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MAQÂM AND TAQSÎM IN THE ART OF NÂY PLAYING IN MODERN EGYPT

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Introduction

The *nây*, the rim-blown flute of the Middle East, is played with amazing virtuosity and diversity of tone colour. The instrument has sounded in this region since ancient times: iconographic and written sources reveal a type of rim-blown flute used by the Egyptians as early as the third millennium BC. Its oldest iconographic source is a ceremonial slate palette on which a fox plays the instrument in front of a dancing giraffe and ibex. Actual flutes, of which the oldest ones date from the Middle Kingdom (2160–1550 BC.), were found at archaeological sites.¹

Today, the *nây* (Arabic and Persian or *ney* in Turkish) is found in Arab countries, Turkey, Iran and Central Asia. This flute has played a prominent role in art music for ages. The term *nây*, meaning reed or reed flute, is often confusing in a discussion on the instrument, because it is at the same time the generic Arabic name for several folk flutes as well as the specific term for the reed flute used in Arabic art music.

The classical Arabic *nây*, however, consists of an open-ended tube of reed of well-defined, traditional dimensions. The stem of reed must have eight nodes and nine antinodes. The flute has seven tone holes: six at the front and one at the back. Furthermore, the classical *nây* is made in several lengths. Each instrument is named after the major second above its fundamental.

In Egypt, a number of seven *nâyât* (plur. of *nây*) are most currently used: *nây Râst* (c), *nây Dûkâ* (d), *nây Bûsâlik* (e), *nây*

¹ Hassan, S.Q. & During, J. 'Nay'. In: Sadie, S. (ed.) *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, London, 1984, p. 751–752.

Jahârkâ (f), *nây Nâwâ* (g), *nây Husaynî* (a), and *nây 'Ajam* (b flat). Musicians often use different sizes of *nây* during a concert; a flat, black suitcase stands beside their chair. A master player can produce the three-octave range on one instrument by altering the positions of his fingers on the holes ('half-holing'), by change of his embouchure ('lipping'), and by breath control. The classical *nây* is played with dazzling virtuosity and subtle changes of tone colour. Its rather soft tone perfectly mingles with the other instruments of an ensemble of traditional art music.

The popular Arabic *nây* does not confirm to the strict norms of the classical instrument. This folk flute may be made of wood, reed, metal, or even plastic, and it has different names in each region of the Arab world, such as *kawwala* or *sallamiyya* in Egypt, and *shabbâba* in Syria. Its loud tone makes this flute especially fit for outdoor performances.

The Egyptian *kawwala* is made of reed, with four nodes and five antinodes, and it has six instead of seven tone holes, only six at the front of the tube and none at the back. There are also *kawwalât* (plur. of *kawwala*) of varying lengths and each *kawwala* has a range of approximately one octave and a fifth.

The classical *nây* is the only wood wind instrument used in traditional Arabic art music and in ensembles that accompany the *inshâd* (songs) of the Sufî fraternities, the mystics of Islam. As a member of the so-called *takht* ensemble, it appears alongside the '*ûd* (lute), *qanûn* (box zither), *riqq* (frame drum), *tabla* (vase drum) and *kamân* (violin). As a soloist, the *nây* player performs the *taqsîm* or improvisation in one of the many *maqâmât*, i.e. musical modes of Arabic music. However, apart from the classical repertory modern compositions for *nây* exist.

During my fieldwork between 1991 and 1996, I recorded and interviewed a number of celebrated Egyptian *nây* and *kawwala* players about their art and they introduced me to Cairo's musical scene.¹ I studied their playing technique, repertory, performance

¹ Oostrum, A.H. van, *The Art of nây playing in modern Egypt*, Dissertation University of Leiden, the Netherlands, 2004. For this paper I am especially indebted to dr. Qadrî Surûr, professor of *nây* and music theory at the

practice, their rehearsals and performances with their ensembles and concert pieces. Moreover, I observed the transmission of their art by attending their lessons at the conservatory. Also they taught me how to play and I observed the manufacturing of the instrument. This paper will focus on the concept of *maqâm* in two examples of the *nây*'s repertory: a traditional *taqsîm* as well as in a modern concert piece for the instrument.

Maqâm

A *maqâm* is a musical concept for which two of its aspects, i.e., structural as well as procedural, are relevant here. For the structural aspect, the concept of scale (*sallim*) is central, while for the procedural aspect; the specific melodic course (*sayr*) is the focal point. As far as the scale of a *maqâm* is concerned, its range is generally an octave, and its seven successive notes are divided into two groups called *ajnâs* (sing. *jins*, tetrachord, in a few cases pentachord) plus an extra tone. These tones can either be disjunct (*munfasil*: for example c-d-e-f and g-a-b-c) or conjunct (*muttasil*: for example c-d-e-f and f-g-a-b) or interwoven (*mutadâkhill*: for example c-d-e-f and e-f-g-a).¹ In case of *maqâm Bayyâtî* (d1-e*1-f1-g1-a1-b*1-c2-d2), there are two successive conjunct tetrachords: d1-g1 and g1-c2.²

There are eleven so-called basic *ajnâs* that are usually arranged in two groups:

1) the diatonic *ajnâs* (made up of a semi-tone and two whole tones), i.e., '*Ajam* (bflat-c1-d1-eflat1), *Nahâwand* (c1-d-eflat1-f), and *Kurd* (d1-eflat1-f1-g1). To these 'regular' *ajnâs* are added *Hijâz* (d1-eflat1-fsharp1-g1=two semi-tones and one step of one and a half

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¹ Surûr, Q.M., *al-Maqâm fi-l-mûsiqa-l-'arabiyya qadîman wa hadîthan fi misr* (The Old and Modern Mode in Arabic Music), Dissertation al Qahira, 1986, pp. 72-74.

² The tone e*1 is called *Sikâ* or 'e1 a quartertone lowered' and b*1 is called *Awj* or 'b1 a quartertone lowered'.

tone) and *Nawa'aththar* (c1-d1-e-flat1-f-sharp1-g1), which is a pentachord ('*uqd* or knot).

2) the *ajná*s (with one or two Arabic three quarter tones + one whole or semi-tone), i.e., *Râst* (c1-d1-e*1-f1), *Bayyâtî* (d1-e*1-f1-g1), *Irâq* (b*-c1-d1-e*1), *Sâbâ* (d1-e*1-f1-g-flat1), *Sîkâ* (e*1-f1-g1-a1), and *Huzâm* (e*1-f1-g1-a-flat1).

In a *maqâm*, some tones have a special function. These are designated as *qarâr*, *jawâb*, *ghammâz*, and *markaz*. The *qarâr* is the lowest tone of the first *jins*; it is generally the tone on which a composition or improvisation has to end. The melody often returns to the to confirm its predominance; in other words, it functions as the tonic. The octave of the *qarâr* is called *jawâb* (i.e. 'answer'); it is also an important tone. The *ghammâz* ('key') is the lowest tone of the second *jins* of the *maqâm*. In *Maqâm Bayyâtî* the tone d1 is *qarâr*, d2 is *jawâb* and g1 is its *ghammâz*.

There is no fixed rule specifying which tone must be *markaz*, but quite often the top tone of the first *jins* functions as such. Occasionally the third tone in a *maqâm* is regarded as *markaz*: e.g., the tone e* (*Sîkâ*) in c-based and f in d-based *maqâmât*. Like the *ghammâz*, these tones may temporarily function as tonal centre or as resting tone for a musical movement. The division of a *maqâm* into its *ajná*s is important for the understanding of the tonal structure of any improvisation or composition. Many phrases are composed of motives with a compass that does not exceed the boundaries of a *jins*.

Although there is no agreement on the number of *maqâmât* used in musical practice, most Egyptian theorists agree on 11 *maqâmât* 'asliyya, i.e., 'basic *maqâmât*': *Râst*, *Nahâwand*, *Nawa'aththar*, *Bayyâtî*, *Kurd*, *Hijâz*, *Sâbâ*, *Irâq*, *Ajam*, *Sîkâ*, and *Huzâm*. Each of these *maqâmât* has one of the basic *ajná*s as its first *jins* and carries the same name. For instance, *maqâm Bayyâtî* has first *jins* *Bayyati*. In addition to basic *maqâmât*, there are also the *mushtaqqât* (their derivatives). They share the same first *jins*, but the secondary *jins* is different. For example, *maqâm Bayyâtî* is a basic *maqâm* which is built up in two 'ajnas, the first called *Bayyâtî* and the second called *Nahâwand*. *Maqâm Shûrî*, also having *Bayyâtî* as its first but *Hijâz* as its second *jins*, regarded as a derivative or *mushtaqq* of *maqâm Bayyâtî*.

Modes that share the same first *jins* are regarded as belonging to the same *fasîla* (sort).

Regarding the procedural aspect, the concept of *sayr* is important. The *sayr* basically consists of a starting tone, mostly the *qarâr* and a set of options for *intiqâl* (modulation) to other *maqâmât* and a *qafla* (closing formula). *Intiqâl* (shift, transfer) is the practice of moving from one *maqâm* to another within a piece of music. As such it can be compared to the concept of modulation in the practice of Western music.

The most common type of modulation is a modulation to a *maqâm* belonging to the same *fasîla*, which means that the first *jins* of the second *maqâm* is the same as that of the first *maqâm*. In addition, another common type of modulation is a modulation to a *maqâm* with the same *qarâr*. Another general rule ('convention') is that *intiqâlât* from one *maqâm* to a new one having a *qarâr* one tonal step higher or lower are 'not done' in musical practice.¹

Taqsim

In Egyptian music, *taqsim*, an instrumental solo improvisation governed by 'conventions'² of *maqâm* practice, is regarded as the genre par excellence for instrumental improvisation, in which the player could show off his *mahârat al-'azf* (skill of playing).

Taqsim literally means 'division' in Arabic; in the grammatical sense, it is the verbal noun corresponding to the second form of the verb *qasama* (to divide). Never repeated in exactly the same way, the *taqsim* is composed of (musicians say 'divided into') many musical phrases (*fawâsil*; sing. *fasîla*) separated by periods of silence (*waqfât*; sing. *waqfa*). Its melodic line is made up of progressively more complicated phrases built upon the tonal material of the chosen *maqâm*. In fact, *taqsim* is an improvised representation of a *maqâm*.³

¹ Marcus, S., *Arab Music Theory in the Modern Period*, 2 Vols, Dissertation University of California, Los Angeles, 1989.

² There are no fixed 'rules' in *taqsim* playing rather than 'conventions' between groups of performers.

³ Faruqi, L. Ibsen al-, *The Nature of the Musical Art of Islamic Culture: a Theoretical and Empirical Study of Arabian Music*, Dissertation 1974, Syracuse University, Michigan, p. 196.

There are two types of *taqsîm*: i.e. *taqsîm hurr* ('free' *taqsîm*) that is without accompaniment, and *taqsîm mawzûna* ('metered' *taqsîm*) which in most cases is accompanied by a percussion instrument. Only the 'free' type will be discussed in this paper; it is not likely that the 'metered' type will supply additional basic information.

Traditionally, a concert given by a *takht* ensemble or large *fırqa*, a *taqsîm* is performed on one of the *takht* instruments (i.e., 'ûd, *qanûn*, *kamân*, or *nây*) and as such serves as an introduction to metric (vocal or instrumental) composition.¹ The *taqsîm* prepares the singer, other performers, and the audience for the *maqâm* of the following piece, a process that is called *saltanat-il-maqâm 'alâ-l-mughannî* ('domination of the *maqâm* over the singer'). Today, however, there are concerts devoted entirely to *taqâsîm* on the *nây*, *qanûn*, *kamân* and 'ûd, for *taqsîm* playing may be considered as the highlight of musicianship, for instance on the Congress of Arab Music held in Cairo 1995. *Taqsîm* playing, however, is not only confined to traditional art music, although it is in this genre the most artistic. In modern and popular music, *taqâsîm* are played to prepare a singer for the *maqâm* of his song or in instrumental (dance) compositions.

Taqsîm Bayyati on the nay

Question at stake here is how a *taqsîm* is performed on the *nây*?² Research has been carried out on the basis of two main questions:

(1) What is the structure of a *nây taqsîm*? And (2) what is the opinion of a *nây* player about extra-musical aspects of the performance practice, such as the various moods of the *maqâmât*, and are there other musicians who influenced his art of *taqsîm* playing?

¹ Shawan, S., 'Traditional Arab Musical Ensembles in Egypt since 1967: Continuity of Tradition within a contemporary Framework?' *Ethnomusicology*, may 1984, p. 272.

² It must be noted here that there are two articles on *nây taqâsîm*: Nettl, B., and Riddle, R., 'Taqsîm Nahawand: A Study of Sixteen Performances by Jihad Racy', *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, 5, 1973, pp. 11–50, and Suppan, W., 'Takassim Nay, Beobachtungen zur gegenwärtigen Verwendung der makamat in Ägypten anhand der Praxis des Nay-Spiels, *Vergleichend-systematische Musikwissenschaft*, pp. 337–360, 1994.

(1) In order to answer the first question, the following topics will be discussed:

– The *maqâmât* that are used for improvisation: During my fieldwork I recorded 55 recordings of *taqâsîm* played by recognized Cairene masters of the art.¹ Two series of recordings were made of each musician. Each of them was asked to play a series of *taqâsîm* in the *maqâmât*, which, in their opinion, were the most important. The number, duration and succession of *taqâsîm* was left to their choice. It appeared that nay players chose only 6 of the 11 basic *maqâmât* for their *taqâsîm*: *Râst*, *Nahâwand*, *Bayyâtî*, *Hijâz*, *Sâbâ*, and *Huzâm*. Since a discussion of all these *taqâsîm* would exceed the limits of this paper, one example of a *taqâsîm* in *maqâm Bayyâtî* performed by Qadri Surur was chosen here.

– The *sayr* of a *taqâsîm*, that is the formal constraint and the way in which the *maqâm* is developed during the performance of a *taqâsîm*. The *sayr*, the course of the *maqâm*, is to a great extent determined by two (formal and modal) frames.

1. The modal frame that determines the *sayr* is formed by elements such as range and internal structure of the *maqâm*'s scale, special cadential formula's (*qaflât*, sing. *qafla*) and optional excursions (modulations) to other *maqâmât* (*intiqaâlât*).

A *qafla* is a cadential formula, either being very short and simple with a limited range of approximately the first *jins* or more extensive with a virtuoso course. In *Taqâsîm Bayyâtî* Qadri Surur plays a short *qafla* with the range of the first *jins* at the end of Part I of the *maqâm* and one with a large range of an octave at the end of Part II, see musical example 1.

The relationship between basic *maqâm* and *intiqaâlât* is described with regard to the tetrachordial built-up of the basic *maqâm*'s *ajná*s (*munfasil*, *muttasil*, and *mutadâkhill*) and thus five categories of *intiqaâlât* can be found. Each *maqâm* appears to have its own set of specific *maqâmât* used as *intiqaâlât*. For instance, in *Taqâsîm Bayyâtî* Qadri Surur played modulations *Bayyâtî-Husaynî-Mukhayyir-Bayyâtî-Shûrî-Bayyâtî-Bayyâtayn-Bayyâtî*, of which the shift

¹ Oostrum, A.H. van, *The Art of nây playing in modern Egypt*, Dissertation University of Leiden, the Netherlands, 2004, pp. 152–213.

Bayyâtî-Shûrî-Bayyâtî is the specific modulation in *maqâm Bayyâtî*, also found in the *taqsîm* of other *nây* players. Some *maqâmât* are easy to perform on the *nây*, since they are compatible with the fingering of the instrument, others are difficult, because they contain tones that can only be produced by half-holing (such as aflat1) or lipping (b1) as in *maqâm Shûrî* (d1-e*1-f1-g1-aflat1-b1-c2-d2). The shift *Bayyâtî-Shûrî-Bayyâtî* is therefore a rather difficult one. The fingering of the *nây* therefore determines the *maqâmât* played in a *taqsîm*, and the most skilled players perform the most difficult modulations.

2. The formal frame determines the syntactical built-up of the *taqsîm* in parts, phrases, and further more so-called prolongational devices. This syntactical scheme of the parts can be drawn which *nây* players follow when improvising a *maqâm*:

– The range of the first part is basically confined to the first *jins*; modulations to other *maqâmât* do not occur.

– In case a *taqsîm* consists of two parts as in this particular *Taqsîm Bayyâtî* (musical example 1), the melodic expansion to two or more *ajnâs* and modulations to other *maqâmât* take place quite directly in the second part.

– The character of the first part is determined strongly by relatively long sustained tones that are introduced and alternated by short, lively tonal figures and ornaments such as turns, trills and mordents. In the parts following Part I, the rhythmical as well as melodic movements increase, in case of this *Taqsîm Bayyâtî* (musical example 1) in Part II.

The prolongational devices that a performer has at his disposal are repetition and sequencing (respectively ‘r’ and ‘s’ in the musical example 1 of *taqsîm Bayyâtî*).

– Other melodic features are steps, intervals, and ornaments, that cling to the ear as ‘typical for *nây taqsîm*’, such as fore falls, shakes, vibrato, turns, slides and double tones.

(2) *Nây* players also explained about extra-musical aspects of the performance practice, such as the various moods of the *maqâmât*, and other musicians who influenced their art of *taqsîm* playing. Many musicians state that each *maqâm* has its own *ihsâs* (‘sensitivity’) that is determined by the specific intonation of the

individual tones of each *maqâm*. These intonations may either be *maqâm*-related or a matter of taste for the performer.

The idea of a relationship between a *maqâm* and a specific mood (*hass*) exists in Egyptian music, but there is no consensus among musicians about which *maqâm* provokes which mood, with the exception of *maqâm Sâbâ*. According to Egyptian *nây* players, the ideal, traditional tone quality of the *nây* has to sound *shajî'* ('sad'), notably by the use of double tones.

In spite of the fact that the *kawwala* rather than the classical *nây* is used in the current Egyptian Sufi music, there has been a long connection between the later and Sufism. For ages the classical *nây* has been used in the rituals of the *Mawlawiyya* brotherhood, the Egyptian branch of the Turkish *Mevlevi* brotherhood from the city of Konya. This *Mawlawiyya* fraternity was presented in Egypt's Sufi scene until 1954.¹

The *Mevlevi* order inspired by the Sufi poet Jalâl ad Dîn Rûmî (1207–1273 AD.), later spread from Konya over large parts of the Arab world reigned by the Ottoman empire. The *Mevlevi* adopted the *nây* as their leading instrument in their ritual after Jalâl ad Dîn Rûmî had sanctified this flute in the *Mathnawi*, his handbook of Sufi poetry:

'In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate,
Listen to the reed how it tells a tale complaining about
separations

Saying that ever since I was parted from the reed-bed, my
lament hath caused men and women to moan.'²

These few verses depict a metaphor: the reed (*nây*) is cut off from its stem in the reed-bed at the bank of the river and then it weeps because of this separation, just as the human soul grieves over

¹ Margolieuth, D.S. and de Jong, F., 'Mawlawiyya'. In: Brill, E.J. (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of islam*, New Edition, Vol. VI, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1991, p. 883–888.

² Nicholson, *The Mathnawi of Jalalu 'd-Din Rumi*, London, 1925, Vol.II: transl., p. 5–6.

his separation from the Divine. At the *dhikr* sessions or *sema'* (spiritual concerts) of the *Mevlevi*, the sad tone of the *nây* always remembers the participants of this separation. This tone quality is still a concept among contemporary *nây* players, although the *Mawlawiyya nây* payers left Egypt in 1954. In general these players had their influence on some Egyptian *nây* players like Mahmud 'Iffat who studied their style.

The musical score is presented in ten staves of music. It includes various performance markings such as *qafila*, *husayni*, *muhayyar*, *bayyati*, *sturi*, *bayyatayn*, and *bayyati qafila*. Measure numbers are indicated throughout the score, ranging from 15 to 50. The score is divided into sections labeled I and II, with sub-sections like *sd* and *1.00*. Performance techniques like *vibrato* and *tr* are also noted.

Musical example 1: *taqsîm Bayyâtî* (A.H. van Oostrum, *The Art of nay playing in modern Egypt*, Dissertation University of Leiden, the Netherlands, 2004, p. 199.) performed by *nây* player Qadrî Surûr.

A modern concert piece for *nây*

Contemporary Egyptians composers wrote a few modern concert pieces for *nây* as a solo instrument accompanied by a chamber orchestra. Examples of such pieces are *Dumû' al-bulbul* ('The Tears of the Nightingale') composed by Ahmad Fu'âd Hasan in 1960, followed by *an-Nây as-sâhir* ('The Magic Nây') of Muhtâr as-Sayyid in 1975, and *Kûnshirtû an-nây wa-l-firqa-l-mûsiqiyya* ('The Concert for *nây* and Orchestra') of Atâya Sharâra in 1981.

These compositions remind the listener instantly of concert pieces for the Boehm flute. The question at stake here is which melodic elements are traditional such as the *maqâm* and which elements are inspired by western classical music. Only one piece, *Dumû' al-bulbul*, dedicated to and performed by Egypt's most famous *nây* player, the late Mahmûd 'Iffat (1935–1994), will be discussed here.

The piece was written in *maqâm Kurd* (d1-eflat1-f1-g1-a1-bflat1-c2-d2), a *maqâm* without quartertones, which is a convenient choice with respect to the tuning of the western instruments of the chamber orchestra. *Dumû' al-bulbul* is tri-partite concertino, i.e. Andante, Allegretto, and Allegro, in the form of a dialogue between soloist and orchestra: some parts are designated for *al-jamî'* ('tutti') and others for the *nây*. There are a solos for the *nây*: one reminds of a metered *taqsîm* (*taqsîm mawzûna*) in bar 22–27 and repeated in bar 27–33, while the *qanûn*, string section and *riqq* perform the rhythmical cycle called *duwayk al basît* as accompaniment for the *nây* solo. Bars 34–70 contain a long cadenza for *nây*, with Western melodic elements such as chromatic runs, broken chords and triplets.

These chromatic runs can only be performed on a special *nây* that contains two closed keys for the little finger of each hand. Mahmûd 'Iffat mounted these two keys on the *nây*. The keys produce when opened the tones d flat, a flat, e and b on the *Dûkâ nây*, which facilitates playing chromatic runs. A player produces these tones on the traditional *nây* by half-holing and lipping, but this is technically impossible in a quick tempo (see musical example 2).

These two keys on the *nây* and the modern compositions for the instrument reveal the influence of the Boehm flute on the style of *nây* playing. Mahmûd 'Iffat, who had been a flute player during his

teens, invented the two keys for the *nây* since he knew the advantage of keys of the flute. The predecessor of the flute, the seventeenth century transverse flute, which was one-keyed and developed slowly with more keys, inspired him. ‘Iffat also introduced Boehm flute playing techniques on the *nây* such as double staccato playing.¹



Musical Example 2 *Dumû' al-bulbul*, bars 62-70, ‘Iffat, Mahmûd, *Usûl dirâsat an-nây* (The basics of *nây* playing), al-Qâhira, matba’at nahdat misr, 1968, p. 92–93.

Concluding remarks

This paper concentrated on two examples of the *nây*’s repertory: a traditional *taqsîm* as well as in a modern concert piece for the instrument. Two cases were discussed: an example of *taqsîm Bayyâtî* performed by Qadri Surur, and *Dumû' al-bulbul* performed by Mahmûd ‘Iffat.

Maqam Kurd of the concert piece *Dumû' al-bulbul* is a convenient choice for this composition, since at the one hand its scale doesn’t contain any quarter tones, which could be problematic for the accompanying chamber orchestra, and on the other hand it provides an opportunity to perform chromatic runs and other western melodic elements such as broken chords.

A *taqsîm* may be considered as being a musical explanation of a *maqâm*, on one hand, and as an exposition of possibilities offered by a specific instrument, on the other hand. Thus the structure and other characteristic features of traditional *taqsîm* playing on the *nây* were discussed, although these findings can only be applied to the

¹ Personal communication with Mahmûd ‘Iffat, Cairo 1992.

art of *nây* playing of a group of prominent *nây* players in Cairo that participated in this study. Future research will show if comparable results are found among players of this instrument from other parts of the Arab world.

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