

*MERI-SOFIA LAKOS (FINLAND)*  
*MOHAMMED ASHKAN NAZARI (IRAN)*

**POLYPHONY IN THE MUSIC OF HAWRAMAN  
(A STUDY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS POLYPHONY YIELDED  
IN THE INTERACTION OF SHEMSHAL AND SINGING  
IN HAWRAMAN'S TRADITIONAL MUSIC)**

Hawraman is a mountainous region located within the provinces of Kurdistan and Kermanshah in western Iran and in north-eastern Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

Hawraman has its own music tradition that differs from the music of other regions in Kurdistan.

The traditional music of Hawraman is mainly vocal and the singing is unaccompanied. A flute called shemshal is the only instrument that has been part of the musical tradition of Hawraman besides the frame drum called daf<sup>1</sup>.

Shemshal has been existing a long in the region, having its own path and development. The path of singing and the path of shemshal have thrived in parallels.

Shemshal is also one of the oldest instruments in the Kurdistan area. The instrument has its own repertoire different from that of the vocal repertoire of the region. The musical thinking related to shemshal is maqam-based while traditional vocal music of the region is not. The traditional Hawrami songs are not based on specific maqams and they are limited in range.

Shemshal is a solo instrument and it is used in cultural ceremonies and it is traditionally not an instrument for accompanying the songs.

Anyhow those playing shemshal have been trying to adapt to more rhythmic songs by repeating or answering the vocal melodies as well as accompanying the singers. For reasons such as differences in tuning of the instrument and the sound range of the singers, the aesthetic features of the local people's auditory taste as well as cultural aspects, the accompaniment leads often to heterophony, and in performances with two singers, it leads to polyphony. This polyphony is by no means conscious and intentional and it may occur each time at different intervals. In fact, in most of the vocal performances accompanied by Shemshal polyphony is occurred.

The main research question is how this polyphony is formed and what are the characteristics related to it? Under what conditions does this polyphony occur? What are the intervals and the cultural aspects related to those? The results indicate that the musicians of Hawraman do not notice this polyphony. The "dissonant" intervals that occurred were not considered as unpleasant by the listeners. Kurdish people have commonalities in terms of language, morals and habits, way of life, and religion; But the dispersion in the vast lands that are divided between the countries of Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Armenia for political reasons, in addition to historical events, has caused differences in some cultural characteristics.

Hawraman, as one of the regions of Iranian Kurdistan, leads from the south to Javanrud, from the west to Iraq, and from the north to Marivan (Bahman & Hawrami 2007: 355).

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<sup>1</sup> Daf is a Kurdish frame drum that has been used for spiritual ceremonies and peace-building from the ancient times.

The cultural differences mentioned in the regions of Kurdistan undoubtedly exist in the field of music as well. The music of Hawraman has differences from other popular music in Kurdistan, such as its vocal nature, hand-clapping along the singing, fixed repertoire, the formation of a melody from two or three basic sounds (notes), and the lack of the existence of improvisation in musical performances.

The musical instruments in Hawraman have never been combined with the vocal music of this region and have followed a separate path. The most important instrument in the Hawraman region is the “Shemshal”. This instrument plays a complex role in the culture of the region. Shemshal has its own special repertoire and the word “Maqam” is used for each of these pieces. Some of the maqams have a direct relationship with the life and culture of the people of this region, which shows their practical and aesthetic position among the people of Hawraman. Regarding the Shemshal instrument and especially the cultural role of this instrument, there is a lack of research related to shemshal and its special role in the culture.

**Research Methods:** The current research is a combination of library and field methods. Most of the information has been obtained through on-site research and conversations with shemshal musicians in Hawraman. Field research was carried out based on the methods proposed by Dr. Bruno Nettl in the book *Ethnomusicology* and lectures by Dr. Mohammad Reza Azadefar. Also, the questions and methods of conversations with native (Hawrami) singers have been compiled based on the questionnaires suggested in the mentioned book as well as Dr. Azadefar’s lectures. Beneficial in the preparation of the article was also the existence of available literature related directly or indirectly to this subject as well and at some level also the existing audio material.

### **Shemshal**

Shemshal is a Wind instrument and one of the oldest and the most common musical instruments among the Kurds. The length of this instrument is usually 40–45 centimeters and the diameter is usually the same from the tab to the end. Usually, it is about 2 centimeters. Shemshal has usually 6 holes which are 2,5 centimeters high and the distance between the last hole with the bottom of the instrument is 3 centimeters. When playing, the left hand is placed above and the right hand below. The instrument is held diagonally and the sound is produced through mouth air blowing into the top hole of the instrument. Shemshal is known in Hawraman in Iraq and Iran in the cities as Paveh, Ravansahr, Javanroud, Nowsud, Nowdeshah, and in the villages like Biare in Iraq, also Satyaran in Iran, Shimshir, etc. Unfortunately, the amount of shemshal-players has been decreasing causing a reduction also in the number of live performances. Nature has a very important place in the culture of Hawraman. One of the maqams belonging to shemshal has been played especially for the flowers and plants. (Some studies have confirmed that music has a strong impact on the well-being of plants). In numerous areas of the world, the connection of wind instruments and shepherds has been existing as far as we can go back in human history. One of the maqams has been played for the flock. There are maqam-based melodies played with shemshal for different kinds of situations in Hawraman.

### **The Role of Shemshal in the Life of Hawraman's People Maqams for Different Kinds of Situations**

The term Maqam is used among the Kurds in various ways and it has three concepts. The most common concept is used to show non-metric performances include singing and playing, which are mostly impromptu. In the second concept, Maqam is used as a musical mode, and finally, in most Kurdish regions the term Maqam is used as a piece of music. This last concept is common among Hawrami people and in Shemshal repertoire. In order to refer to the melodies of Shemshal and distinguish them from each other, the musicians in Hawraman use the term maqam. Hawraman has its own maqams for different kinds of situations as well as its own names for them. Maqam sahari is derived from the word sahar having which means the dawn of the morning. Sahari is the maqam that is played early in the morning. Maqam sahari has three different melodies and all of those have the aspect of an announcement. Each of these melodies has its own function/ reason to be played. Sahari is a maqam that has the aspect of the announcement. One of the pieces in the Sahari maqam is used for death announcements and traditionally people of Hawraman when hearing this maqam become aware of death. Hospitality is an important part of the culture in the region of Hawraman and it is considered important and as duty both from a religious and of the aspect of humanitarian point of view. Another of the pieces of the maqam Sahari is played for the visitors as well as for announcement for the arrival of people in the village and another the time of sunset as an announcement that a joyful event – as a wedding for example is going to be started. (Audio ex. 1) **Harallazarda** is a maqam related to nature. Haralla is a type of flower and zard means yellow. This “yellow flower” is growing in the mountains of Hawraman. This is a maqam for plants and flowers and it is played in order to help plants grow. Anyhow it seems to have a negative effect on the existence of the flower Haralla Zarda. The maqam name **MayGali** is formed by two words. “May” means “sheep” and Gali (the main form is Gala) means herd/flock. This is a maqam of the shepherds. It is a pastoral mode, and it is played for the animals of the flock. This maqam has three melodies. **Hasba** refers to a disease called Hasba which is an infectious disease that causes breathing problems. This maqam is played for the recovery of the sickness. Hasba has three melodies. The maqam name **Ghalawasi-awa** is derived from words “Ghalaw” which has the meaning of crow and “Siaw” which means black, so the name of this maqam means “Black crow”. The reason for this naming is not known. This maqam has a metric melody and it is played on joyful occasions and at the beginning of the dance. This maqam is played also on mystical occasions, tekiyahs (sacred places for Sufi mystical prayers and ceremonies), and religious occasions. This maqam is represented by one melody. Dara’ee is derived from the name “Dara” which means valley, but in Hawraman the word is used also when referring to a garden. The reason for this naming is not clear, but some people are calling it “Dairi”. Maqam Dara’ee has one melody. This is known to be played for elderly people. Chamari is referring to the word “Chamar” meaning a ring weeping or lamentation. Chamari is a maqam related to the mourning ritual and is performed at a funeral and it is always accompanied by daf. This maqam has two melodies (Nazari: 2016).

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### **Common Vocal Types in Hawraman**

The traditional vocal songs of Hawraman are not based on some specific maqams. The range is limited usually in tetrachord. Vibrato is one of the features of singing. In the process of investigating and recognizing vocal types in Hawraman, certain research difficulties make it difficult to accurately determine these songs. Some of these problems include the lack of agreement among the singers of the region and the lack of historical sources in this field. Some of these problems include the lack of agreement among the singers in the region and the lack of historical sources in this field. In the conversations (that took place during the research) with Hawraman singers, more or less different categories and names were obtained in determining the songs. One of the most important reasons for the emergence of such problems is the influence of the dominant music and culture adjacent to this region. Many singers of the region due to the influence of Iranian classical music and the feeling of its superiority over Hawrami music, try to introduce the musical concepts of this region close to the concepts of Iranian instrumental music (sometimes even synonymous). (Nazari: 2012: 1, 4, 5).

The traditional musical thinking of Hawraman is anyhow different and it is unique carrying its archaic elements that are manifesting in the traditional songs of Hawraman that used to be unaccompanied through the generations. There is also a tendency to polyphony in those traditional songs both in metric and nonmetric, rhythmic and unrhythmic. The polyphony that takes place in some of the performances is unconscious and it is happening in parallel or overlapping manner. (Lakos: 2020).

Among the vocal types of Hawraman, the three songs **Siachamana**<sup>2</sup>, **Werdabazam**<sup>3</sup>, and **Chapla**<sup>4</sup> are the most important and common.

### **Singing with the Accompaniment of Shemshal and the Unconscious Polyphony:**

As mentioned earlier, Hawraman's songs are basically performed without instrumental accompaniment, and Shemshal also follows a separate path in compiling its repertoire and performs its positions independently of the vocals. In the last few decades and probably due to the influence of media and neighboring music cultures, we have seen the accompaniment of the Shemshal instrument with Hawraman songs, especially metrical songs such as Werdabazm and Chapla, in a relatively large number of performances. In these performances, the Shemshal accompanies the

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<sup>2</sup> The most important song of Hawraman region is Siachamana. This song has a very special place among Hawraman people and singers. Much has been said about the meaning of the name of this song and its history and origin, which we will discuss in the continuation of the discussion. The importance of Siachamana singing in the region is such that a singer who can perform it is considered a good singer, and in fact, it is a criterion for distinguishing a good singer from a weak one. Among the songs of Hawraman, Siachamana is the only song that is absolutely related to this region and is not performed anywhere else in the Kurdish region.

<sup>3</sup> Werdabazm is composed of two words "werd" which means small and "bazm" which carries the general meaning of a song. The name of the song means literary "a short song". The name of this song is probably related to its characteristics compared to Siachamana', Werdabazm has shorter stanzas than Siachamana, and it also has shorter stretches in terms of rhythmic divisions. This song is sometimes mistakenly considered as a general term for any kind of rhythmic song in Hawraman; But in fact, Werdabazm is a melodious song with a heavy tempo, which has obvious differences with other melodious songs of this region

<sup>4</sup> The most important song of the joyful ceremony in Hawraman is Chapla. This song, which has a happy and rhythmic mood, is performed very energetically. Traditionally, it has its own special dance with the same name, but nowadays any (Kurdish) dance can be performed with it. Compared to other Hawraman songs, Chapla has undergone more changes due to the expansion of communication and the influence of musical characteristics of other regions, and today non-native melodies, sometimes Persian, Lori and even Arabic, have influenced it.

singing by repeating the melody giving the singer a chance to rest by responding to the melody. In these performances, in many cases, due to the fixed tuning of the shemshal instrument (the tuning of this instrument cannot be changed), the distance between the voice of the singer and the instrument is not in unison, and as a result, we encounter a type of polyphony. This polyphony occurs unconsciously and may be happening in dissonant intervals. The dissonance of the created distance is not important neither for the performers of this music or for the audience. In some performances, the singer may tune his voice with the shemshal instrument, and as a result, polyphony does not occur, but performances with non-unison intervals are much more than unison performances. Another reason for polyphony is that usually the performances are started by the singer and it is not common for the singers to coordinate the vocal range of their performance with the tuning of the shemshal. Failure to check the tune of Shemshal before the performance shows the unimportance of harmony and tune between the performers of this music. The aesthetic features of the local people's auditory taste, as well as cultural aspects, play a role in the interaction, but which are stronger the cultural and aesthetic aspects related to shemshal or the corresponding aspects of the vocal song? The singers are not adapting to shemshal, but shemshal is adapting in singing trying to respond

Polyphony in the Music of Hawraman (A study of the unconscious polyphony yielded in the interaction of Shemshal and singing in Hawraman's traditional music) to it, repeating the melodies, but sometimes playing in parallel intervals. In general, this polyphony happens in the moments when the singer and musician of Shemshal are performing at the same time. This synchronicity occurs mostly when the shemshal starts playing in the final parts of each verse to answer (Video ex. 1). In video example number one, we see a performance of a Hawrami song accompanied by Shemshal. In this example, Shemshal starts performing with an approximate distance of an added fourth lower than the singer, and this distance is maintained almost until the end of the performance. This example is one of the good examples that shows that what is important in the aesthetic view of the people of the region is not in intervals and performance in consonant intervals, but melody and rhythm. In this performance, even though there is polyphony with the interval tritone (parallelly), it is not important from the point of view of the performers and audience (ex.1). In another sample (transliterated sample number 2), which is a song called "Akh Ba Lanja Gyan", Shemshal and the voice perform at a distance of approximately one major from each other. According to what was said before, the singer starts singing without paying attention to the tune of the shemshal, and when the shemshal starts playing in harmony with its tune, it is approximately one major step lower than the song. Although the interval of the first major is not considered a pleasant interval in most musical cultures, but in this example, the performers continue to perform regardless of the created dissonant interval. One of the usual features in Hawrami performances is the change of tune and range of the singer's performance during the performance, which may occur for various reasons. This change is usually towards higher pitches. In this performance, the singer's voice goes up by about 150 musical cents, while the tuner does not change. In fact, the created polyphony is not stable until the end of the performance, and the distance between the singer's and the instrument's voice increases during the performance (Video ex. 2.). Continuation of Singing with a Higher Pitch of the Singer's Performance Range In the ex. 3, both the singer and the instrument of Shemshal do perform with a distance greater than one and the two voices created are basically not in consonance, but the performers of this music do not attach importance to it. In the continuation of this performance, the vocal range of the singer's performance has increased as a result of the two voices created with a different interval (Video ex. 3).

### Conclusions

The concept of polyphony can be seen to exist consciously or unconsciously in several musical cultures around the world. Hawraman's musical culture is no exception to this rule. In this musical culture, many factors cause the emergence of polyphony. Accompanying two or three singers together in which their voices meet at some points, changing the vocal range of the singers during the performance, which occurs for various reasons, and accompanying the vocals with the instrument. Today, under the influence of neighboring cultures, the Shemshal instrument accompanies the singers in many performances, which traditionally and in the past, this kind of accompaniment has rarely happened. The Shamshal instrument continues to exist independently and has its own independent repertoire that is not related to the vocal repertoire. In many cases, due to the unimportance of consonance and the unimportance of unison performance, the voices of Seamshal and the singer are not in harmony, and they create duplicity or polyphony. This polyphony is unconscious and unintentional, and of course, it is not important from the point of view of performers and listeners. In fact, it is ignored. The point to think about is the presence of dissonant intervals, which are not considered unpleasant by the people of the region because if it was so, they would have tried to fix it, but we see that the presenters and listeners never tried to change it. The concept of unpleasant intervals has not occurred.

### Audio Examples

**Audio ex. 1.** Melody performed in Maqam Sahari  
Shemshal-player: Mohammad Najib Hasani  
Recorded around 2010 by Mohammad Najib Hasani

### Video Examples

**Video ex. 1.** Hawrami men are singing with the accompaniment of shemshal. Vocal: Najmaddin Hawrami, Mohammad Hawrami. Shemshal: Jafer Zalkaei. The place and time of performance is not known. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UeFgU6htUHo4VRtyU-CDHmlG132mCa1R>

**Video ex. 2.** Vocal: Esmail Hamidi, Shemshal: Basit Moradi, Rasht, Record for Nations Music Festival, 2021. The name of song: Akh Ba Lanja Gian. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwuSKY0cc6U>

**Video ex. 3.** Vocal: Esmail Hamidi, Shemshal: Basit Moradi, Rasht, Record for Nations Music Festival, 2021. The name of the song: Baz aba Tawe. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PaewWJqjE8>

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მაგალითი 1.

Example 1.

Vocal 

Vocal 

Vocal 

Vocal 

Vocal 

2 

Vocal 



### მაგალითი 2.

#### Example 2.

Musical score for Example 2, featuring Vocal and Shemshal parts in 4/4 time. The score is divided into four systems, each starting with a measure number (3, 5, 7, 9). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The vocal line consists of eighth and quarter notes, while the Shemshal line features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth and quarter notes.

### მაგალითი 3.

#### Example 3.

Musical score for Example 3, featuring Vocal and Shemshal parts in 4/4 time. The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number (3, 5, 7). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The vocal line consists of eighth and quarter notes, while the Shemshal line features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth and quarter notes.