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MUSIC IN THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM DURING THE TIME OF APOSTLES

Of all the historical roots of Orthodox music, the musical tradition of the Temple of Jerusalem is by no doubt the most relevant one in theological terms – even though the Temple cult has been relatively seldom studied by Orthodox theologians.¹ In addition, the phenomenon also reflects in a tragic way the theme of the present conference (*Music, State and Nation*): the musical tradition of the Temple was destroyed precisely because of its association with the affairs of state and nation.

We may start with St. Luke, who repeatedly states that the apostles used to go regularly to the Temple in Jerusalem. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.”² The question I shall be outlining in this paper is: what do we know about the musical world they encountered in the Temple? As I am not a musician, I need to concentrate on the textual evidence in my presentation, without entering upon a discussion on the nature of the music *per se*.

Early Christian sources, to my knowledge, have no relevant discussions on temple music, if we exclude the expositions of biblical passages that do not add any genuine traditions or concrete details to our knowledge. Obviously, the lack of interest is connected with the tendency of the early Church to distance itself from its Jewish past. However, early Jewish literature contains a rich variety of interesting reminiscences on the details of the Temple cult, not to mention the later abundance of interpolations and interpretations. Firstly, there are two well-known witnesses from the apostolic times: Josephus Flavius, a historian of priestly origin, and Philo of Alexandria, the famous philosopher and exegete. Secondly, there is the early rabbinic tradition. A remarkable number of traditions dealing with the Temple cult were recorded in the second and third centuries AD. These were preserved in the earliest strata of the Talmud, *Mishnah*, and later they were developed further in *gemara* and other Talmudic sections. Due to this multi-stratum character, Talmudic literature must be used with strict caution. Later strata contain a plenty of idealized speculations on the way things are supposed to have been.

1 See e.g. George Barrois, *Jesus Christ and the Temple*. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1980.

2 Acts 2:46 (NIV). See also Luke 24:53, Acts 5:20–21, 5:25, 5:42, 21:27–30, 22:17.

WHEN DID THEY HAVE MUSIC? WHAT DID THEY SING?

Music was used in the Temple to accompany the daily offering (*tamid*)³ on weekdays as well as on holidays, and during the processions. Each morning, the singers started the song of the day (*šir šel yom*) on the very same moment when the priest (*kohen*) started to pour out the sacrifice. According to the traditional Jewish interpretation of Talmudic sources, the songs were arranged in three stanzas (*pereq*), and after each stanza the people in the inner courtyard made a full prostration.⁴ The afternoon service and sacrifice took place in approximately the same way as the morning service. In addition, music accompanied the *musaf* sacrifices (Num. 28–29) on Shabbats and holidays, and it could even accompany private offerings of various kinds brought by the people. This means that the music was audible to Jewish visitors every day on various occasions, and it must have been an important factor of the Temple experience.

The texts that were sung were mostly Psalms, in addition to certain poetical sections of the Pentateuch such as the *Shirat ha-yam* (Song of Moses and Miriam on passing the Red Sea, Ex. 15) and *Ha'azinu* (Song of Moses before his death, Deut. 32). Each main feast (Pascha, Pentecost, Tabernacles) had a song of its own. Certain Psalms were connected with certain weekdays. The daily Psalms are enumerated in a text known as *baraita* – the dating of which remains obscure – associated with the *Tamid* tractate in the Talmud. According to this source, Psalm 24 was sung on the first day, i.e. Sunday, the day of the beginning of Creation.⁵ Psalm 48 was sung on Monday, Psalm 82 on Tuesday, Psalm 94 on Wednesday, Psalm 81 on Thursday, Psalm 93 on Friday, and finally, Psalm 92 on the Sabbath.⁶ The *Hallel* Psalms (113–118) used to be recited during Hanukkah and three main pilgrimage festivals. Psalm 81 was also used in the New Year (*Roš ha-šana*) festivity as a New Year Psalm.

Later Jewish authors speculated further on the logic of the relation of Psalms to the corresponding weekdays. For example, Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon, d. 1204) in his *Piruš ha-mišnayot* wrote that the Psalm invoking the “God of vengeance” (Ps. 94) was chosen for the day when sun and moon were created (Wednesday) because God takes revenge on those who err to worship

3 Heb. קרבן תמיד ‘Continuous Offering’, perpetual daily offerings based on Num. 28:1–8.

4 For more details, see Israel 1997, 55–56.

5 *Baraita* is an attachment to the *Tamid* tractate in the Talmud. The word *Baraita* comes from the Aramaic *barrâyâtha*, ‘outsiders’. “The song which the levites used to sing in the Temple. On the first day [i.e., Sunday], they used to say [Ps. 24]: ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein’ (Tam. 7:4), and so on for each day of the week.” See Hayward, C.T.R. *The Jewish Temple. A Non-Biblical Sourcebook*, 134.

6 See Wilson-Dickson 1992, 27–28. Philo (*De Specialibus Legibus* 2:156) considered the seven days of Mazzot a time of special harmony, since the days themselves reflect the seven days of creation, therefore being perhaps potential for special musical harmony as well.

them.⁷ Friday's Psalm, referring to the kingship of the Lord "clad in majesty", is well-known in the Orthodox Church for being the Great Prokeimenon of Sunday vespers. In Jewish understanding, Psalm 93 is connected with the fact that the Creation was completed and perfected on Friday.

THE PERFORMERS AND COMPOSERS

The Psalms were sung by the Levites, a Hebrew clan whose descendants are known still today under the names such as Levy and Levi. The vocation applied only to the male Levites: the Temple choir had no female singers.⁸ According to Mishnah, there had to be at least twelve Levite singers in the choir. In addition to the Levites, the choir used to be joined by children from the leading families of Jerusalem. This detail is evidence for two things. Namely, the choir was a large one, and secondly, it was a respected and admired institution.

Levites were not only performers but also composers. Certain Psalms were written by the Levites, and obviously they were in charge of composing melodies as well. It seems that the significance of the Levites as a social group increased over the centuries. This implies an increase in the significance of their music, which in turn speaks for development also in its quality. The story of the inauguration of the Temple in I Kings does not refer to music at all, but music is strongly present in the narrative of the Chronicles, a later version on the same event. It seems that historically music had a lesser role in the first temple (i.e. before 586 BC). In the apostolic times, the Levite singers probably were at the peak of their fame.

There was also a special class of sacred musicians called *mešorerim*.⁹ They accompanied the daily burnt-offerings, as well as *musaf* sacrifices, by singing and stringed instruments. According to I Chronicles, these musicians came from three families, all related, and formed a distinctive group in the Temple order.¹⁰

WHERE DID THEY SING AND PLAY?

The Temple was the solemn centre of various religious and public activities. Nearly all of these activities, however, took place in the outer courtyards, not in the innermost courtyard, not to mention the Temple itself, which was reserved as the dwelling-place of the Divinity. The outer court that was open to all people, even to non-Jews. The actual temple zone was inside the outer court. It had a courtyard of its own, generally called the "women's court",

7 Israel 1997, 206.

8 The only exceptional case that we know of is mentioned in Ezr. 2:65 and Neh. 7:67. Even if the tradition is historically correct, it had no relevance for the period of the Second Temple. Also in synagogues men and women are separated and only men sing. For Talmudic views on the matter, see *Berakhot* 24a ("A woman's voice is indecency") and *Sotah* 48a.

9 In Greek, they have been given various terms: ψαλτωδοί, ιεροψάλται, υμνωδοί, κιθαρισταί.

10 1 Chr. 6:16–32, 15:16–19, 25:1 ff.