine to start so the problem stemmed from reconciling practices with a tradition very unlike their own. Converts needed or wanted to retain some of the practices that they enjoyed and many of these practices revolved around the performance and enjoyment of music. Once again the early

Christians needed to find that balance between incorporating familiarity to attract new converts and maintaining their adherence, while at the same time trying to forge their own identity and to create their own ritual practices.

Music was an important aspect of this identity for several reasons. The Jewish tradition had always incorporated music into their liturgy and despite the changes that Judaism was undergoing at the emergence of Christianity, that ritual aspect of their tradition was almost inherent in the Christian community. Also, the new non-Jewish members of the Christian community had also been exposed to various musical rituals through their own cultic worship. Thus, the two most influential cultures on early Christian music both maintained musical practices of various sorts and it was nearly impossible for Christianity to ignore that aspect of everyday life. So, they incorporated certain musical rituals, altered others, and banned some all together, however, the main point is that music was important in the Christian context from the beginning. This thesis demonstrates that the importance Christian music and musical practices was influenced by various Jewish communities and an assortment of Greek cultic practices.

The Power of Music

If we step back and examine the question of Christianity's success, the "re-working" of pagan ritual plays an important role. As Peter Brown argues, we tend to think of Christianity as an instant success after the death of Jesus on the cross. This, however, was not the case. Brown states "[o]f all the collective representations that had to move, through the slow redrawing of the map of the divine world at the behest of Christian theologians and preachers, the ancient representation of the *mundus* was the one

which shifted with the slowness of a glacier.”²⁶¹ This cosmology is malleable, according to Brown, and the Christians used this to influence to exert power over non-Christians. The rituals associated with paganism were permanent in the eyes of the early Christians but also notably outside their own domain. Brown notes that Christians considered pagan rituals to be superstitious but also they had what he terms a “healthy respect” for them.²⁶² They actually needed these pagan rituals to remain initially so that they themselves could be clean and unpolluted.

How does music fit into this picture? The early Christians associated certain aspects of pagan music with wickedness. Music in certain settings, both instrumental and vocal, was regarded in this manner because of what it represented. The use of musical instruments in social dining situations is an example of this type of symbolism. The instrument itself was representative of that malevolent behaviour against which the Christians preached. They regarded the instruments themselves as wicked because of their association with various behaviours such as promiscuity, overindulgence, and drunkenness. Yet, the Christians did adopt some pagan practices because they did not completely want to disassociate themselves from the lifestyle of new converts. In chapter two, the example of bells was given. Christian parents would put bells on a string and drape them around their children’s necks for protection from demons and evil spirits. This ritual stems from pagan traditions and was also incorporated into Jewish practice in some areas. The adoption of this ritual illustrates the “superstitions” to which many laypeople clung. This was not part of official church doctrine but there were also numerous small acts, such as the bells, that characterize the incorporation of pagan

²⁶¹ Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9.

²⁶² Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, 18.

practices into the early Christian communities. Therefore, the early Christians did not formulate their practices solely to avoid polytheistic ritual, but they also incorporated some of these rituals into their own religious practices.

The Next Step

This study is essentially a stepping stone to the next section of a larger project on early Christian music. The next phase of the project will examine how the early Christians used music as a potential tool of religious propagation. What role did music play in everyday Christian life and how was music used as a mode of communicating the Christian message? The first part of this question has already been addressed in this thesis. We have examined how music was integrated into liturgy and other Christian ritual practices based on surrounding influences from other groups of people, specifically Jewish groups and various Greek communities. Modes of communication in early Christianity have been well-documented, yet music is conspicuously absent from such studies. Most obvious, the Christian message was spread by missionaries and their letters. Music, however, must also have played an important part in of the spread of Christianity because music, both lyrical and instrumental, was already a well-established form of expression and communication, particularly in Greek culture, as we have already demonstrated. Greeks, and later the Romans, had various uses for music, particularly in so-called “voluntary associations,”²⁶³ such as artisan or merchant guilds. Music was a communicative mode that played a larger role in the success of early Christianity than previously thought. Because of already existent musical forms and established ritual, early Christians were familiar with various uses of musical expression. This naturally

²⁶³ Stephen G. Wilson. “Early Christian Music.” *Common Life in the Early Church: Essays Honouring Graydon F. Snyder*. (ed. Julian V. Hills: Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity, 2001), 398.

became a form of religious expression for them and it allowed for a wider audience to hear the Christian “gospel.” Music was a social mechanism used to convert people by utilizing a form of expression that was already familiar to people and common in normative social settings.

This research project is central to furthering our understanding of the most widely-studied ancient social movements. Scholarship in the area of Christian origins has been extraordinarily prolific and productive but there are numerous areas of study that have not been explored. Some of these topics have been left untouched since there is a lack of physical data. Nonetheless, recent archeological and manuscript finds offer a whole new set of data to analyze, including the aforementioned Nag Hammadi collection. This evidence is useful because it provides an historical description of how music was written and documented. One cannot, however, make far-reaching conclusions based solely on one example of a Christian hymn. There is no evidence to suggest that this hymn is representative of all early Christian music nor does it prove that this hymn was used in Christian liturgy. Despite the fact that this document does shed some light on early Christian music, it does not allow scholars to make any broad generalizations regarding music in the first Christian communities. It is, however, a very useful piece of information because it allows scholars to speculate with a greater degree of confidence on several aspects of early Christian music. As this thesis argues, music was a very important component in constructing Christian identity. This identity was influenced by various Jewish and Greco-Roman sources and neither source can be discounted nor privileged above the other. In terms of content, it is only natural that Christian hymns would show a high degree of similarity because of the relationship that Judaism had with

early Christianity. The first Christians were Jews, which is a point that proponents of the Greek-influence theory do not really address in any depth. In terms of notation and metre, however, it is evident that the Greek influence was certainly present in early Christian communities. The influence of both cultures, however, reaches far beyond the musical practices of the early Christians.

Music, however, was more than a mode of communication for the early Christians. As outlined in the preceding section, music was a form of sacred power. The early Christians were both fearful of it but also tried to use it to their advantage. Music was a daily component that shaped many different facets of everyday life. Musical performance was a key factor in many social settings and played an important role in liturgy, social gatherings and other public events. The church's position on music certainly influenced other doctrines that were later established; therefore, music was not only a tool of communication but also an implement used to exert power and authority. Music had a complicated beginning in the Christian church and continues to remain an important influence in the modern context. Music was a point of controversy because it possessed various polytheistic characteristics and once again this controversy is still relevant in today's Christian church. In Antiquity, the Christians tried to maintain a balance between establishing their own identity and utilizing other practices for reasons of authority and power. In the modern context, the situation is very similar but there is even more variation in opinion. Some Christian churches have little to no instrumental music in their services, while others incorporate rock music. The musical debate is still present but the timeline has shifted almost two thousand years. Tracing the historical roots of Christian music has relevance not only in an historical context but also in the

study of contemporary Christianity.

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