Particularities of Byzantine Singing in Banat

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Abstract: Due to the particular historical and socio-cultural conditions in which Byzantine religious music developed, especially adopted by Southeastern Europe peoples, due to its many heterogeneous influences and the influence of indigenous folk music having exercised over it, due to different musical conceptions of its reformers, its oral circulation for centuries, the deficiencies of so many scoring systems and psychological determinants that have imprinted a particular aspect, this Byzantine religious music was not only adopted but also adapted to various nations, according to their own feeling and specific musical thinking. In this way, it received a new expression and dimension, a specific individuality, original and proper to the peoples who adopted it. Taken together, all these peoples make up – in terms of religious music – the same spiritual community, as evidenced by recent compared Southeastern European folklore research, each contributing through its original and specific part to the crystallization of own national religious music.

Key-Words: religious music, byzantine music, folklore, scale, Banat.

1. Introduction

The causes which led to the emergence of these national variants of the same original Byzantine music were and are crucial, as the differences that imposed them appear not only from one nation to another, but within the same people, from one province to another and even from one smaller social community to another, from one village to another. In other words, Byzantine religious music can show artistic expression differences from one social unit to another.

The subconscious categories that imprint unity and stylistic consistency to all human creations and even life, by which all these differences are explained, are exactly the same that explain regional differences of secular folk music, of different dialects and linguistic speech, customs, tires, architectural forms, etc.

For that matter, variation in unity is an aesthetic law known since Aristotle and confirmed by various modern experienced researchers, which have shown that lack of variation in uniformity would lead to monotony and gloom. This aesthetic law of variety in uniformity dominates arts of all times and all peoples, being expressed in art, music, speech, tire, customs, etc. Thus no one ever wanted to unify and generalize dialects, folk music or the tire of a specific land in all folklore areas inhabited by the same people. Such an attempt would not only be welcome by natural reactions, but would also be considered downright absurd.

Returning to religious music, this is how not only national variants of Byzantine music, but also regional variations within the same nation, or, as we say today, its dialects, which correspond to certain areas of folklore, are explained. Such folkloric areas and music dialects exist not only in our country, among Romanians, but in all peoples, they being determined by the specific local element contribution as an expression of the soul and the spiritual
community of a social group. This is how, for example, in his enormous two-volume work, entitled Cântarea populară bisericească ortodoxă sârbă, published posthumously in 1969 in Belgrade, the Serbian bishop Ștefan Lastavici sets the numerous variants of local dialects (napev), differing among each other by richer or poorer melodic lines.

As for our religious singing, one of its most individualized local dialects is the Banat nuanced one, a dialect of great artistic beauty, distinguished from others by rich and varied melody, by nuanced expressiveness and by the intertwining and the organic unity between musical substance and the sacred content of its text[1]. Both our religious music in general, and the one from Banat in particular have reached the current structure following a natural evolution, having assimilated all the influences that were exerted upon them along the centuries, influences that they have melted and transformed into a predominant whole made of domestic items, according to specific soul requirements of thought and our people’s musical predispositions in different regions lived by it. It is true that in some regions, such as former Romanian provinces which have suffered especially the influence of Greek and Turkish music[2], these foreign influences have won more strongly due to historical, social and cultural conditions different from those of the Romanians in Transylvania and Banat. The most relevant conclusion about religious music from Banat belongs to Timotei Popovici: “Our religious singing has the same common base as the old singing of the oriental church. But the religious books used by us, not having notations, religious songs have been preserved only by tradition, in passing orally from one generation to another. In this situation it could not be protected from changes mainly due to cantors ... because, from the vagaries of old cantors, who, with few exceptions, were, like those of today, unschooled people and especially not musically schooled, into religious singing have crept the ill-suited elements, introduced by folk music, thus singing received a somewhat national coloring... in every province, in fact in almost every parish, singing is done differently and thus we do not have a uniform singing.” [3]

2. Modal Structures in Banat Byzantine Singing

To establish a proper and authentic relationship between Byzantine music and religious Banat singing, we must go through the general characteristics or basic principles of each type of singing that will clear the similarities and differences.

The music practiced by the Orthodox Eastern Church is known as Byzantine music, its name being assigned by musicologists and historians of the modern age, those who have turned their attention to the investigation of medieval arts. In the early centuries of Christianity, religious singing had as model synagogue singing, which was joined over the centuries by music influences of peoples in Asia Minor, Syria, Antioch, Armenia and the ancient Greek music[4]. With the emergence and development of Christian hymnography and with the passing of centuries, within religious singing occurred a certain synthesis, an increasingly clearer direction, more stable, religious music starting to acquire personality, a determinant specific, the center of creation and development being Byzantium, the capital of the Eastern Empire, and from here disseminating towards other large monastic centers in Greece, Mount Athos, Palestine, Alexandria and the Romanian Principalities [5].

Over the centuries, in the Romanian Principalities, music of Byzantine origin was an objective reality, an integral part of the distant past of art and culture of the Romanian people[6]. This particular art was preserved, developed and transmitted in an evident traditional spirit through manuscripts due to some Romanian musician scribes, wise of neumatic singing and writing, which opened schools near the great monastic sanctuaries [7].

The ihos or voice cannot be defined in terms of mode or tone but by the complex of elements: musical scale, genre to which it belongs, sound system, cadence system and melodic formulas. Speaking of a musical scale we consider a fragment of the scale, sometimes numbering three, four or five tones, sometimes surpassing the octave. Groups of three, four or five sounds are sometimes made in sound systems by interlinking or joining which form scales of a larger ambitus.

In psalm music, for example, systems of four or five tones can be found both in the diatonic genre and in the chromatic one. Long practice has led slowly, and at the same time together with the text, to the formation of cadence systems more or less specific to each voice, as it also led to the formation of melodic formulas determined by the melodic intertexture that arises between the basic sounds of each voice: tonic and dominant, which differs from voice to voice or sometimes from one category of singing to another within the same voice.

2.1 Particularities of 1st voice

1st voice— uses the diatonic scale with the bass or tonic in pa, i.e. re, and is called the dorios voice (prothos). The ordinary ambitus do-la (ni-ke), in stichiraric singing, re-do in irmologic singing. The voice final is re, interior and final cadences are made
by the fa and re sounds — in stichiraric stroke, sol and re in the irmologic stroke.

The 1st voice in the Banat alternative uses as internal and final cadences melodic formulas the sound mi for the form of voice itself, the mi sound for interior cadences for 1st voice troparion and la for the final cadence. The ambitus falls in the small sextant for the voice itself 1st voice singing, and in the octave in troparion 1st voice melodies. Unlike the psalmic 1st voice, in Banat songs there is an extended second, that impresses the mode with a chromatic character, the place of the extended second respecting a pattern, it always being placed before cadences in which the melody follows a descending line.

2.2 Particularities of 2nd voice

2nd voice - psalmic, chromatic (the scale contains two extended seconds: re flat - mi, la flat - si) named lydios (deuterous), has as tonic the do sound, and as final the sol sound. The stichiraric 2nd voice has three specific intervals: extended second la flat – si, reduced fourth mi – la flat, tritone fa – si. The ambitus of melodies ranges from grave re flat and high re, resulting from the scale structure built on the principle of diapophonic. Perfect cadences are made on sol and mi, and the imperfect on si and fa. The irmologic 2nd voice melodies fall into a small sextant ambitus (mi – high do), cadences are made on sola and mi, and the melodic formulas are borrowed the 6th from plagal. The papadic 2nd voice retains the same small sextant ambitus, like irmologic melodies, the perfect and final cadences are on sol, and the interior on mi. The accompaniment for 2nd voice melodies uses the sol and mi sounds.

In the Banat version, the 2nd voice uses three types of scales, a diatonic one to form the voice itself and two chromatic ones for the troparion and antiphon melody. Cadences in the voice itself 2nd voice are made on sol, in the troparion 2nd voice on fa and la, and in the antiphon 2nd voice on fa and mi.

2.3 Particularities of 3rd voice

The 3rd voice, phrygios (tritos), uses an enharmonic scale called agem, composed of three united tetrachords: do – fa, fa – si flat, si flat – mi flat, synthesizing two manners, one with a major character and fa as center, the second with a minor character and re as center. For stichiraric and papadic melodies the ambitus falls in disdiapason (grave fa – fa⁵), and for the irmologic ones the ambitus falls in diapason, imperfect cadences are made on the la, sol, do sounds, and those perfect on fa and re.

The 3rd voice in the Banat version uses two melodies, specific to the voice itself and troparion. The voice itself 3rd voice melody uses in cadences the re, do and la sounds, the ambitus going beyond the octave. The troparion 3rd voice melody uses in cadenced the re and la, and the ambitus falls in octave.

2.4 Particularities of 4th voice

The psalmic 4th voice, called mixolydios (tetartos), uses three types of scales: leghetos for the irmologic stroke, mi – mi² ambitus, imperfect cadences on sol, rarely on re, perfect cadence on mi, melodic formulas are built on sub-octave structures of tri-, tetra-and pentachord; diatonic with re - re² ambitus for the stichiraric stroke, the scale coincides with that of the 1st voice, melodic formulas revolve around mi, a sound that corresponds to the final; diatonic for the papadic stroke, sol – sol² ambitus, final cadence on sol.

In the Banat version, three types of scales are used which correspond to the melodies in the voice itself, troparion and antiphon. The voice itself 4th voice melodies are characterized by small seventh ambitus and cadenced on the final la. The troparion 4th voice melodies fall within the perfect quint ambitus, cadences are made on the fa and la sounds as finals. The antiphon 4th voice melodies fall in the perfect quint ambitus, cadences are made on the sol sounds and the final on la.

2.5 Particularities of 5th voice

The hypodorios 5th voice in psalmic singing uses two types of scales, one enharmonic agem with re as base for stichiraric and papadic strokes, and a diatonic one, similar to that in the 1st voice, whose plagal is a diatonic scale with la as base for the irmologic stroke. The ambitus for the stichiraric stroke is of perfect eleventh do-fa², the melody takes place in high areas by melodic formulas employed in the pentachord or tetrachord, having as characteristic the slow strokes followed by quart or quint leaps, rarely octave or third; imperfect cadences are made on the sol and la sounds, and the final ones on re. The irmologic 5th voice melodies fall in the perfect quint ambitus (la-mi²), imperfect cadences are made the do and la sounds, and the perfect ones on the final la.

The Banat version uses for this voice two types of scales corresponding to melodies which can be included in the voice itself and troparion form. The specific melodies for the voice itself are built on a scale of ten sounds placed in octave ambitus; the interior cadences are made on the si and la sounds, and the finals on si. The troparion 5th voice melodies take place in a perfect quint interval (la-mi²), the cadences keeping the same sound landmarks as the self voice 5th voice melodies. Note that the first cadence formula of the troparion 5th voice, as exemplified below, is also used in the religious works
of Sabin Drăgoi.

2.6 Particularities of 6th voice

The hipolydios 6th voice uses for the irmologic stroke the chromatic scale with the final re and the ambitus falling in diapason. For the stichiraric and papadic melodies mixed diatonic-chromatic scales are used, the ambitus being extended through the grave and high registers by the process of quart and quint rotation. Imperfect cadences for all types of melodies are made on the re, sol and la sounds, and perfect ones on the final mode, re.

The 6th voice in the Banat variant uses two types of scales proper to the voice itself and troparion melodies. The voice itself 6th voice melodies are characterized by the small seventh re-do² ambitus, a nine sound scale, interior cadences on the mi and la sounds, finals on la. The troparion 6th voice melodies are characterized by the perfect quint fa-do² ambitus, the (sometimes) presence of an extended second between the 1st and 2nd levels, interior cadences on fa and la, finals on la.

2.7 Particularities of 7th voice

The hipophrygios 7th voice uses in psalmic singing two types of scales, an enharmonic agem with the base on fa for stichiraric and irmologic melodies, and a diatonic varis one with the base on si in the grave register (for which there is a mobile steps version) for the papadic melodies. Irmologic and stichiraric melodies shall have imperfect cadences on the sol sound and perfect ones on the fa sound, and the papadic will be characterized by si:fa small quint ambitus and cadences on si.

The 7th voice in the Banat version will have two specific melodies, one for the voice itself and one for the troparion, which will differ by the scales’ ambitus: small seventh for the voice itself, and octave for the troparion. Interior cadences have the same landmarks for both versions: sol and fa, and the finals in both cases are on fa.

2.8 Particularities of 8th voice

The psalmic hypomixoloydios 8th voice uses three types of scales, a main one with the base on do and the ambitus falling in the diapason, whose specific melody is made of tetrachord and pentachord structures, imperfect cadences on sol, mi and re, perfect on the final do; the second scale, secondary with the base on fa, do-do² octave ambitus, a specific melody built on the principle of quart rotation, imperfect cadences on sol and do², perfect on the final la; the third scale, enharmonic (nisabur) is used in modulating type melodies, not having an own melody.

In the Banat version, the 8th voice uses three types of scales specific to the voice itself, troparion and antiphon. In the voice itself 8th voice melody, the ambitus falls within a small seventh, wit interior cadences on fa sharp and re, finals on re. The troparion 8th voice melodies use a different scale from that of the voice itself (see musical examples), an octave ambitus and interior cadences on la and sol, finals on sol. The antiphon 8th voice melodies fall within a large sextant re-si ambitus with inner cadences on la and re, final on fa sharp.

3. Use in musical practice

Voices with the largest modal stability both in the collections of Atanasie Lipovan and in other prints mentioned above are the 3rd, 6th, 7th, and 8th voices, the 8th voice appearing frequently in the south-west of the country as the 8th voice after triphone (the voice of Anton Pann), while the 7th voice appears exclusively as agem;

Voices with the hardest problems in modal interpretation are the voices which, because of some contact surfaces with similar scales and vocabulary through contact surfaces with common melodic formulas are assimilated in modal mixtures or gamut with fluctuating steps at one point being converted unconsciously in modal structures proper to other voices than those who, through oral tradition, are awarded, recorded by those who noted and recognized both music historians and those studying Byzantine tradition. In this sense, the most labile are the 1st, 4th, 5th and 2nd voices;

One can observe the special frequency of the hisar, a voice whose scale is common in the area’s folkore – it corresponds to the folkloric 1 chromatic scale – which explains why the choir singers’ preference for the melodic voice, replacing structures of such voices, such as 2nd, the 5th and sometimes even the 6th voice;

One can observe the folkloric Phrygian cadence frequency in most voices, either on the 2nd step of the voice, or even on its base, and some final folk cadences typical to Banat folklore achieved by dropping to the 5th step of the voice, proving massive inter-influence of the religious and folkloric musical tradition on a liturgical musical language ambiguous from a modal point of view, but of great beauty in the singing of choir singers and talented priests;

One can observe the general structural assimilation of voices with similar modal structures in a relativity or homonymy modal coupling, on the one hand under the influence of major-minor Tonalism traditionalized through centuries of long choral practice, and on the other hand due to ignorance and poor theoretical command of modal structures typical to Byzantine music, under the education system used.
in theological teaching in the western part of the country. In this regard, under the harmful influence of massive tonal harmonization of Byzantine religious singing from all over Romania, inadequate to Byzantine Modalism and folkloric Modalism of the said cultural inter-influence, the danger of the unification of Romanian Byzantine music arises, as well as its melting in minor-major Tonalism, as was the case with the standardization and conversion of Renaissance Catholic religious music modes in the current major-minor Tonalism up to its obsolescence;

Creating contemporary music books for the use of both choirs and general teaching must take into account the actual modal structures of the religious music repertoire, which, for republishing in the current common notation system of the Orthodox Church, must be reorganized according to rigorous structural criteria, which require specialized scientific and theological work, methodologically diversified, in order to eliminate errors.

We should mention that in our research on the religious repertoire in general and on voices in particular we have found melody similarities between:

- *voice itself* 1st voice and *troparion* 1st voice;
- *troparion* 1st voice and *troparion* 2nd voice;
- *voice itself* 3rd voice and *troparion* 3rd voice;
- *voice itself* 4th voice and *antiphon* 8th voice;
- *troparion* 2nd voice, *troparion* 4th voice and *troparion* 6th voice;
- *voice itself* 5th voice and *troparion* 5th voice;
- *antiphon* 2nd voice and *voice itself* 6th voice;
- *voice itself* 8th voice and *troparion* 7th voice.

We would like to mention that the differences between the specific melodies of these voices are primarily due to the initial melodic formulas and cadences and secondly due to the ambitus.

4. Previous research results

"... church singing began to distort by leaving out some musical phrases, and by the misapplication of religious texts on different melodies. For these reasons I have set to music the religious singings strictly necessary to be sung during church celebrations, both in the Menaion, and in the Triodion, Pentecostarion, Octoechos and Molitvelnic [translator’s note: prayer book], based on old common melodies from Banat and Crișana"[4].

"I used for the melodies’ notation the most appropriate musical notes, settling at the same time to the natural laws of the melody that is sung by voice. We used scales with fewer signs of alteration, so as to be easily read and executed with any musical instrument. Signs of alteration, which appear in its melodies (except for those under clef), should be considered as accidental alterations, and those put in parentheses shows us a doubt (some sing in a way, others in another way – i.e. with or without sign of alteration)."[8]

The most important contribution to the study of aspects of choir singing in Banat belongs to the researcher Constanța Cristescu, who concludes[9]:

a) the importance that at the time the above mentioned prints began to appear had the fixing in writing, regardless of the musical notation used, of Byzantine Romanian music from Transylvania, Banat and Crișana and the special efforts of those who devoted themselves to this work to note the repertoire, learned from various choir singers and stored in memory, to find music scoring solutions easier and more accessible to choir singers with poor musical education;

b) the tonal musical formation of most who scored musical singing in Transylvania and Banat, a formation which is reflected in the arbitrary use of the Western tonal system in Byzantine musical voices notation and the manner of tonal harmonization of religious singing, inappropriate to Byzantine Modalism and Byzantine tradition;

c) the special value, both documentary and musical-artistic, of the musical repertoire performed at Transylvanian and Banat choirs, which justifies its resistance for a long time, centuries in a row, and the self-preservation by the singers’ memory, despite all attempts of cultural and spiritual interference;

d) the need to update Byzantine religious musical books and those of documentary and scientific use by incorporating within religious musical repertoire and classical music repertoire, stylistically diverse, the above-mentioned areas, to complete the Romanian Byzantine church music fund.

According to the same author cited above - Constanța Cristescu – the concepts of model and cliché in the music of Byzantine origin will be stated as fundamental principles underlying the musical discourse as follows: improvisation develops from the semi-orality of Byzantine music, involving the ability of psalms to put to music different liturgical texts by lexical combinations mastered in a discourse of artistic syncretic prayer (sung text), to adapt a melody to different texts or to sing a text on different melodies, as typically required by the liturgical ritual[10]. The three forms in which the model concept appears will involve the idea of cutting with the cliché. The concept of model will go through three forms:

- type-melody memorized by the singer and then varied through different discursive techniques to be adapted to other liturgical text[11];
- the general melodic model represented by voice or ihos;
- the melodic type, defined as a model of preferential
lexical combinations (rhythmic-melodic) belonging to one or more voices, respecting an architectural pattern of fixed or free form.

A voice is a melodic structural model that underlies a group of religious songs, which is defined by:
- scale or gama, which renders through an abstract scheme the intervocalic relations between the sounds of melodies ordered by pitch criteria, in relation to a fundamental called the voice base;
- style and singing tempo, marked semiographically by tactus, resulting in several scales of a voice and a specific lexical fund;
- cadence system (final cadences and semi-cadences);
- melodic formulas delimited by structure and by the function performed in the sentence or period and in the macro-form.

5. Conclusion

The cadence system and the melodic formulas are two categories of elements found both in Byzantine and Gregorian worship music. Worship music knows melodic formulas showing, at different heights, the same melodic intertexture. This is the case with psalm music with the voices’ Troparion seven and eight.

The more songs are spread orally, the more melodic formulas and cadences become more typical, and their number is reduced. This phenomenon is found in all choir music. The small number of melodic formulas restricts those performing orally this kind of music, making it for the less skilled poor and monotonous. Terențiu Bugariu speaks of three models in Banat religious singing: the own voice, called the voice itself, equivalent to the stichiraric style, the stihovna voice, equivalent to the irmologic style, and the troparion voice equivalent also to the irmologic style. Timotei Popovici said that each of the eight voices usually has two or three melodies more or less different, that we call the voice itself, the troparion melody and the antiphon melody. The same division is found in Dimitrie Cunțan’s work, except that he adds a fourth melody called podobia[10]. Aurel Popovici also mentions the following models: voice melody, antiphon melody, troparion melody and podobia melody.

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