A new source for the early Octoechos?

Troelsgård, Christian

Simple Psalmody in Byzantine Chant

Christian Troelsgård

As I was commissioned to write an entry in the new edition of the New Grove on "Byzantine Psalmody"[1] – which strangely enough did not exist in that dictionary before – I had to the pleasure first to revisit what Oliver Strunk on that topic.[2] I was struck by the importance and quality of his contributions on the one hand, and on the other hand by the fact that only very few references to the system of simple psalmody, the Byzantine psalm tones, are found in musicological literature. The reason might be that Strunk's condensed examples and packed discussions need further explanation. In this paper, therefore, I shall in part present well known material, trying though to suggest a proper context of understanding the results of the research on the topic until now and some analytical approaches to the "simple psalmody."

Many papers and major studies have been published on more complex psalm settings in the kalophonic style, settings which are found primarily in the Akolouthiai-manuscripts. Various traditions of the *kekragaria*, and especially the numerous kalophonic settings of the verses for *Polyeleos*, the *Amomos*, the *Proemiac Psalm* and the first *Kathisma* of the Psalter have been studied.[3] These elaborated settings are represented numerously in the MSS. Much less interest has, however, been invested in the study of simple psalmody and the Byzantine "psalm tones."

The core of the material relevant for the study of simple psalmody in Byzantine chant was introduced by Strunk in the article "The anti-

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1   Ch. Troelsgård, "Psalm, III, Byzantine Psalmody" in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2. ed, vol. 20., ed. S. Sadie (London, 2001), pp. 463–466.

2   O. Strunk, "A First Look at Byzantine Psalmody," *BAMS*, XI–XIII (1948), pp. 19–21; "The Antiphons of the Oktoechos," *JAMS*, XIII (1960), pp. 50–67; "Die Gesänge der byzantinisch-griechischen Liturgie," *Die Geschichte der katholischen Kirchenmusik*, ed. K. G. Fellerer, I (Kassel, 1972), pp. 128–147. All these articles are reprinted in Oliver Strunk, *Essays on music in the Byzantine world*, ed. Kenneth Levy (New York, 1977).

3   I refer to the bibliography in the "New Grove," see above note 1. To this bibliography Achilleus Chaldaiakis' recent and monumental *Ho Polyeleos stên Byzantinê kai Metabyzantinê Melopoiïa* (Athens, 2003), should be added.

phons of the Oktoechos" (1960). The title of the article might not clearly enough have revealed, that the main topic of that article is in fact the melodic quality of Byzantine psalmody and it characteristics. In this work, Strunk convincingly demonstrated how melodic fragments of Byzantine psalmodic patterns looked like in the manuscripts and how they had been preserved because of "hidden" melodic quotations in a set of *Stichera* for the *Oktoechos*, the written transmission of which might be traced back at least to around AD 900. Annette Jung has also contributed with an important article on the analysis of simple and moderately simple psalmody and its relation to the modal intonations,[4] and at an earlier Cantus Planus meeting, Simon Harris took up again the theme and furnished important observations on simple psalmody and "psalm tones."[5]

The Terminology of Byzantine Psalmody

No precise descriptions nor rules of psalmody are given in the theoretical texts. This means that – except for the quotations of simple psalmody transmitted together with the Antiphons of the Octoechos in the classical Sticherarion – Byzantine psalmody was probably a genre living in the sphere of oral transmission up to at least around 1250 where the earliest settings turn up as appendices in some Sticheraria.[6]

However, the following quote from the Hagiopolites treatise might refer to simple psalmody performed with intercalated troparia (though the text transmission must in this passage be described as insecure, as must also the precise date of the text):[7]

> ...ἐπεχήματα δὲ προσθήκη τοῦ ἐνεχήματος, καὶ κατιοῦσα καὶ συναρμο
> ζομένη τῷ φθόγγῳ τοῦ μέλλοντος προενεχθῆναι εἰς τὴν <u>ψαλμῳδίαν</u> –

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4   A. Jung, "The Settings of the Evening and Morning Psalms according to the Manuscript Sinai gr. 1255," *Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Age grec et latin* (CIMAGL), XLVII (1984), pp. 3–63.

5   Simon Harris, "'Byzantine Psalmody', an Interim Report," in *Cantus Planus, Papers Read at the 7th Meeting, Sopron, Hungary, 1995*, ed. László Dobszay (Budapest, 1998), pp. 273–281.

6   Grottaferrata E.α.II, Γ.γ.II, Γ.γ.IV, Γ.γ.VII (dated around the middle of the 13th c.) and Paris, Ancien fonds grec 261 (from AD 1289).

7   Jørgen Raasted, "The Hagiopolites. A Byzantine Treatise on Musical Theory, preliminary edition," *CIMAGL* XXXXV (1983), § 45.

ὡς ὅταν μετὰ τὸ ἐνήχημαν λέγεται ναὶ λέγε καὶ ναὶ ἅγιε καὶ ὅσα τού-τοις ὅμοια.

…*Epechemata* are the addtion to the *Enechema*, descending and being adapted to the melody of the which is to be sung in the **psalmody** – e.g. as when we after the *Enechema* sing "*ne lege*" or "*neagie*" and the similar.

Thus no explicit theoretical explanation of a system of psalm tones exists in the theoretical treatises on Byzantine chant, not even from the later Middle Ages.

However, the liturgical *ordines*, the so-called Typika or Synaxaria, refer frequently to simple, antiphonal psalmody. "στιχολογεῖν" (*sticho-logein* / vb. «to perform simple psalmody» from stichos and legein, "to say a verse"), "στιχολογία" (*stichologia* / sb. «simple psalmody»), and the alternative designation "ψαλμὸν λέγειν" (*psalmon legein* / vb. «to say a psalm») are found very often. The verb "*psallein*" it almost exclusively reserve to more complex music, eg. the Stichera to squeeze in between the *stichoi* of the psalm. Mostly, *stichologia* refers to the continuous psalmody which consists of the twenty divisions (kathismata) of the Psalter, sung during the week and beginning Saturday evening with Ps. 1, *Makarios Aner*. It is however also used for the singing of some of the fixed psalms for the Saturday and Sunday morning offices, Ps. 118 (Amomos) and Ps. 134 sqq. (the Polyeleos), for the Beatitudes (*Maka-rismoi*, Mat 5,3) and, finally, for the Biblical odes, i.e. the Canticles making up the framework of the *Kanon*-complex of the morning office, *Orthros*. Further, the intercalation of *stichera* (inserted *troparia*) at ten, eight, six or four verses before the end of a psalm (including the Doxology and the number varying according to the degree of the feast celebrated): "We raise" *(ιστωμεν)* so an so many *stichoi* (verses) and sing the following *stichera*… etc."[8]

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[8]   This is the standard phrasing in MS Athens, Nat. Bib. 788, first edited by Aleksej Dmitri-evskij in *Opisanije liturgitseskich rukopisej,* vol. I (Kiev, 1895, pp. 256–614; photographic reprint: Hildesheim, 1965). A new edition and English translation, of which first volume has appeared, is now partly published by Robert Jordan, *The Synaxarion of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis,* Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations 6.5 (Belfast, 2000).

The model-verses as constituents of the term "Simple psalmody"

Many of the above mentioned psalmodic items from the descriptions in the *Typika* have their counterpart in notated sets of single psalm verses in the much later Akolouthiai-manuscripts. These are normally arranged in groups of eight, one verse per mode and are often referred to as "model verses." Strunk pointed to most of these and I have added the two sets of small *Prokeimena* to the body of "simple psalmody," see the following table.

The body of notated model-verses for simple psalmody consists thus of the following items (though more might be suites for inclusion in the group when the heterogeneous material of the surviving Akolouthiai-manuscripts have been more thoroughly studied):

Item	Text	Service
1. LXX 141,8 "Kyrie ekekraxa"	Ἐξάγαγε ἐκ φυλακῆς τὴν ψυχήν μου τοῦ ἐξομολογήσασθαι τῷ ὀνόματί σου......	*Hesperinos/ Vespers*
2. LXX 50,3 "Ho pentekostos"	Ἐλέησόν με , ὁ θεός, κατ τὸ μέγα ἔλεος σου.....	*Orthros/ Matins*
3. Prokeimena 'amnema' LXX 32,22 and the whole 8ech. series	Γένοιτο τὸ ἔλεός σου, κύριε, ἐφ' ἡμᾶς, καθάπερ ἠλπίσαμεν ἐπὶ σέ......	*Orthros/ Matins*
4. LXX 9,2 2nd Kathisma / Hoi Ainoi	Ἐξομολογήσομαί σοι, κύριε, ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ μου, διηγήσομαι πάντα τὰ θαυμάσιά σου.	*Orthros/ Matins*
5. Prokeimena anastasima LXX 11,7 and the whole 8ech. series	Νῦν ἀναστήσομαι, λέγει κύριος, θήσομαι ἐν σωτηρίᾳ, παρρησιάσωμαι ἐν αὐτῷ.....	*Orthros/ Matins*
6. Canticle of Moses / 1st Ode of the Canon	Ἄισωμεν τῷ κυρίῳ, ἐνδὸξως γὰρ δεδόξασται......	*Orthros/ Matins*
7. Makarismoi (Beatitudes)	Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.....	*Divine Liturgy/ Holy Mass*
8. Doxology	Δόξα Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ καὶ Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι / καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας τῶν αἰώνων, Ἀμήν.	*All services*

It should be noticed that this group of settings of psalm verses is established in order to find a proper basis for an analysis of the simple psalmodic patterns in Byzantine chant. It is in this respect an artificial group, put together of various model-verses, which are placed in various parts of the Akolouthiai-manuscripts, intermingled with more elaborated psalm settings and other pieces. One explanation for this scattered occurrence seems to be that the more elaborated settings occur at the beginnings of the psalm-complexes, as to furnish the chanter(s) with impressive and festive introductions to the upcoming liturgical unit, if the occasion would demand this; then, after some elaborated verses, simpler settings might occur. If the notated chant books were made primarily to support the performance and study of elaborate and difficult settings while the simple and traditional melodies and musical practices were orally transmitted, this might account for the situation.

The Byzantine Psalm-tones

Simon Harris described the co-existence of psalm verses with various degrees of elaboration though evidently melodically linked traditions as "elusive." However he recognised that "There can be no doubt from these links that a Byzantine psalm-tone system connected with the modal system existed in the Middle Ages."[9] In order to approach this system then, the establishment a body of "simple psalmody," implicitly advocated by Strunk and explicitly suggested in the table above, could yield some progress in the study of Byzantine psalmody. There is thus sufficient material to approach a stylistic characterisation of the simple psalm settings:

- The psalmodic cadence is applied invariably to the four last syllables of the verse, and thus simple psalmody follows the principles defined by Ferretti as the "cursive psalmodic cadence." No medial cadences occur, though "half-verses" sometimes are treated as full verses.[10]

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[9] Simon Harris, "'Byzantine Psalmody', an Interim Report," p. 280.
[10] Oliver Strunk, *Essays on music in the Byzantine world*, p. 308.

– There are typical recitation pitches and accent pitches for each mode. But as the accent peaks have in themselves a short preparation and also a leading-off motive attached, the psalm verses appear to be somewhat more melodic and flexible than their average Western counterparts.

– There is generally one intonation pattern per mode, sometimes two, in which case a precentor with his voice might have guided the choir to agree on the chosen intonation. The intonation patterns are applied according to the placement of the first accented syllable in the psalm-verse, except in mode I authentic (*protos*), where an EF-Ga-motive serves as an alternative opening and mode III authentic (*tritos*), which invariably begins on the recitation pitch c.

– Most likely due to the primarily oral administration of the Byzantine psalm-tone system, a little space seems to have been left for variation within the borders set by some basic principles. This does not exclude antiphonal, choral psalmody, which was indeed with certainty practised in the monastic tradition, according to the directions of the preserved Typika. One should perhaps not imagine the perfect homophony as the aesthetic ideal of the performance; a well balanced and artful execution of "heterophony" is encountered in various orally administered folk music traditions, and this might also have been the case with simple psalmody in Byzantium.

– With an average of 1.2–1.3 notes per syllable in the settings of simple psalmody, the genre takes a position just below the average of notes per syllable in the Sticherarion, if the genre should be placed in continuum from strictly syllabic-melismatic.

– The ambitus of simple psalmody is narrower than those of the Stichera and other genres of Byzantine chant.

– The "recitation pitches" outnumber by far other pitches, while the distribution of pitches is more even in the Sticherarion and other chant genres.

– The peaks of the "accentuation patterns" represent above 90% of the grammatically accentuated syllables in the chanted texts.

Simple Psalmody
Ps. 9,2 and first part of the doxology from MS Athens EBE 2458, fol. 65.

Mode 1

Mode 2

Mode 3

Mode 4

Ex -o -mo-lo -gé-so-mai soi, Kú-ri-e, en hó-le kar-dí-a mou, di -e-gé-so-mai pán-ta ta thau- | má- si- a sou | Dó-xa pa-trí kai ui-ó kai a-gí- | o pneú-ma- ti

Mode 1 pl.

Mode 2 pl.

Mode Barys

Mode 4 pl.

Ex -o -mo-lo -gé-so-mai soi, Kú-ri-e, en hó-le kar-dí-a mou, di -e-gé-so-mai pán-ta ta thau- | má- si- a sou | Dó-xa pa-trí kai ui-ó kai a-gí- | o pneú- ma- ti

Ex. 1.

The only complete eight-mode series of the psalm tones furnished by Strunk in his contributions[11] correspond to the doxology part in my *Example 1*. By rendering first a full series of psalm verses through the eight modes followed by the first part of the great doxology I hope to furnish an understandable illustration of the Byzantine psalm-tones.

In *Example 2*, I suggest an analysis of the simple psalm-settings, focussing on the intonation patterns, recitation pitch, accent peaks with preparations and "leading-off"-motives. This analysis is made on the basis of the occurrences in the total body of simple psalmody studied and will therefore include the verses rendered in *Example 1*, adding also alternative realisations of the psalmodic patterns found in other settings. The choice of a lower "accentuation pattern" is normally linked to the beginning of the verses, while the alternative and higher "accent patterns" are often reserved for the subsequent accented syllables. As mentioned, the cadence is invariably set to the last four syllables of the verse. However, in some of the actual settings in the manuscripts, small flourishes are attached to the cadence patterns; still the four-syllable-rule applies, but the individual pitches might apprear moderately embellished, the last one even furnished with a "leading on"-motive, probably securing a smooth melodic transition to the troparion (sticheron/ heirmos or another troparion) which was intercalated between the verses or the beginning of the next psalm-verse.

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[11] Oliver Strunk, *Essays on music in the Byzantine world*, p. 171.

Simple Psalmody
Accentuated syllables marked with "⌐", facultative notes in parentheses.

Ex. 2.

Finally, I shall show another example of simple psalmody. I quote in *Example 3* a fine example in the first mode. It is a setting of Ps 141,8 and the full doxology in 1ˢᵗ mode (from *Kyrie ekekraxa,* see table above nos. 1 and 8), transcribed according to MS Sinai gr. 1255 (15ᵗʰ c.) by Annette Jung:[12]

Ex. 3.

Conclusion

The preliminary results of my study of the simple psalmody is that

a. "simple psalmody" is a flexible and orally administered type chanting; yet it seems to be quite stable and firmly linked to the eight-modes-system over a period from the earliest witnesses – i.e. from Strunk's traces of psalmody as quoted musically in the Stichera of the Octoechos part of the Sticherarion – until the model-verses of the late-Byzantine Akolouthiai MSS.

b. "simple psalmody" formed the musical "backbone" of the Byzantine office and was performed together with the well-known repertories of stichera and heirmoi.

c. "simple psalmody" is thus indispensable as a reference point for the assessment of the melodic style(s) of the chants that were designed to be performed with simple psalmody, i.e. primarily the stichera, the heirmoi and the poetic kathismata, but also in the study of more elaborated psalm settings it is important to note how much these settings have in common with simple psalmody, and where and how they do depart from the simple psalmodic style.

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12 A. Jung, "The Settings of the Evening and Morning Psalms according to the Manuscript Sinai gr. 1255," p. 38.