

This paper seeks to describe one way in which a typical 'Latin' cultural person can penetrate into the world of mediaeval Byzantine melodies, using his own experiences of the melodies of one or more liturgical chants from neighbouring liturgy traditions. This way transcends the limits posed by the romantic enchantment associated with the East-Slavonic baroque music composed for the Byzantine-Slavonic rite, which is frequently experienced by many in Central Europe with an interest in church music.

Personal experience

For one deeply interested in Gregorian chant, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile the aesthetics of singing with the instructions formulated by the mediaeval scholars in manuscripts. From the age of six, I served as an acolyte during the Latin liturgy, and was able to observe Gregorian chant performed by different priests and choral groups of laymen in Roman Catholic churches. Concurrently, I began to play the violin, the piano and organ, and was led to respect such laws of music as seemed to hold universally. After the age of eight, I began to perform Gregorian chant, for which at the time there were opportunities for seeking good advice.

Soon I read texts written by mediaeval scholars, among which there were those related to the performance of Gregorian chant; and they frequently seemed me to be in contradiction to the 'universal' laws of aesthetic singing. Concerning the contradictions, I could not get any good answer from those who were more familiar with Gregorian chant. The only possible avenue was thus to neglect the advice formulated by the mediaeval scholars.

Many years later, in the sixties, I was present at the solemn liturgy on the feast of the Assumption at the church in Nesebar (a peninsula on the Bulgarian shores of Black Sea). Although the liturgical language of the liturgy was Old Slavonic, the music was different – and quite distant from that composed by authors such as Bortniansky, Berezovsky and Vedel. One could observe that all sang the same melody in unison, excepting those with *ison*, yet very differently from Gregorian chant.

During that liturgy, many new aspects of that practice became apparent to me, and the experience served as an illustration as to how one can perform things such as 'repercussions', 'quilismata' and other 'unaesthetic' details such that they appear aesthetic, but within a somewhat different 'musical world'.

Egon Wellesz and his school

Many months later I discovered that the melodies sung in Nesebar originated in books written according to the principles of the Chrysanthine reform, but endowed with Old Slavonic translations of the sung texts. Nevertheless, immediately after my return home, I sought out any information that I could. My teacher of violin performance, Otto Bartoš, teaching at the Paedagogical Faculty of Charles University, advised me to contact Eduard Herzog, who taught at the same Faculty, and who was known as a good specialist.

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Byzantine chant among other mediaeval liturgical compositions

Abstract

Discoveries in the history of liturgy and progress in music beginning at the end of the nineteenth century offered a plenitude of stimuli to dig out analogies between melodies found in the traditional chants applied in old liturgies. While the theological point of view yielded more discoveries at the level of (musical) forms and other, larger-scale structures, the experience of practical performance helped expose smaller-scale analogies – in particular, those in melodic motifs.

In general, there are fewer stimuli leading to discoveries on this smaller scale; but the author led a group of singers (of mixed voices) that engaged in singing traditional chants in a liturgical context in the Latin, Greek, Old-Slavonic and Armenian rites. The main motivation was thus to popularise the chants amongst music lovers; the first opportunity arose at the International Courses in the Interpretation of Early Music (organised by the Czech Society for Early Music in 1985), but, as further opportunities arose, the group actively took part in the liturgies of the above traditions. In rehearsal (with a high level of concentration on the execution of details) numerous analogies emerged, which are hidden within the structures of modes and rhythm of the music and of the words. The results then led the author to extend the process to pre-Christian melodies. Although their number is relatively small, analogies with Christian chants appeared in each of six chants conserved in such a state that it can be presented to audiences as a 'habitual' chant.

Key words: mediaeval chant; liturgy; Latin rite; Greek rite; Armenian rite; Old-Slavonic rite

Number of characters / words: 15 425 / 2 475

Number of music examples: 8

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Dr. Herzog directed me to study the books and papers written by Egon Wellesz, and by the members of the so called Copenhagen school that Wellesz had co-founded (namely, Dimitri Conomos, Oliver Strunk, Carstens Höeg et al.). The works of this school had opened up a lot of knowledge. One of the most important aspects was the relatively large number of motifs used by both Gregorian chant and Byzantine chant, transcribed by the scholars active in the Copenhagen school.

A very instructive example was presented by Egon Wellesz in his book *Eastern Elements in Western Chant* (*Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae. Subsidia*, Oxford – Boston, 1946); it concerns two Christmas chants: a Byzantine *idiomelon* and a Gregorian antiphon. Their respective openings are shown in Fig. 1; to make the example clearer, the Gregorian melody is transposed up a tone.



Fig. 1

A further example was presented by Dimitri Conomos in his book *Byzantine Hymnography and Byzantine Chant* (Hellenic College Press, Brooklyn, 1984). The melodies carry Greek words, which the Byzantine liturgy uses in almost every celebration of the liturgy, whereas the Latin counterpart (and therefore its Gregorian version) are chanted only once a year, at the special liturgy on Good Friday. In Fig. 2, one can observe the two exclamatory openings of the chants under comparison.

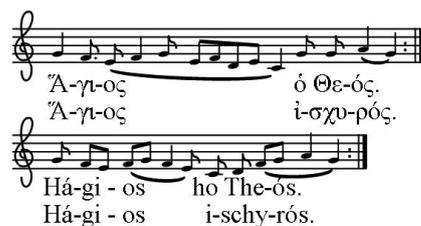


Fig. 2

There are other examples referred to in the literature. I collected them and was able to present them in my paper *Analogies in Melodies of Early Christian Liturgical Chant Originated from Different Cultural Domains*.¹

Nevertheless, anyone practising Gregorian chant 'daily' during the Latin liturgy and familiar with the transcriptions of Byzantine chants by the Copenhagen school, has the opportunity to collect further such examples. I too did so, drawing on my day-to-day experiences of chanting, and proceeded to include many further such analogies in the aforementioned paper. Let us consider some interesting cases.



Fig. 3

Unlike common practice in baroque, classical and romantic Western music, where grief is expressed by long notes, in Gregorian chant grief is expressed by means of short ascending legato semitones, typically expressing sobbing and lamentation. A good example of this is the antiphon for Communion composed for the Tuesday after Palm Sunday, the first part of which

¹ Eugene KINDLER, 'Analogies in melodies of early Christian liturgical chant originated from different cultural domains', in *Recent advances in acoustics & music: theory & applications. Proceedings of the 10th WSEAS International Conference on Acoustics & Music: Theory & Applications (AMTA '09)*, Prague, Czech Republic, March 23–25, 2009, ed. by Nikos E. MASTORAKIS et al. (Stevens Point, WI: WSEAS Press, 2009), pp. 45–52.

is shown in Fig. 3. An English translation is “They that sit in the gate talked against me, and they that drank wine sang against me.” The upward intervals of seconds, representing sobs, are marked by asterisks. Other similar examples of sobs occur among the chants of late Lent, but also in the liturgy commemorating the murder ordered by Herod of the Bethlehem innocents. Fig. 4 shows the first part of the antiphon for Communion. Its translation is “In Rama a voice is heard, lamentation and ululation.”



Fig. 4

Notice the melody carrying the word *ululatus*: its original Latin onomatopoeia is emphasized and exalted by the small ascending seconds carrying both central syllables – both simple, and based on the consonant *l*.

In Byzantine chant the same image of sobbing occurs frequently. One excellent analogy is presented on p. 395 of *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* by Egon Wellesz.² It is a chant composed for the Wednesday of Holy week, presenting the converted woman sinner (Luke 7:37–38, and identified with Mary Magdalene in the Latin tradition). In the chant, its author, the nun Kasia, developed the psychology of the converted person in a profound and detailed manner: the acceptance of repentance alternates with the fear of former sins and of future disability. The chant, which may be presented in modern Western notation in a mere 19 short lines, contains no fewer than 36 ascending legato minor seconds. An excerpt may be found in Fig. 5.



Fig. 5

Speculation regarding affinities between Byzantine chant and the Gregorian versions of the *Kyrie eleison* (a chant occurring at almost every traditional Latin Eucharist Liturgy celebration), was supported by many particular instances of similarity (presented in the *AMTA '09* paper above).³ Particularly interesting are instances where relations to Byzantine chant may help clarify ‘errors’ against Gregorian modality or aesthetics. Three Gregorian compositions officially included in the ‘Vatican edition’ of liturgical chant, represent ‘errors’ against the system of authentic Dorian tonality: namely, the hymn *Iesu dulcis memoriae*, the fourth version of *Kyrie eleison*, and the second version of *Kyrie eleison ad libitum*: although they are classified as being in the above mode (and although they really do follow motifs exhibited in many of the other chants so classified), they contravene a fundamental rule for modes: instead of concluding on the legal *finalis* of their mode, namely on a *D* (*re*), they end on a higher note, namely an *A* (*la*). The answer is that these chants follow Byzantine aesthetics of *heirmoi* of the first authentic Dorian *echos* (mode). The conclusion on an *A* (*la*) is characteristic of that *echos* in the case of *heirmoi*. Note that these three compositions also contain motifs of the Byzantine *heirmoi* of the authentic Dorian *echos*. In the first line of Fig. 6 we can see the concluding melody of the aforementioned fourth Gregorian *Kyrie eleison*, whilst the second line of the same figure shows the opening phrase of the last Ode of the Golden Canon by St. John the Damascene, following the melody recorded by means of the musical signs found in the Codex Iviron 470 of the twelfth century. Incidentally, seven of the eight *heirmoi* presented there for the Golden Canon are concluded with the note *A* (*la*), even though all eight *heirmoi* are (legally – according to the rules for the form of Canon) in the same Dorian authentic *echos*.

² Second, revised and enlarged edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).

³ See footnote 1.



Fig. 6

The third line of Fig. 6 contains the concluding phrase of the last Ode of the Golden Canon. Note the concluding tones A, G, E, F, G, A (*la, sol, mi, fa, sol, la*) forming the ascending arch of the melody, leading to the final *la*. It can be observed at the end of any of the three Gregorian compositions and in all seven *heirmoi* of the Golden Canon mentioned above.

First summary

One can formulate an interim summary, based on the following observations.

In the present epoch, any view which has as its object the traditional melodies of liturgical chant is bound somehow to be 'influenced'; the influence consists of a limitation or even a distortion in our understanding, and is caused by the 'direction' from which this object is observed. A frequent (and, it may be said, natural) case is the tendency to view along time. Simply said, the object is thus viewed from the present day, that is from a position 'upstream' along the time flow. Interpreting Gregorian chant, such a view qualifies the chant as a predecessor to Gothic music, and eventually (for many ecclesiastic viewers, discerning as they do only major steps within history) to classical vocal polyphony.

Let us call this view an *historical* one. It carries some obstacles in understanding the object so viewed: in the case of liturgical chant, obstacles to performing, and possibly to the integration into the liturgical reunion. Some of these have been touched upon in the first part of this article. Let us note that in many cases the historical view leads to the opinion that what is exhorted by early scholars, and formulated in preserved manuscripts, goes against 'universal' musical aesthetics.

Nevertheless, other views are possible. The experiences referred to and the analogies mentioned above lend support to the idea that if two different views are combined, the aforementioned contradictions disappear or are at least greatly diminished. But the directions in which the views are taken have to differ from each other. This is possible when one view leads us along the time axis (albeit in a backwards direction), whilst the other view proceeds in a cartographical, geographical sort of way. Thus, viewing Gregorian chant from the direction of the Byzantine tradition is one example of this way of observing. And combining it with the historical approach has been of help to me.

However, combining views in this manner can lead us further still.

Armenian chant

Combining views is worthwhile only if the objects viewed are equals. Theoretically, one can invert the view from Byzantine liturgical music towards Gregorian chant. The result would be to view Byzantine music from the perspective of Gregorian chant. Now this is indeed possible, but let us omit such speculation, as there exist other, more fruitful possible combinations.



Fig. 7

Armenian traditional liturgical chant offers possibilities for drawing analogies of its own with both early Latin and Byzantine liturgical chant. Let us consider some of them. First, we present a set of three chants – one Byzantine chant, one Gregorian and one Armenian – see Fig. 7 (where all of them have been transposed to render them more readily comparable). In the first line a Byzantine *hypakoé* is presented. (Incidentally, as Constantin Floros has shown

in his paper *Die Entzifferung der Kondakarien-Notation*,⁴ the melody exactly coincides with that of its Slavonic counterpart, preserved in Russian Kondakaria of the twelfth century.) The second line gives an illustration of a Gregorian psalmodic formula, here taken from the Introit *Tenuisti manum dextram*, sung at the feast of St. John the Damascene on March 27 (according to the traditional Latin calendar). On the third line, we present the opening of the Armenian *taf* (or ode), *Hawik mi payca' tesi* ("I saw a brilliant bird"), composed almost a millenium ago, possibly by Aristakēs of Xarberd.

Ex-sul-tet iam an-ge-li-ca tur-ba cae-lo-rum

Εκ τοῦ κατὰ Μάρκον ἁγίου εὐ-αγγελί- - ου το ἁ-νά-γνω - σμα

Hawatamk' ew i mi miayn andhanrakan ew arak'elakan Surb Ekelec'i

Fig. 8

Another interesting case entails certain recitation formulae (ecphonic chant), used in the Latin, Byzantine as well as Armenian liturgies. On the first line of Fig. 8, the opening phrase of the panegyric hymn *Exsultet*, sung in the Roman liturgy on Easter Eve, is presented. The second line contains a Paschal (solemn) formula for announcing the Gospel. On the third line we can see part of the Creed ("We also believe in the one and only Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church") – although very similar melodies can be found throughout the Armenian creed, as well as various deacons' chants, litanies from the Morning Office, and so on. The similarity of the three chants is striking.

Second summary

The highly similar melodies within corpora of Byzantine and Armenian traditional liturgical chants can serve as a 'bridge' through which a person of Latin European heritage can come to a better understanding of Armenian liturgical chant; but, moreover, viewing Byzantine liturgical chant from the angle of the Armenian tradition can provide us with another valuable perspective from which to view the Byzantine tradition – a perspective different from that of Gregorian chant.

But in this paper we have discussed three different ways of viewing Gregorian chant: the historical way, that from the perspective of Byzantine traditional liturgical chant, and that from the perspective of the Armenian tradition. Symmetrically, one can appreciate three ways of approaching the traditional Byzantine chant – that historical way, and the perspectives of Gregorian chant and Armenian chant. The synthesis of the above ways may offer new and unexpected stimuli towards an enriched understanding of Byzantine chant and of traditional Christian liturgical chant more generally. It represents a challenge well worth taking up.

⁴ Constantin FLOROS, 'Die Entzifferung der Kondakarien-Notation', in *Musik des Ostens*, vol. 3 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1965), pp. 7-71 (Part I) and vol. 4 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1967), pp. 12-44 (Part II).

