

On Haig Utidjian's thesis submitted to the Charles University, Prague, for the PhD degree: *The Music of the Armenian Hymnal: the Tntesean corpus*



External examiner's report

1. Brief description

The author, henceforth HU, gives pp. 1-15 ('Introduction') pieces of practical information with the purpose of informing the reader who is not familiar with the history of the Armenian chant, such as the immediate historical background of the posthumous Tntesean Hymnal (henceforth TH), an explanation of its modal organisation and HU's method of indicating 'intonational deviations' from the equally-tempered Western scale, the applied transliteration of Armenian alphabet into the Latin one, the applied orthography and the organisation of the thesis.

In section 2, pp. 17-44 ('The TH in context'), HU provides a short biography of the E. M. Tntesean (1834-1881), his predecessors and successors among the Armenian cantors/theoreticians in Constantinople and their relation to the Armenian ecclesiastical hierarchy. a commented bibliography and a presentation of the so-called Limōnečan notation system applied in the TH.

In section 3 ('Characteristic features of the TH'), pp. 45-84, HU presents the particular characteristics of the TH, particularities of the notation, the missing elements (e.g. final cadences), unusual tonal variants, the character of the lyrics and the text-music-relationship, melodic variation, modal hybrids, parallels between the Ottoman *makamlar* and the Armenian *oktoechos*, tempos and internal organisation of the chant collection.

In section 4 ('Tntesean's procedures as professed in *Nkaragir ergos*'), pp. 85-106, Tntesean's treatise published in 1874 is confronted with the redaction of the TH, and section 5 ('TH and the earlier *Bowandakut'iwn nuagac*'), pp. 107-155, some of Tntesean's own transcriptions into Western staff notation (published 1933 [1864]) are introduced and compared to the versions notation of TH written in Limōnečan notation.

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Section 6 ('Balancing theory with practice: apparent inconsistencies and the information they embody'), pp. 157-190, conveys the analytical nucleus of HU's thesis, offering a classification of the various 'apparent' inconsistencies in the distribution of melodic formulae in comparison with recurrent neumatic patterns (also in different modal contexts and different degrees of melismaticity) and the accentuation of the hymn texts. HU arrives at a plausible description of the practical-musical approach taken by Tntesean, resembling of the practices embodied in an orally administered or 'semi-improvisational' chant tradition. Finally, the section points forward to describing a set of principles apt for establishing a critical edition of the TH, that takes the practices encountered in the TH into account.

Section 7 ('Reconstruction or completion of items in the TH'), pp. 191-202, HU continues the perspective of edition in a discussion of the possibilities of supplementing the 'missing' elements in TH from Tntesean's theoretical writings, even taking the course as to supplement totally missing hymns from other sources, in order to transform the TH into a more practical hymnal.

Section 8 ('Conclusions'), pp. 203-208, summarises the HU's new insights into the TH, signalling Tntesean's particular ways of receiving and editing the corpus of Armenian chant in the context of 19th-century Constantinople. Further, HU emphasises the uniqueness of the source and the gain obtained by contextualising it with Tntesean's own theoretical and other relevant materials. Perspectives for further investigation and a possible edition are also touched upon.

The thesis is (after 'Thanks and acknowledgements') concluded with a precise list of 'Mss. consulted' and bibliography of publications in Armenian and other languages and an Appendix

2. Assessment

Given the scarceness of literature on Armenian chant in English (or other modern languages known to a wider musicological public) and the almost total lack of literature on the TH, HU's thesis must be considered a very welcome first step to fill that gap.

I find the idea of contextualising (and understanding) the TH with Tntesean's and his contemporaries' musical writings and the surrounding musical cultures very appropriate. This idea is convincingly carried through and a very detailed picture of the TH and its context is created. The many details eventually fit into a clear picture of a historical musical milieu of the until now little-known Armenian cantor/musical theoretician.

I think that there is no doubt as to the question whether the thesis meets the standards customarily requires of a doctoral thesis: since it is well focussed, well organised, signals a deep familiarity with the source material, presents adequate analytic approaches and sound conclusions, it definitely meets such standards.

PAGE 3 OF 3

A potential, minor criticism regarding HU's occasional use of colourful or biased adjectives is best interpreted as a sign of enthusiasm, an enthusiasm and a personal engagement without which the whole research project would probably not have been realised. I also see the author's orientation towards the practical use of the results of the thesis as a strongly positive element, since it is always clear to the reader what the sources reveal and how this is interpreted and contextualised by the author.

On this background, I strongly recommend HU's thesis for public defence and definitively propose that it should "Pass".

Christian Troelsgård



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