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THE LYRE, THE TEMPLE AND THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN

Before the scientific discoveries of the 16th century the Earth was believed to be a small dot of matter at the centre of a series of seven invisible spheres on which the planets moved. Beyond these was a sphere of glittering stars. Beyond that eighth sphere, God. This image of the cosmos had been certainly known for two thousand years, perhaps far longer, from well before the time of Plato and Pythagoras. Perhaps it came from Babylon, perhaps Egypt.

The great 13th century Franciscan theologian Bonaventure wrote, following Plato's *Timaeus*:

It should be noted that this world, which is called the macrocosm, enters our soul, which is called the smaller world [microcosm], through the doors of the five senses as we perceive, enjoy and judge sensible things.ⁱ

Our soul is a copy of the cosmos. How can this be?

The answer is this –

The true cosmos is not a physical reality, an arrangement of planets and stars, but a pattern – a pattern of Harmony.

We all have this same Harmony within us.

What is this pattern of Harmony? -

The pattern, the forming structure, is, quite simply, the musical scale – though this is only a way of thinking about something more intangible. This scale is the seven note diatonic scale which we know as the white notes on the piano – the scale from A to G. In the old cosmos each note matched a planet (beginning the moon on A, then Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn on G. This is how it always was. This specific scale with its associations of planets or deities, muses or syrens, is now known to have been used consistently and continuously for at least three thousand years. It is an unchanging, yet unrecognised, Wisdom. This musical scale was revealed by the sacred seven stringed lyre.

The lyre itself was the pattern of the cosmos and the soul. It was the pattern of the heavens, the cosmic temple. It was the secret of Creation, the days of the week. Each string, each note, had a music of a different character which the planets represented.

Most importantly – this Harmony was always something which communicated through the doors of the human senses and inspired imagination. We might pursue Harmony as an abstract formula but at its heart it is something beyond Number. We can seek it intellectually, but we know it in the Imagination and Feeling, Music and Nature which it inspires.

Imagine this world of Nature, Memory and Imagination as a dance of coloured lights, drawn by love in an infinite variety of forms or works. The harmonies which flow from the source of light weave a golden web - and the threads of this web pass through Nature, dreams, stories and lives in connections which might not be apparent to our view, fixed as we are in place and time. Everything comes from Unity and seeks Unity, but Everything is this Dance through which weaves, as if in a timeless and spaceless dimension, Harmony - the guiding law and, in some stories, the pattern of the Eternal Temple.

This is just a way of thinking about something beyond words – and yet experienced in Nature, Art, Music and our lives. I've been pursuing this idea for a very long time – the Law which is within Nature and the Imagination which allows things to form freely – allows the Dance to go on without collisions – though some trips and falls can be creative. The various people and traditions which this study will pass over might not have seen the world quite in this way, but it seems to me that this Cosmos lies behind this whole story.

APHRODITE AND KINYRAS

We can begin the story on Cyprus, at Paphos. There may have been other stories in other places and other times, but this particular story begins here on the shore of the blue sea.

Perhaps 3000 years ago worshippers gathered on the beach of this mediterranean island and remembered the birth of Aphrodite from the sea – sea almost more blue than our eyes can bare to gaze on – sea stirred by a breeze – and the goddess rising from its dancing white foam.

Daughter of Ouranos, a remote and mysterious deity - God of the heavens. His genitals were severed by his son, Cronos or Saturn, later thought of as time – thrown into the sea – and Aphrodite is born from his seed – on this beach (later other islands would clam her) - but she is a cosmic deity.

Homer thought she was the daughter of Zeus and Dione.

An ancient Homeric hymn begins:

Muse, tell me the things done by golden Aphrodite,
the one from Cyprus, who arouses sweet desire for gods
and who subdues the races of mortal humans,
and birds as well, who fly in the sky, as well as all beasts
all those that grow on both dry land and the sea.¹

Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium* tells the guests at the party that there are two Venuses. Aphrodite Urania, who has no mother, born from the sea, is heavenly love. Earthly love belongs to Aphrodite Pandemos, but it is heavenly love that moves the stars and brings beauty into the world.

Aphrodite Urania is one of the most ancient representatives of a very ancient idea – Harmony as a force which draws things – all things – together – something both beyond Nature and yet embedded within it.

We might prefer to think of heavenly and earthly love as aspects of one goddess.

The lyre is not just a symbol – it is a demonstration of the Law – or language - of Harmony – a universal Law which is known in musical harmony and was imagined to be displayed by the pattern of the cosmos. The lyre is the pattern of a cosmos which embraces the physical world, the soul and Imagination.

In bronze-age Cyprus Kinyras was the king who played his sacred lyre for the Queen of Heaven.

Centuries later than this Homer wrote in his *Iliad* that Kinyras presented a breastplate to king Agamemnon. This was in the Trojan wars. Kinyras was old then. Aphrodite was ageless.

According to Ovid, much more recently, Kinyras was the grandson of Pygmalion and his beautiful statue, brought to life by Aphrodite. Kinyras had an incestuous relationship with his daughter Myrrha, who gave birth to Adonis. Myrrha was turned into a tree that wept myrrh. There is something in this myth about the relationship between the cycles of Nature and the divine world, guided by Harmony communicated through music.

(Robert Graves, in his *The Greek Myths*, thought the story of Kinyras and Myrrha was a myth of the temporary king marrying a priestess to prolong his reign.)

¹ <https://www.uh.edu/~cldue/texts/aphrodite.html>

The myths are complex and change over time but the constant in this story is Kinyras's lyre. Or was Kinyras himself the lyre? The lyre is the same now as it was then – a magical artifact belonging to the Queen of Heaven.

THE LYRE

There are other priest musicians. The goddess they serve can have other names.

John C Franklin writes:

...in Greek evidence, 'lyre heroes' like Orpheus, Amphion, Cadmus
and Linus are seen as late mythological derivatives of the pattern.²

The seven stringed sacred lyre is unchanging. There are larger instruments with more strings but the seven stringed lyre, which sets the pattern of the seven-note scale and the tuning of larger instruments, is the key to Harmony, and the Cosmos. The Priest King is the Lyre. He serves the lyre, and the Queen of Heaven - but is the king simply a personification of the lyre?

The seven strings of the sacred lyre form a diatonic (white note) scale from A to G. The central string is, to us, the D. Franklin explains that tablets from the ancient civilisations of Ur, Nippur, Sippar, Assur, and Ugarit show illustrations of the seven-stringed pattern and provide evidence that this tuning system dates back to third millennium BC, in which case this story has run through 5000 years. Scholars had believed that diatonic tuning only developed in the late classical period, but the new evidence shows it was passed on through Mycenaea and possibly the Minoan civilisation

The Greeks believed that Terpander had introduced the seven-string lyre, replacing a more primitive four stringed instrument. This would have been in the 7th or 6th century BC.³ Franklin explains that Terpander must have been reviving a much older kind of music. The diatonic tuning became associated with Pythagoras, with an assumption that it required knowledge of the mathematics of harmony to tune the seven different notes of the scale. Tuning, though, can be done purely by ear - by what sounds harmonious – though it is perfectly possible that the more ancient musicians knew the secrets of number long before Pythagoras. A lasting source of confusion lies in the fact that ancient Greek music

² Franklin, John C. "Lyre Gods of the Bronze Age Musical Koine", *The Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 6.2 (2006), 39–70.

https://www.academia.edu/7860988/_Lyre_Gods_of_the_Bronze_Age_Musical_Koine_The_Journal_of_Ancient_Near_Eastern_Religions_6_2_2006_39_70

³ John C Franklin, "Diatonic Music in Greece: A Reassessment of its Antiquity," *Mnemosyne* 56.1 (2002), 669-702.

often uses non-diatonic tunings, smaller or larger intervals which sound more exotic to a western ear used to diatonic tuning.

This simple diatonic musical scale, which sounds surprising if we expect ancient music to be exotic and alien, had been heard as divine, the music of the heavens, for thousands of years.

THE LYRE AND THE COSMOS

Though it is hard to date the origin of the association of the seven-string lyre with the planets it is undoubtedly ancient, pre-Greek and possibly as old as the lyre itself.

When we look at the lyre as a model of the cosmos the central string represents the sun, which illuminates the other planets, below and above. In Greek writers this central string is called “theon”, the god. Aristotle gives the names of the strings and Plato mentions the stringing of the lyre, but they were writing about a tradition that was already very old.

The seven strings are tuned A B C D E F G.

Our note D is always the central string. This central string remains the same however we tune the lyre. To tune the rest of the strings to this original sacred scale we tune them from the central string.

The strings can be tuned by ear – to what sounds to us – to nature - to be harmonious. We do not need any numbers or ratios or mathematical theories to tune the lyre. The order of strings and planets is this:

A Moon

B Mercury

C Venus

D Sun

E Mars

F Jupiter

G Saturn

The Pythagorean Nichomachus (first century AD) strangely reverses the order of Mercury and Venus which shows, I suspect, that the later Greeks and Romans had some uncertainty about the ordering of the cosmos.

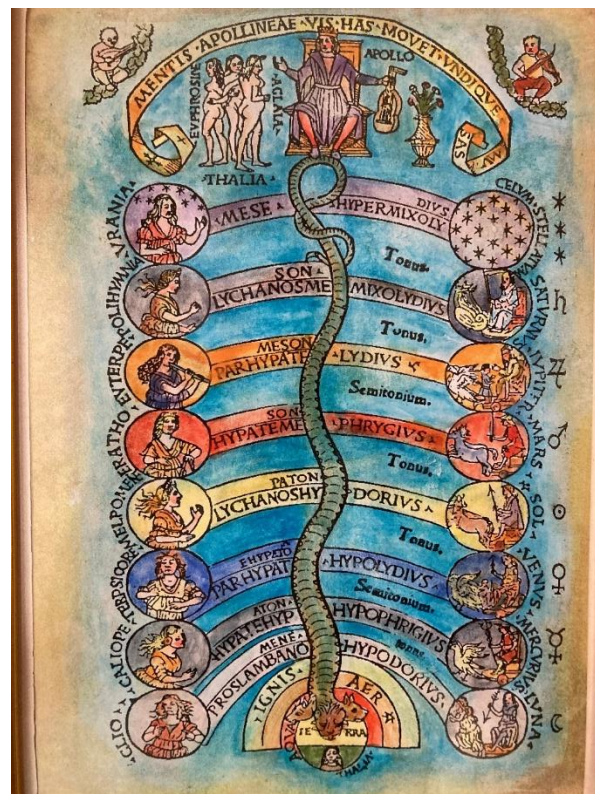
Nichomachus added an eighth string, making an octave. This was attached to Cronos, or to the fixed stars. Cronos is generally taken to be the same god as Saturn. In reality this higher A is the same note as the lower A. It, and its music, cannot represent the meaning of the eighth sphere, which is beyond the planetary harmonies, perhaps standing for harmony itself. This second A, the octave, found other meanings in time – the beginning of a new scale, a recurring pattern spiralling upwards.

It is impossible to know when the planets were first associated with the seven-stringed lyre - possibly a millennium before Pythagoras. But which came first? Was the lyre made to imitate the perceived order of the cosmos or was the cosmos perceived to imitate the tuning of the lyre?

The Greeks, it has to be said, did not see the distances between the planets quite like this. The Moon and Mercury appeared to them to be closer than a whole tone. I feel this is evidence that the more ancient perception of the cosmos was adjusted to imitate the lyre. Perhaps the Greeks were more accurate astronomers, (though this seems unlikely if we assume the Babylonians were especially expert in observation of the stars.

The lyre is not a symbol of the Cosmos. It is a mystery in itself. The Cosmos is a symbol of the lyre.

THE MODES AND THE MUSES



When I first knew this Gafori illustration (from the late 15th century) I might have thought that the inclusion of the muses was a poetic fantasy, perhaps something that was invented by the Renaissance imagination with its newly rediscovered enthusiasm for classical mythology. In the light of the recent research it is possible to see the muses as an ancient and most important key to the understanding of the meaning of Harmony.

The harmonies of the lyre, the strings, had meaning. Each string and the mode which grows from it has an emotional quality that seemed to reflect the symbolism of the planets but which has a reality regardless of how we imagine the cosmos.

But the lyre is more than this. It is also a living source of inspiration. Each string is a muse, with her own character.

Music itself has meaning. A single note might mean nothing, but as soon as our song moves to another note we hear a distinctive mode. The melodies centring on the seven notes of the lyre communicated seven archetypal qualities which could guide our songs and inspire our imagination.

For example:

The theon, middle string, is D, associated with the Sun. Its mode was used for “worthy melodies” matching the idea of the D Dorian mode in Gregorian chant as the most serious mode. Gafori places Melpomene, the muse of Tragedy, here.

If we sing chants in which F is dominant they will have a bright sound because of the position of the semitones in relation to F which is suited to delight and joy. This is the tone and the mode of Jupiter, or Euterpe. In modern music it’s as if the harmony wants to modulate upwards a fifth.

In contrast a chant in which G dominates will tend to be sombre or melancholy. As if the music wants to modulate down a fifth. This is the tone of melancholy Saturn, or Polyhymnia.

The muses or syrens might have had other names long ago but they represent the archetypal qualities in each tone or mode and, as Franklin writes,

...a reverent, contemplative relationship between musician and instrument in which the lyre itself plays an active, even dominant role...

The...Muses (of the seven strings) lead the lyrist...into a treasure house of ideas and inspiration, provided they be cultivated with the devotions of ‘skill’ and ‘wisdom’.⁴

⁴ John C Franklin in *Music, Text, and Culture in Ancient Greece*. United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 45.

In other word, perhaps before any association was made with the planets, the seven strings of the lyre were – not symbols of but actually were – the sources of inspiration. Each string and the melody that flowed from it had its own quality. These qualities could be imagined as string-muses but they need not have been the same as the classical group of muses – and yet, when we look at the musical qualities of each string and its mode, there are at least some cases in which the classical muse, as illustrated by Gaffurius, seems to be appropriate.

This ‘treasure house’ has a sense of unity and completeness by being a Cosmos of the seven diatonic strings. It is as if these seven archetypes together are the fundamental principles of Harmony and the key lights that rule Imagination – just as medieval philosophy would see the planetary Cosmos as the pattern of the soul.

That ancient image of the cosmos is artificial, not necessarily - but possibly - an accurate image of the planets as they observed. The diatonic scale of the lyre is something found in Nature that is also the key to beauty and meaning.

Harmony comes first.

The lyre is a Cosmos held in the hand. The lyre of Kinyras, the original as far as this story is concerned, serves Aphrodite as the Queen of Heaven. The muses, whatever their names, are her handmaidens.

She is the source of Harmony. Harmony is both an energy that draws things to Unity - whether musical notes, Nature, events or lives - and the law which guides them in their formation. The harmonies of the sacred lyre are a gateway into the “treasure house of ideas and imagination.”

The earliest source for the nine muses of Greek tradition is Hesiod’s poem *The Theogony* written in the 8th or 7th century BC, one of the earliest works of Greek literature. The poet opens his work, describing the origins of the Gods and the world, with an encounter with the muses on Mount Helicon where he is, he says, a shepherd.

(Loeb old edition H. G. EVELYN-WHITE)

From the Heliconian Muses let us begin to sing, who hold the great and holy mount of Helicon, and dance on soft feet about the deep-blue spring and the altar of the almighty son of Cronos, and, when they have washed their tender bodies in Permessus or in the Horse's Spring or Olmeius, make their fair, lovely dances upon highest Helicon and move with vigorous feet.

...

And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon...

Come thou, let us begin with the Muses who gladden the great spirit of their father Zeus in Olympus with their songs, telling of things that are and that shall be and that were aforetime with consenting voice. Unwearying flows the sweet sound from their lips, and the house of their father Zeus the loud-thunderer is glad at the lily-like voice of the goddesses as it spread abroad, and the peaks of snowy Olympus resound, and the homes of the immortals.

The muses are singers. They communicate through song.

They are the daughters of Mnemosyne (memory) and Zeus. Their songs inspire Zeus himself.

These things, then, the Muses sang who dwell on Olympus, nine daughters begotten by great Zeus, Cleio and Euterpe, Thaleia, Melpomene and Terpsichore, and Erato and Polyhymnia and Urania and Calliope, who is the chiefest of them all, for she attends on worshipful princes: whomsoever of heaven-nourished princes the daughters of great Zeus honour, and behold him at his birth, they pour sweet dew upon his tongue, and from his lips flow gracious words.

The muses, then, are musical in origin and they communicate wisdom and knowledge through music. This is not a poetic fancy. Music is the mystery which connects the gods with the world and with poets.

The muses are they who bring inspiration and wisdom from the gods, They are not simply poetic symbols but a way of understanding the working of inspiration which flows from the source of being,

Their names identify them as individual characters. Euterpe is the giver of delight. Terpsichore delights in dancing. Polyhymnia is the "one of many hymns".

Calliope, often the leader of the muses, is said to have been the mother of the ancient musicians Orpheus, who was believed to have brought eastern wisdom to Greece. According to Hesiod Urania was the mother of the singer of tragic songs, Linus.

The associations of muses with individual forms of art and of Urania with astronomy, seem to have originated much later in the Roman period.

They each communicate an individual message from the Gods. I would suggest that they represent the series of archetypal qualities which were represented by the planets and experienced through strings of the lyre. There are nine, not seven, because Thalia is usually associated with the Earth, which has no music of its own. Urania stands beyond the others in her eighth sphere. She is the heavenly muse, rather than the muse of astronomy. She inspires the poet with heavenly wisdom. She is an aspect of Aphrodite

Ourania. In later traditions, as will be explained, her sphere is the home of Sophia, Wisdom.

This Cosmic choir of archetypal qualities, whether remembered as muses or planets and stars, represents the variety and colour of the archetypal qualities which weave Creation. Their loss might be said to lead to a spiritual monotony. Unity comes from the Harmony of this infinite Variety of song, not from a single monotonous song.

PYTHAGORAS WAS WRONG?

The 5th century BC Greek philosopher Pythagoras is often said to have been the one who discovered that the harmonies of musical sounds were derived from simple numerical ratios. This, in turn was evidence that everything in the world came from One, an abstract source, which some people associated with God.

Some sources claim Pythagoras had visited Egypt. It is quite possible that this knowledge of harmonic ratios is much older. It could have been known in the earlier stages of the story of the sacred lyre. Iamblicus, long after Pythagoras's time wrote:

In Phoenicia he conversed with the prophets who were descendants of Moschus the physiologist, and with many others, as well as with the local hierophants.⁵

Some, much later, have wondered if Moschus was Moses. Iamblichus goes on:

After gaining all he could from the Phoenician mysteries, he found that they had originated from the sacred rites of Egypt...

The diatonic, tuning of the lyre has long been thought of as a Pythagorean tuning⁶, based on the knowledge of harmonic ratios, but if this tuning was the tuning of Kinyras it follows that the knowledge of the ratios, or a simple awareness that Harmony came from unity, could be as ancient as the lyre.

John C Franklin writes:

The diatonic or 'Pythagorean' tuning process...is now known to have been cultivated in the Ancient Near East from the Old Babylonian period (c. 1800 BC)

⁵ Iamblichus. The Life of Pythagoras. United Kingdom, Lulu.com, 1965, p. 7 (available on Google Books)

⁶ John C Franklin, "Diatonic Music in Greece: A Reassessment of its Antiquity," Mnemosyne 56.1 (2002),

This was remembered by Aristophanes as ‘the method of tuning handed down by our forefathers’.⁷

The actual point in history when the mathematical basis of harmony was discovered is elusive, as is the date when it was first realised that this knowledge of number could justify a belief in the One, an abstract kind of monotheistic deity, which could be thought of as the source of all things.

Pythagoras was known to have been a wise spiritual leader who inspired his followers to a simple life of unity with all things, but he was probably not the discoverer of the numerical secrets of Harmony. He and Plato, whose philosophy owes a great deal to the earlier thinker, were following a much more ancient wisdom.

A 2024 Cambridge University study suggested that Pythagoras was wrong – not that there was no Universal Harmony but that we don’t necessarily enjoy music which is perfectly harmonious.

Their study, published in [*Nature Communications*](#), shows that in normal listening contexts, we do not actually prefer chords to be perfectly in these mathematical ratios.

“We prefer slight amounts of deviation. We like a little imperfection because this gives life to the sounds, and that is attractive to us,” said co-author, Dr Peter Harrison, from Cambridge’s Faculty of Music and Director of its Centre for Music and Science.⁸

Some musical traditions enjoy the emotional effects of other tunings – or of notes that are not quite in tune – a singer or instrumentalist might “bend the note” - but their emotional effect comes from the tension between the natural harmonies and the melody.

Universal Harmony remains but deviations can be a source of delight. Perhaps our world only exists and has beauty and life because it is not quite in tune.

In fact, it is only possible to define the simplest harmonies - octave fifth and fourth – by simple ratios. The other intervals – major and minor thirds - are more difficult to define. The pursuit of a mathematical explanation for these harmonies can lead to madness. Perhaps there is no such explanation.

⁷https://www.academia.edu/7860932/_Diatonic_Music_in_Greece_A_Reassessment_of_its_Antiquity_Mnemosyne_56_1_2002_669_702

⁸ <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/pythagoras-was-wrong-there-are-no-universal-musical-harmonies-study-finds>

Gafori, in the late 15th century, explained that Pythagoras's harmony is ideal but

...because this is mixed with corporeal material it falls from the exactness of numbers (but) in the place above us there is true and incorruptible music, as our holy church declares to exist in angelic choirs.⁹

But music, earthly or angelic, is about feeling and imagination, not number.

TUNING THE WORLD

Another important piece of evidence for the significance of the sacred lyre is a Mesopotamian tablet, CBS 1766, in the Penn Museum.¹⁰

The meaning of this tablet, from about 700 BCE, has been debated for some time but has become much clearer in the light of John Franklin's research.

The seven-pointed star in a circle is actually a diagram of the order in which you tune the strings of the seven-stringed lyre. This simple illustration has surprising importance. This is something that affects us all every day. We are all participating in the mysteries of the lyre.

As I have mentioned, the tuning always begins with the central string, *theon*, which can represent the sun. The other strings are tuned by ear from that string in fifths in this order:

D A E B F C G

To give them their planetary names the order in which we tune the strings is:

Sun

Moon

Mars

⁹ Joscelyn Godwin op. cit p 184)

¹⁰ <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=54528>

Mercury

Jupiter

Venus

Saturn

It's not as obvious in English, which substitutes some appropriate Norse god for planets, but this is why the days of the week are in this order.

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

This is the order we tune the lyre – Strings 4 1 5 2 6 3 7 - and the order in which God tunes the world.

The Greeks did not use these days of the week.

In his second century CE Roman History Cassius Dio explains that the idea of Harmony was related to the seven planets – and he adds that from ancient times the relationship of harmony and the planets was the source of the Days of the Week. He thinks this was known to the Egyptians.

The custom, however, of referring the days to the seven stars called planets was instituted by the Egyptians, but is now found among all mankind, though its adoption has been comparatively recent; at any rate the ancient Greeks never understood it, so far as I am aware.

...you will find all the days to be in a kind of musical connection with the arrangement of the heavens.¹¹

The Greek writer Celsus wrote about the Mithraic mysteries in which initiates climbed a ladder (Latin 'scala', the root of the musical term 'scale') of seven rungs, where each rung was associated with a classical planet. The initiates ascended through the planetary spheres in this order, 4 1 5 2 6 3 7, not in the order the spheres appear in the sky.¹² Again, this was the revival of a very much older tradition, centuries older than the development

¹¹ Cassius Dio 37.18. Translated by Earnest Cary, quoted in Gadalla, Moustafa. *The Enduring Ancient Egyptian Musical System: Theory and Practice*. United Kingdom, Moustafa Gadalla, 2016. Available on Google Books.

¹² See <https://languageelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=54528>

of the Roman cult of Mithras, centuries before Pythagoras, and known throughout the near eastern cultures.

A 2016 book by Moustafa Gadalla (see reference below) explains that this is Ancient Egyptian musical wisdom. Throughout this story a recurring theme is that all these aspects of musical knowledge might be Egyptian, and the possibly even older than the radiantly blue beginning of Kinyras and Aphrodite.

The ancient sacred lyre tradition was passed down to the Christian world through the Hebrew Temple.

CREATION

A distinctive feature of Hebrew and later Jewish religion is that it is concerned with Creation, the work of God in this world. The Hebrew God is beyond Creation yet known through Creation. We participate in Creation. Our words make God known to himself.

It could be that the Hebrew religion only became monotheistic quite late in its history. The philosophical principal of monotheism might have originated in other places or have been carried by musicians who knew the secret of Harmony.

In this monotheism there is no need for worldly deities or spirits within Nature because nature is sacred in itself. Everything comes from one source and has meaning by being what it is – creatures, trees, mountains, rivers.

And, also very importantly, the story of Creation means everything exists in Time. Everything has a beginning, (Aristotle taught that time could not have a beginning.) However we like to understand the story of Genesis it places Creation, everything in it and everything that follows, in time. Everything is a story, with a beginning, a sense that things can be timely – happening at a proper time – and a sense of events leading to an end. (Music, as distinct from Harmony, is an art happening in time.)

Cassius Dio thought the associations of days and planets came from the Egyptians. The Babylonians had a story of seven days of creation long before the Genesis myth was written, but it was a complex story of many gods. The Hebrew version simplified it, had one creator God and, very importantly, made Nature important in itself rather than describing a world influenced by many smaller deities.

It was a very different way of seeing the world and our relationship with it.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.¹³

(Some say that the original Hebrew makes it clear that this our world, the world in which we are intimately a part, not as cosmic or universal as the English makes it – Sky and Land rather than Heaven and Earth.)¹⁴

Creation began with Light.

And God said “Let there be Light!” And there was light.¹⁵

Light is the creative force which existed before the sun moon and stars were made.

God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The idea of the week, as I’ve explained, was ancient and comes from the tuning of the lyre. The Hebrews did not name the days after the planets – simply first day, second day and so on – but they named the planet Saturn *Shabtay* after the Sabbath, the day of rest. They knew the same order of planets in the cosmos.

By the time of the beginning of Christianity the Creation myth was seen as a parallel with Plato’s creation story in *Timaeus*. According to Philo this work of seven days was the pattern of Creation, the pattern of Harmony, rather than the complete construction of the physical world.

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.¹⁶

Creation was very good.

Unfortunately, the first human beings lost their harmonious relationship with the good Creation.

Job questioned why, if God and Creation was good, was his life so awful. God says:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

¹³ Genesis 1:1 KJV

¹⁴ <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/38447/sky-and-land-vs-heaven-and-earth-in-gen-11>

¹⁵ Genesis 1:3 KJV

¹⁶ Genesis 1:31 KJV

Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?¹⁷

David, later King David, father of Solomon who built the first great Temple, composed the psalms which are at the heart of worship.

David's instrument is the lyre. He is one of the succession of sacred lyre players. There is a rabbinic tradition that David's lyre was seven-stringed. John C Franklin in his *Kinyras, the Divine Lyre*, suggests this was the case. The association of David with the seven-stringed lyre is implied by his role as king, sacred player, singer - and the Hebrew name of the lyre, *kinnor*, is derived from Kinyras.

David sings praises to the kinnor, the lyre – usually translated as harp:

I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp. ¹⁸

And his music can be used for healing, restoring harmony in the soul:

And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. ¹⁹

This story ensured that the idea that the music of the harp could be used for healing was remembered throughout the middle-ages.

The Hebrew Temple was a model of Creation and was God's dwelling place on Earth. One of the features of the Temple was the Menorah, a seven-branched candlestick made from one piece of gold. Philo, writing in the first century CE, explains the cosmic symbolism of the Menorah.

The first century AD Jewish theologian Philo described the candlestick and its connection with the order of the planets. A little less than two hundred years later Clement of Alexandria, basing his description on Philo, wrote:

The lamp...was placed to the south of the altar of incense: and by it were shown the motions of the seven planets...the sun, like the lamp, set in the midst of all the planets, dispenses with a kind of divine music to those above and to those below.²⁰

¹⁷ Job 39:4-7 KJV

¹⁸ Psalm 49:4 KJV

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 23 KJV

²⁰ <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.iv.v.vi.html>

In other words, the lamp is the pattern of the cosmos. It has the same form as the seven string lyre of the Babylonian system, with the Sun as its central string.

In Psalm 43 the harp is the kinnor, with seven strings tuned exactly as the seven lights of the lamp in the temple.

O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp (kinnor) will I praise thee, O God my God.²¹

The ancient Temple was a model of the Cosmos – and its liturgy helped sustain creation.

The Temple music included a varied orchestra, including the ancient kinnor, a larger harp - the nével - pipes, flutes, trumpets and percussion. The music, as an organised and regulated aspect of the liturgy, predated the building of the Temple:

And these are they whom David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord, after that the ark had rest.

And they ministered before the dwelling place of the tabernacle of the congregation with singing, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem: and then they waited on their office according to their order.²²

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The Menorah shows that the lyre and the image of the cosmos preserved the same order and the same musical scale – a sign aspect of the divine law of Harmony in all Nature.

Margaret Barker argues that the ancient Hebrews knew a female aspect of deity, necessarily the first thing God created, and the representation of the guiding principle in Creation.

This Lady – Asherah - would take the place of Aphrodite Urania as the personification of harmony. Take this idea of Harmony away and there's a danger that God is re-imagined as a totalitarian ruler or a God who rules by set laws rather than a divine law of Harmony within Creation and the Soul.

After the Hebrews returned from captivity in Babylon in the sixth-century BCE their monotheism became more rigorous, and this feminine imagery was suppressed. Perhaps in the world of the Temple popular mythology had become a distraction from the more cosmic meaning of the image of Harmony,

²¹ Psalm 43:3:4

²² 1 Chronicles 6 31-32 KJV

Later in Hebrew tradition the Lady seems to have been remembered in the more abstract writings about Wisdom. Margaret Barker writes:

The mysterious Wisdom had something to do with spiritual vision, with the human mind, and with knowledge. The harmony of the world was closely connected to her way of perceiving the world, since she joined all things together. What Wisdom gave was not just knowledge and information; it was an attitude to knowledge and information such that the world was in harmony.²³

In her book *Creation*, a biblical vision for the environment, Barker explains in detail the ways in which the law within Nature was understood in the Hebrew world. They wrote of the “bonds” which held Creation together, which were also related to the idea of the covenant between God and Man. Could these bonds be the golden web which Harmony weaves in Creation – which I like to imagine as the web, or réseau, which gives stricture to lace. The music of the Temple was essential to maintain the harmony between this world, the music of the angels and God.

These ideas must surely have been carried into Christian thought. For example, Philo wrote that the Messiah, who was already existent, waiting the time to come to Earth, was the child of the Word and Wisdom.²⁴ The medieval development of Mary as a human figure of Wisdom is an inevitable product of this idea.

THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE

The earliest texts of the New Testament, the seven authentic letters of Paul, are concerned with the Lord, Jesus, who is priest of the cosmic temple. This idea is elaborated in the later *Letter to the Hebrews*. The physical temple, fixed to a particular place, is no longer valid. It was only ever a copy of the eternal temple, which is the pattern of Harmony in the cosmos and in the soul.

The earlier Hebrews imagined the earth as a disc with waters beneath it and a dome above. At some point, possibly at the time of the return from the captivity in Babylon (whatever that actually was) they adopted the Babylonian cosmos, the system of planets which matched the strings of the lyre.

The earthly temple could be seen as a representation of the heavenly temple, the cosmos. According to the Jewish historian Josephus the veil before the Holy Holies was

²³ (<http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/WisdomAndTheStewardshipOfKnowledge.pdf>)

²⁴ Margaret Barker, *Creation. A biblical vision for the environment*, T & T Clark, 2010. P.248ff

woven of four colours representing the elements which made the physical world. It was decorated with a representation of the stars.

This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures.

(Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 5.5.4)

The signs of the zodiac were symbolised by the twelve jewels worn by the High Priest.

And for the twelve stones, whether we understand by them the months, or whether we understand the like number of the signs of that circle which the Greeks call the Zodiac, we shall not be mistaken in their meaning.

(Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3:186)

This veil and the priest himself, moving and entering the temple was the equivalent of the eighth sphere, God was beyond this veil with the choirs of angels who communicated God's light to the planets and the lower spheres, represented by the Menorah.

Though the symbolism of the temple is complex it can be seen to be a reflection of the cosmos, which was the sign of the heavenly temple – which was in itself an image of Harmony.

The idea of the heavenly temple was known to the Dead Sea Scrolls community.²⁵ It seems to me possible that the importance of the heavenly temple grew with the political troubles of the last two centuries BC and this led to some sects devoting themselves to this new cosmic vision. I also suspect that a possible inspiration for this movement towards the cosmic temple was the discovery of the precession of the equinoxes. Hipparchus in the 2nd century BC saw that the entire celestial sphere appeared to move. This was actually due to the wobble of the Earth. It seemed as if the rising of the zodiac very slowly changed. There was a series of ages, of about 2000 years, as the zodiac returned to its starting point. The Age of the Aries, the Bull, was giving way to the Age of Pisces, the fish.²⁶

This was the origin of the Roman Mithraic religion. Mithras was the sun beyond the sun who slays the bull and brings about a new eon.

Is this idea must be behind Paul's talk of a coming age (1 Corinthians 2:6, in more recent translations than KJV)? The precession seemed to show that there was a power beyond the zodiac. The old celestial powers were obsolete. It is possible that this coming era was

²⁵ file:///C:/Users/ajbak/Downloads/503Doud(3).pdf

²⁶ See David R. Fideler. *Jesus Christ, Sun of God: Ancient Cosmology and Early Christian Symbolism*. United States, Quest Books, 1993.

believed to bring tumultuous change, an end to the old world - but this never happened. The precession of the equinoxes is a gradually process that has no perceptible effect on the planet. There was no dramatic end of an eon. The new world the early Christians expected did not arrive but the leap was made from an earthly temple, fixed to one place and belonging to one chosen people, to a concept of eternal temple – which, to those with a background of the old temple lore, must have an eternal High Priest.

A story of how there came to be such a High Priest according to Hebrew tradition could easily have developed.

For those who believed that the cosmos was the heavenly temple of which the earthly temple was a copy the complex temple tradition of the Hebrew Temple would provide the materials for an elaborate backstory to explain how that High Priest came to be there. Prophecies and psalm would supply the details of the suffering Messiah to tell the story of how such a priest died and became eternal.

The Letter to the Hebrews explains this in detail.

Christ is not a priest from the line of Moses and Aaron but from a more mysterious origin. He is a “priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Genesis 14:18–20)

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;

To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;

Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

(Hebrews 6:19-20, 7:1-3 KJV)

Christ is, in some way, heir to Melchisedec and is Priest in the heavenly temple:

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;

A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

(Hebrews 8:1-2 KJV)

The earthly temple is a copy of the heavenly temple:

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, *that* thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

(Hebrews 8:5 KJV)

Where is this Heavenly Temple? It is here and now for those with faith:

For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest...

ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

(Hebrews 12:18, 22)

The Heavenly Temple is the Cosmos in which the eighth sphere is the veil, the stars, beyond which is God and the angels. This is the true Heavenly Jerusalem. If we do not have an understanding that the true Cosmos is Harmony, present in all Creation, where, in the modern universe, do we place heaven?

Though Paul makes a cryptic remark about someone ascending to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2) (it is unclear what he means by this – he might be referring to the highest sphere below God rather than the heaven of Venus) his letters (at least the seven believed to be authentic) do not describe the Heavenly Temple but focus on the idea that Christ is within us.

But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

(Romans 8:10)

Perhaps the elaborate symbolism of the Heavenly Temple developed after Paul's time though most scholars date the *Letter to the Hebrews* to before 70AD, shortly after the presumed dates of Paul's letters.

Alternatively, in the light of these fragmentary pieces of information, I am tempted to suggest that the idea of the heavenly cosmic temple predates Paul's letters and could well be a key theme in the earliest Christian communities which certainly predate Paul (he is writing to established churches) and predate the gospels by an uncertain number of decades. This might be something which was passed on from the Dead Sea Scrolls community, along with some concept of who or what the High Priest of this temple might be.

St John's gospel (assumed to have been written before 100AD) places the Logos (incarnated as Jesus) in the Cosmos. This appears to be consistent with the imagery of the Cosmic Temple.

He was in the COSMOS, and the COSMOS was made by him, and the COSMOS knew him not.

And the LOGOS was made flesh.

The two nativity stories in Matthew and Luke flesh out this idea. The story is intended to parallel the story of Creation in Genesis.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. [2](#)And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

(Genesis 1:1)

(John's gospel makes the parallel clear – "In the beginning was the Word.")

In Matthew's nativity story Holy Spirit comes upon Mary, in Luke it is "the power of the Highest."

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

(Luke 1:35 KJV)

All three stories make it clear. Mary is the cosmos, bearing God in a new creation.

CHRIST THE CONDUCTOR

Musical allusions in the New Testament are rare. St Paul tells us that they sang psalms in the early church. In the context of the Temple and the more ancient tradition this must, surely, have been a far more important form of worship than might recognised today. The song of the angels is heard on earth at the Nativity. There is singing and the playing of harps in heaven.

In other early Christian texts Christ is referred to as the cosmic-lyre player (sometimes specifically the kinnor).

Clement of Alexandria, writing around 200 CE uses elaborate musical imagery. Christ is the leader of not just the Music but the Dance of Creation:

Tuning this world and this microcosm – I mean man, both soul and body – with the holy spirit, he plucks this many-toned instrument – man – and sings thereto for God.²⁷

The union of many in one, issuing in the production of divine harmony out of a medley of sounds and division, becomes one symphony following one choir-leader and teacher, the Word, reaching and resting in the same truth, and crying Abba, Father.²⁸

Later St Gregory of Nyssa (335–395) used this image of Christ as choir leader but to him the original Dance had been broken by the Fall:

For there was a time when the dance of the rational nature (i.e. humankind and the angels) was one, and looked to the one leader of the dance-chorus and, in its movement in relation to his command, interpreted the choral song in relation to the harmony which came forth from it. But later, when sin occurred, it put an end to that divine concord of the chorus, and broke this divinely inspired harmony of the dance. By its slippery deception, sin tripped up the feet of the first humans who were dancing with the angels and triggered humanity's fall.²⁹

We can work hard to regain our harmony with the Dance, but it is interesting that for Clement writing only a century and a half earlier the Dance was still happening, unbroken. Presumably the Incarnation of Christ had repaired whatever damage had been done. This seems to show a change in Christian attitudes in the period of the establishment of the Nicene creed which attempted to define the doctrine of the Trinity and demanded a literal and historical reading of the gospels.

What, from the point of view of this musical theme, appears to be the original vision of the cosmic temple, seems to be present in the early Christian *Odes of Solomon*, perhaps written soon after 100AD, but possibly earlier.

These are probably songs, relics of a sung liturgy.

From Ode 6

As the hand moves over the harp, and the strings speak, So speaks in my members the Spirit of the Lord, and I speak by His love

²⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 1:5:4

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 9

²⁹ Quoted in White, Dominic. *The Lost Knowledge of Christ: Contemporary Spiritualities, Christian Cosmology, and the Arts*. United States, Liturgical Press, 2015, p.115.

From Ode 7

For by Him it was wrought, and He was resting in the Son, and for its salvation He will take hold of everything. 18 And the Most High shall be known in His Saints, to announce to those that have songs of the coming of the Lord: That they may go forth to meet Him, and may sing to Him with joy and with the harp of many tones: The seers shall come before Him and they shall be seen before Him, And they shall praise the Lord for His love: because He is near and beholdeth.

From Ode 14

Teach me the Psalms of thy truth, that I may bring forth fruit in thee: And open to me the harp of thy Holy Spirit, that with all its notes I may praise thee, O Lord. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, so thou shalt give to me; and hasten to grant our petitions; and thou art able for all our needs. Hallelujah.

From Ode 26

I poured out praise to the Lord, for I am His: And I will speak His holy song for my heart is with Him. For His harp is in my hands, and the Odes of His rest shall not be silent.

(From <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/odes2.html>)

The cosmic temple of the *Letter to the Hebrews* was the harmonious cosmos of seven planetary spheres and the eighth sphere beyond, represented by the stars. This was known as the ogdoad by the earliest of the less orthodox Christian groups which have been misleadingly called “gnostics” in the past. There is nothing unorthodox about this view of the heavens though some of the writings of groups who had a negative view of Creation populate the heavens with troublesome beings and see Sophia, Wisdom, whose sphere ogdoad as fallen or corrupted. In more orthodox thought the eighth sphere is the Christian sabbath (above the seventh sphere, the Jewish Sabbath), and, in much later kabbala, the world of Platonic ideas. The Eighth sphere is the source of Harmony itself.

The “Hymn of Jesus” in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas has Jesus dancing before the crucifixion and singing with the ogdoad.

Glory to Thee, Father!

(And we going round in a ring answered to Him:)

Amen!

Glory to Thee, Word (*Logos*)!

Amen!

Glory to Thee, Grace (*Charis*)!

Amen!

Glory to Thee, Spirit!

Glory to Thee, Holy One!

Glory to Thy Glory!

Amen!

...

(Grace leadeth the dance.)

I would pipe; dance ye all.

Amen!

I would play a dirge; lament ye all.

Amen!

The one Eight (Ogdoad) sounds (or plays) with us.

Amen!

The Twelfth number above leadeth the dance.

Amen!

All whose nature is to dance [doth dance].

Amen!

Who danceth not, knows not what is being done.

Amen!³⁰

THE COSMOS AND THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The ancient cosmos is essential to the understanding of how Creation works in medieval theology. The planetary spheres play a part in the transmission of the divine power to the material world. The original light – LUX – radiates through the Sun and the heavenly bodies, guiding the formation of everything in Nature.

³⁰ <https://sacred-texts.com/chr/gno/hoj.htm>

The great 13th century Franciscan theologian Bonaventure explained that, though all things had their causes and designs (“seminal reasons”) in God, their generation

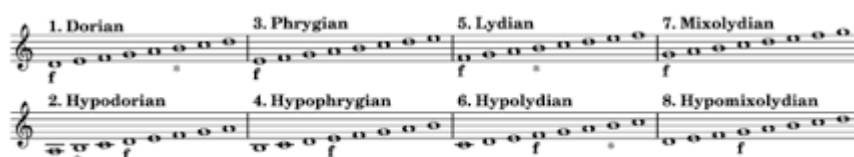
...cannot take place in generative and corruptible matter except by the beneficial action of the light of those heavenly bodies that are most remote from generation and corruption; namely the sun, moon and the stars.³¹

But this LUX is not light in our usual sense. It is a creative energy which also encompasses sound and all the languages of the senses, sight, taste, sound, touch and smell. LUX is incorporated into Nature and forms the Universal Harmony which guides all things known through the senses. And, of course, Creation is something that is continuous. New things are continuously being formed.

The medieval philosopher happily looked to the movements of the visible stars as an indication of changes in our world. They were not physical objects themselves, but a different kind of created object, made of their own unearthly element, the quintessence.³²

As I have explained, these moving lights were only images of the fundamental harmonies.

The Gregorian modes of the western church were a way of classifying existing chants. Though the system was not established until the 9th century AD by tradition or nature it follows exactly the seven note scale of the sacred lyre. The eight modes are arranged, by their lowest notes, in the order of the days of the week – no. 1 is on D, the Sun, no. 2 on the Moon and so on. The eighth returns to D to make the octave, the Sunday of the following week.



* Under certain conditions, the B is flattened in modes 1, 2, 5, and 6.

The Gregorian modes are numbered 1 to 8, and only much later, in the Renaissance, were they given Greek names, from Greek texts that were known in the middle-ages, including Boethius, but these are confusing and misplaced.

The original songs sung to the sacred lyre might have been in slightly different modes, simply moving about the seven individual notes. In Gregorian theory the modes on A B C

³¹ Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, translated by Zachary Hayes O.F.M., D. Th.. (Franciscan Institute 1996) p. 57

³² See Zachary A Matus, *Franciscans and the Elixir of Life*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017

and the eight mode are versions of the modes on D E F and G, with a lower range. These were called “plagal” modes using misunderstood terminology from the Roman theorist Boethius.

The eighth mode has a distinct sound but it is a plagal version of the seventh and cannot be said to represent the eighth sphere – the stars. It does give the symbolic eight, the beginning of a new octave.

An 11th century song demonstrates the notes of each planet as they appear in the tuned cosmos.

The order of the planets from earth to heaven

Is similar to the harmony of pitches.

(Cicero) traced them from the lowest numbers in ascending order thus:

Moon, Hermes, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.

In a similar order you should parse out pitches:

Make the first the moon, which lies close to the earth;

Then note how much Mercury is higher than that one,

And the musical order computes the tone for this space.

Venus guards the following space, fitting for a semitone. ³³

The distances of tone and semitone form that scale on A, exactly as in the Gafori illustration and the ancient lyre.

In the 13th century Saint Francis of Assisi and his followers had a particular interest in music. Francis himself was said to sing troubadour songs accompanying himself on an imaginary fiddle made of sticks. His relationship with Nature suggests he was a new Orpheus. There is story that when he was ill an angel came to play to him on a cithera, a form of kinnor or lyre. ³⁴

From the early days there were Franciscan composers and theorists at Assisi. The earliest surviving description of the ethoi, or qualities, of the modes was written by Juan

³³ Text provided by Sam Barrett, Professor of Early Music, Pembroke College, Cambridge

³⁴ See Andrew Baker, *Hidden Music, a Franciscan Musical Theology*, AJB Publications, 2023

Gil de Zamora in the mid-13th century. This was copied by Renaissance writers including Juan de Pareja and Gafori. These descriptions preserve the idea that each mode had a distinctive character, an echo of the archetypal qualities of which they are aspects.

Juan Gil says of Mode 3, associated with Mars and called by Gafori the Phrygian:

One should note that the third tone is angry and stimulating, having vigorous leaps in its contour. Whence Boethius says that Pythagoras roused some youth to health through the third tone, through mode two one returns to a gentler disposition.³⁵

Of Mode 5, Jupiter's mode, he says:

One should note that the fifth tone is modest and delightful, cheering the sad and softening the anxious, calling back the fallen and hopeless.

Juan Gil explains that appropriate modes should be used to suit the mood of the liturgy. Mode 5 is often used for the Gradual which introduces the gospel.

Today, three or four thousand years after this story began we can still experience music – and a mystery – in certain churches which takes us back through the ancient Temple, the ancient image of the cosmos, the imagination inspired by the muses, to the seven strings of Kinyras's lyre – to the source of Harmony.

Medieval theology assumes that there is a Harmony which guides the formation of things – a universal Harmony visible in the stars which guides the formation of all things, guides the body and soul to unity and guides the working of justice and peace.

This story of the Nativity is part of the Christian emphasis, developed from the Hebrew myth of creation, on the value of Nature and the presence of God in this world, here and now. In the incarnation God, the One, the Word, enters this world and humanity through the embodiment of human nature and Harmony.

³⁵ Loewen, Peter. *Music in Early Franciscan Thought*. Netherlands, Brill, 2013, p. 212

If we attempt to rationalise the impossible story of the Virgin Birth we can lose sight of its meaning. This story can only be read as a story or as entirely true. If we read it selectively – accepting some things and rejecting others – we are distorting its meaning.

In a sermon on the Assumption Bonaventure tells us that the Virgin Mary is

...the mother of the fabric of the cosmos and the mother of angelic reparation. So Bernard (St Bernard of Clairvaux): 'Rightly then, O Lady, the eyes of every creature turn to you, through whom and in whom and from whom the kind hand of God created and recreated.'³⁶

Elsewhere Bonaventure writes that everything that is said of Wisdom in the Old Testament applies to Mary. His second sermon for the feast of the Assumption is on the text (Wisdom 7:29):

She is more beautiful than the sun and above all the order of the stars being compared with the light she is found before it. (Sermons p. 168)

The late medieval Mary is the patron of learning, of all earthly wisdom – as can be seen at Chartres, presiding over the Seven liberal arts, Astronomy, Music, Geometry, Arithmetic, Rhetoric. Logic and Grammar.

St Francis declares the significance of Mary in his *Salutation*.

Hail, O Lady, Holy Queen, Mary Holy God-bearer, Who are the virgin made church.

Chosen by the Most Holy Father in Heaven, whom he consecrated with his most holy beloved Son and with the Holy Spirit the paraclete.

In whom there is and was all fullness of grace and every good.

Hail his Palace! Hail his Tabernacle! Hail his House!

Hail his Robe! Hail his Servant! Hail his Mother!³⁷

Francis sees that Mary is a human form of the Temple, in its earlier form as the portable tabernacle. This is an echo of the idea of Wisdom as the tabernacle, or within the tabernacle, and as the mother of the Messiah which is found in Philo over a thousand years earlier. She is Mother of God. She is the Cosmos – the pattern of Creation – bearing the Logos – God within Creation. In later times some objected that this high regard for

³⁶ Bonaventure, 6th sermon on the Assumption. In

³⁷ McMichael and Wrisley Shelby, op. cit, p. 21)

Mary was non-scriptural but, in the context of this study, it can be seen as authentic and ancient and clearly implied in the three incarnation accounts in the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. It has far older origins in temple tradition, reaching back to the original Queen of Heaven – and yet Mary is a human person, and even if we think of her as fiction she could be said to be more real than any historical person because she is an icon of a universal reality.

Later Franciscans saw that, as Mary had been the bearer of God she is also the Mother of everything in a new Creation. Everything contains God. This had been explained in philosophical terms, the Word in Creation, but this icon of Mary shows that God is present in real Nature, here and now, in Us.’

This Queen of Heaven, or Regina Mundi, Queen of the Cosmos, is human, material. This is not a new invention of the 13th century but a rediscovery of the meaning of the ancient Hebrew temple in human form.

In the 13th century philosophers in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic worlds, influenced by rediscovered works of Aristotle, began to argue that God was remote and detached from Creation – merely the prime mover. This, as Bonaventure warned, could lead to a quite false idea of God and a devaluing of Creation.

Aware of this danger the Jewish students of Kabbalah in Gerona in Spain, led by Rabbi Isaac the Blind, developed the imagery of the ten sephiroth. This kabbalistic philosophy sees God as inseparable from Creation. The sephiroth are aspects of God through which the divine Light emanates down to every level of existence.³⁸

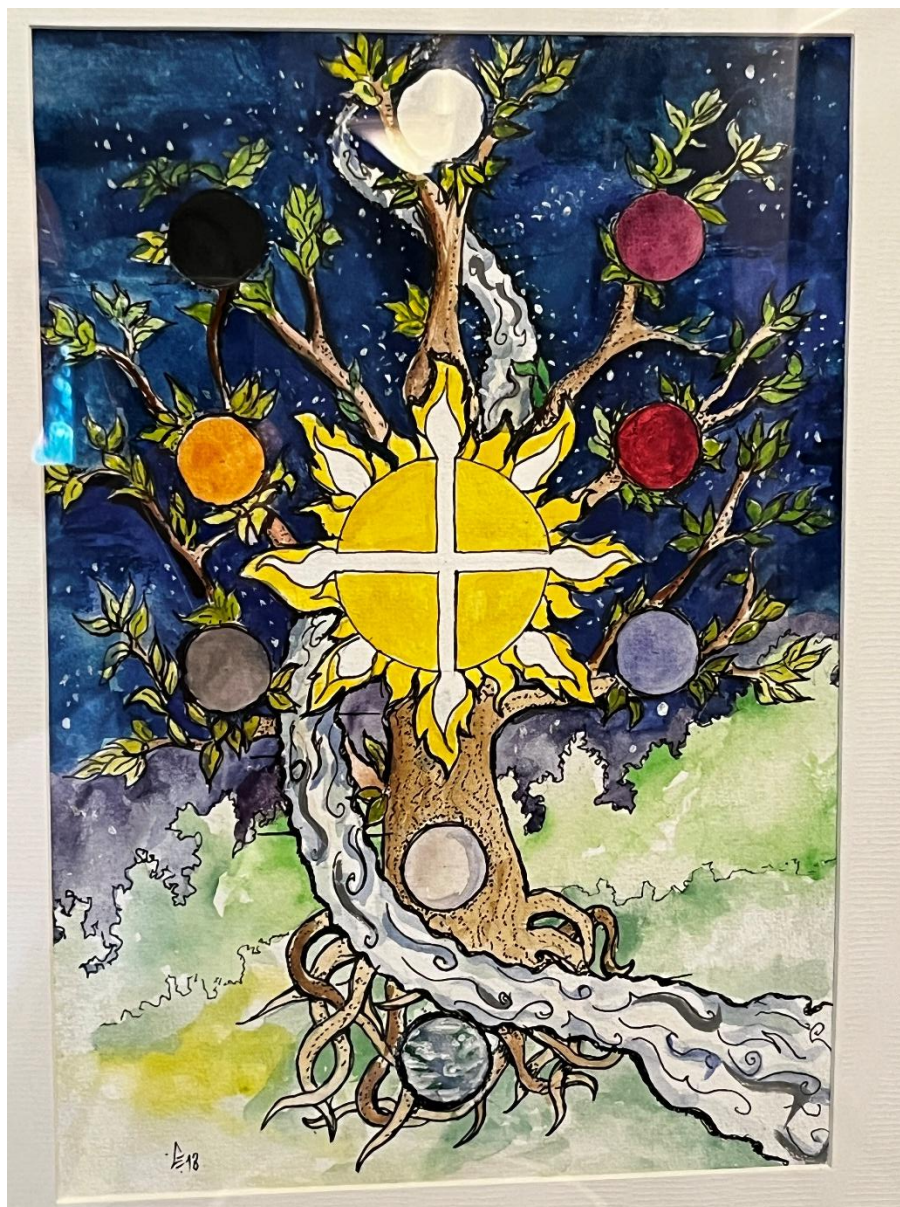
When these ten sephiroth are represented as a Tree of Life the central sephiroth is Tiphereth, like the Sun or the central light of the Menorah, radiating God’s light to the others.

The sephiroth communicate the light of God through Creation in the same way that Bonaventure saw the light (Lux) emanating through the planetary spheres to take on forms in Nature. The system of the sephiroth has an advantage of being more abstract than the old spheres. The planets might be reflections of the sephiroth but the ten lights represent this creative working in every aspect of existence. They are what the cosmic temple represented.

³⁸ *The Early Kabbalah*. United States, Paulist Press, 1986.

The ten are parallels of the eight spheres with God, as the Crown, above and the physical world or Earth below. The central light is Tiphereth, beauty, which takes the place of the Sun or the central string of the lyre. In Christian kabbalah Tiphereth is the place of Christ – in particular, Christ Crucified. The highest light below the Crown is Chokmah, Wisdom, and has all the characteristics of the eighth sphere, the place of Sophia. The Renaissance Franciscan Francesco Giorgi saw Chokmah as the heaven of Platonic Ideas.

The kabbalistic Tree of Life can be seen as a map of the fundamental structure of the world, the pattern of the true Temple within.



Bonaventure's series of mediations *The Tree of Life* tell the story of Christ from his origins before Creation, his earthly life, death and resurrection, to his place in heaven. The structure of the series appears to follow an ascent through the spheres, with four of the twelve sections for the crucifixion. Bonaventure asks us to place ourselves in the scenes. This is a form of spiritual tuning, participating in the story through every archetypal aspect. As we are a microcosm the ascent is a real experience in imagination – and at the same time it's a story happening in this world, in real time. The barriers between creation and the temple begin to dissolve.

This is very close to the Islamic tradition of spiritual journeys, inspired by the prophet's night journey through the heavens to the farthest mosque, Jerusalem. The 13th-century Franciscans certainly knew about Islamic work with imagination, though this is not quite the same as the Islamic concept of a *mundus imaginalis*, an imaginal world between Creation and God.

In this same period the muses appear in a new guise in the Persian epic *Haft Paykar* by Nizami, completed in 1197.³⁹ King Bahram Gur builds domes for his seven wives, the seven beauties, who tell him stories which guide the formation of his character. The seven beauties are the seven planets and also represent regions or countries and colours. They also belong to the days of the week in the ancient tradition but their order begins with Saturday, Saturn.

The Platonic and Pythagorean sources lie behind this story.

The lyre player in *Haft Paykar* is the king's slave-girl Fitna. Jacomien Prinz writes:

...Bahrām's spiritual growth can be attributed to the magic of music, described in the *Haft Paykar* as part of Fitna's "magic's charms" (p. 83). Nizāmī adopted the Platonic belief that music can have a lasting positive effect on a person's character in virtue of the common harmonic nature shared by the world soul, the human soul, and the soul of music.

Nizāmī presents Bahrām as an example of a passage in the *Republic*, where Plato argued that: "rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace, so that if someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, then the opposite" (p. 1038).⁴⁰

³⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haft_Peykar

⁴⁰ <https://www.jhiblog.org/2025/04/16/gendered-conceptions-of-cosmic-harmony-and-the-power-of-music-in-ni%E1%BA%93amis-haft-paykar/>

In this period, then, in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, music (and imagination) are seen as the binding force between God and Creation as an antidote to the danger of making God detached and unknowable which might be encouraged by some followers of Aristotle.

HOW CREATION WORKS...

This story is about the nature of the world – the nature of Nature. Religion, as a way of life, can be a reaction to this knowledge (or supposed knowledge) of how the world works. I have passed through several religious systems in this story. There are, of course, others in which the idea of Harmony from Unity and some of the recurring images are important, but I have tried to follow a particular thread from a beginning in the blue-skied and azure-sea-d bronze age to the present.

At the heart of the story is the idea that everything that is and everything that seeks being, or even occurs, is drawn by Harmony. Harmony, very importantly, is inseparable from the energy or desire which draws things to find form. In Christian terms, the Spirit, or perhaps, remembering Aphrodite, Love, draws all things to Unity.

In the Christian world it might be possible to imagine God entering this world as an intrusion into something detached from God, lawless, or subject to purely mechanical laws, or even fallen. But until the 16th century most religious thinkers would assume that this was not the case. Creation had divine laws within it. It was Good. A more Platonic theologian would say Nature was never detached from God but the Christian story emphasises a more intimate relationship between Nature and humanity in all its aspects than Platonism imagined. From the point of view of the Cosmic Temple the archetypes are within us. The Lord, if we follow the Christian story, is within us and within all people – all things. Mary is the mother of all things.

We might easily restrict ourselves to thinking about individual objects, but there are no individual objects in Creation. Everything exists in relationship – just as one note needs others to reveal its modal quality. Everything is drawn to unite with other things, to compose larger works. This is, as I suggested at the beginning, the Dance – new works and stories linked by golden threads which might be invisible and unknowable to us.

Harmony is a principle in Nature which draws things together and guides their Formation. Discord and the occasional trips and stumbles are necessary parts of the working of Formation. The medieval theologians knew a classic description of this in the work of the author known as Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Divine Names*.

This is a very important text. It establishes the principle that the object of the working of Harmony is Peace – or, we might also say, Justice – when diverse things come together in Unity:

For all things love to dwell at peace, and to be united amongst themselves, and to be unmoved and unfallen from themselves, and the things of themselves. And the perfect Peace seeks to guard the idiosyncrasy of each unmoved and unconfused, by its peace-giving forethought, preserving everything unmoved and unconfused, both as regards themselves and each other, and establishes all things by a stable and unswerving power, towards their own peace and immobility.⁴¹

To the 13th century theologian Bonaventure creation was an outpouring of God, divine ideas taking form through the hierarchies of angels, stars and planets and of matter. Nature depended on this law within creation, expressed by these hierarchies. God did not control and decree every detail but had established this inherent law which we might call Wisdom and see in human form in Mary as mother of Christ who contained in himself all the divine Ideas.

Once the old image of the cosmos was rejected this whole system of creation seemed to be nonsense. God could be rejected entirely as having no meaning in a mechanical system, or seen as detached from Nature or as a dictator controlling everything that had being and everything that happened, good or bad, including war, disease and natural disasters.

Of course, as this essay has hoped to show, Harmony came first. The true cosmos is Harmony, and that Harmony belongs to the Queen of Heaven.

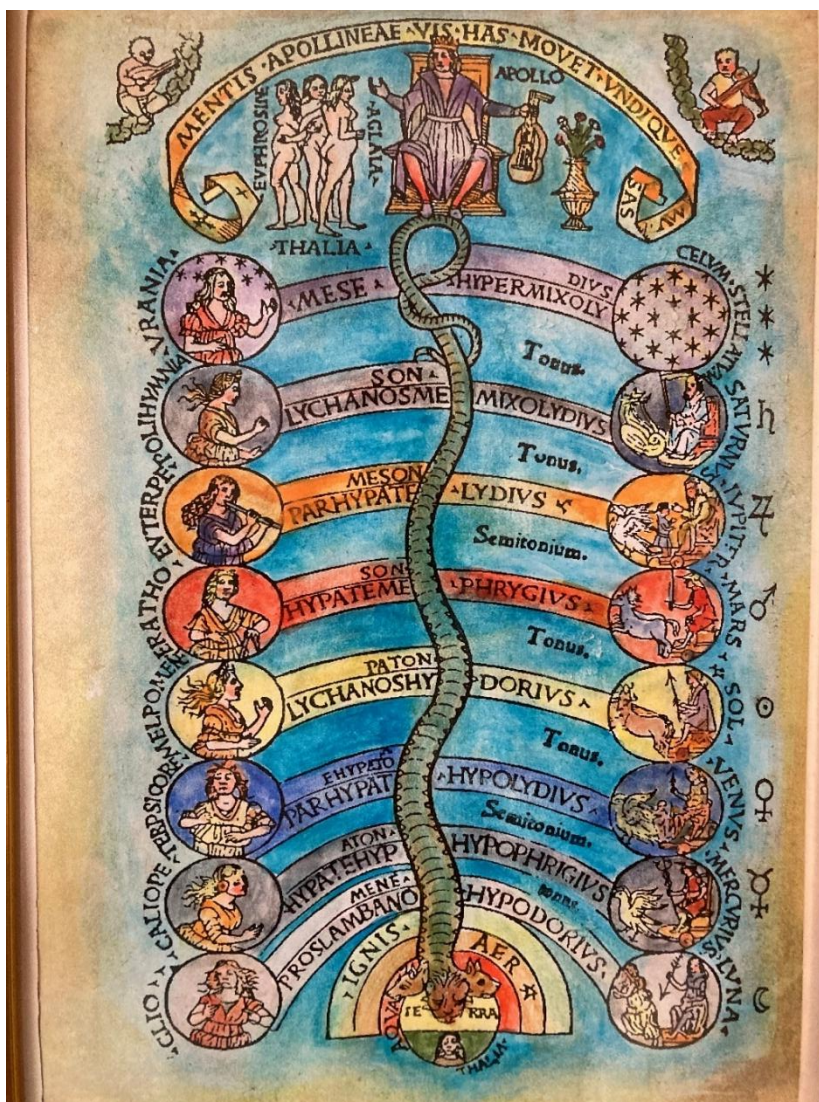
THE MUSES RETURN

The muses themselves are less visible in the middle-ages but they reappear in the Renaissance when classical imagery became fashionable. This famous illustration by Gafori shows the muses with their associated planets, the musical scale and the modes. The modes are the Gregorian eight but they have been given the Greeks names which

⁴¹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, Chapter 11, section 3. From https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/areopagite_03_divine_names.htm#c7

have remained in use but are misleading. These diatonic modes are far older than the Greek.

Remarkably the order of muses, musical notes and planets is consistent with the earliest source. Other Renaissance writers disagree about the order of the muses but Gafori is undoubtedly correct. This is, in effect, a diagram of the archetypal qualities of the sacred lyre, but with an added eighth string for the eighth sphere, making an octave. This is neat but wrong. The Hypomixolydian mode is a mode on D, not A. It is the eighth mode in the Gregorian series which has D as its lowest note because the series follows the order of the days of the week rather than of an ascent through the heavens. The eighth sphere, though, correctly belongs to Urania.



CONCLUSION

It is important, I feel, to say that this temple, imaginal world, pattern of creation is NOT religious in itself. It is, if we accept that it is at all, a fundamental pattern in Nature and the mind.

The religious imagery and activities we chose may be ways of attuning ourselves to this universal reality but they can also be ways of imposing laws on the world and ourselves or asserting divisions. If we accept the universal pattern we can judge the value of whatever religious or mythological images we engage with.

The Harmony at the heart of this is by definition universal. We may enjoy whatever stories and images allow us to participate in this Temple within us, but anything which limits their universality must separate them and us from the Universal Harmony.

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ⁱ *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St Francis*. Ewert Cousins (Translator), Ignatius Brady (Contributor). The Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1988 (first edition 1978), p.69. Note: The Latin original of this passage uses the words *macrocosmus* and *minor mundus* for "microcosm".