

DIMITRIOS BALAGEORGOS

UNITY AND VARIETY IN ORTHODOX MUSIC:
THE CASE OF THE GREAT DOXOLOGY
(SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY - BEGINNING
OF THE 19TH CENTURY)

PREAMBLE

From the manuscript sources until today, the Great Doxology – as well as the whole spectrum of the ecclesiastical repertory – has undergone a progressive development with characteristic phases and gradual transformations. The Great Doxology was shaped by creative innovators and famous composers during the course of the development of psaltic art throughout the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods. Studying the sources, we can observe the historical process of the Great Doxology’s melodic development; we can also observe the process of its configuration and its morphological diversifications, brought about by the younger generation of composers. These morphological diversifications determined a remarkable course of development, which can be divided in five periods:

The first period is the so-called Byzantine one, from the 14th to the first half of the 15th century. The first musical setting of a part of the Great Doxology appeared in manuscript sources from the second half of the 14th century. This period was not productive:¹ only one anonymous melody is preserved. In this melody, the first hymn’s hemistich² and the final unit, including the last verse or part of it and the Trisagion³, were notated. The remaining verses were not accompanied by musical notation and their chanting followed the music of the first part of the hymn. The music of the hymn was not recorded in its entirety, which means that its melody was known and was chanted with simple and easily memorable musical phrases following the old tradition. The notation of the music shows homogeneity; in addition, the music phrases are identical in every manuscript in which they are collected.

1 For more information about the melopoiea of the Great Doxology during this period, see the article by the present author “The first appearance of the melos for the Great Doxology in the manuscript sources during the 14th century”, to be published by the Faculty of Music Studies, University of Athens in the volume dedicated to Prof. George Amargianni.

2 St. Triados Meteora 78, f. 53v. EBE 2062, ff. 50v-51v. Koutloumousiou 457, ff. 104v-105r.

3 EBE 2456, ff. 145r-145v. Koutloumousiou 436, f. 89r.

These particularities of the hymn's melodic setting preserved a psaltic doxological pattern that the chanter knew and which reflected the old psaltic tradition and the imitation of earlier teachers. All manuscript sources testify that the hymn's anonymous melody is presented only in the second chromatic mode. This traditional preference follows the old ecclesiastical practice in which all fixed hymns for the night and day offices and Divine Liturgy were chanted in the second mode.

The second period is the transitional phase from Byzantine to post-Byzantine era, from the mid-15th to the mid-17th century. This period favoured local peculiarities, owing to different local political and historical circumstances.⁴ It is, therefore, characterized by the coexistence of both old traditional and new settings to music of the Great Doxology. It should be noted that, in this case, the new repertoire includes the atypical works of Cretan composers as well as the composition of Melchizedek, bishop of Rhaidestos, which was meant to become a kind of template for subsequent settings to music.

Manuel Gazes initiated the period of development of the melopoeia of the Great Doxology in the 15th century. In fact, only a few verses of the Doxology were set by Gazes.⁵ Later, Ioannes Plousiadinou completed Gazes's work.⁶ In the mid-16th century famous composers from Crete such as Antonios and Benediktos Episkopopoulos, Dimitrios Tamias, Kosmas Varanis and Ignatios Tribizas created their own compositions, which are contained in particular Cretan musical manuscripts. The Cretan compositions should be regarded as rather atypical; their special features are the imposition or addition of extra verses (usually at the end of the composition), the local style, and the strong personal stamp of these composers.

A further enrichment of the Great Doxology's melopoetic tradition began in the first decades of the 17th century, mostly at the hands of composers from the major centres, such as the Patriarchate, but also by regional composers. The initiator of this tradition was Melchizedek, Bishop of Rhaidestos. With his first setting of the Great Doxology, he influenced and inspired later compositions, defining and establishing a configuration which was followed by almost all later composers.

The third period extends from the mid-17th to the mid-18th century. During this period, Melchizedek's composition served as musical standard for the glorious compositions of the latter period. This century is marked by the expansion of the tradition with new compositions by Jacob, Bishop of Ganos and Chora, the young Chrysafis, Germanos Bishop of New Patras, Priest Balasios, Petros Berektis, Kosmas Makedonas and Iberites, Giovaskos Vlachos, Athanasios Iberites, Ioannis Koufos, Arsenios Kydonias, Theodoulos Ainites, Deacon Theodosios of Chios and other lesser known composers. The renewal of psal-

4 Gr. Th. Stathi, "Η εξέλιξη της ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μουσικῆς στὴ μεταβυζαντινὴ περίοδο", In memory of Maximos, Metropolitan of Sarda, 1914-1986, v. 4, Geneva 1989, p. 438.

5 Koutlounousiou 455, f. 107r.

6 Dionisiou 570, ff. 3r, 90r.