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## HYMNOGRAPHY WITH(OUT) MUSIC AS SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER

Interpretation by contemporary Eastern Christians of the theme of the 2015 conference of the International Society for Orthodox Church Music (and now the title of the present volume) “Creating Liturgically: Hymnography and Music” is likely to depend on the prevailing musical practices within their own churches. Those whose traditions of liturgical singing long ago embraced polyphonic arrangements of chant and free composition for mixed chorus may envision composers working in staff notation to create new harmonizations or completely original music for what is essentially a fixed repertory of hymns transmitted in the service books of the Byzantine rite. Meanwhile others whose hymnody remains heavily dependent on oral transmission will tend to perceive the music and text as fundamentally interrelated, bound together in ways that may be stretched through greater or lesser melodic elaboration but not completely reconfigured.

The latter approach generally fits the experience of modern Balkan and Middle Eastern Christians whose liturgical expectations have been shaped by received traditions of Byzantine chanting, in which most hymns are either *idimela* possessing essentially unique, through-composed melodies, or metrical and melodic *contrafacta* (*prosomoia*) to specific prototypes contained within a circumscribed repertory of model hymns (*automela* or, in the case of canons, *heirmoi*). Relationships between text and music within any given hymn are governed largely by the melodic formulas available within the System of the Eight Modes (*Octoechos*) for its particular musical mode and stylistic genre.<sup>1</sup> Although the melodic content of these formulas may have changed over time, one may see essentially the same structural principles operating over the last millennium in *Sticheraria*, *Heirmologia* and other musically notated collections of Byzantine hymnody.<sup>2</sup> Greater understanding of how past generations of Eastern Christians “created liturgically” may be gained by placing the con-

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1 Hieromonk Ephraim of St Anthony’s Monastery in Florence, Arizona, USA has compiled an extensive catalogue of formulas based on published sources in the New (Chrysanthine) Method of Byzantine musical notation organised by mode, genre (*Heirmologic*, *Sticheraric* and *Papadic*), and syllable-count. See <http://www.stanthonysmonastery.org/music/Formula.html>

2 See, for example, the diachronic treatments of Byzantine hymnody in Spyridon St. Antoniou, *Tò eírμολόγιον καὶ ἡ παράδοση τοῦ μέλους του*, Institute of Byzantine Musicology Studies 8 (Athens: Institute of Byzantine Musicology, 2004); and Σπυρίδων Στ. Ἀντωνίου, *Μορφολογία τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Μουσικῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Μουσικῆς* [*Morphology of Byzantine Ecclesiastic Music*] (Thessalonica: Ἐκδόσεις Βάνιας, 2008).

tents of chant books and other notated musical sources within their broader historical contexts of worship and piety as preserved in Orthodox service books, collections of rubrics, canonical legislation, and patristic writings.

The aim of my prior study “Hesychasm and Psalmody” was to achieve such an understanding for later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Byzantium, a period prior to the modern invention of the terms ‘Byzantine chant’ and ‘Byzantine music’ when the term *psalmodia* embraced the rendering of both biblical psalms and extra-scriptural hymnody.<sup>3</sup> Within that historical context “psalmody” proved to be not only a textually but also a musically ambiguous term. As had been the case in Eastern Christianity since Late Antiquity, *psalmodia* of the late Byzantine period encompassed a spectrum of practices ranging from the grand and carefully choreographed sung worship of cathedrals to the meditative use of the Psalter by ascetics, amongst whom the use of the verb ‘to chant’ (*psallein*) might indicate forms of recitation or reading with a negligible or non-existent musical component.

Today one finds in Eastern Orthodoxy a similarly broad range of approaches to the performance of Byzantine hymnody, with variations observable both within and across jurisdictions. The remainder of this study will briefly consider only one of form of variation in hymnodic practice, namely that of rendering in intoned recitations (cantillation) or a plain-speaking voice (a practice generally avoided by northern Slavs) hymns that, whether according to the circumstances of their composition or prevailing use, were historically intended for melodic performance. Contrasting examples of this phenomenon may be seen in modern Greek and Russian approaches to the celebration of Saturday vespers and Sunday matins. In Russian usage the ancient evening hymn “Joyful Light” (*Phos hilaron*) and the canticle of Symeon (Luke 2:29–32) are usually sung chorally, but contemporary Greek rubrics place both among the *gerontika* traditionally recited by the monastic superior (*geron*) or some other senior figure.<sup>4</sup> The troparia of the Royal Office found at the beginning of matins are heard today in both traditions without their well-known melodies. Other morning hymns read simply in modern Greek practice are hypakoai, kontakia, oikoi, and the Resurrection Ode ‘Having Seen the Resurrection of Christ’.<sup>5</sup> Depending on the time available, Greek cantors may render the heirmoi and troparia of kanons with or without their melodies, while the prevailing Russian practice is to sing only the Paschal Canon in full.

This brief and far from exhaustive list of variations in the application of melody to the weekend offices of the Resurrection is only meant to be indica-

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3 Alexander Lingas, “Hesychasm and Psalmody,” in: *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism: Papers from the Twenty-eighth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1994*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham, *Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 4* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), 155–68.

4 Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, *The Office of Vespers for Sundays and Feasts Translated from the Greek Original* (Manchester: St Andrew’s Press, 2000), 22, 27 and 58.

5 Hypakoai and kontakia are, however, sung melodically in the sequence of hymns following the Introit (*Eisodikon*) of the Divine Liturgy.

tive of the range of divergence, which I have encountered during Lent at my present home parish in Oxford. When alternating between Greek and Russian styles, my colleagues and I at the choir desk (*analogion*) are now used to the awkward moments that ensue when we alight upon a hymn text that is somehow designated for musical performance in service books – by being ascribed, for example, to a particular musical mode – but is longer chanted melodically within one tradition or the other. Moments of confusion within contemporary Orthodox worship may also arise in connection with such items of biblical psalmody as the prokeimena and alleluiaria of the Divine Liturgy, which in Greek churches underwent a demusicalization that is only now gradually being reversed as a result of liturgical renewal.<sup>6</sup>

Accounting for specific divergences in the application of melodic singing versus cantillation in the contemporary Byzantine rite requires detailed diachronic study of the musical enrichment or impoverishment of specific repertoires of hymnody and psalmody, as well as of the forms of worship to which they are attached. Bearing in mind that this publication is directed towards a broad audience of church musicians, however, I will devote the remainder of this short essay to an overview of the demusicalization of hymnody as a historical phenomenon in both the public worship and the private devotions of Byzantine Christianity. This becomes evident in documents from the ninth century onwards in which troparia, canons and other chants originally composed for communal worship were assimilated for private prayer and devotion in ways that made their musical components optional or superfluous. I will begin by noting distinctions made in Late Antiquity between biblical psalmody and Christian hymnody that render the selective melodic impoverishment of the latter in Byzantine monasticism somewhat surprising.

#### LATE ANTIQUITY

Scholars now recognise that the ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’ of Ephesians 5:18–20 and Colossians 3:16–17 were not technical terms denoting particular types of chants, but synonyms indicative of the fluid boundaries between psalmody and hymnody in early Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Only a few of the many extra-scriptural hymns employed by Christians prior to the canonization of scripture in the fourth century A.D. were conveyed into the traditions of Byzantine liturgy, the two most notable examples being the evening hymn of thanksgiving

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6 I survey these changes in Alexander Lingas, “Tradition and Renewal in Greek Orthodox Psalmody,” in: *The Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical and Artistic Traditions*, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Margot Elsbeth Fassler (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

7 James W. McKinnon, ed. *Music in Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15–16. Recent overviews of musical practice in early Christianity are John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011) 182–87, and Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) 55–87.