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Maqam Analysis: A Primer
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This paper analyzes 18 pieces of music from the Egyptian and Syrian maqam (Arabic melodic modal) tradition, with the following goals: 1) to demonstrate how to parse musical examples using the abstract information available on scale structure; 2) to challenge the conventional understandings of Arabic music theory, and offer new definitions of jins (tetrachord or scale type) and maqam (scale); and 3) to provide hypotheses as to the shape of the overall maqam system and suggestions for potentially fruitful avenues of research.

Keywords: maqam, Arab, Arabic, Egypt, Egyptian, Syria, Syrian, jins, oral tradition, arbitrary, network, microtone, quarter-tone, Umm Kulthum, Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab, Farid al-Atrash, Sayyid Darwish, Riyad al-Sunbati, Zakaria Ahmed, muwashshah, improvisation, Middle-East, mode, modal, modulation, Bruno Nettl, Jihad Racy, Scott Marcus

SCOPE

The goal of this paper is to provide an accessible introductory framework for the analysis of music within the maqam (modal melodic) traditions of Egypt and the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine), a region that shares both repertory and an approach to melody. While much of what is written here will also apply to many of the musics from related maqam traditions (including Turkey, Iraq, the Arab Gulf, and parts of North Africa, and to a lesser extent traditions from Iran and Central Asia), I do not wish to make claims that are too broad, nor that fail to respect the many subtle and not-so-subtle differences among regional traditions. I have selected musical examples from Egypt and Syria to illustrate my points, all of which can be heard at http://www.maqamworld.com/analysis. The website contains much more than could be presented here: complete analyses of 27 pieces of music (plus fragments from two more), broken down jins-by-jins into 819 audio samples that illustrate more completely the same analytical points made in shorter form here. I feel strongly that the analyses and claims made in this article cannot be understood without hearing the audio samples, so the reader is highly encouraged to follow the analysis track of the website and play those samples along with the article itself.

Aside from addressing the general need for more maqam analyses in the music theoretical literature in English, this paper advances new ideas that differ significantly from the conventional view of maqam, as represented both in the theoretical literature and in the oral theory tradition of practitioners. The concept of jins is refined here, through the new concept of “jins baggage,” as well as through the identification and naming of ajnas not described in previous theory. The understanding of maqam (and sayir within maqam) is expanded to encompass the frequently occurring paths of common modulations from jins to jins within a maqam. The shape of each maqam can be represented as a network of pathways among ajnas, rather than simply a scale or set of scales divided into tetrachords. This new perspective is based in my experience as a practitioner: over the course of my study, performance, and teaching, I grew to feel that there was a gap between the conventional understanding of maqam, and what I actually heard in the repertory and experienced through practice.

That conventional understanding is, to summarize: that maqamat are scales built from conjunct or disjunct tetrachords, known as ajnas (singular: jins, meaning in Arabic “kind,” “type,” or “gender,” derived from the Greek word genus, and translated as “genre” in some writings,2) and that maqamat are organized into family groupings with others sharing the same lower (or root) jins. Some sources also allow for the existence of pentachords (occasionally are referred to as Sugud rather than ajnas) as well as trichords. All of this is perfectly adequate for a description of scales in the abstract, and on that level I have no major disagreement with the presentations of scales on www.maqamworld.com or elsewhere,3 such as shown in Examples 1a and 1b.

The major gap I feel exists between the theory and practice of Arabic music is that, from what I have been able to understand, current theory in both Arabic and English amounts to little more than a description of scales. Not only does Arabic music tend to violate the constraints of octave-based scales,4 but the melodic content that uses those scalar skeletons is just as if not more important to treat theoretically as are the scales themselves. By analogy, if Western tonal theory only dealt with descriptions of the diatonic scales, rather than accounting for common and

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2 For example, Maalouf (2002).
4 Maqam Saba is often presented as the one exception to octave equivalence, whereas a closer look at the repertory reveals that 1) numerous other maqamat in practice do not display octave equivalence, and 2) the factors leading Maqam Saba not to display octave equivalence (namely the power of typical relationships among adjacent ajnas to outweigh octave relationships) apply generally to all of the maqamat.
uncommon chord progressions, melodic motifs, and large-scale melodic movement, there would be no way to tell the difference between Bach and Tchaikovsky, since both use the same diatonic scales in their compositions. In fact, the material presented here will not go as far as I would like in characterizing melodic content, but will attempt to lay the groundwork for that discussion by clarifying the broader use of the maqamat in actual musical practice.\footnote{Being drafted at www.maqamlessons.com.}

A brief note about notation and intonation: in my transcriptions I will be using the fairly standard accidental symbols for the so-called “quarter-tone” notes: $\sharp$ for “half-flat” (so that “E-half-flat” is a note roughly halfway between E-flat and E-natural), and $\natural$ for “half-sharp” (so that “F-half-sharp” is a note roughly halfway between F-natural and F-sharp). This does not mean that I am claiming that Arabic music uses an equal-tempered 24-tone schema out of which scales are built: to the contrary, not only was such a schema demonstrated false at the 1932 international conference of Arabic Music held in Cairo (attended by such well-known Western musicians and scholars as Béla Bartók and Henry George Farmer),\footnote{Abu Shumays (2007).} but it has been demonstrated that the intonation of the so-called “quarter-tones” differs from scale to scale, being higher in some scales than in others, and that the apparently “normal” notes (E-flat, F-sharp) also differ in intonation from scale to scale,\footnote{Marcus (1993).} so that the musical reality is one of many gradations of pitch, each of which is learned precisely by ear by practitioners of the tradition. By my count I have, as a practitioner, around 12 different distinct notes between my lowest E-flat and my highest E-natural.\footnote{Maalouf (2002).} Nonetheless, the similarities in quality among intervals do lend themselves to grouping in three broad categories: flat, half-flat, and natural (or natural, half-sharp, and sharp, depending on the position with respect to the diatonic scale), so that we can say that there are several kinds of E-flat (some higher and lower), several kinds of E-half-flat, and several kinds of E-natural. Therefore, the 24-tone schema is useful for nomenclature and notation, as long as it is understood that the precise intonation of the notes so represented must be learned by ear. To those not familiar with the tradition, this may make it complicated to accurately hear and classify the ajnas, but to those within the tradition, such differences add to the clarity with which ajnas can be distinguished from one another, in addition to differences in melodic vocabulary used in each jins, and differences in tonal emphasis. The subject of intonation is too large to be discussed in this paper beyond what I’ve written here,\footnote{For more thorough discussions of intonation in Arabic music, please consult: http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/FuzzyBoundaries_MaqamIntonation2009.pdf and http://shumays.libsyn.com/microtones-in-arabic-music as well as Marcus (1993).} so the reader will have to simply accept that the transcriptions are approximations of musical reality, especially from the perspective of intonation, and that the more definitive analytical statements are those made by the naming of ajnas used within the musical examples.

I would also note that in my transcriptions I have transposed pieces to pitches that facilitate an easier comparison with other
pieces in the same maqam; for example “Fakkaruni” (Example 9) is actually performed by Umm Kulthum in Rast on A-flat, which I have transposed to Rast on C, while “Mihtaar ya naas” (Example 20) is actually performed by Umm Kulthum in Bayati Shuri on B, which I have transposed to Bayati Shuri on D. Maqamat and ajnas are intervallically and melodically invariant with respect to pitch transposition, with transpositions most frequently occurring to accommodate the range of the singer; these transpositions are frequently (but not always) accomplished by the retuning of instruments a half or whole step lower or higher, so that the maqamat are technically and conceptually in the same location as they would be in their original key. Hence I felt no compunction in making matters easier for readers by transposing all of the examples of pieces in the same maqam to the same key, which in most cases is also the key used in the description of that maqam in conventional theoretical sources (Rast on C, Bayati on D, etc.). Therefore, when I refer to pitches by note name in making my analyses, those pitches should not be assumed to be absolute, but instead relative to the root tonic of the piece in question. (On the companion website, www.maqamlessons.com/analysis, I have used scale degrees relative to the root tonic of the piece, rather than note names, for consistency and clarity (e.g. “Jins Rast 1,” “Jins Hijaz 5,” “Jins Jiharkah 8”) to refer to the position of each jins within the maqam—“1” refers to the root tonic, “5” the fifth scale degree, “8” the octave, and so on.)

A clarification of the conventional definition of jins

According to a conventional definition, Maqam Bayati looks as shown in Example 2. Example 2 incorporates two differences from the presentation of Maqam Bayati on www.maqamworld.com. First, the example shows two forms, one with an upper Jins Nahawand G, the second with an upper Jins Rast G. On www.maqamworld.com, Bayati has only one form, and the scale that starts with Jins Bayati D and finishes with Jins Rast G (what I’ve labeled “form 2” here) is listed as Maqam Husseini. This reflects a minor dispute within the Arab music community; many others represent Bayati as I do here, with Maqam Husseini being represented as shown in Example 3.11

11 This is the version of Husseini more consistent with the Turkish & Iraqi music traditions, as well as the older Syrian Muwashshah tradition. Husseini has more or less disappeared as a maqam in the Egyptian tradition, which has led some contemporary practitioners to be confused about its usage. However, in the double-octave note-name system shared by Turks and Arabs, the name “Husseini” refers to the A-natural, which in Bayati-family maqamat is the 5th scale degree. The melodic path of Husseini, where it is extant in Turkish, Greek, Iraqi, Kurdish/Persian musics, and in older Syrian

The second major difference between my presentation of Bayati and that on www.maqamworld.com is that I have represented the ajnas Nahawand and Rast as pentachords rather than as tetrachords. The reason is that in all of the maqamat in which Nahawand and Rast occur as a root jins, the most important secondary tonic occurs on the 5th rather than the 4th scale degree, and when Nahawand and Rast occur as ajnas within other maqamat, they most frequently modulate on their 5th scale degree. I have therefore adopted the convention of classifying the size of a jins (as 3, 4, or 5 notes) according to the scale degree of its expected secondary tonic/point of modulation. Within this classification system, ajnas of the same size are most likely to modulate amongst each other on the same tonic, a fact that makes it more useful than the current convention of classification, in which all ajnas are represented as tetrachords unless it is impossible to do so (as in the case of Nakriz, which is represented as a pentachord because of its raised 4th scale degree, or Sikah, which is represented as a trichord because of its limited range). This in itself—what amounts to a simple reclassification of some of the ajnas—is not a radical departure from the conventional understanding of ajnas and maqamat, except perhaps to those who may believe that it is important to maintain a strong connection with Greek tetrachord theory, which heavily influenced the Arab theorists of the medieval period in their descriptions of the scales.12 In the classification system for which I am arguing here there are no maqam scales made from disjunct ajnas; all are made from conjunct (or overlapping) ajnas of different sizes. (See the “Basic Ajnas” section of the website for audio samples of all of the most common ajnas: http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/basicajnas.html.)

12 The 13th-century theorist Al-Urmawi extended the sense of jins beyond that of his predecessor, 10th-century theorist Al-Farabi, to allow for 5-note ajnas, yet most of the 5-note ajnas he lists are identical to the 4-note ajnas with the addition of a whole tone at the top—and there is no mention of any tonic emphasis being the reason for that distinction between the two classes of jins (Maalouf [2002]).
The real departure from conventional theory comes when we begin to examine the repertory. Taking Example 2 as a starting point for Maqam Bayati, how can we account for the modulations that open the second khana of the very famous Sama3i Bayati al-3Aryan, shown in Example 4?

The first 8 beats of the measure arguably tonicize Jins Bayati on A, though that tonicization is brief and resolves quickly to the secondary tonic of G via a Nahawand phrase at the end of the measure. Starting in m. 2, from beat 4 on, and into m. 3, it should be clear that we are in Jins Rast on G. The notes to which I'd like to draw your attention occur within the first three beats of m. 2, the F-half-sharp and E-natural. How should we account for these notes? Are they part of a Jins Bayati on E-natural (a naive interpretation I've actually seen from practitioners—which would be a radically distant modulation)? Or should they be defined as Jins Rast on D (also a rather distant modulation from Bayati on D)? Theoretical sources (and practicing musicians) have difficulty accounting for these notes. Yet they are very common in Maqam Bayati; here's another example, from the very popular song “Nura Nura” by Farid el-Atrash (Example 5).

The same F-half-sharp occurs on the second beat of m. 3 of my transcription, between extended passages in Jins Nahawand on G and Jins Rast on G. Here there is no E-natural, so should we refer to this mystery passage as the trichord Sikah on F-half-sharp?

None of the scalar explanations (Sikah on F-half-sharp or Bayati on E-natural) really make sense when we listen to these passages. Instead, it becomes clear that these notes serve to aid in the tonicization of G. If we were to write out the scale of Maqam Rast on G we would find that its principal form uses the notes G, A, B-half-flat, C, D, E-natural, F-half-sharp, G. Therefore, we could account for these notes (E and F-half-sharp) as the 6th and 7th scale degrees of Maqam Rast on G. However, in both of these passages, the Rast feeling lasts for only two or three measures, and does not reach a full octave above its tonic. Can we really say that we are in “Maqam” Rast? I would argue that the answer is no, and that instead these are passages in Jins Rast on the fourth scale degree of Maqam Bayati: the notes underneath this secondary tonic form a part of the jins itself. I am depending on the evidence of a single tonicization within these passages, and claiming on that basis that a jins equals a tonicization.

Here’s another example, also involving Jins Rast tonicizing the fourth scale degree of Maqam Bayati, from a 1950 Egyptian film dance piece for the dancer Taheya Carioca (Example 6).

A scalar, tetra- or pentachordal, definition of jins might lead to an analysis of this passage using four ajnas: Jins Sikah on B-half-flat in mm. 1 and 2, Jins Bayati on D at the end of m. 2, Jins Nahawand on D in the middle of m. 3 (on the basis of the fact that the E-natural has a half-step trill to F-natural), and Jins Rast on G in m. 4. Yet the tonicization analysis is more elegant and clear: Jins Bayati on the octave tonic in mm. 1 and 2, and Jins Rast on the 4th scale degree in mm. 3 and 4. Both ajnas extend beyond their conventionally-defined jins boundaries: Jins Bayati using the 6th and 7th scale degrees under its tonic (B-half-flat and C), and Jins Rast using the 6th scale degree above its tonic (E-natural). What might have appeared confusing and dissonant—the close juxtaposition of E-half-flat and E-natural less than a measure apart—now becomes comprehensible and straightforward.

The questions “Why is there an E-natural in this passage?” and “Why does that E-natural not feel strongly dissonant, but almost pass unnoticed?” were a major factor in helping me to seek clarification regarding the manifestation of ajnas within the repertory.
I have found in the repertory that the notes appearing below the jins tonic are nearly as consistent as the 3-4 notes above the jins tonic that conventionally define the jins; Jins Bayati on D almost always occurs with C-natural and B-half-flat underneath it, Jins Bayati on G almost always occurs with F-natural and E-half-flat underneath it; Jins Rast on C almost always occurs with B-half-flat and A-natural underneath it, Jins Rast on G almost always occurs with F-half-sharp and E-natural underneath it, etc. The notes occurring above the secondary tonic of the jins are also somewhat consistent—certainly consistent enough that when the jins in question occurs, it frequently causes accidental changes on the 5th or 6th scale degree above its tonic—though less consistent than the notes underneath the primary tonic. For example, Jins Rast on C usually includes A-natural as its 6th scale degree but occasionally substitutes A-flat. This consistency on either side of the conventionally-defined jins (and the melodic use of those “extra” notes while still preserving the primary tonicization of the jins) is strong enough across the repertory to allow for a refinement of the jins definition that includes those neighboring tones, which I sometimes like to call “jins baggage.”

Using this new definition of jins, I represent Maqam Bayati as shown in Example 7.

The larger open note represents the principal tonic of the jins, the normal-sized open note represents the secondary tonic of the jins, the normal filled notes are those within the conventional jins definition, and the smaller filled notes represent the “jins baggage.” Thus this representation privileges the notes within the conventional definition of each jins, while simultaneously acknowledging the presence of surrounding notes as important. In a similar way, my sense of the meaning of jins in maqam-based music still recognizes the primacy of the trichord, tetrachord, or pentachord above the jins tonic, but acknowledges the surrounding notes and emphasizes the meaning of the word jins itself in Arabic—as a “kind” or “type” or “gender”—and could be stated as: a tonicization with a specific set of intervallic relationships both above and below the tonic.

Although the notes underneath the jins tonic are very consistent, there are cases in which those notes are modified by the prevailing maqam context, examples of which we will see later in this study. I will deal here with the two most frequent cases of this phenomenon: the first, one that occurs prominently in Maqam Rast, and the second in Maqam Hijazkar. Example 8 shows the opening of the famous muwashshab16 “Ya Shadi il-Alhan.”

How should we characterize the jins of the first two bars? Traditional sources would call this Jins Rast on G (see Example 1[b]). Indeed, it has the intervallic structure of Jins Rast on G: (G A B-half-flat C). But what note is tonicized? It is clearly C, not G;17 we don’t have a tonicization of G until the B-flat of m.

Previously unnamed ajnas

Using this new sense of the word jins, I have encountered a number of tonicizations within the repertory distinct from the ajnas identified in conventional theory.15 I will deal here with the two most frequent cases of this phenomenon: the first, one that occurs prominently in Maqam Rast, and the second in Maqam Hijazkar. See the “Basic Ajnas” section of the website for audio samples of most of these (http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/basicajnas.html).

15 A standard list of ajnas in the conventional theory would include the following 5-note ajnas: Rast, Nahawand, Ajam, Nakriz, Athar Kurd; the following 4-note ajnas: Hijaz, Bayati, Kurd, Saba; the following 3-note ajnas: Sihak, Mukhalif, Mustaar; and the following hard-to-classify ajnas: Jharkah, Sibah Beladi. See the “Basic Ajnas” section of the website for audio samples of most of these.

16 The muwashshab is a genre of song from Aleppo, Syria, based on a genre of classical Arabic poetry of the same name that originated in Arab Andalucia, which distinguished itself from the qasidah (the traditional genre of poetry that originated among the nomadic tribes of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula), by its variable structure and more lyric content. By the 19th and 20th centuries the muwashshab had become one of the principal genres of Aleppo music.

17 Nettle (1973) claims that it is difficult to identify tonic emphasis in Arabic music examples, or that such identification is “subjective”—but it is in fact easy and clear to experienced practitioners, and difficult only for those not immersed in the tradition as either listeners or practitioners. There is no great mystery in this (nor any pretense or haughtiness in claiming a privileged position based on experience)—the same could be said of identifying tonicization in Bach or in Jazz music—unfamiliar listeners...
3 leads to jins Nahawand on G (also as in Example 1[b]). There is something strange about this Rast—if it were really Rast, we should expect an F-half-sharp underneath it, as I suggested above in my discussion of Rast as a secondary jins within Maqam Bayati. No F-half-sharp occurs (although there is no F of any kind in this passage).

To see clearly what is going on, we need a counter-example. In the Umm Kulthum song “Fakkaruni,” composed by Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, the first verse is in Maqam Rast; Example 9 is my transcription of the ending of that first verse (the brackets underneath the staff represent instrumental interpolations between the vocal melody called “lawazim,” sing. “lazima”). The passage starts in jins Nahawand on G, dips below Nahawand within the scale of Rast on C in measures two and three (Nahawand as a secondary jins is more flexible with the notes underneath its tonic than are some other ajnas, and frequently conforms to the jins below it), returning to the G emphasis at the end of m. 3. Measure 4 introduces the dramatic change we were looking for, but didn’t find, in “Ya Shadi il-Alhan”: a clear tonicization of jins Rast on G, complete with E-natural and F-half-sharp to solidify it. The C at the peak of the melody in m. 5 doesn’t feel like a tonic, but rather like the fourth scale degree above the tonic of G. This Rast passage continues through m. 9, at the end of which the B-flat lazima reintroduces jins Nahawand on G, which continues through m. 11. The brief reference to jins Hijaz on G in m. 12 neutralizes what has come before, and mm. 13 and 14 clearly tonicize the octave C—with the same mystery jins from “Ya Shadi il-Alhan” (shown here to be different than the Rast on G from mm. 4-9)—followed by a descent (via a brief reference to the A-flat of Hijaz on G) to the root jins Rast on C by the end of the passage.

The contrast between these two passages couldn’t be clearer to my ear, and it should be apparent that if a composer or musician really wished to tonicize jins Rast on the 5th scale degree, he or she would do so using the characteristic “jins baggage” underneath the tonic I referred to above. This type of tonicization is in fact extremely rare in the repertory in Maqam Rast—I have encountered only one other piece using it (also composed by Abdel-Wahhab)—though, as we saw above, it is a fundamental tonicization within Maqam Bayati. Much more common in Rast is the tonicization found in “Ya Shadi il-Alhan”—I have encountered only one other piece using it (also composed by Abdel-Wahhab)—though, as we saw above, it is a fundamental tonicization within Maqam Bayati. More common in Rast is the tonicization found in “Ya Shadi il-Alhan,” which for lack of any other name I have decided to call “jins Secondary Rast G/C” to distinguish it from “true” Rast on G that actually tonicizes G.

One might reasonably ask, based on the arguments I have made regarding expanding the range of a jins, why give this a jins name at all? Isn’t it the same as the “notes underneath the tonic”
described above, and hence simply a part of the ordinary Jins Rast on the octave tonic? The difference is that in the passage in “Ya Shadi il-Alhan” (and in other similar passages we will see below, as well as in mm. 13 and 14 of the “Fakkaruni” passage), the area beneath the tonic is dwelt on, the area above the tonic doesn’t occur in the melody (or at most the D one step above the tonic), and the G is strong and present, though not tonicized. If the G were absent, and most of the melody were above the tonic, I would instead refer to the A-natural and B-half-flat as part of the upper-octave Jins Rast. I admit that as a result of the way I’ve chosen to delineate the boundaries are sometimes not as clear as they are in the conventional theory—as we saw above in the case of Bayati (Examples 6 and 7), the ajnas as I describe them actually overlap each other as scale fragments—nonetheless, I prefer not to force the music to fit the procrustean bed of an inadequate theory, and instead to allow the theory to reflect the less-than-clear boundaries within the music itself. To me, the combination of tonicization and melodic motion settles the issues of analysis as well as can be hoped.

The second hitherto-unnamed Jins I’ll discuss here occurs in Maqam Hijazkar and those of its family, such as Shadd Araban, Suzidil, etc. Jins Hijaz (occurring as a root jins in Maqam Hijaz, and as a secondary jins in Maqam Suznak, Maqam Bayati Shuri, and many other maqamat), has the same intervallic relationships below its tonic (i.e., “jins baggage”) as does Jins Bayati: a whole step immediately below the tonic, and a 3/4 step between the 6th and 7th scale degrees below the tonic. Example 10 shows a few characteristic melodies in Jins Hijaz: Example 10(a) is a simplified version of the melody of the call to prayer used all over the Arab world, in Hijaz on D; Example 10(b) is the opening of the third verse of “Ghannili Shwayya,” in Jins Hijaz on G, which in this case is the 5th degree of Maqam Suznak (whose root Jins is Rast C).

So how should we describe the Jins that opens the muwashshab “Tif Ya Durri,” in Maqam Hijazkar-Kurd on C? See Example 11.

Conventional theory would account for this passage using two ajnas: Hijaz on C, and Hijaz on G. But there is one tonic (the C), and the melody is stepwise and contiguous surrounding it. We also cannot say that the notes underneath the tonic of C represent a variation on the jins baggage for Jins Hijaz C, because the B-flat and A-half-flat that would typically be there in that case are very strong in the repertory, and because the diminished third that occurs around the tonic between D-flat and B-natural is so characteristic, distinguishing the quality of this jins from the usual Jins Hijaz. Hence I have chosen to call this unnamed jins “Jins Hijazkar C” which I represent as in Example 12.

Notice that in this case I have not made the notes underneath the tonic a smaller size. That is because melodies in Jins Hijazkar, while usually centered on the tonic, spend as much time below it as above.

A close look at the repertory reveals other examples of hitherto unnamed ajnas. I have counted around fifteen, four or five of which are quite common (we will encounter a few others later in this article), with these two—Jins Secondary Rast and Jins Hijazkar—being the most common. Jins Secondary Rast also has a prominent place in Maqam Sikah, and Jins Hijazkar also has a prominent place in Maqam Nawa Athar. Along the model of the revised version of Maqam Bayati I presented in Example 7 above, Examples 13 (a–d) show my versions of Maqam Rast, Maqam Sikah, Maqam Hijazkar, and Maqam Nawa Athar, showing these two “new,” previously unnamed ajnas.

See http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/unnamedajnas.html for more examples, as well as for descriptions of several other previously unnamed ajnas, including Secondary Ajam, Secondary Saba—discussed later in this paper—and Pseudo-Sikah.

A MAQAM AS A PATHWAY; COMMON PATHWAYS

When discussing the motion or direction of a maqam, Arab musicians and theorists refer to the concept of “sayir” (meaning
more specific with this concept: some maqamat start at the bottom, go up, and then come down again, while other maqamat start in the middle, go up, and then descend, while others start at the top of the scale and descend. At this level of generality, all of these patterns can be observed in the repertory, and certain maqamat can be observed always to obey one sayir (such as rarer maqamat like Zanjaran, which we'll encounter later), while others appear to have the option of using more than one sayir (such as Rast).

We can formalize this rather minimal concept by specifying the most frequent ajnas and sequences of ajnas used in any given maqam, which will take the maqam graphs in Examples 7 and 13 one step further. Let us return to Maqam Rast for further illustration. The transcription and analysis of the remaining melody of "Ya Shadi il-Alhan" (the opening of which served as Example 8) is as in Example 14. Another muwashshah typically performed in the same wasla as "Ya Shadi il-Alhan" is "Sihtu Wajdan," part of whose transcription and analysis is shown in Example 15.

Example 16 shows the chorus of an early song for the Egyptian Singer Layla Murad, composed by Daoud Husny, called "Hayrana Leh." In all three of these examples—and we could present many more similar to them—we see the expression of a pathway among three ajnas base around the 5th scale degree of Maqam Rast: Jins Secondary Rast G/C, Jins Nahawand G, and Jins Hijaz G. Those who might wish to see Jins Hijaz as a modulation away from Maqam Rast into Maqam Suznak (as Allah Werdi and Marcus do) are missing the fact that this Jins Hijaz is just as seamlessly woven into the overall Rast melody as are Jins Secondary Rast and Jins Nahawand, and that therefore we should consider Maqam Rast (the principal member of its family) large enough to include Jins Hijaz as a passing modulation within it. In fact, that modulation occurs with overwhelming frequency in the repertory of Maqam Rast, and usually in conjunction with these other two secondary ajnas, Nahawand and Secondary Rast.

An even greater specification of sayir would involve a discussion of the melodic vocabulary used within each jins in the progression of the maqam. We will return to this in subsequent sections, where we will consider the specific case of Maqam Suznak, which is echoed by Marcus (1992, 2002, 2007). The common understanding of practicing musicians is consistent with these two sources.

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"trip," "procession," "movement," or "course"): each maqam is said to have its own sayir, which, in the descriptions I have encountered, usually means little more than that either the melodies in the maqam start at the bottom of the scale, or start instead at the top of the scale. 18 Turkish musicians are a little
I suggest the following criteria as a way to distinguish *Maqam Suznak* from the use of *Jins Hijaz* within *Maqam Rast*: when *Jins Hijaz* on the 5th above Rast is 1. heavily emphasized as a long-term modulation (as in the second verse of Umm Kulthum’s long song “Aruh Li-Meen”), when it 2. takes precedence over the other secondary ajnas (as in “Ghannili Shwayya”), or when it 3. opens the melody of the song or piece (as in the instrumental “Tahmila Suznak”), then we should say we are in *Maqam Suznak*. None of those cases apply to the examples above.

Several other ajnas have a frequent enough occurrence within *Maqam Rast* melodies that I feel they should be included in the overall structure of the *maqam*, namely *Jins Bayati* on the 5th scale degree, *Jins Saba* on the 5th scale degree, and *Jins Sikah* on the 3rd scale degree. In a *maqam* that is as central to the Arabic music repertory as *Maqam Rast* (many, including myself, would consider Rast the most important *maqam* of the entire system; in Syria there is an expression that translates “If your night is long, use Rast”), its frequent occurrence is bound to mean that it occurs with many variants, and that the melodic and modulatory vocabulary available to it is very large. In general, the most common and central *maqamat* contain the greatest number of pathways, while the rarer *maqamat* have many fewer pathways. The branch *maqamat* contain a subset of the pathways available to the principal *maqam* of the family—with each different branch exploring a different subset. Example 17 is a partial graph of the most important ajnas within *Maqam Rast*.

In comparison with other music traditions, it should come as no surprise that the *maqamat* each contain a finite number of frequent modulations that can be named and catalogued, with

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21 The *tahmila* is a genre of instrumental piece that involves an improvisatory call and response between the solo instrument and other instruments; frequently each instrumentalist will take a turn soloing over the course of the performance.
rarer modulations either being repeated, and therefore also catalogable, or being unique occurrences (which then give rise to an analytical choice as to whether to view them as fundamental to the maqam, or explainable via some series of other common modulations several steps away, or completely unique and original). In Arabic music the collection of common modulations becomes the unconscious knowledge of both practitioners and listeners in the tradition (more so in that the tradition is oral rather than written), and that is in large part what generates the senses of expectation and surprise. When Arab musicians improvise in Maqam Rast, they move almost instinctually to ajnas such as Hijaz and Bayati on the 5th scale degree; if a typical modulation is delayed long enough it can cause expectation and suspense in the listeners simply by its non-occurrence. In the opposite direction, that common acquired knowledge is also part of what contributes to a listener’s feelings of stability and tonicization; for my own part I notice when tonicizations occur within a note or two at the most, because those few notes fulfill my unconscious expectations built from similar tonicizations I have previously heard. Other experienced listeners to the tradition also hear those tonicizations very quickly, a phenomenon that can be observed first-hand at a live performance when listeners react verbally to a modulation or tonicization they like within a second or two. Listeners need not be able to identify those modulations by name, or have any understanding of theory, to be able to react thus, because they have stored all of these jins modulations unconsciously in memory over the course of years of listening.

It is on the basis of my observation of the frequent reoccurrence of many ajnas in specific contexts within different maqamat that I insist that a theory accounting for them must be based first and foremost on a catalogue, or lexicon. It is on the basis of observing the distinctiveness and ease of the most common of those modulations that I insist that we must view those catalogued as being part of our understanding of the fundamental structure of the maqamat, rather than something extra, or something that moves us away from a given maqam. This is perhaps the biggest gap I feel between conventional theory, which describes a maqam only in terms of a one- or two-octave scale (occasionally with one different version), and actual practice, where pieces in the repertory of a given maqam move through many more ajnas than that abstracted scale represents. And, as I will discuss in detail below, because these modulations are arbitrary—not in the sense of an individual musician’s actions, which are heavily determined by the repertory he or she has absorbed, but in the sense of being determined in the community at large by the conventions of a culture rather than by absolute underlying principles of melody or intervallic relations—they must each be understood on their own terms and learned one by one. (See http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/common paths.html for more examples and audio for this section).

**EXAMPLE 17. Network graph of Maqam Rast.**

**ALTERNATE PATHWAYS**

Sometimes we find that a given maqam has distinct alternate pathways, either the result of regional differences or of change over time. Let us compare three examples illustrating Maqam Bayati Shuri (also known as Maqam Qarjighar), one of the branches of the Bayati family of maqamat. Example 18, the muwashshah “Hibbi da3ani lil-wisaal,” illustrates the path of Bayati Shuri with which most present-day musicians are familiar.

As you can see, the tonicization opening the piece is Jins Hijaz on the 4th scale degree above the tonic (D in this case). A brief foray into Jins Bayati on the octave tonic leads back to the emphasis on Jins Hijaz on the 4th scale degree, with a brief passage at the beginning of m. 3 I refer to as “Jins Pseudo-Sikah” (another unnamed jins), because of its melodic motion that resembles Jins Sikah despite not being based on a quarter-tone pitch. Pseudo-Sikah frequently occurs in two principal instances: either tonicizing/emphasizing the 3rd scale degree of Jins Hijaz, or tonicizing/emphasizing the 3rd scale degree of Jins Ajam. Because that tonicization is usually brief and unstable, some might wish to consider this simply a part of Jins Hijaz (or Jins Ajam as the case may be), as a subsidiary tonicization within the jins, or as an accidental/chromatic passage. In any case, the remainder of m. 3 and the opening of m. 4 are in Jins Hijaz, with the root Jins Bayati of the maqam occurring at the end of the fourth and final measure of the piece, almost as a cadential afterthought. Ignoring for a moment the brief Pseudo-Sikah passage (which intensifies Jins Hijaz in any case), we can summarize the pathway as follows: from Jins Hijaz on the 4th scale degree, up to Jins Bayati on the octave tonic, back to Jins Hijaz.

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22 We should note that in the case of Bayati Shuri, the expected 6th scale degree under Jins Bayati—B-half-flat—does not occur in the upper part of the maqam, and instead the B-natural from Jins Hijaz remains even when the tonic emphasis is on the Bayati above. This is one example in which the strength of one jins can affect part of the jins baggage of another jins. However, if the melody dipped below the root tonic (admittedly a rare occurrence in this maqam—although it happens in instrumental improvisations), we would expect the B-half-flat in the lower octave to be present.

23 In Jins Nahawand, for example, a common melody using accidentals involves the raising of the minor third to a major third as a leading tone to the 4th scale degree, before descending through the minor third again to the tonic. But this melody doesn’t in fact tonicize that 4th scale degree, and certainly not to the degree that Pseudo-Sikah tonicizes the 3rd scale degrees of Ajam and Hijaz, so I treat it as a melody within Jins Nahawand rather than a distinct jins.
on the 4th scale degree, and finally with a brief cadential phrase to the root Jins Bayati. We could illustrate this with a graph as in Example 19 (this graph is intended to be read from top to bottom, with the jins at the top being the leading and most prominent jins in the piece, and the left-to-right axis representing pitch register; the number following the jins name represents the scale degree of the jins tonic relative to the root tonic of the maqam).

My second example (Example 20) is the 1931 song “Mihtar Ya Naas” composed by Mohamed al-Qassabgi for Umm Kulthum. As you can see, Jins Hijaz on the 4th scale degree is still the opening and most prominent jins in this piece, and Jins Bayati on the root tonic occurs, once again, only in a cadential motion at the end of the chorus and the verse. The chorus of the piece includes only these two ajnas: a long emphasis of Jins Hijaz followed by a cadence to Jins Bayati. The verse, however, introduces a very different jins than in Example 14: Jins Nahawand.

EXAMPLE 18. “Hubbi Da3ani lil-Wisaal” in Maqam Bayati Shuri.


EXAMPLE 20. “Mihtar Ya Naas” in Maqam Bayati Shuri.

on the 7th scale degree. This jins lasts for most of the verse before the melody descends back to Jins Hijaz on the 4th scale degree, followed by the same melody from the end of the chorus (which uses Jins Hijaz on the 4th scale degree and Jins Bayati on the root) to end the verse. We could represent this pathway using the graph shown in Example 21.

This pathway may seem very unusual to those familiar with the first version of Maqam Bayati Shuri, in part because of its disregard for the octave tonic of Bayati, and its tonicization of the 7th scale degree. However, it is a pathway that can be found in other pieces of the time period (the first few decades of the 20th century), and it may even have been more common at that time than the version of Bayati Shuri (shown in Example 18) that eventually became the standard.24 The apparent strangeness of this pathway actually reveals an important principle of the maqam system once we understand it in relation to Jins Hijaz. Hijaz is a 4-note jins, like Bayati, in that its most common modulations occur on its 4th scale degree, and those modulations are to Jins Nahawand on the 4th scale degree and also to Jins Rast on the 4th scale degree. When Hijaz occurs as a secondary jins in Maqamat such as Rast / Suznak, Nahawand, and Ajam / Shawq Afza, it tonicizes the 5th scale degree above the root, and as a result its own secondary tonic, on its 4th scale degree, is also the octave tonic above the root jins of the maqam. This combination of a jins spanning a fifth with a jins spanning a fourth, resulting in an octave, is the most frequent, but not the only, type of jins combination that occurs in the maqam system. Bayati Shuri is a good counter-example, combining a two ajnas each spanning a 4th, with the result that the secondary tonic above the second jins is a 7th above the root tonic. (See http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/alternatepaths.html for audio, as well as for another example of alternate pathways within Maqam Ajam.)

The manifestation of this secondary pathway suggests several important principles of modulation within maqamat: first, ajnas have a tendency to carry their typical relationships to other ajnas with them, even when they occur as secondary ajnas in other maqamat—as Hijaz carried its relation to Jins Nahawand on its 4th scale degree into its secondary tonic relation within Maqam Bayati Shuri. This could be viewed as a more extended form of the “jins baggage” described above: not only do ajnas tend to preserve their usual relationships with surrounding notes and intervals, they also preserve their usual relationships to other ajnas. This tendency is not as apparent to observe when the secondary tonic of a particular secondary jins agrees with the octave tonic above the root jins (as when a jins spanning a 4th links to a jins spanning a 5th), leading us to surmise in those cases, possibly incorrectly, that the jins appearing on the octave tonic does so because of a relationship to the root jins. In fact, some such occurrences are better explained in terms of a relation to the strong secondary jins in the middle, such as when Jins Nahawand occurs on the octave tonic above Maqam Rast in conjunction with Jins Hijaz or Jins Bayati on the 5th scale degree. When we encounter such passages, a careful listening will often reveal a stronger relationship between that Jins Nahawand on the octave and the jins tonicizing the 5th scale degree, as the 4th above it, rather than between it and the 1st scale degree (incidentally, the appearance of Jins Pseudo-Sikah in its typical relationship with the secondary Jins Hijaz, in Example 18, illustrates the same principle).

There are several other points suggested by the comparison of these two pathways:

- A maqam derives its character and shape from its pathways among ajnas, rather than from any abstracted scale or collection of scale fragments—the tonal character and feel of these different versions of Bayati Shuri is quite distinct in these examples.
- Two ajnas are rarely sufficient to characterize a maqam, whose total pathway frequently spans more than an octave, and whose typical motion usually goes through at least three different ajnas, and in many cases more.
- The path that defines the shape of any given maqam is arbitrary, in the sense intended by Saussure:25 it is the result of convention, developed by a community, rather than the result of some absolute principle. As we can see, the pairing of Jins Hijaz on the 4th scale degree of Jins Bayati opens up two equally valid pathways, each of which may be the result of tendencies in each jins, some of which contradict and some of which complement each other.26 So the choice of which pathway to use is arbitrary rather than determined.

The tendencies within each jins are also arbitrary, in the same sense: they are the result of cultural habits and conventions rather than some ideal rule about the behavior of intervals. It is easy to imagine the possibility of Hijaz or Bayati having morphed into 5-note ajnas rather than 4-note ajnas, if more musicians and composers had emphasized modulations on their 5th rather than 4th scale degrees. (As an analogue to the arbitrariness of pathways among ajnas, consider the fact that the V–IV chordal motion so common to 20th-century American popular music was not a common or accepted part of the vocabulary of Baroque music, which almost always progressed IV–V.)

24 A more comprehensive survey of the repertory is needed to establish the frequency of both pathways at different time periods.

25 Saussure ([1916] 2011). For a discussion of the relevance of Saussure to contemporary linguistics see Pinker (2000, 74–75). Even though music does not have a correspondence to meaning as words do, it is still functionally a signal system, based on units that are not absolutely but rather culturally and contextually determined. I will devote more time to this important point in later writings.

26 We could advance the hypothesis that that octave equivalence became more important in Arabic music after the 1930s, because we see more examples of non-octave equivalence before the 30s than after. Maqam Hijazkar is another revealing example: many early-20th century examples use Jins Nahawand rather than Jins Hijazkar on the octave tonic to open the maqam, with the Jins Hijaz on the root only manifesting at the end of melodies. This pathway dwindled to insignificance by the mid-to-late 20th century. Historical change is one of the things made possible by arbitrariness.
It is worth dwelling for a moment on the importance of comprehending the idea of arbitrariness for music theory. Some seeking to understand the maqamat hope that a few, simple, deterministic principles or rules can be discovered that will unlock the secrets of the maqam system. The ancients (both Greek and Arab) believed in some kind of absolute “harmoniousness” that determined musical relations, and medieval Arab theorists such as Al-Farabi echoed Plato’s statements placing different values on certain musical modes. I recognize that I am setting up a straw man here, but I have encountered many questions from students, unfamiliar with Arabic music, reflecting this rule-based approach. If there were absolute rules governing music, music would never change. The underlying reality is one of a plethora of tendencies, some of which are more common than others, and repeated habitually enough to be worth mentioning as a tendency to expect. “Harmoniousness” is, I would argue, determined by context: the frequent occurrence is harmonious because it is expected, and therefore does not create as much tension when it occurs as the less frequent occurrence does. (The second version of Bayati Shuri was more dissonant to me when I first encountered it simply because I was accustomed to the first version.)

We can see this arbitrariness easily in the tone systems: the Arabic maqamat appear tremendously disharmonious to Western ears unused to listening to them, while they are very harmonious to Arab ears; whereas the equal-tempered scale of Western music is disharmonious to those used to the intervals of the Arabic maqamat (just as it would be if played to a European of the 16th century used to music built from Just, Pythagorean, and Mean-Tone intervallic relationships), but modern Western musicians have become so used to it that they don’t even notice that every interval is out of tune except the octave. Hence the tone systems of music are arbitrary, changeable, and adaptable to different conventions.

Those who hope to describe an arbitrary system like the maqamat by finding absolute principles underlying it are engaged in a logical fallacy—the consequence of an arbitrary system is that each piece of content has to be learned one by one, like the words of a spoken language, which cannot be predicted from rules about phoneme combinations, even though broad statistical tendencies for phoneme usage can be found—but to my mind it also reflects an intellectual laziness: the unwillingness to learn all of the different kinds of musical motion that occur because of a preconceived belief that they can be predicted by applying derived rules to those few instances encountered initially. On the contrary, I have found that every new piece or song I encounter reveals new information about the maqam system, whether that is the confirmation of a common pathway, the revelation of a new pathway that manifests a less-common tendency among ajnas, or (very rarely) appears to be completely unique. To grasp the principles of the maqam system, analysts and theorists will have to learn and then catalogue the majority of its content. I am not suggesting that theory should amount to mere cataloguing, but that cataloguing is a necessary first step to enable the evaluation of which are more and which less common tendencies, and to put those tendencies into context. An arbitrary system is large and contains a great deal of information—information that is stored in memory by practitioners in the case of oral musical traditions such as the Arab one—whereas a hypothetical rule-based system would be small because every new instance would simply be the result of the replication of a rule. The most interesting theoretical question for me becomes, “How is such an arbitrary system cognitively instantiated?” as opposed to the fallacy-based theoretical question “Can we derive fundamental or universal rules to account for the maqamat?”

MULTIPLE COMMON PATHWAYS IN MAQAM BAYATI

My final example illustrating Maqam Bayati Shuri shows the use of a Bayati Shuri pathway within Maqam Bayati. This is the well-known Syrian/Palestinian folkloric song (often used at weddings) “Ah Ya Hilu, Yamsallini” (Example 22).

The opening jins of the song is Ajam on the flat 6th scale degree, another quite common jins used in Maqam Bayati. My opening examples in Maqam Bayati didn’t show it, but this jins is in fact present in two of those three pieces: in the Sama3i


27 See Maalouf (2002) for the categorization of scales according to which are more harmonious.
28 It is worth noting the similarity of this statement to the mathematical principle in Information Theory that the less common, and hence less-expected, signals carry more information than the more common and expected ones (Pierce [1980], Shannon and Weaver [1949]). This is an argument I will develop further in future papers.
29 Pierce (1980).
30 This brings to mind the story about the five blind men each with their own conflicting descriptions of an elephant, based on what part of the elephant they are standing near and able to touch—“it is flexible and rubbery” (the trunk), “it is smooth and hard” (the tusks), etc.
Bayati, *Jins* Ajam on the 6th scale degree forms a major part of the third *khana*, while in the dance piece for Taheya Carioca, Ajam appears after the passage I transcribed in Example 6. In both of those cases, it appears in the same way: via a descent from the octave after the appearance of *Jins* Bayati on the octave tonic, then leading down to Nahawand on the 4th scale degree. In our example here, “Ah Ya Hilu,” the opening *Jins* Ajam is similarly followed by a descent to *Jins* Nahawand on the 4th scale degree. The line repeats, followed by a brief dip to the root *Jins* Bayati (its first appearance in the song), which is then followed a cadential melody using *Jins* Hijaz on the 4th scale degree, reaching up to the octave tonic and then descending down to end on the root *Jins* Bayati. This cadential melody is more or less identical to the first pathway we discussed for *Maqam* Bayati Shuri, shown in Examples 18 and 19.

The analytical question here becomes: should we say that we have modulated from *Maqam* Bayati to *Maqam* Bayati Shuri in this piece? I would argue that the answer is no. Because the modulation is brief, and especially because it occurs cadentially, we should say that we have modulated to *Jins* Hijaz within *Maqam* Bayati, or that *Maqam* Bayati has borrowed a pathway from *Maqam* Bayati Shuri. This Hijaz-on-scale-degree-4 pathway down to the root *Jins* Bayati is in fact quite common in pieces in *Maqam* Bayati (it also occurs, after the Ajam passage, in the Taheya Carioca dance piece of Example 6), common enough that musicians and listeners feel that it is a fundamental part of the *maqam*, rather than a departure from it—in the same way that the use of Ajam on the 6th scale degree, or Rast on the 4th scale degree, are also fundamental expected *jins* modulations within *Maqam* Bayati. It is worth noting that *Maqam* Bayati is the major *maqam* of its family, with Bayati Shuri being one of its branch *maqamat*. A tendency across the repertory as a whole is for the principal *maqam* of a family to include the melodies and *ajnas* of its branch *maqamat*, a point we illustrated earlier in *Maqam* Rast.

If we allow *Jins* Ajam and *Jins* Hijaz a place within the overall structure of *Maqam* Bayati, we can then represent that *maqam* with the following graph (Example 23) which, as we can see, includes *Maqam* Bayati Shuri as a sub-graph (or an overlapping graph if we include *Jins* Nahawand on the 7th scale degree within the Bayati Shuri graph).

The lines in the graph represent acceptable pathways, or *jins* modulations, within the *maqam*. Not every *jins* within the structure connects to every other; for example: *Jins* Bayati 8 doesn’t connect to *Jins* Nahawand 4, and *Jins* Rast 4 doesn’t connect to *Jins* Ajam 6. The root *Jins* Bayati 1 has the greatest number of connections to other *ajnas* within the structure.

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31 Readers may notice that the relationship between Ajam and Nahawand here is identical to the relationship between relative major and minor keys in Western tonal music. This relationship, which is commonplace between the 4th and 6th scale degrees of both *Maqam* Bayati and *Maqam* Kurd, does not occur frequently (if at all) when either *jins* is the root *jins* of a *maqam*, in *Maqam* Ajam or *Maqam* Nahawand respectively. So it appears that the relation between them here is actually more the result of a strong relationship between Bayati and its flat-6.

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32 The *mawwal* is a genre of vocal improvisation that sets a poem, usually in the colloquial language. It is typical for the *mawwal* to open with a *layali*, an improvisation on the syllables “ya layli” (“oh my night”).

33 *Jins* Saba’s third note is a secondary, but not a primary, tonic center—and in fact I would argue that in *Maqam* Saba, the most prominent secondary tonic center for actual modulation is the 6th scale degree, rather than the 3rd scale degree, above the root tonic. See http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/jins2ndsaba.html for audio examples and more discussion of Secondary Saba.
has three main uses within Secondary Saba (that 3
system. The first and second (Examples 25[a-b])
Ajam.
muwashshahat
scale degree above
5
maqam
Ajam Ush-
Ajam, using
Secondary Rast,
Second-
Layali are vocal improvisatory phrases using the syllables ''Ya layli'' (''Oh,
analysis: a primer 249
mawwal
Jins Bayati
scale degree, embed-
century.
Jins
using it. This
on the 5
ajnas
Secondary Saba at the octave tonic
scale degree, rather than on its 5
Rast and
Rast. After several more passages following this
scale degrees to
''Kull illy habb itnasaf'' (see http://www.
Maqam Ajam/Showq Afza with Jins Secondary
Maqam Ajam Ushayran with Jins Secondary
preceeding the poem. This opening passage is quite
Rast, in the
scale degree of the
ajnas
system: because observing the functionality of Rast and
scale degree, on which it modulates to many of the
same ajnas, such as Hijaz, Nahawand, and Bayati. The second version of
Ajam, on the other hand, has its principal secondary tonics on its 3rd and 6th
scale degrees, rather than on its 5th, and it appears to borrow some of its
structure from its position as a secondary jins on the 6th scale degree of the

In the marwaaal “Kull illy habb itnasaf” (see http://www.
maqamlessons.com/analysis/uniquepaths.html for audio and
more discussion), Abdel-Wahab starts in Maqam Rast, in the
layali36

These modulations are uncommon nowadays, though I find
them to have been more common in the early 20th century.
Maqam Dalansheen is the name given to the maqam within the
Rast family whose principal secondary jins is Secondary Saba;
however, few pieces use this as a principal modulation, so I treat
it instead as a rare pathway within Rast. (The famous mu-
washshah "Ya maal ish-sham" makes prominent use of this
modulation in its middle-section). Secondary Saba has a third
usage: between the 3rd and 5th scale degrees of Maqam Ajam,
where its 3rd scale degree is a common tone with the principal
secondary tonic of Ajam, its 5th scale degree (Example 26).

The most famous occurrence of this modulation is the second
verse of Umm Kulthum’s long song "Lissa Fakir,"34 composed by Riyad is-Sunbati, but it is common enough to be encountered elsewhere in the repertory of Maqam Ajam from Egypt.35

Although Umm Kulthum sings “Lissa Fakir” on concert B-flat, it is con-
ceptually in Ajam on C—it is usually played on C by contemporary musi-
cians—and the strong presence of Jins Bayati on the 5th scale degree
(conceptually G, but concert F in the Umm Kulthum recordings) confirms that the maqam here doesn’t behave as Ajam Ushayran—which never has Jins Bayati F.

I have observed two distinct versions of Ajam in the repertory, one that
behaves much like Maqam Rast and Maqam Nahawand, in that its principal secondary tonic is its 5th scale degree, on which it modulates to many of the same ajnas, such as Hijaz, Nahawand, and Bayati. The second version of
Ajam, on the other hand, has its principal secondary tonics on its 3rd and 6th
scale degrees, rather than on its 5th, and it appears to borrow some of its
structure from its position as a secondary jins on the 6th scale degree of the

34 maqamat Bayati, Kurd, and Saba (as shown above in the discussion of
Maqam Bayati). This version of Ajam can be referred to as Ajam
Ushayran (Ajam on B-flat), as it is in the compendium Min Kunuuzina
(Darwish [1955]), which includes several muwashshabat using it. This
version does not seem to manifest in Egypt past the 1940s, having been
replaced by the 5th-scale-degree-leaning Ajam. For discussion of these
alternate versions of Ajam, see http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/
ajampaths.html.

35 Layali are vocal improvisatory phrases using the syllables “Ya layli” (“Oh,
my night”) and “Ya 3cini” (“Oh, my eye”).

---

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Jins Rast C} \\
\hline
\text{Jins Secondary Rast G / C} \\
\hline
\text{Jins Secondary Saba G / C} \\
\end{array} \]

**EXAMPLE 25(A). Maqam Rast with Jins Secondary Saba (a.k.a. Maqam Dalansheen).**

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Jins Ajam B-flat} \\
\hline
\text{Jins Secondary Ajam F / B-flat} \\
\hline
\text{Jins Saba / Secondary Saba G / B-flat} \\
\end{array} \]

**EXAMPLE 25(B). Maqam Ajam Ushayran with Jins Secondary Saba.**

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\hline
\text{Jins Ajam C} \\
\end{array} \]

**EXAMPLE 26. Maqam Ajam/Showq Afza with Jins Secondary Saba.**
true: this particular *mawwal* is the only instance I have encountered in the repertory of this modulation. As a consequence, the modulation can seem distant and jarring (again, not for structural intervallic reasons, but because of arbitrary convention). Abdel-Wahab accomplishes it in this *mawwal* via a secondary *jins* that is distant to both *maqamat*—Secondary Saba. It is as though he could establish a connection between Rast and Ajam on the same tonic only by going as far away from each *jins* as possible and playing with the dramatic shifts in mood engendered by the juxtaposition of these *ajnas*. Ajam seems particularly bright and sweet, in a very intense other-worldly and nostalgic way, when it first appears, transforming the intense dark and unresolved quality of the Saba. Abdel-Wahab’s eventual return to Rast at the end of the *mawwal*—by descending from the octave of Ajam, and then surprising us by lowering the 3rd scale degree to that of Rast—seems somewhat jarring and unsatisfactory to me, as though the tensions opened up in the rest of the piece needed something more than what he offers here for a complete resolution. But that doesn’t take away from the masterful and ingenious pathway that Abdel-Wahhab used to forge a connection between distant parts of the *Maqam* system. Example 27 is a graph of the pathways used in this *mawwal*.

The second *mawwal* I’d like to discuss, “Amana Ya Leil,” is in *Maqam* Zanjaran (also known as *Maqam* Zankulah), a rare *maqam* to begin with. A member of the Hijaz Family, Zanjaran’s secondary *jins* is Ajam on its 4th scale degree, in place of the Nahawand and Rast that would normally occur there in *Maqam* Hijaz. The common *sayir* of Zanjaran starts with *Jins* Hijaz on the upper-octave tonic and descends through *Jins* Ajam on the 4th scale degree, resolving to *Jins* Hijaz on the root. Abdel-Wahhab follows this conventional pathway through more than half of the *mawwal*, including all of the opening *layali* and the first few lines of the poem. The short qanun and violin solos in between vocal phrases follow the same path. Only two things are worth noting here: the brief emphasis on *Jins* Pseudo-Sikah on the 6th scale degree (created by a raised 5th scale degree [G-sharp]; this *jins* appears in its typical place on the 3rd scale degree of *Jins* Ajam), and the use of the lowered 6th scale degree (A-flat) on the descent, which is part of the upper baggage of *Jins* Hijaz on the root. Both of these accidental changes are fully within the typical structures of *Jins* Ajam and *Jins* Hijaz, respectively, so that we should consider them fundamental to *Maqam* Zanjaran. Example 28 shows the core *ajnas* of *Maqam* Zanjaran.

Abdel-Wahhab gradually begins to expand *Jins* Ajam into *Maqam* Ajam by dwelling on its octave tonic, the 4th scale degree above the octave tonic of Hijaz (hence the 11th scale degree above the root). Brief passages through *Jins* Secondary Ajam C/F (8/11), *Jins* Ajam F (11), *Jins* Nahawand C (8), and *Jins* Nahawand F (11) solidify this tonic emphasis. Then Abdel-Wahab introduces Secondary Saba descending from that octave-and-a-fourth tonic (similar to the descent from the octave tonic of Rast in the *mawwal* “Kull illy habb itnasaf”). This particular *jins*, as I noted before, is quite intense and dissonant, and creates a moment of tension and drama that, instead of resolving, intensifies further on the descent, by the introduction of *yet another* *Jins* Secondary Saba, a fourth below the first, between the 3rd and 5th scale degrees of *Jins* Ajam F (hence the 6th and 8th scale degrees of Zanjaran). This astonishing modulation then resolves back to Ajam before descending finally to the root *Jins* Hijaz. Because of its combination of distant modulations and complete coherence within the *maqam*, the one long melodic phrase that starts with the modulation to the second Secondary Saba and ends with the resolution down to the root of Zanjaran is to me one of the most masterful and ingenious single phrases I’ve encountered in the repertory. For the purposes of analysis, this passage demonstrates how a secondary *Jins* (in this case Ajam) can be expanded into a full *maqam* of its own, yet still fit within the base *maqam* by carrying with it its own secondary *ajnas* pathways. It also demonstrates how a rich knowledge of the many various secondary pathways within the *maqam* system can allow a master like Abdel-Wahhab to create ingenious and original

37 *Jins* Secondary Ajam is, like *Jins* Secondary Rast, a *jins* that tonalizes the note a 4th above the conventionally-defined tonic. In *Maqam* Ajam on F, the *Jins* that occurs between the 5th scale degree and the octave is [C D E F]. The conventional definition would call this “Ajam C”, but, while it shares the same notes as that *jins*, it actually tonalizes F. In my reference to this *jins* I have chosen to refer both to the conventional tonic and to the actual tonic—hence “*Jins* Secondary Ajam C/F” or “*Jins* Secondary Ajam 5/8.” Within the overall context of *Maqam* Zanjaran, where *Maqam* Ajam occurs on its fourth scale degree, this becomes “*Jins* Secondary Ajam 8/11” relative to the Zanjaran tonic of C (1).
combinations. Here, Abdel-Wahab is showing off his knowledge of two different versions of Maqam Ajam—Ajam Ushayran and “Egyptian” Ajam—and juxtaposing them side-by-side using a distinctive secondary modulation within each. I should also note that the second Secondary Saba modulation—the one between the 3rd and 5th scale degrees of Jins Ajam—also occurs in several muwashshahat in Maqam Zanjaran included in Min Kunuzina; therefore it has a double interpretation as a secondary pathway within Maqam Ajam and a secondary pathway within Maqam Zanjaran. We can thus surmise that it is that double meaning of the jins that in part allows the resolution back to Zanjaran.

Example 29 shows a transcription of the phrases in question, and Example 30 is a graph of the maqam structure manifested in “Amana Ya Leil.” Just to be sure you heard him right the first time (which on a first listening may have been jarring and disorienting), Abdel-Wahab repeats the same sequence of modulations in the final line of the mawwal. He is clearly emphasizing the intentionality of this unique sequence of two linked Sabas a fourth apart, making sure that we hear his virtuosity within the maqam system. (Audio for these examples, as well as more discussion, can be found at http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/uniquepaths.html.)

**CONCLUSIONS**

The aim of this presentation has been to demonstrate how the abstract descriptions of the maqamat from previous theories can be applied to actual musical examples, and the modifications of theory required by that application. I am in agreement with the majority of information available about the classification and naming of ajnas and maqamat, but that information becomes confusing and contradictory when we attempt to use it to account for real musical examples, which has been one of the significant obstacles to analysis for those outside of the tradition. The major analytical problems I find are: the potential misattribution of ajnas when scale fragments are given prominence above tonicization; the failure to note distinct categories of melodic movement and tonicization because of similar intervalic structure; the appearance of excessive modulation created by the naming of separate maqamat each time a different jins occurs (it is important to recognize when a jins modulation is small enough, and typical enough, to be considered part of the base maqam, and when, on the other hand, the modulation is significant enough to warrant the naming of a new maqam); and the lack of a canonical catalogue accounting for common and uncommon jins modulations that would enable analysts to base their claims within the context of the maqam system as a whole.

The melodic subtleties appearing in the repertory suggest to me three levels or categories of modulatory motion:

1. The use of quickly-passing accidentals within a jins, or of melodic motion outside of the central 3–5 notes of the jins, which doesn’t destabilize the jins tonicization and hence could be characterized as a melody within the jins itself,
rather than a true modulation (some might make this argument about my use of “Jins Pseudo-Sikah”).

2. The tonicization of a new area, or the shifting of intervallic relations around a tonic, in a way that is typical and expected within the repertory of a given maqam and hence should not be considered a change of maqam but rather an internal move from jins to jins within the maqam. The cataloguing of these would give a fuller and more accurate representation of each maqam than the single scalar representation of conventional theory. This article has focused on the description of this category.

3. A significant modulation that destabilizes the original root jins enough, and/or builds a large enough structure of multiple linked ajnas outside of the original maqam, to be considered a true modulation from maqam to maqam. For the most part, these moves are accomplished by a series of individual steps, each one of which can be found in category 2, but the combination of them goes outside the bounds of a maqam as typically used.

It should be noted that this third kind of motion is quite rare in the music composed before 1950, except in the compositions and improvisations of Mohamed Abdel-Wahab. The folk traditions of the Arab world apparently do not use it at all, sticking instead to the traditional motions among ajnas (category 2), which are as instinctively understood by native musicians as are the typical Blues progressions to Blues musicians in the U.S. Zakaria Ahmed, one of the major early composers for Unmm Kulthum, uses these category 2 modulations—the song “Ghan-nili Shwayya” is a perfect example of this use of multiple category 2 modulations—but he has a very large vocabulary of such, using all of the different possible ajnas available to him rather than simply sticking to the most common ones. He arguably therefore gives the fullest expression to the maqam system in its traditional form, and the body of his compositional work could be taken as a canonical representation of the Egyptian Maqam in the first half of the 20th century.

On the other hand, with the development of the long-song genre for Umm Kulthum and other singers such as Warda and Abdel-Halim Hafez in the 1950s-70s, composers such as Riyad is-Sunbati, Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab, and Baligh Hamdy began to give a more symphonic form to their 30- to 45-minute-long compositions, necessitating an expansion of the maqam system, especially in the direction of the hitherto less-explored category 3 of modulation. Sunbati feels to me the most traditional of the three, because his modulations among maqamat usually follow the typical, traditional modulations among ajnas within the base maqam, but expand them by developing each new jins into a full maqam of its own (See “Al-Atlal” for a good example; this type of move is equivalent to the treatment of Jins Ajam in “Amana Ya Leil” from Examples 29 and 30). Baligh Hamdy frequently doesn’t obey the traditional modulations, although he does respect the tonal differences between the 4- and 5-note ajnas, and so his modulations proceed by semi-typical sounding steps to modulate to various and distant maqamat; he gives up the feeling of rootedness in a single maqam that defined earlier compositions in favor of drowning us in a sea of endlessly-varying catchy melody (see his compositions for Warda such as “Ihdeounou-l-ayyam”). Abdel-Wahab, the oldest of these three major composers of mid-20th century long songs, is the most grounded in the traditional, typical, modulations, but that also means that his vocabulary of unusual modulations is very large (like Zakaria Ahmed’s), and he stretches the traditional boundaries as far as he can without breaking them.

My own as-yet-unpublished attempts to develop a complete catalogue of all of the typical jins-to-jins modulations within the
maqamat (from above, category 2) have led me to the following conclusions:

- The maqam system is best viewed as a network of ajnas and the traditionally-accepted pathways among them (as opposed to a linear list of distinct scales). This network is completely (and densely) connected from one end to the other—in other words, given enough steps, one can get from any jins or maqam to any other.
- Some ajnas, like Rast, Nahawand, Hijaz, and Bayati, are very common, occurring in many different maqamat, and linked via many pathways to other ajnas; while other ajnas (such as Mustaar, Pseudo-Sikah, and Athar Kurd) are quite rare and have fewer links to other ajnas. The common ajnas can be viewed as central, while the less-common ajnas can be viewed as peripheral, within the total network.
- From a finite collection of possibilities (in terms of ajnas and links among them) the network is capable of generating an infinite number of pathways. While the majority of songs follow well-trodden pathways, many songs explore rare or unique pathways. Because a pathway can be made from many steps, a song can follow a total pathway not taken by any other song, while still remaining within the bounds of the network, because each individual step of that larger unique path is by itself a conventional one. In other words, the maqam system is another example of a discrete combinatorial system, like spoken language.
- The network can change, and it has changed observably in recorded music of the 20th century. Change happens in ways that some might describe as “organic” to the original structure of the network: rarer pathways become more common; common pathways fall out of use; links are extended to other parts of the network; new links are formed by connecting ajnas that were previously two or three steps apart (by skipping traditionally intervening ajnas). Only very occasionally is a completely new pathway or link invented. These types of change happen gradually and leave different versions of the maqam system recognizable to each other, preserving its overall generalized structure across history and geography. The type of change I am describing is more or less identical to the way spoken language evolves over time.
- As a result of the preceding point, there can be no single “canonical” version of the maqam system—only versions particular to specific regions at specific points in time, or particular to individual singers or composers. The version used by a very famous and influential singer or composer (such as Unm Kulthum, Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab, Farid el-Atrash, Riyad is-Sunbati, or Zakaria Ahmed) is likely to be close to the version of the maqam system of the region at the time of that individual’s prominence—in other words it is likely to be a central, rather than peripheral, version. In some sense, because the total system is so large—too large, really, to be grasped fully by any one individual—there are as many distinct versions of the maqam system as there are practitioners.

The shape of the network of ajnas that makes up the maqam system, as described in the above points, appears to me to resemble what mathematician Steven Strogatz calls a “Small-World Network.” Small-World Networks have many interesting properties, one of the most important being a short average path length from any two nodes within the network. Such networks have hubs (nodes which are connected to many other nodes) as well as less-connected nodes. Because of the overall well-connectedness of the network, these networks are robust, in other words: a change or loss of part of the network doesn’t result in the destruction of the network as a whole. Small-World Networks have been shown to exist in many naturally-arising (and self-organizing) domains, such as social networks (where this type of network is known colloquially as “six degrees of separation”), the spread of disease, neurons in the brain, links on the internet, and among words in spoken languages. The most interesting potential connection for me is the linguistic one, because if the organization of content in memory can be shown to be similar between music and language then we may be able to draw other interesting conclusions about the cognitive functioning of both human skills.

Much statistical work will have to be done to test these hypotheses, specifically to answer some of the following questions: What are the statistical occurrences of each jins in particular repertoires? Of links among ajnas? Where those statistics change, how much is the network affected as a whole? How much difference is there in use of ajnas between practitioners in the same time and place? In different times and places? How slowly or quickly does the system change as a whole, and is the rate of change stable, or has it accelerated or slowed at any point in time? By examining these questions it may be possible to quantify the spread of information in oral music traditions and to get a clearer sense of how such traditions function—how the complex interaction of human memory and shared community experience can sustain a music tradition while allowing it to grow and change. Aesthetics and the subject of individual creativity can similarly be addressed with reference to a picture of the overall network structure of the maqam system. In terms of aesthetics we can ask how a network of modulations, stored in the memory of listeners, creates a sense of expectation and surprise. In terms of individual creativity, we can ask to what extent a particular artist follows typical vs. atypical pathways, and how he or she uses them for particular effects. How often do artists invent completely new pathways, and how influential are those new pathways, especially in terms of shifting the system as a whole?

Two major subjects have been left out of this study: the subject of intonation in the maqamat, and the subject of melodic vocabulary. I cover the subject of intonation in a preliminary context of the overall network structure of the maqam system. In terms of aesthetics we can ask how a network of modulations, stored in the memory of listeners, creates a sense of expectation and surprise. In terms of individual creativity, we can ask to what extent a particular artist follows typical vs. atypical pathways, and how he or she uses them for particular effects. How often do artists invent completely new pathways, and how influential are those new pathways, especially in terms of shifting the system as a whole?

Two major subjects have been left out of this study: the subject of intonation in the maqamat, and the subject of melodic vocabulary. I cover the subject of intonation in a preliminary context.
fashion at http://www.maqamlessons.com/analysis/FuzzyBoundaries_MaqamIntonation2009.pdf (and I also recommend Marcus [1993]). My next study (the audio samples and preliminary analysis for which are on display at www.maqamlessons.com) will cover melodic vocabulary within the scope of one maqam (Rast) from one practice (early 20th century Egypt). Nonetheless, I hope that the current study can provide a fertile ground for more indepth analyses of Arabic repertory. I also hope that analysts interested in other maqam-based musics, whether from Turkey, North Africa, Iraq, the Gulf states, Iran, Azerbaijan, or Central Asia, can find points of comparison and contrast with the principles I have laid out here, in order for us to develop a clearer sense of how maqam traditions are related to each other.

WORKS CITED


MUSICAL EXAMPLES


Unfortunately complete documentation is non-existent for the vast majority of Arabic Music, and most of the traditional repertory is no longer available in commercial circulation (though it is widely available in second-generation copies and on the internet, and in some cases in re-issues by new publishers). Where known, I have given the information on the composer and year of composition, as well as the vocalist for whom the song was composed. For those songs with a canonical version (for the Egyptian singers Umm Kulthum, Abdel-Wahhab, Farid el-Atrash, and Layla Murad), the musical examples presented are transcriptions of the available recordings (which can be heard at http://maqamlessons.com/analysis). In the case of the muwashshahat, the Adhan, and the Samai Bayati, there is no canonical performance or recording, and my transcriptions here are based on my own practice as a musician. I selected recordings for use on the website, some of which differ in some details from the transcriptions presented here. Any errors in documentation or transcription are the sole responsibility of the author.
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