The Sacred Music from the Byzantine Tradition and the Romanian Folklore

MĂDĂLINA DANA RUCSANDA
MARIA CRISTINA BOSTAN
Faculty of Music
University Transilvania of Brasov
Address: B-dul Eroilor nr. 29
Romania
madarucsanda@yahoo.com, maricrisi@yahoo.com

Abstract: The Romanians' sacred music was established as a component of the local musical tradition at the same time as the development of the ethno-genetic process. The practice of Byzantine music in Romania began with the crystallization and consolidation of the feudal states, during which the church was supported and protected by the throne, the religious arts flourished and near the monasteries schools designed to train church minister were established. We can find a correspondence between the liturgical and the folklore music in the four states or idioms of the Byzantine melos: recitative, irmologic, stichiraric or papadic, and the musical expression which lies between declamation and singing can also be met in the case of the aforementioned genres. For a better understanding of the style phenomenon of the tonal systems specific to the Byzantine songs, we have to take into account the context in which they appeared, which is the Jewish world to which, once the songs spread towards the peoples within the Roman Empire, the popular songs are added by broadening the repertoire.

Key-Words: sacred music, folklore, psalm, monodic nature.

The Byzantine music represents the contributions gathered in a pattern typical to the oriental feeling, coming from different provinces. The whole community under the Byzantine influence contributes to building a chant unit, able to obtain, according to the generalization of structural formulas, adhesion and spreading. Being, by its nature, universal, the Byzantine music does not claim fatherhood when it comes to the territories controlled by the ecclesiastical chant. That is why, during the historical period that followed the fall of Byzantium, the maintenance and the further development of this music could remain the task of the national Orthodox Churches which have been in canonical unity with Constantinople; among them, the Romanian Orthodox Church has had a preponderant role. The sacred music of the Romanians was

established as a component of the local musical tradition at the same time as the development of the ethno-genetic process. The practice of Byzantine music in Romania began with the crystallization and consolidation of the feudal states (Wallachia – 1330 and Moldavia - 1359), during which the church was supported and protected by the throne, religious arts flourished and near the monasteries schools designed to train church ministers were established.

Orthodoxy and Slavic language, as the language of religion and state, is found in the case of all Romanians, even those from Transylvania, Banat and Maramureş, where there were Orthodox monasteries and over a thousand manuscripts in Byzantine notation were found. [1]

On the Romanian territory, two types of religious music have developed: one practiced in religious centers that circulated in manuscripts and the one that existed in rural areas, was transmitted orally and was contaminated by the popular way of speaking. The influence of folklore on the Psalm music, transmitted orally, was felt especially in central and northern Transylvania, but also in other provinces, and consists of melodic accents often placed on unstressed syllables, the melody and the rhythm being close to those from the folklore, the modulations or the modal tunes are resembling, the ornamentation manner is similar. [2]

In Transylvania, the songs belong to a single style, closer to the stichiraric and we do not meet other styles practiced in the Byzantine music: irmologic and papadic. Even in the Byzantine music practiced in monasteries one can see how, involuntary, the Romanian psalm writers printed, often involuntarily,

"the musicality of their mother tongue, a faint echo of the traditional intonation and, respectively, something of the local artistic sensitivity". [3]   In order to observe the latent affinity of the psalm melos with the Romanian folklore one, we must present, without getting into details, the stylistic elements that define it. The modal particularities of the Byzantine music also emerge from the purely vocal style of this art, having the modal system made of whole steps, half steps and un-temperate infra-chromatic structures. The chant that was sung by one or more people, or by the entire community, was always monodic, as it remained until today. Melody is in this case the essential component, on which, in order to avoid monotony, a multiple action is applied by he constitutive parameters: text, rhythm (polyrhytm), specific melodic formulas and cadences, ornaments, metrics, and the fusion between text and melody is ideal. Made only horizontally, the Byzantine music has a simple and efficacious modulatory framework, thanks to which the passage from one modal framework to another is made promptly and without difficulties.

The emergence of the oldest notation systems for the Psalms music is shrouded in uncertainty and controversy. In the development of the Byzantine music one can distinguish three main stages:

1. the Paleo-Byzantine period (4th to 12th century) – the height of the sounds was not mentioned and not every syllable was written, so that the singer had to know the song beforehand; there are few documents stored from this period; [4]

2. the Medio-Byzantine period, also called Koukouzel after the name of singer John Koukouzelis who imposed it (13th to 18th century) – when we can already speak of a musical system based on modes, called echos or voices;   3. the neo - Byzantine period (19th to 20th centuries).

1. Lacking precise rules, heteroclite and cumbersome, the Paleo-Byzantine notation is reviewed in the VIII century by John of Damascus who organizes it into a new synthesis, more rigorous and consistent, based on the eight echos or voices, which led him to the making of the famous Octoechos, a religious book in which the religious chants are included in the liturgical hymns, based on the eight voices (eight modes) – mode meaning, in this context, a musical atmosphere made on the basis of melody and cadence formulas.   The Paleo-Byzantine music uses two primary systems of notation: ecphonetic notation (lb. Greek: ekfonisis = exclamation, proclamation, reading aloud, formal reading) in. Between the 5th and the 12th century and the linear notation (between the 8th and the 12th century), which develops directly from the ecphonetic one, from which it borrows some of its neums, but also bringing in use the first names with purely musical meaning, thus constituting a mixed graphic system: ecphonetic -musical. The linear notation is, from the graphical point of view, the first system in which the diastemic notation system functions: a sign or a neum is a musical interval. The place of origin of the paleographical system appears to be Mount Athos, with its monasteries.

2. Nevertheless, this notation system gets to be fully used only between the 12th and the 15th centuries, indicating the Medio - Byzantine stage of the Psalms music. John Koukouzel, the famous psalm writer from Constantinople, composer, performer and theorist of the Byzantine music, has materialized his musical notation system in a book entitled Psalm Writing Art. The Middle-Byzantine Music uses two notation systems: the hagiopolite notation (between the 12th and the 13th century) and the Koukouzelis notation (between the 15th and the 18th century). The hagiopolit notation (lb. Greek: Aghios = holy and polis = town, city), also called round, express an inventory made entirely of names with purely musical effect. Each name represents a certain melodic interval, the diastemic notation principle being now general throughout the system. Two types of names are known in the hagiopolite notation: the name somata (all which indicate ascending or descending of the melody with a second or a step - ascending: oxia, oligon, petasti, pelaston, kiifisma, descending: one apostrophe, two apostrophes) and the name pnevmata (all which indicate ascending or descending intrval steps, higher than the second).

In the byzantine score there are also signs called testimonies (they indicate the syntactic elements of the musical discourse), as well as those known as florals (they indicate the transition of the melody from one mode to another – the modulation). The Koukouzel notation gives us a rich catalog of signs, actually the most complicated hagiopolite names mixed with many hironomic names, as well as new ones.

3. Modern or neo-Byzantine music (since the 19th century up until today) uses the hrisantic notation, resulting from the simplification and reconsideration of the previous notation, the Koukouzel one. The general principles according to which the byzantine notation system works matches the neo-Byzantine chants style and with musical illustrations reprinted in Western notation according to this system (hrisantic).   In

modern notation system, used today, there are five categories of Neums:

- Diastematic neums - also called vocals or phones - by means of which the interval chain that forms the melody is expressed
- Rhythm neums – also called temporals - my means of which the duration of sounds is expressed
- Additional neums - denumite *testimonies* - they are used for the syntactic division of the musical discourse, as well as control elements for the correct melodic intonation
- Modulation neums – also called *florals* - by means of which the change in the way of singing is expressed
- Ornamental neums – also called *consunantas* - by the fact that they are not independent, but they sound together with the diastematic ones, with the aim of embellishing them.

The Byzantine modal music gear is able to compete with the generous modal chromatic of the Romanian folklore, and it can also coexist and cooperate with it. Regarding the rhythm of the Byzantine music, we see a similarity with the folklore by means of the asymmetry of the rhythmic formulas "that are entirely subject to the whims of he melodic flow*"* [5] identical with the parlando-rubato rhythm met in the melancholy song, in ballads or lamentations.

Correspondences between the liturgical and the folklore music can be found in the four states or idioms of the Byzantine melos: recitative, irmologic, stichiraric or papadic, and the musical expression which lies between declamation and intonation can also be met in the aforementioned genres. However, the folklore recitative specific to the melancholy song, to the ballad or to lamentation, one will not find that rhetorical pathos that results from the chanting of a liturgical text.

The functional equivalent of the stichiraric chant, the most comprehensive and representative of the Byzantine melos in popular music can be represented by the vocal lyrical genres. The papadic chant is characterized by the rich ornamentation, giving the impression of a slow and sinuous sound flow that captures an ecstatic and euphoric state, caused by the imaginary proximity to the deity. We can establish correlations between the papadic chant and the melancholy song, because both are based on improvisation, but which is based on laws and default patterns, the expressiveness of the recitative melancholy song is also supported by all the sound flourishes, which are not just simple accessories, but they are related to the essentiality of the melos.

Other similarities can be found in the use of the accompaniment, of the vocal pedal in the stichiraric or papadic chants, similar to the accompaniment of the song played on bagpipes or pinching the strings in a popular band or by using the same proliferation of the intonation material: repetition and variation. The organization of the steps structure indicates the lack of adhesion of the modes to the Octavian conception, showing once again the circulation principles of the modal units in the monodic cultures, and the variation of the steps highlights the consciousness of the adoption of the new schemes in accordance with the need for the representation of the melodic essence (not accepting, like in other modal theories, the frozen fixed structures, ineffective in live practice). [6]

The sacred music of Byzantine tradition has common areas with the Romanian folklore, which is bound by its monodic nature, origin and living space, as well as by the similarity of modal, rhythmic and architectonic solutions. Together with the folklore songs, the religious chant was the second source of acoustic music phenomenon on Romanian soil and a lever of hope in defending ethnic consciousness. What is even more important is the fact that it remained faithful to the musical vein until today.

For a better understanding of the stylistic phenomenon of the tonal system specific to the Byzantine chants, you we have to take into account the context in which they appeared, which is the Jewish world to which, once the chants were spread towards the peoples within the Roman Empire, folklore songs are added, by broadening the repertoire. Due to the modal structures based mainly on the melodies of the Hebrew chants and the ones of the folklore songs with a great diversity and representative by means of the domination of the oriental ones, we can notice the existence of the oligocordic and pentatonic background, well represented, followed by modal structures in which modal units are combined - tri- tetra- and pentacords – which are then solved in the songs based on heptacordice steps.

The background of the Byzantine chants has been continuously "polished", so that, along the centuries, a stylistic unit of the melodies has been acquired, a unit which results from the melodic formulas and the typical ornaments. The inner organization of the modes structure is closely related to practice and it suggests a different conception from the Octavian steps. This is due to the variations in the modal steps that come from the practical necessities, at the same time designed in accordance with the principle of modal unit, which is typical for the monodic musical cultures.

However, the music treasure of the Middle-Byzantine chants in our country still awaits to be revalued.

References:

[1] X1. Ciobanu, Gheorghe. *The Byzantine musical culture on the Romanian teritory until the 18th century*, in: *Ethnomuzicology and Byzantinology studies,* Bucharest, Muzicală Publishing House, 1974, p. 279.

[2] X2.Ciobanu, Gheorghe. *The relation between the text and the melody in Romanian religious music,* in: *Ethnomuzicology and Byzantinology studies*, vol. II, Bucharest, Muzicală Publishing House, 1979, p. 258.

[3] X3. Galaicu, Violina. *The ethnical dimension of the musical creati*on (in the light of the Romanaia tradition), Chişinău, Arc Publishing House, 1998, p. 45.

[4] X4. A document that goes back to the 10th and 11th century is Greek Evangelical Lessons Collection, which is kept in the"Mihai Eminescu" Central Library of Iaşi.

[5] X6. Galaicu, Violina. The Ethnical dimension of the musical creation (in the light of the Romanian tradition), Chişinău, Arc Publishing House, 1998, p. 46.

[6] X8. Râpă, Constantin. *Teoria Superioara a Muzicii* vol. I, Conservatorul "G. Dima ", Cluj, 1986, pag. 105