



## Abstract

### SYRIAC CHANT TRADITIONS IN SOUTH INDIA

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The Syriac chant traditions of the Chaldean and Antiochene rites reached South India at various stages in the history of the St. Thomas Christians. In spite of attempts by the Portuguese missionaries to suppress the Syriac tradition in the sixteenth century, and the voluntary efforts of the Syriac churches to vernacularize liturgies in the 1960s, the Syriac language and the musical styles associated with it have survived in oral transmission for centuries in South India. The dissertation focuses on the contemporary practice of the model melodies of the Chaldean rite in the Syro-Malabar Church, and the *oktoēchos* ("eight voices") of the Antiochene rite in the Orthodox churches. The system of model melodies supports the practice of singing multiple texts in a specific poetic meter to a single melody, and the system of *oktoēchos* supports the practice of singing the same text in eight different ways. A survey of the historical circumstances that led to the retention of Syriac chant traditions in India shows that one of the reasons for the resilience of the melodies is the resoluteness of the practitioners to perceive music also as an imaginary boundary marker between communities. The analysis of model melodies shows the presence of consistent melodic and rhythmic gestures that are coordinated with the semantic and syntactic structures of the text. The system of *eṭṭunīram* ("eight colors"), the local term for *oktoēchos*, exemplifies the transformation of a musical concept as a tradition is transferred from one culture to another. The model melodies and the *oktoēchos* employ a systematic body of musical knowledge that is applied as normative standards in composition and performance and, therefore, deserve to be included in the larger discourse on music in India. Also, the Syriac chants present a case in point for the musical proximity of otherwise distant regions and diverse cultures.

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