



Achilleus Chaldaeakes from Greece.

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ACHILLEUS G. CHALDAEAKES

THE FIGURES OF COMPOSER AND CHANTER IN GREEK PSALTIC ART

The theme of the present paper is the *composer and chanter in Greek* (as well as in every other language's) *Psaltic Art*. Nowadays, we all – obviously – understand what a composer and a chanter means: **the composer** is the one who has the “creative state” and therefore the “capability to construct a chant, by inventing and writing new chants that are pleasing to his audience”, whereas **the chanter** is just the one who is called to “recite this chant”, to sing, to perform “various long known psalmodies”. Precisely what results from Chrysanthos' relevant writings in his *Great Theory of Music* [Chrysanthos, *Great Theory of Music*, p. 165, § 389]:

Chant-making is the power to construct chant. We construct chant, not just by chanting various long-known psalmodies, but also by inventing and writing our new chants, pleasing to listeners. Chant-making, therefore, differs from chant-singing because the latter is the recitation of a chant, while chant-making is a creative state.

We realize nevertheless that many more latent skills are needed in both cases, skills which may be misunderstood or unknown to people nowadays: a real

chanter should also be characterized by other special talents, just as a real composer should have a full knowledge of, and constantly follow, some specific rules. Nowadays, all these have been weakened; the criteria have been relaxed for a very long time. It is common, today, to characterize someone as a composer or chanter without much thought. At all events, we need to be much more careful and (even) more cautious in both cases. Let us recall, at this point, how these two figures that concern us (the chanter and the composer) are described in Greek musical sources.

By the 15th century, the monk Gabriel had already thought that it was advisable to “picture the perfect chanter” [Gabriel, pp. 100-103⁶⁹⁶⁻⁷²⁶]. He established, therefore, six criteria, which “should be met by any chanter who does not want to contradict his reputation” [Gabriel, pp. 88-89⁵⁸⁵⁻⁵⁸⁶]. Three of them are connected with the use of notation:

- *A knowledge of the musical notation’s “dictation”*
- *An ability to write music without the use of any reference book*
- *An immediate (and flawless) transcription of any music heard*

Whereas only two of them refer to the chanter’s vocal capabilities:

- *tonally correct vocal placement*
- *euphony*

Moreover, it is remarkable that the ability to

- *compose new melodies*

is included among the talents of a chanter.

Manuel Chrysaphes [Chrysaphes, pp. 46-47¹⁷⁶⁻¹⁹⁶], agrees with Gabriel’s observations; during the same period, he mentioned six respective “categories”,

which are not known to all but which ought to be known by all, especially to those who lay claim to this science. First, therefore, there is the ability to compose appropriate and fitting theseis following the rules of the art. Secondly, the ability not to follow slavishly and copy from the book, but to write with certainty without the book and as required by the art, whenever a composition is requested. Thirdly, the ability to sing at sight every kind of lesson, old and new, flawlessly, at any time and on every occasion, without previous study or thought. Fourthly, the ability to write and to chant exactly the melody that another singer performs. Fifthly, the ability to compose all kinds of original pieces either on one’s own initiative or from an outside commission both with and without preparation. Sixthly comes the judgment of the compositions, which is partly the ability to judge what is good and accurate in the work and what is not, and partly the ability to recognize someone’s work simply by hearing it. This is indeed the greatest achievement of all in the art.

And indeed, one particular question arises at this point: who exactly is Manuel Chrysaphes describing? The chanter or the composer? He proceeds [Chrysaphes, pp. 48-49¹⁹⁷⁻²¹²], by saying:

The man who is scientifically skilled and capable of using these above-mentioned six categories as the art requires, is now a perfect teacher: let him compose and write and teach and make judgments, let him discourse on his own and others’ works, especially the latter. For he will create his own compositions following