

BYZANTINE MUSIC

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The music of the Orthodox Eastern Church was developed and shaped during the Byzantine Empire¹ (330-1453 A.D.) and for this reason it was named "Byzantine Music".

Its notation, named Parasimandiki developed during 4 periods : In the first period² (9th-12th c. A.D.) this could be termed stenographic: it means that few *neums* on top of the *syllables* of the text are helping the chanter remember the melody. The next stages of evolution are nothing more than an effort to quote the melodies in a more analytical way.

During the second period (1100-1453 A.D.) called the Middle Byzantine Period the musical *neums* have reached greater perfection. The scripture of this period is called Round Notation because of the round form given to the annotation.

This same musical notation, perfected by a great musician, Ioannis Koukouzelis, covers also the whole of the third period (1453-1814 A.D.)

In the year 1814 A.D. the three great teachers Chrysanthos, Gregorios, and Chourmouziou conceived a new method of musical notation based on the ancient one. This new method is in use up to our time. A fair number of ancient melodies were thus transcribed into that new way of notation.

This notation is simple, accessible, and allows an absolute precision in the transcription of the melodies.

¹Constantinople (the today Istanbul) was named in honour of the Emperor Constantine the Great who in 330 A.D. transferred there from Rome the capital of the Roman Empire. The earlier name of this Greek city was "Byzantium". For this reason the Empire was called "Byzantine Empire" and its religious music "Byzantine music".

²The 9th Cent. A.D. is taken as the chronological point of the starting of the Byzantine Notation because the oldest MS with notation of Byzantine Music which has been discovered up to now is dated from the IX Cent.

We are now concerned with the Byzantine music as it was shaped after 1814 A.D.

(A) Special features of Byzantine Music

(1) It is a strictly *ecclesiastic music*. It means that the scope is not only one of ecclesiastic use, but it also covers the worship. Thus its aim is not to offer an artistic sensation, but to help in the comprehension of the poetical meaning of the hymns and more than that to create contrition in the souls of the faithful.

(2) It is *purely vocal*. This means that musical instruments were never used. Human voice was considered to be the most perfect and the best instrument when it comes to communication with God.

(3) It is *choral*. This implies that the faithful should chant together. The fact that nowadays in many churches the chanting has been restricted to only two voices (soloist) is due to very specific historical and other reasons.

The choral character of Byzantine Music fits also totally the characteristics of the Orthodox worship, which is collective. It also means that both priests and worshippers together participate actively in the chanting part of the worship.

(4) It is *monophonic*, or as we might better say a monophonic polyphony, which means that the chanters are all chanting the same melody (unison) with the exception of the drone, which is only permitted because in a way it sustains the melody. The drone which is also only vocal, and is performed by a group of chanters is heard at times as a single restrained note (pedal) and at other times in a discontinuous way with a simultaneous recitation of the syllables of the text. The drone being vocal, has the possibility, according to the movement of the melody, to be removed from its tonic base to the 5th degree or even to other degrees.

Mode I

The image displays musical notation for Mode I. At the top, there is a sequence of notes with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6. Below this, there is a line of Greek text: Σ ε τιν γα ει νην λαμ πα δα και μη τε ρα του θε ου ...

The main part of the image shows two staves of music. The top staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6. The bottom staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5, C6. The Greek text is written below the staves: Σ ε τιν γα ει νην λαμ πα δα και μη τε ρα του θε ου ...

A variety of that sort is *the ornamented stickheraric style* which are broad and highly ornamented melodies.

Mode-Plagal IV

Εἰς τὸν Στίχον Ἦχος ᾠ δ̣.
Ἰακώβου Πρώτοψάλτου (μέσα Ἡ' σῶνος)

[illegible]

Χα - λι - νος ————— ά ————— πο — πύ —
 ————— εας τούς ————— πα-τρι-
 — τούς πα-τρι- ————— νους ————— νους —————

(3) *Papadiko*: In this are included the very ornamented melodies of the byzantine music. The expression "papadiko melos" does not mean melodies sung by the priests, but by chanters during the time the priests are involved in reciting mystically long blessings.

(C) The scale

The names of the steps of the byzantine scale are the following :

ΠΑ, ΒΟΥ, ΓΑ, ΔΙ, ΚΕ, ΖΩ, ΝΗ, ΠΑ
 (ΠΑ, VU, YA, THE, KE, ZO, NI, PA)
 (RI, GA, MA, PA, DHA, NI, SA, RI)

They are the first letters of the Greek alphabet, to which vowels or consonants have been added :

ΠΑ,	ΒΟΥ,	ΓΑ,	ΔΙ,	ΚΕ,	ΖΩ,	ΝΗ,	ΠΑ
(Α)	(Β)	(Γ)	(Δ)	(Ε)	(Ζ)	(Η)	(Α)
(ALFA	BETA	GAMA	DELTA	EPSILON	ZITA	ITA	ALFA)

(D) Modes

The modes of the byzantine music are 8, that is 4 main (First, Second, Third, and Fourth) and 4 plagals (Plagal First, Plagal Second, Plagal Third, Plagal Fourth). Between them the First, Fourth and their Plagals belong to the diatonic gender. The Second and its Plagal to the chromatic gender and the Third and its Plagal to the Enarmonic gender.

As in ancient Greek music, in the same way in the Byzantine Music, the foundation for the formation of the scale of the modes is the tetrachord (four comprising three intervals) in accordance with the position of the semitone and the length of the intervals we have the various genders. Before entering into the details of the tetrachord and the scales I feel necessary to add few words about the formation of the scales.

Low tetrachord				High tetrachord			
12	10	8	12	12	10	8	
Nn Do	Πα Re	Βου Mi	Γα Fa	Δι Sol	Κε La	Ζω Si	Nn Do

All the scale is divided in 72 microtones named "moria". In this way the number 12 means that the interval DO-RE includes 12 *moria* and is called major tune. The interval RE-MI 10 *moria* and is called minor tune and the interval MI-FA 8 *moria* and is called small tune. The scale includes two similar tetrachord DO-FA and SOL-DO disjunct from the major tune FA-SOL: Each one of the two tetrachord has the same number of *moria*, that is 30 and its intervals are following the same sequence that is 12—10—8. Of course as we will see further there are intervals which include more than 12 and less than 8 *moria*.

Hence in accordance with the length, size of the intervals and the position of the semitone inside the tetrachord we have the formation of various genders as :

Diatonic

12	10	8
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Chromatic A'

8	14	8
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Chromatic B'

6	20	4
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Enharmonic

12	12	6
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The scales of the sounds in sequence are as follows : (The asterisk* indicates the tonic base of the sound)

Mode I

* 10	8	12	12	10	8	12
Re	Mi	Fa	Sol	La	Si	Do

Mode II

8	14	8	12	* 8	14	8
Do	Re ^b	Mi	Fa	Sol	La ^b	Si

Mode III

* 12	12	6	12	12	12	6
Fa	Sol	La	Si ^b	Do	Re	Mi

Mode IV

*	8	12	*	12	10	8	12	10
Mi	Fa	Sol	La	Si	Do	Re	Mi	

Mode Plagal I

*	10	8	12	12	10	8	12
Re	Mi	Fa	Sol	La	Si	Do	Re

Mode Plagal II α'

*	6	20	4	12	6	20	4
Re	Mi ^b	Fa [#]	Sol	La	Si ^b	Do [#]	Re

Mode Plagal II β' "nenano"

6	20	4	*	12	10	8	12
Re	Mi ^b	Fa [#]	Sol	La	Si	Do	Re

Mode Plagal III "Enarmonic"

12	12	6	12	12	12	6	
Si ^b	Do	Re	Mi ^b	Fa	Sol	La	Si ^b

Mode Plagal III "Diatonic"

*	8	12	10	8	12	12	10
Si	Do	Re	Mi	Fa	Sol	La	Si

Mode Plagal IV

12	10	8	12	12	10	8	
Do	Re	Mi	Fa	Sol	La	Si	Do

Besides the octachord scales other scales also exists i.e. the Pentachord and tetrachord.

Low pentachord				High pentachord			
10	8	12	12	10	8	12	12
V				V..			
12	10	8	12	10	8		
IV				IV			

All these relate to the general characteristics of the Byzantine Music. We hope to be able to deal in a future article with more specific characteristics and features and mainly with the system of the musical notation.