

# Byzantine music

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**Byzantine music** (Modern Greek: Βυζαντινή μουσική), in a narrow sense, is the music of the Byzantine Empire. Originally it consisted of songs and hymns composed to Greek texts used for courtly ceremonials, during festivals, or as paraliturgical and liturgical music. The ecclesiastical forms of Byzantine music are the best known forms today, because different Orthodox traditions still identify with the heritage of Byzantine music, when their cantors sing monodic chant out of the traditional chant books like sticherarion which in fact consisted of five books, and the heirmologion. Byzantine music did not disappear after the fall of Constantinople. Its traditions continued under the Patriarchate of Constantinople which was annexed by the Islamic Ottoman ruler Sultan Mehmed II in 1454, and granted administrative responsibilities over all Orthodox Christians. During the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, burgeoning splinter nations in the Balkans declared autonomy or "autocephaly" against the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The new self-declared patriarchates were independent nations defined by their religion. In this context, Christian religious chant practiced in the Ottoman empire, Bulgaria and Greece among other nations, was based on the historical roots of the art tracing back to the Byzantine Empire, while the music of the Patriarchate created during the Ottoman period was often regarded as "post-Byzantine." This explains why Byzantine music refers to several Orthodox Christian chant traditions of the Mediterranean and of the Caucasus practiced in recent history and even today, and this article cannot be limited to the music culture of the Byzantine past.

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## Imperial Age

The tradition of eastern liturgical chant, encompassing the Greek-speaking world, developed in the Byzantine Empire from the establishment of its capital, Constantinople, in 330 until its fall in 1453. It is undeniably of composite origin, drawing on the artistic and technical productions of the classical Greek age and inspired by the monophonic vocal music that evolved in the early Greek Christian cities of Alexandria, Antioch and Ephesus.<sup>[1]</sup> It was imitated by musicians of the 7th century to create Arab music as a synthesis of Byzantine and Persian music, and these exchanges were continued through the Ottoman Empire until Istanbul today.<sup>[2]</sup>

The term Byzantine music is sometimes associated with the medieval sacred chant of Christian Churches following the Constantinopolitan Rite. There is also an identification of "Byzantine music" with "Eastern Christian liturgical chant," which is due to certain monastic reforms, like the Octoechos reform of the Quinisext Council (692) and the later reforms of the Stoudios Monastery under its abbots Sabas and Theodore.<sup>[3]</sup> The triodion created during the reform of Theodore was also soon translated into Slavonic which required also the adaption of melodic models to the prosody of the language. Later, after the Patriarchate and Court had returned to Constantinople in 1261, the former cathedral rite was not continued, but replaced by a mixed rite, which used the Byzantine Round notation to integrate the former notations of the former chant books (Papadike). This notation had developed within the book sticherarion created by the Stoudios Monastery, but it was used for the books of the cathedral rites written in a period after the fourth crusade, when the cathedral rite was already abandoned at Constantinople.

## The earliest sources and the tonal system of Byzantine music

According to the chant manual "Hagiopolites," the earliest which has survived until today, chanters of the Hagia Sophia used a system 16 church tones (echoi), while the author of this treatise introduces to a tonal system of 10 echoi. Nevertheless, both schools have in common a set of 4 octaves (*protos*, *devteros*, *tritos*, and *tetartos*), each of them had a *kyrios echos* (authentic mode) with the finalis on the degree V of the mode, and a *plagios echos* (plagal mode) with the final note on the degree I. The resulting eight modes (octoechos) had been identified with the seven tropes (tropoi) of the Ancient Greek *harmonikai*, the Pythagorean mathematic discipline of music theory as it had been formulated by the *harmonikoi* during the Hellenic period. Today, chanters of the Christian Orthodox churches identify with the heritage of Byzantine music whose earliest composers are remembered by name since the 5th century, with compositions which are related to them, although it is nearly impossible to reconstruct the original melodies of their hymnodic poems. The melodic neume notation of Byzantine music developed late since the 10th century, with the exception of an earlier ekphonic notation, interpunction signs used in lectionaries, but modal signatures for the eight echoi can already be found in fragments (papyri) of monastic hymn books (tropologia) dating back to the 6th century.<sup>[4]</sup>

Despite censorship and the decline of knowledge which marks the rise of Christian civilization within Hellenism, certain concepts of knowledge and education did still survive during the imperial age, when Christianity became the official religion.<sup>[5]</sup> The Pythagorean sect and music as part of the four "cyclical exercises" (οἱ ἐγκυκλικοί μαθήματα) which preceded the Latin quadrivium and science today based on mathematics, established mainly among Greeks in southern Italy (at Taranto and Crotone). Greek anachoretas of the early Middle Ages did still follow this education. The Calabrian Cassiodorus founded Vivarium where he translated Greek texts (science, theology and the Bible), and John of Damascus who learnt Greek from a Calabrian monk Kosmas, a slave in the household of his privileged father at Damascus, mentioned mathematics as part of the speculative philosophy.<sup>[6]</sup>

“ Διαιρεῖται δὲ ἡ φιλοσοφία εἰς θεωρητικὸν καὶ πρακτικόν, τὸ θεωρητικὸν εἰς θεολογικόν, φυσικόν, μαθηματικόν, τὸ δὲ πρακτικὸν εἰς ἠθικόν, οἰκονομικόν, πολιτικόν.<sup>[7]</sup> ”

According to him philosophy was divided into theory (theology, physiology, mathematics) and practice (ethics, economy, politics), and the Pythagorean heritage was part of the former, while only the ethic effects of music were relevant in practice. The mathematic science *harmonics* was usually not mixed with the concrete topics of a chant manual.

Nevertheless, Byzantine music is modal and entirely dependent on the Ancient Greek concept of harmonics.<sup>[8]</sup> Its tonal system is based on a synthesis with ancient Greek models, but we have no sources left which explain us, how this synthesis was done. Carolingian cantors could mix the science of harmonics with a discussion of church tones, named after the ethnic names of the octave species and their transposition tropes, because they invented an own octoechos on the basis of the Byzantine one. But they made no use of earlier Pythagorean concepts which had been fundamental for Byzantine music like:

Greek Reception	Latin Reception
the division of the tetrachord by three different intervals	the division by two different intervals (twice a tone and one half tone)
the temporary change of the genus (μεταβολὴ κατὰ γένος)	the official exclusion of the enharmonic and chromatic genus, although its use was rarely commented in a polemic way
the temporary change of the echos (μεταβολὴ κατὰ ἦχον)	a definitive classification according to one church tone
the temporary transposition (μεταβολὴ κατὰ τόνον)	<i>absonia</i> (Musica and Scolica enchiriadis, Berno of Reichenau, Frutolf of Michelsberg), although it was known since Boethius' wing diagramme
the temporary change of the tone system (μεταβολὴ κατὰ σύστημα)	no alternative tone system, except the explanation of <i>absonia</i>
the use of at least three tone systems (triphonia, tetraphonia, heptaphonia)	the use of the systema teleion (heptaphonia), relevance of Dasia system (tetraphonia) outside polyphony and of the triphonia mentioned in the Cassiodorus quotation (Aurelian) unclear
the microtonal attraction of mobile degrees (κινούμενοι) by fixed degrees (ἑστώτες) of the mode (echos) and its melos, not of the tone system	the use of dieses (attracted are E, a, and b natural within a half tone), since Boethius until Guido of Arezzo's concept of mi

It is not evident by the sources, when exactly the position of the minor or half tone moved between the devteros and tritos. It seems that the fixed degrees (hestotes) became part of a new concept of the echos as melodic mode (not simply octave species), after the echoi had been called by the ethnic names of the tropes.

## Instruments between the Byzantine and the Carolingian court

The 9th century Persian geographer Ibn Khurradadhbih (d. 911); in his lexicographical discussion of instruments cited the lyra (lūrā) as the typical instrument of the Byzantines along with the *urghun* (organ), *shilyani* (probably a type of harp or lyre) and the *salandj* (a bagpipe).<sup>[9]</sup> The first of these, the bowed stringed instrument known as the Byzantine lyra, would come to be called the *lira da braccio*,<sup>[10]</sup> in Venice, where it is considered by many to have been the predecessor of the contemporary violin, which first flourished there.<sup>[11]</sup> The bowed "lyra" is still played in former Byzantine regions, where it is known as the Politiki lyra (lit. "lyra of the City" i.e. Constantinople) in Greece, the Calabrian lira in Southern Italy, and the Lijerica in Dalmatia. The second Byzantine instrument mentioned by Ibn Khurradadhbih, the organ, originated in the East (see Hydraulis) and was used in the Hippodrome. A pipe organ with "great leaden pipes" was sent by the emperor Constantine V to Pepin the Short King of the Franks in 757. Pepin's son Charlemagne requested a similar organ for his chapel in Aachen in 812, beginning its establishment in Western church music.<sup>[12]</sup> The final Byzantine instrument, the bagpipes, known as *Dankiyo* (from ancient Greek: angion (Τὸ ἀγγεῖον) "the container"), had been played even in Roman times. Dio



Earliest known depiction of lyra in a Byzantine ivory casket

Chrysostom wrote in the 1st century of a contemporary sovereign (possibly Nero) who could play a pipe (tibia, Roman reedpipes similar to Greek aulos) with his mouth as well as with a bladder under his armpit.<sup>[13]</sup> They continued to be played throughout the empire's former realms through to the present.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Acclamations at the court and the ceremonial book

Secular music existed and accompanied every aspect of life in the empire, including dramatic productions, pantomime, ballets, banquets, political and pagan festivals, Olympic games, and all ceremonies of the imperial court. It was, however, regarded with contempt, and was frequently denounced as profane and lascivious by some Church Fathers.<sup>[15]</sup>

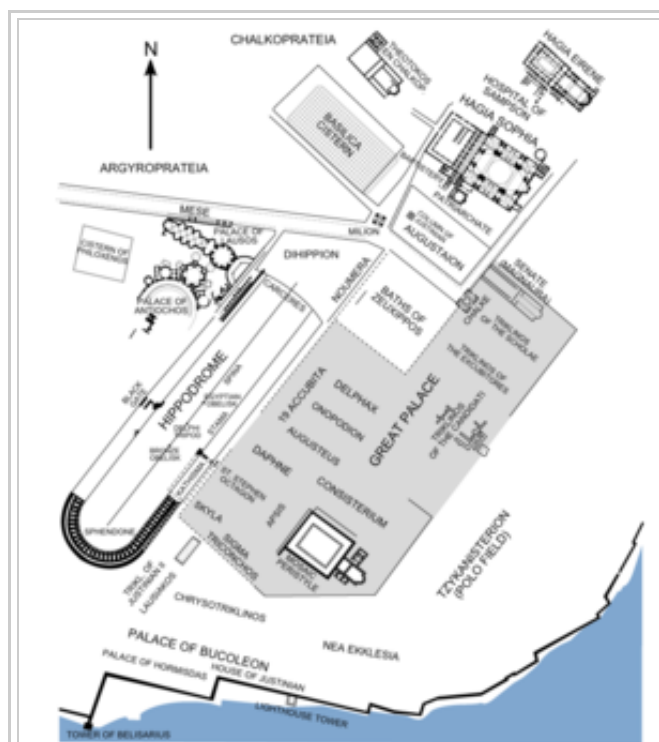
Another genre which lies between liturgical chant and court ceremonial are the so-called polychronia (πολυχρονία) and acclamations (ἀκτολογία).<sup>[16]</sup> The acclamations were sung to announce the entrance of the Emperor during representative receptions at the court, the hippodrome or in the cathedral. They can be distinct from the polychronia, ritual prayers or ektenies for present political rulers which are usually answered by a choir with formulas like "Lord protect" (κύριε σῶσον) or "Lord have mercy on us/them" (κύριε ἐλέησον).<sup>[17]</sup> The documented polychronia in books of the cathedral rite allow a geographical and a chronological classification of the manuscript and they are still used during ektenies of the divine liturgies of national Orthodox ceremonies today. The hippodrome was used for a traditional feast called Lupercalia (15 February), and on this occasion the following polychronion was celebrated:<sup>[18]</sup>

Claqueurs:	Lord, protect the Master of the Romans.	Οἱ κράκται·	Κύριε, σῶσον τοὺς δεσπότας τῶν Ῥωμαίων.
The people:	Lord, protect (X3).	ὁ λαός ἐκ γ'·	Κύριε, σῶσον.
Claqueurs:	Lord, protect to whom they gave the crown.	Οἱ κράκται·	Κύριε, σῶσον τοὺς ἐκ σοῦ ἐστεμμένους.
The people:	Lord, protect (X3).	ὁ λαός ἐκ γ'·	Κύριε, σῶσον.
Claqueurs:	Lord, protect the Orthodox power.	Οἱ κράκται·	Κύριε, σῶσον ὀρθόδοξον κράτος·
The people:	Lord, protect (X3).	ὁ λαός ἐκ γ'·	Κύριε, σῶσον.
Claqueurs:	Lord, protect the renewal of the annual cycles.	Οἱ κράκται·	Κύριε, σῶσον τὴν ἀνακαίησιν τῶν αἰτησίων.
The people:	Lord, protect (X3).	ὁ λαός ἐκ γ'·	Κύριε, σῶσον.
Claqueurs:	Lord, protect the wealth of the subjects.	Οἱ κράκται·	Κύριε, σῶσον τὸν πλοῦτον τῶν ὑπηκόων·
The people:	Lord, protect (X3).	ὁ λαός ἐκ γ'·	Κύριε, σῶσον.
Claqueurs:	May the Creator and Master of all things make long your years with the Augustae and the Porphyrogeniti.	Οἱ κράκται·	Ἄλλ' ὁ πάντων Ποιητὴς καὶ Δεσπότης τοὺς χρόνους ὑμῶν πληθύνει σὺν ταῖς ἀνγούσταις καὶ τοῖς πορφυρογεννήτοις.
The people:	Lord, protect (X3).	ὁ λαός ἐκ γ'·	Κύριε, σῶσον.
Claqueurs:	Listen, God, to your people.	Οἱ κράκται·	Εἰσακούσει ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ λαοῦ ἡμῶν·
The people:	Lord, protect (X3).	ὁ λαός ἐκ γ'·	Κύριε, σῶσον.



The main source about court ceremonies is an incomplete compilation in a 10th-century manuscript which organised parts of a treatise *Περὶ τῆς Βασιλείου Τάξεως* ("On imperial ceremonies") ascribed to Emperor Constantine VII, but in fact compiled by different authors who contributed with additional ceremonies of their period.<sup>[19]</sup> In its incomplete form chapter 1-37 of book I describe processions and ceremonies on religious festivals (many lesser ones, but especially great feasts like the Elevation of the Cross, Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter and Ascension Day and saint's days like St Demetrius, St Basil etc. often extended over many days), while chapter 38-83 describe secular ceremonies or rites of passage like coronations, weddings, births, funerals, or the celebration of war triumphs.<sup>[20]</sup> For the celebration of Epiphany the protocol begins to mention several *stichera* and their *echoi* (ch. 3) and who had to sing them:

“ Δοχή πρώτη, τῶν Βενέτων, φωνὴ ἡχ. πλαγ. δ'. « Σήμερον ὁ συντριψας ἐν ὕδασι τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν δρακόντων τὴν κεφαλὴν ὑποκλίνει τῷ προδρόμῳ φιλανθρώπος. » Δοχή β', τῶν Πρασίνων, φωνὴ πλαγ. δ'. « Χριστὸς ἀγνίζει λουπρῷ ἀγίῳ τὴν ἐξ ἐθνῶν αὐτοῦ Ἐκκλησίαν. » Δοχή γ', τῶν Βενέτων, φωνὴ ἡχ. πλαγ. α'. « Πυρὶ θεότητος ἐν Ἰορδάνῃ φλόγα σβεννύει τῆς ἀμαρτίας. »<sup>[21]</sup> ”



Map of the Great Palace situated between the Hippodrome and the Hagia Sophia. The structures of the Great Palace are shown in their approximate position as derived from literary sources. Surviving structures are in black.

These protocols gave rules for imperial progresses to and from certain churches at Constantinople and the imperial palace,<sup>[22]</sup> with fixed stations and rules for ritual actions and acclamations from specified participants (the text of acclamations and processional troparia or kontakia, but also *heirmoi* are mentioned), among them also ministers, senate members, leaders of the "Blues" (*Venetoi*) and the "Greens" (*Prasinoi*)—chariot teams during the hippodrome's horse races. They had an important role during court ceremonies.<sup>[23]</sup> The following chapters (84-95) are taken from a 6th-century manual by Peter the Patrician. They rather describe administrative ceremonies like the appointment of certain functionaries (ch. 84,85), investitures of certain offices (86), the reception of ambassadors and the proclamation of the Western Emperor (87,88), the reception of Persian ambassadors (89,90), Anagorevseis of certain Emperors (91-96), the appointment of the senate's *proedros* (97). The "palace order" did not only prescribe the way of movements (symbolic or real) like on foot, mounted, by boat, but also the costumes of the celebrants and who has to perform certain acclamations. The emperor often plays the role of Christ and the imperial palace is chosen for religious rituals, so that the ceremonial book brings the sacred and the profane together. Book II seems to be less normative and was obviously not compiled from older sources like book I which often mentioned outdated imperial offices and ceremonies, it rather describes particular ceremonies as they had been celebrated during particular imperial receptions during the Macedonian renaissance.

## The Desert Fathers and urban monasticism

Two concepts must be understood to appreciate fully the function of music in Byzantine worship and they were related to a new form of urban monasticism which even formed the representative cathedral rites of the imperial ages which had to baptise many catechumens.

The first, which retained currency in Greek theological and mystical speculation until the dissolution of the empire, was the belief in the angelic transmission of sacred chant: the assumption that the early Church united men in the prayer of the angelic choirs. It was partly based on the Hebrew fundament of Christian worship, but in the particular reception of St. Basil of Caesarea's divine liturgy. John Chrysostom, since 397 Archbishop of Constantinople, abridged the long formular of Basil's divine liturgy for the local cathedral rite.

The notion of angelic chant is certainly older than the

Apocalypse account (Revelation

4:8-11), for the musical function of angels as conceived in the Old Testament is brought out clearly by Isaiah (6:1-4) and Ezekiel (3:12). Most significant in the fact, outlined in Exodus 25, that the pattern for the earthly worship of Israel was derived from heaven. The allusion is perpetuated in the writings of the early Fathers, such as Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, Athenagoras of Athens, John Chrysostom and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. It receives acknowledgement later in the liturgical treatises of Nicolas Kavasilas and Symeon of Thessaloniki.<sup>[24]</sup>

The second, less permanent, concept was that of *koinonia* or "communion". This was less permanent because, after the fourth century, when it was analyzed and integrated into a theological system, the bond and "oneness" that united the clergy and the faithful in liturgical worship was less potent. It is, however, one of the key ideas for understanding a number of realities for which we now have different names. With regard to musical performance, this concept of *koinonia* may be applied to the primitive use of the word *choros*. It referred, not to a separate group within the congregation entrusted with musical responsibilities, but to the congregation as a whole. St. Ignatius wrote to the Church in Ephesus in the following way:



Chludov Psalter, 9th century (Moscow, Hist. Museum Ms. D.129, fol. 135)  
River of Babylon as illustration of Ps. 137:1-3



You must every man of you join in a choir so that being harmonious and in concord and taking the keynote of God in unison, you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father, so that He may hear you and through your good deeds recognize that you are parts of His Son.

A marked feature of liturgical ceremony was the active part taken by the people in its performance, particularly in the recitation or chanting of hymns, responses and psalms. The terms *choros*, *koinonia* and *ekklesia* were used synonymously in the early Byzantine Church. In Psalms 149 and 150, the Septuagint translated the Hebrew word *machol* (dance) by the Greek word *choros* Greek: Χορός. As a result, the early Church borrowed this word from classical antiquity as a designation for the congregation, at worship and in song in heaven and on earth both.

Concerning the practice of psalm recitation, the recitation by a congregation of educated chanters is already testified by the soloistic recitation of abridged psalms by the end of the 4th century. Later it was called *prokeimenon*. Hence, there was an early practice of simple psalmody which was used for the recitation of canticles and the psalter, and usually Byzantine psalters have the 15 canticles in an appendix, but the simple psalmody itself was not notated before the 13th century, in dialogue or *papadikai* treatises preceding the book *sticheraria*.<sup>[25]</sup> Later books like the *akolouthiai* and some *psaltika* also contain the elaborated psalmody, when a protopsaltes recited just one or two psalm verses. Between the recited psalms and canticles *troparia* were recited according to the same more or less elaborated psalmody. This context relates antiphonal chant genres like *antiphona* (kind of introits), *trisagion* and its substitutes, *prokeimenon*, *allelouiarion*, the later *cherubikon* and its substitutes, the *koinonikon* cycles as they were created during the 9th century. In most of the cases they were simply *troparia* and their repetitions or segments were given by the antiphonon, whether it was sung or not, its three sections of the psalmodic recitation were separated by the *troparion*.

### The recitation of the biblical odes

The fashion in all cathedral rites of the Mediterranean was a new emphasis on the psalter. In older ceremonies before Christianity became the religion of empires, the recitation of the biblical odes (mainly taken from the Old Testament) was much more important. They did not disappear in certain cathedral rites, like the Milanese and the Constantinopolitan rite.

Before long, however, a clericalizing tendency soon began to manifest itself in linguistic usage, particularly after the Council of Laodicea, whose fifteenth Canon permitted only the canonical *psaltai*, "chanters," to sing at the services. The word *choros* came to refer to the special priestly function in the liturgy - just as, architecturally speaking, the choir became a reserved area near the sanctuary - and *choros* eventually became the equivalent of the word *kleros* (the pulpits of two or even five choirs).



Chludov Psalter, beginning of the canticles

The nine canticles or odes were:

- (1) The Song of the sea (Exodus 15:1-19);
- (2) The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32:1-43);
- (3) - (6) The prayers of Hannah, Habakkuk, Isaiah, Jonah (1 Kings [1 Samuel] 2:1-10; Habakkuk 3:1-19; Isaiah 26:9-20; Jonah 2:3-10);
- (7) - (8) The Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Holy Children (Apoc. Daniel 3:26-56 and 3:57-88);
- (9) The Magnificat and the Benedictus (Luke 1:46-55 and 68-79).

and in Constantinople they were combined in pairs against the canonical order:<sup>[26]</sup>

- Ps. 17 with troparia Ἀλληλούϊα and Μνήσθητί μου, κύριε.
- (1) with troparion Τῷ κυρίῳ ἄισωμεν, ἐνδόξως γὰρ δεδόξασται.
- (2) with troparion Δόξα σοι, ὁ θεός. (Deut. 1-14) Φύλαξόν με, κύριε. (Deut. 15-21) Δίκαιος εἶ, κύριε, (Deut. 22-38) Δόξα σοι, δόξα σοι. (Deut. 39-43) Εἰσάκουσόν μου, κύριε. (3)
- (4) & (6) with troparion Οἰκτείρησόν με, κύριε.
- (3) & (9a) with troparion Ἐλέησόν με, κύριε.
- (5) & Mannaseh (apokr. 2 Chr 33) with troparion Ἰλάσθητί μοι, κύριε.
- (7) which has a refrain in itself.

## The troparion

The common term for a short hymn of one stanza, or one of a series of stanzas, is troparion. As a refrain interpolated between psalm verses it had the same function like the antiphon in Western plainchant. The simplest troparion was probably "allelouia", and similar to troparia like the trisagion or the cherubikon or the koinonika a lot of troparia became a chant genre of their own.

A famous example, whose existence is attested as early as the 4th century, is the Easter Vespers hymn, *Phos Hilaron* ("O Resplendent Light"). Perhaps the earliest set of troparia of known authorship are those of the monk Auxentios (first half of the 5th century), attested in his biography but not preserved in any later Byzantine order of service. Another, *O Monogenes Yios* ("Only Begotten Son"), ascribed to the emperor Justinian I (527-565), followed the doxology of the second antiphonon at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy.

## Romanos the Melodist, the kontakion, and the Justinian Hagia Sophia

The development of large scale hymnographic forms begins in the fifth century with the rise of the kontakion, a long and elaborate metrical sermon, reputedly of Syriac origin, which finds its acme in the work of St. Romanos the Melodist (6th century). This dramatic homily, which usually paraphrases a Biblical narrative, comprises some 20 to 30 stanzas (oikoi "houses") and was sung during the Morning Office (Orthros) in a simple and direct syllabic style (one note per syllable).<sup>[27]</sup> The earliest musical versions in Italobyzantine *kontakaria* of the thirteenth century, however, are melismatic (that is, many notes per syllable

of text), and were probably sung since the ninth century, when *kontakia* were reduced to the *prooimion* (introductory verse) and first *oikos* (stanza).<sup>[28]</sup> Romanos' own recitation of all the numerous *oikoi* must have been much simpler, but the most interesting question of the genre are the different functions that *kontakia* once had.

Some of them had a clear liturgical assignation, others not, so that they can only be understood from the background of the later book of ceremonies. Some of Romanos' creations can be even regarded as political propaganda in connection with the new and very fast reconstruction of the famous Hagia Sophia by Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles. A hole quarter of Constantinople had been burnt down during a civil war. Justinian had ordered a massacre at the hippodrome, because his imperial antagonists who were affiliated to the former dynasty, had been organised as a chariot team.<sup>[29]</sup> Thus, he had place for the creation of a huge park with a new cathedral in it, which was larger than any church built before as Hagia Sophia. He needed a kind of mass propaganda to justify the imperial violence against the public. In the *kontakion* "On earthquakes and conflagration" (H. 54), Romanos interpreted the Nika riot as a divine punishment, which followed in 532 earlier ones like earthquakes (526-529) and a famine (530).<sup>[30]</sup>

The city was buried beneath  
these horrors and cried in great  
sorrow.

Those who feared God  
stretched their hands out to  
him,

begging for compassion and an  
end to the terror.

Reasonably, the emperor—and  
his empress—were in these  
ranks,

their eyes lifted in hope toward  
the Creator:

"Grant me victory," he said,  
"just as you made David  
victorious over Goliath. You  
are my hope.

Rescue, in your mercy, your  
loyal people

and grant them eternal life.

Ὑπὸ μὲν τούτων τῶν δεινῶν  
κατείχετο ἡ πόλις καὶ θρήνον  
εἶχε μέγα·

Θεὸν οἱ δεδιότες χεῖρας  
ἐξέτεινον αὐτῷ

ἐλεημοσύνην ἐξαίτουντες παρ'  
αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν κακῶν  
κατάπαυσιν·

σὺν τούτοις δὲ εἰκότως  
ἐπηύχετο καὶ ὁ βασιλεύων

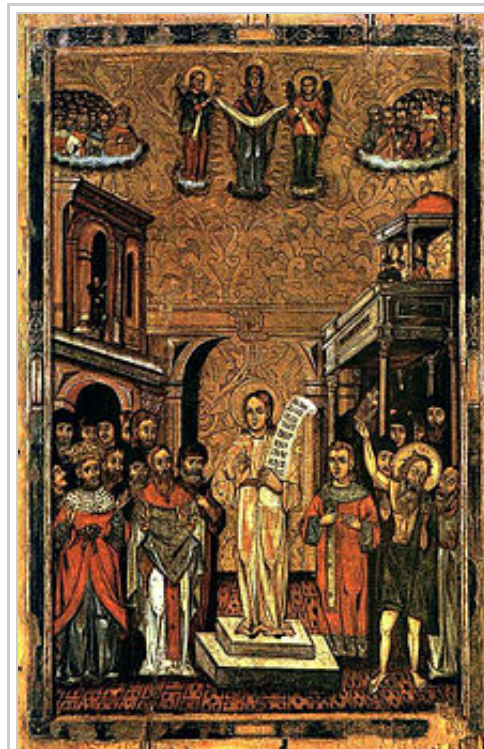
ἀναβλέψας πρὸς τὸν πλάστην  
—σὺν τούτῳ δὲ σύννευος ἡ  
τούτου—

Δός μοι, βοῶν, σωτήρ, ὡς καὶ  
τῷ Δαβὶδ σου

τοῦ νικῆσαι Γολιάθ· σοὶ γὰρ  
ἐλπίζω·

σῶσον τὸν πιστὸν λαόν σου ὡς  
ἐλεήμων,

οἷσπερ καὶ δώσης ζωὴν τὴν  
αἰώνιον.(H. 54.18)



An icon depicting Romanos the  
Melodist, c. 490–556



Ancient Ambon outside Hagia Sophia



According to Johannes Koder the kontakion was celebrated the first time during Lenten period in 537, about ten months before the official inauguration of the new built Hagia Sophia on 27 December.

## Changes in architecture and liturgy, and the introduction of the cherubikon



Icon screen of SS. Forty Martyrs Church at Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria)

The separation of the prothesis where the bread was consecrated during a separated service called *proskomide*, required a procession of the gifts at the beginning of the second eucharist part of the divine liturgy. The troparion "Οἱ τὰ χερουβὶμ" which was sung during the procession, was often ascribed to Emperor Justin II, but the changes in sacral architecture were definitely traced back to his time by archaeologists.<sup>[31]</sup> Concerning the Hagia Sophia which was constructed earlier, the procession was obviously within the church.<sup>[32]</sup> It seems that the cherubikon was a prototype of the Western chant genre offertory.<sup>[33]</sup>

With this change came also the dramaturgy of the three doors in a choir screen before the bema (sanctuary). They were closed and opened during the ceremony.<sup>[34]</sup> Outside Constantinople these choir or icon screens of marble were later replaced by iconostaseis.

## Monastic reforms at Constantinople and Palestine

By the end of the seventh century with the reform of 692, the kontakion, Romanos' genre which more or less replaced the former canticle recitation, was overshadowed by a certain monastic type of homiletic hymn, the *kanon*. Essentially, the *kanon* is an hymnodic complex composed of nine odes which were originally attached to the nine Biblical canticles and to which they were related by means of corresponding poetic allusion or textual quotation (see the section about the biblical odes). Out of the custom of canticle recitation, monastic reformers at Constantinople, Jerusalem and Mount Sinai developed a new homiletic genre whose verses in the complex ode meter were composed over a melodic model: the *heirmos*.<sup>[35]</sup>

The nine *odes* of the *kanon* were dissimilar by their metrum. Consequently, an entire *heirmos* comprises nine independent melodies (eight, because the second *ode* was usually omitted outside Lenten period), which are united musically by the same *echos* and its *melos*, and sometimes even textually by references to the general theme of the liturgical occasion—especially in *acrosticha* composed over a given *heirmos*, but dedicated to a particular day of the *menaion*.

The earliest examples were composed during the 6th century and have mainly survived in the Georgian Iadgari tropologion.<sup>[36]</sup> After the octoechos reform of the Quinisext Council in 692, monks at Mar Saba like St. Andrew of Crete (ca. 660-ca. 740), Saints John of Damascus and Cosmas of Jerusalem composed in

these genres.

Today the second ode is usually omitted, but it was medieval custom, that the extremely strict spirit of Moses' last prayer was recited during Lenten period.

## The monastic reform of the Stoudites and their notated chant books



Joseph the Hymnographer, born c. 810

During the 9th-century reforms of the Stoudios Monastery, the reformers favoured Palestinian composers in their new notated chant books *heirmologion* and *sticherarion*. Festal *stichera*, accompanying both the fixed psalms at the beginning and end of Vespers and the psalmody of the Lauds (the *Ainoi*) in the Morning Office, exist for all special days of the year, the Sundays and weekdays of Lent, and for the recurrent cycle of eight weeks in the order of the modes



Saint Kassia, c. 810–865

beginning with Easter. Their melodies were originally preserved in the *tropologion*. During the 9th century two new notated chant book were created at the Stoudios Monastery which were supposed to replace the *tropologion*: the *sticherarion*, consisting of the *idiomela* in the *menaion* (fixed cycle), the *triadion* and the *pentekostarion* (mobile cycle around the holy week), and the *octoechos* (hymns of the weekly cycle), a bulky volume which first appeared in the middle of the tenth century and contains over a thousand model *troparia*, and the *heirmologion* which was either composed according to the eight *echoi* or according to the nine odes of the canon. These books were not only provided with musical notation, with respect to the former *tropologia* they were also considerably more elaborated and varied as a collection of various local traditions. In practice it meant that only a small part of the repertory was really chosen to be sung during the divine services.

The new custom established by the reformer was that each ode consists of an initial *troparion*, the *heirmos*, followed by three, four or more *troparia* from the *menaion* which are the exact metrical reproductions of the *heirmos* (akrostics), thereby allowing the same music to fit all *troparia* equally well.

## The cyclic organization of lectionaries

Byzantine chant manuscripts date from the 9th century, while lectionaries of biblical readings in ekphonic notation (a primitive graphic system designed to indicate the manner of reciting lessons from Scripture) begin about a century earlier and continue in use until the 12th or 13th century.<sup>[37]</sup> Our knowledge of the older period is derived from Church service books *Typika*, patristic writings and medieval histories. Scattered examples of hymn texts from the early centuries of Greek Christianity still exist. Some of these



employ the metrical schemes of classical Greek poetry; but the change of pronunciation had rendered those meters largely meaningless, and, except when classical forms were imitated, Byzantine hymns of the following centuries are prose-poetry, unrhymed verses of irregular length and accentual patterns.

The effect that this concept had on church music was threefold: first, it bred a highly conservative attitude to musical composition; secondly, it stabilized the melodic tradition of certain hymns; and thirdly, it continued, for a time, the anonymity of the composer. For if a chant is of heavenly origin, then the acknowledgment received by man in transmitting it to posterity ought to be minimal. This is especially true when he deals with hymns which were known to have been first sung by angelic choirs - such as the Amen, Alleluia, Trisagion, Sanctus and Doxology. Consequently, until Palaeologan times, it was inconceivable for a composer to place his name beside a notated text in the manuscripts.

## **The Hagiopolites treatise**

The earliest chant manual pretends right at the beginning that John of Damascus was its author. Its first edition was based on a more or less complete version in a 14th-century manuscript,<sup>[38]</sup> but the treatise was probably created centuries earlier as part of the reform redaction of the tropologia by the end of the 8th century, after Irene's Council of Nikaia had confirmed the octoechos reform of 692 in 787. It fits well to the later focus on Palestine authors in the new chant book heirmologion.

Concerning the octoechos, the Hagiopolitan system is characterised as a system of eight diatonic echoi with two additional phthorai, which were not used by John of Damascus, but by Joseph the Hymnographer. It also mentions an alternative system of the Asma (the cathedral rite was called ἀκολουθία ἁσματική) which consisted of 4 kyrioi echoi, 4 plagioi, 4 mesoi, and 4 phthorai. It seems that until the time, when the Hagiopolites was written, the octoechos reform did not work out for the cathedral rite, because singers at the court and at the Patriarchate still used a tonal system of 16 echoi which was obviously part of the particular notation of their books: the asmatikon and the kontakarion or psaltikon.

But neither 9th-century Constantinopolitan chant book nor an introducing treatise which explains the fore-mentioned system of the Asma, have survived. Only a 14th-century manuscript of Kastoria testifies cheironomic signs used in the Kontakarion which are transcribed in longer melodic phrases by the notation of the contemporary sticherarion, the middle Byzantine Round notation.

## **The Slavic reception**

### **The missions of Cyril and Methodius**

### **The Kievan Rus' and the earliest manuscripts of the cathedral rite**

## **The end of the cathedral rite at Constantinople**

Ideas of originality and free invention similar to those seen in later music probably never existed in early Byzantine times. The very notion of using traditional formulas (or melody-types) as a compositional technique shows an archaic concept in liturgical chant, and is quite the opposite of free, original creation. It seems evident that the chants of the Byzantine repertory found in musical manuscripts from the tenth century to the time of the Fourth Crusade (1204–1261), represent the final and only surviving stage of an evolution, the beginnings of which go back at least to the sixth century. What exact changes took place in

the music during the formative stage is difficult to say; but certain chants in use even today exhibit characteristics which may throw light on the subject. These include recitation formulas, melody-types, and standard phrases that are clearly evident in the folk music and other traditional music of various cultures of the East.

## **The kontakarion of the Norman Archimandrites**

## **The kontakarion of the Peninsula Athos**

# **The era of psaltic art and the new mixed rite of Constantinople**

With the end of creative poetical composition, Byzantine chant entered its final period, devoted largely to the production of more elaborate musical settings of the traditional texts: either embellishments of the earlier simpler melodies, or original music in highly ornamental style. This was the work of the so-called *Maïstores*, “masters,” of whom the most celebrated was St. John Koukouzeles (active c. 1300), compared in Byzantine writings to St. John of Damascus himself, as an innovator in the development of chant. The multiplication of new settings and elaborations of the old continued in the centuries following the fall of Constantinople, until by the end of the eighteenth century the original musical repertory of the medieval musical manuscripts had been quite replaced by later compositions, and even the basic model system had undergone profound modification.



A musical manuscript of 1433 from Pantokratoros monastery

## **The revision of the chant books**

## **Kalophonia**

## **The synthesis between harmonikai and papadikai**

## **Ottoman era**

## **Chant between Raidestinos, Chrysaphes the Younger, Germanos of New Patras and Balasios**

## **Petros Bereketes and the school of the Phanariotes**

To a certain degree we may look for remnants of Byzantine or early (Greek-speaking, Orthodox Christian) near eastern music in the music of the Ottoman Court. Examples such as that of the eminent composer and theorist Prince Cantemir of Romania learning music from the Greek musician *Angelos*, indicate the continuing participation of Greek speaking people in court culture. The influences of ancient Greek basin and the Greek Christian chants in the Byzantine music as origin, are confirmed. Music of Turkey was influenced by Byzantine music, too (mainly in the years 1640-1712).<sup>[39]</sup> It seems also remarkable that Ottoman music is a synthesis, carrying the culture of Greek and Armenian Christian chant. It emerged as the

result of a sharing process between the many civilizations which met together in the Orient, considering the breadth and length of duration of these empires and the great number of ethnicities and major or minor cultures that they encompassed or came in touch with at each stage of their development.

## **The Putna school of the Bukovina**

## **Phanariotes at the new music school of the patriarchate**

## **The Orthodox reformulation according to the new method**

Chrysanthos of Madytos (ca. 1770-1846), Gregory the Protopsaltes (ca. 1778 - ca. 1821), and Chourmouzos the Archivist were responsible for a reform of the notation of Greek ecclesiastical music. Essentially, this work consisted of a simplification of the Byzantine musical symbols which, by the early 19th century, had become so complex and technical that only highly skilled chanters were able to interpret them correctly. The work of the three reformers is a landmark in the history of Greek Church music, since it introduced the system of neo-Byzantine music upon which are based the present-day chants of the Greek Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, their work has since been misinterpreted often, and much of the oral tradition has been lost.

## **Konstantinos Byzantios' renunciation of the new method**

## **The old school of the patriarchate**

## **The modern school of the patriarchate**

## **The Simon Karas school at Athens**

Simon Karas<sup>[40]</sup> (1905–1999) began an effort to assemble as much material as possible in order to restore the apparently lost tradition. His work is continued by Lycourgos Angelopoulos and other *psaltai* (“cantors”) of Byzantine music. Two major styles of interpretation have evolved, the Hagioritic, which is simpler and is mainly followed in monasteries, and the Patriarchal, as exemplified by the style taught at the Great Church of Constantinople, which is more elaborate and is practised in parish churches. Nowadays the Orthodox churches maintain chanting schools in which new cantors are trained. Each diocese employs a *protopsaltes* (“first cantor”), who directs the diocesan cathedral choir and supervises musical education and performance. The *protopsaltes* of the Patriarchates are given the title *Archon Protopsaltes* (“Lord First Cantor”), a title also conferred as an honorific to distinguished cantors and scholars of Byzantine music.

## **Modern composers**

Jessica Suchy-Pilalis is an example of a modern composer who writes and arranges sacred music in the Byzantine tradition. Dr. Suchy-Pilalis serves as Protopsaltes at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.<sup>[41]</sup>

## **See also**

- Byzantine musical notation
- Music of ancient Rome
- Ancient Greek music
- Modern Greek music
- Traditional music of Crete
- The Lyra of the Byzantine
- Znamenny Chant - the Russian chant style that evolved from the Byzantine system

For more on the theory of Byzantine music and its cultural relatives in Greek-speaking peoples see:

- Echos
- Octoechos

For collections of Byzantine hymnography see:

For contemporary works featuring Byzantine chant see:

- Prayer Bells
- Days and Nights with Christ
- John Tavener

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14. See Balkan Gaida, Serbo-Croatian Diple, Greek Tsampouna, Pontic Tulum, Cretan Askomandoura, Armenian Parkapzuk, Georgian Gudastviri, and Romanian Cimpoi.
15. Canon 62 of the Quinisext Synod (692) banned certain "pagan" feast of the hippodrome like *Vota* and *Broumalia*. Nevertheless, both feasts were still described in Constantine VII Books of ceremonies (I:72 & II:18).
16. Τὸν Δεσπότην or Εἰς πολλὰ ἔτη, Δέσποτα. are two of the very few acclamations which are still in use today during the veneration of the icons by a Metropolit or the appointment of such an office.
17. These formulas are documented in various regions of the Mediterranean like the Gallican and Visigothic preces, the terkyrie of the Ambrosian rite, but also in coronation rites which were even performed at Montecassino Abbey, when Pope Nicholas II accepted the Normans as allies.
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## External links

- Byzantine music on the Official Website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople (<http://www.ec-patr.net/en/>)
- Learn to Chant (<http://www.goarch.org/en/chapel/chant.asp>)
- Byzantine Music Notation (<http://www.g-culture.org/ioannis/tag/byzantine-music-notation/>)
- Comparison of Byzantine and Western music (<http://www.stanthonysonastery.org/music/Intro.htm>)



Wikisource has original text related to this article:  
**John of Damascus**



Wikisource has original text related to this article:  
**Chrysanthos of Madytos**

- Excellent resource for Byzantine music (<http://www.analogion.com>)
- Hymnography: Traditional Melodic Genres (<http://www.synaxis.info/psalom/hymnography/hymnography.html>) (Traditional Eastern Orthodox Chant Documentation Project)
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