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SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

**"THE LITURGICAL RECITATIVE, THE OLDEST
MUSICAL LANGUAGE OF BYZANTINE MONODY.
CASE STUDY AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH
THE RECITATIVE FROM THE COPTIC ORTHODOX
CHURCH"**

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INTRODUCTION

1. Argument and general framework

The present thesis aims to underline the concept of *word and music* in the context of comparative liturgical recitative, by demonstrating how the two instruments, word and music, contribute to bringing man closer to God within the parameters of cultic rites. It is not easy for us to say which of the two notions best defines man. We would perhaps be tempted to give primacy to the word, simply by virtue of a theological or perhaps philosophical understanding of the act of creation: ... "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory" (John 1-14) or "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (Gen. 1-26). Father Nicolas Losky, a keen observer of the liturgical phenomenon in the Orthodox Church, often claims that "*word sings - music proclaims*". If we carefully decipher this syntagma, we understand that both ennoble man, and both are placed in the nature of man given by God at creation: body and soul - word and music.

But what, after all, is the relationship between word and music? A clear answer can be found in Nicolae Teodoreanu's thesis: "...From a semantic point of view, the word contains a meaning, it denotes something, it is the name of what exists. From an acoustic point of view, the word is a chain of phonemes, sounds with very different sound qualities or colours, divided into two categories: vowels and consonants. Vowels are the supporting sounds of speech and have a precise pitch and harmonic range; they sound, more or less, harmonic. Consonants, on the other hand, are the transition sounds between vowels, they do not have a precise pitch and therefore no harmonic spectrum. The phonemes (vowels and consonants), in their chaining together, are therefore already music: a string of harmonic and disharmonic sounds that are

subject to a certain rhythmic structure. The word is therefore a dual reality, it is both a sound complex and music in itself. This duality of the word corresponds to the dual nature of man: soul and body, mind and heart. For it speaks through meaning to the human mind and through melody to the heart. From this it follows what music is: before it separates itself from the word, before it becomes abstract, before it becomes itself, music is an extension of the word. Song preserves the meaning of the word unaltered, while the sound plane gives greater weight to the vowels, accentuating and developing their melody; song is born from the implicit melody of the spoken word. It is also a duality: meaning and sonority. Perhaps it is not by chance that the genre of recitative, the melodized recitation (*Sprechgesang*), which is a further step in the direction of the musicalisation of speech, has been so cultivated by the Eastern Church, for it extends the sense-sound duality of which we have spoken. This type of recitation, called ekphonesis, is a Hellenistic inheritance and is found not only among Christians, but also among Jews and Muslims, in the recitation of sacred texts" .

Word and music have been present since the earliest ritual expressions of man, especially the ancient-testamentary. It is very interesting to follow how man used the word, sound or image in his relationship with the divine. In the Old Testament we can see the dynamic of the revealing word, the transmitter of divine messages or plans. Regardless of the period, referring to the patriarchs or judges, prophets or kings, God revealed Himself to man through the word, conveying His message through chosen "characters". In such times, the acoustic (word) had a completely different role than the visual. God's revelation then was always indirect, for "no one could see the face of God and live" (Ex. 33-22). With the Incarnation of the Saviour Jesus Christ, another opportunity of communication was opened to man: face-to-face vision. From this moment *a new musicality begins*.

2. Aim and objectives

The present PhD thesis entitled *"Liturgical recitative, the oldest musical language of Byzantine Monody. Case Study and Comparative Analysis with the Coptic Orthodox Church Recitative"*, brings under the spotlight an important topic of Byzantinology and musicology, namely: the first neumatic notation of Byzantine music and, implicitly, the instrument with which it operated for almost ten centuries: the liturgical recitative. The approach to this theme is something new in the context of musicology and Byzantinological research in our country; new in many ways:

1. Liturgical recitative and to a much greater extent ecphonetic notation have raised real technical problems throughout the musicological world. Since ecphonetic notation is so old, the interpretation of its specific visual signs has not yet brought experts in this field together. This can be explained by the total lack of manuscripts that unequivocally contain in their pages theoretical explanations of the characters of ecphonetic notation. Although there are a few documents that specify the names of the signs, names that find their etymological meaning in their visual form, these documents do not specify musical, intonational or interpretative functionality. Such questions are still relevant and legitimate: Do ecphonetic characters signs have musical functionality or are they just prosodic accents? Are they fixed, stable steps or melodic formulas, as they are placed on the scriptural text? Are they to be retained by the declamator of the Gospel text and then applied to any other pericope, like pre-established, mnemotechnical formulas? And the list of questions goes on...

2. In addition to this there is a very small number of Lectionaries or Manuscripts with scriptural texts over which the respective (ecphonetic) signs were placed. On the territory of our country only one Lectionary is known, the so-called

Evangelical Lectionary of Iași (Ms. 160/IV-34) and therefore, for us Romanians it was all the more difficult to make comparative musical analyses. The first researcher to study this Lectionary, transcribing it in linear notation, was Archdeacon Grigore Pañțiru, and this was almost 40 years ago. This manuscript could have been joined by two other Lectionaries of Romanian origin, but they were donated to monasteries on Mount Athos (the first one at Dionisiu - by Mircea Ciobanu and Doamna Chiajna, and the other one at the Great Lavra, donated in 1643 by Matei Basarab and Elena Doamna). As a result of various research studies undertaken with some difficulty in the 1960s and 1970s on Mount Athos, scholar Sebastian Barbu-Bucur mentions their existence in passing, without undertaking any musical documentation, photocopying or transcribing, as Grigore Pañțiru did. Unfortunately, the situation of the collection of manuscripts with ephonetic notation in our country is one of the most unfortunate, compared to our neighbouring countries. Bulgaria, for example, has no less than eight such documents in the National Library in Sofia. One is in the historic Bachkovo Monastery in the south of the country and three ephonetic manuscripts in the Ivan Dujcev Slavonic-Byzantine Research Centre in Sofia. Such a situation is bizarre to say the least, given the extraordinary fame of the Putna School of Music of the 15th-16th centuries, which polarised a very large geographical area, reaching as far as Prague. If Putna was such an important laboratory for the writing and performance of musical manuscripts in Paleo and Middle Byzantine notation, it is hard to believe that this cultural and spiritual effervescence came out of nowhere in history, without having been anticipated documentarily in one way or another.

3. Another interesting point of the thesis is its emphasis on the fact that the concrete understanding of liturgical recitative by the church minister is at least as important as the purely theoretical understanding of the scholar or musicologist. However, in our studies on the subject, one only observes a

technical analysis, detached from the "fire of events"; the liturgical recitative is seen only through the prism of pentameter, iambs or dithyrambs, tributary to the inner laws of language. This approach, limited to the establishment of rigid intonational rules (otherwise correct), and which follow in stretto the specific prosodic laws of the language used, is not sufficient. In the concrete sphere of practice, at the level of deacons and declamatory priests (and here we refer exclusively to those ministers trained musically, especially "career deacons", not transitional ones) another kind of answer should be found. Here, the freedom of musical interpretation of the liturgical recitative is interwoven with the knowledge of phrasing, with the aesthetic sense of the minister, with the study of the text to be read, but above all with the state of living and active prayer, as an integral part of religious service and liturgical worship.

4. As a response to the shortcomings of ephonic manuscripts in our country, two Greek manuscripts with ephonic notation have recently been discovered in prestigious libraries on the North American continent, hitherto unreported, at least from a musical perspective. The first manuscript, also known as the *Codex Torontonensis*, dating from the 11th century, is in the Library of the University of Toronto, Canada, located in the "Thomas Fischer" Rare Book Department.

The second document has a special cultural significance for us, as it was in the possession of the Romanian historian and collector of Byzantine manuscripts Constantin Erbiceanu (1838-1913) for a period of more than ten years (1866-1877). The history of the latter manuscript is interesting, as it once again describes Byzantine historiography and ecclesiastical life, which concerns Romania. In this manuscript we find reference to Hrisant Notara, the then Patriarch of Jerusalem (1707-1731), a friend of St. Constantine

Cantacuzino, who was on good terms with the ruler Constantin Brancoveanu and with St. Antim Ivireanul, Metropolitan of the Romanian Country (1708-1716). The manuscript in question is called *Jaharis Gospel Lectionary* and has been in the Medieval Art Collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, USA, since 2007.

5. A final point that enhances this work is the confrontation of the liturgical recitative specific to the Byzantine-Roman space with the psalmody or liturgical chanting that characterizes the Old Eastern Churches, especially in the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church and tangentially with that of the Ethiopian Church. This comparative-analytical perspective can provide undoubted evidence of the presence and importance of the first notation of Orthodox church music in the ichonomy of the Byzantine sound phenomenon through the identification of Coptic manuscripts with presumably ecphonetic notation of the 10th-11th century, placed on top of Sahidic texts, but it also has the particular role of further highlighting the oral character of these common traditions, which is seen as the core of liturgical dynamics: text and melody.

3. Research status and evidence base

In contrast, musicologists outside Romania have turned their attention to ecphonetic notation since the second half of the 19th century. The first to introduce the term or phrase 'ecphonetic notation' was Ioannes Tzetzes, in his work *Η επινοησις της παρασημαντικης των Βυζαντικων* of 1885. He was soon joined by another Greek scholar, M. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, who in 1890 edited well-known ecphonetic manuscripts.

At the beginning of the 20th century, three other great personalities devoted much of their scientific work to discovering, inventorying and circulating musical manuscripts with ecphonetic notation, first of which is the Frenchman Jean Baptiste Thibaut, followed by the Danish Carsten Høeg and the Austrian Egon Wellesz. Thibaut was a member of the Russian Institute of Archaeology in Constantinople and in this position published in St. Petersburg two of the three books necessary for the study of Byzantine music, devoted exclusively to ecphonetic notation. The three books total more than 400 pages, including folios of very good quality and provide musical manuscripts arranged over a period of several centuries (V-XI).

Equally commendable is the contribution of the Danish Carsten Høeg, who undertook numerous study trips in the interwar period, more precisely between 1930 and 1934. The motivation of the young researcher at the time is surprising: he cites the "acute lack" of documents on ecphonetic notation in the manuscript collection of the National Library in Copenhagen.

This is indeed astonishing when one considers that Denmark is not an Orthodox country, and that the early 20th century here was not at all distinguished in terms of Byzantine musical tradition, quite the contrary. Armed with a camera, the ambitious researcher visited Mount Athos, Thessaloniki, Athens, Jerusalem and St Catherine's Sinai in turn. To these he added Constantinople and the island of Lesbos, London, Oxford and Paris. In Constantinople he contacted Patriarch Photios II by letter, from whom he received a blessing to reach the Great Lavra and Vatoped. Undoubtedly, Høeg is a meritorious pioneer in the research of ecphonetic notation, adding to this the fact that he was, together with Egon Wellesz and Tillyard, one of the initiators of the famous *Monumenta*

Musicae Byzantinae, then the most important publicistic working tool of universal musicology and Byzantinology.

The third pillar of ecphonetic notation was the Hungarian-born Austrian Egon Wellesz. A man for whom scholarly research in Byzantine music became almost a lifelong mission. This can be easily explained once one traces the course of his professional training: he studied music with the composers and musicians Arnold Schoenberg and Guido Adler; the latter was decisive in Egon Wellesz's training, as he was a pioneer of musicology, in the sense of identifying and separating the fields of musical research, for example: music history and music theory, but also ethnomusicology.

Egon Wellesz wrote and printed many studies on Byzantine music, closely following the musical phenomenon in the Byzantine area, especially musical notations. His most comprehensive edited work is *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, in two editions, 1949 and 1961. As far as ecphonetic notation is concerned, Wellesz was the first musicologist to investigate the Oxyrinchos papyrus no. 1786 of the 3rd-4th centuries, the first Christian document with alphabetic notation, and he produced theses on the eight signs identified in it, without, however, reaching a satisfactory result regarding their work.

The doctoral thesis is structured by seven chapters, each with the necessary developments, presented in the form of sub-chapters.

The first chapter is entitled: ECPHONETIC NOTATION - PERIODIZATION, CHARACTERISTICS, PROBLEMATIZATION. Here ecphonic notation has been treated from a semantic perspective, from the point of view of manuscript sources, as well as periodization. The ecphonic notation constitutes the fundamental framework for the development of the liturgical recitative, being the one that has imprinted the legal parameters in which the latter acts and functions.

Certain notions and meanings involved in this idiom were explained, such as: prosodic characters versus ecphonic characters, linguistic functionality and musical functionality of ecphonic signs, polemics about them, the meaning of signs outside the liturgical context, to which concrete examples from different times and cultures were added. All the issues raised have led to an undeniable conclusion: ecphonic signs or characters have a double functionality: linguistic and musical, and represent fixed sounds rather than melodic formulas that are hardly free to be used in any context.

The second chapter turns specifically to the LITURGICAL RECITATIVE, also by establishing the semantic framework, by highlighting local sources and editorial resources, but also by a necessary structuring: *strict recitative, improvisatory recitative and introductory recitative*. Parallels were created between the liturgical recitative, with a strictly cultic functionality (e.g. litanies, evangelical and apostolic readings) and the epic recitative from Romanian folklore. In this sense, it was possible to observe obvious structural similarities between the two, in the direction of a rectilinearity of the musical discourse, of the restricted melodic

framework and of the interdependence between text and melody, the text having the most important role.

Also in this chapter, the practical, applied side of recitative was discussed, with reference to those who give it life in the church: priests and deacons (especially long-serving deacons). Extending this aspect, the "schools of deaconry" in the Romanian Patriarchate and by extension the styles of interpretation of the declaimers were highlighted.

The third chapter looked at the ARTICLES AND STUDIES OF ROMANIAN AUTHORS ON THE LITURGICAL RECITATIVE. The material was divided into two sections: 19th and 20th century Romanian authors and contemporary Romanian authors. The personalities in our country who have dedicated editorial space to the recitative, both in the theological and musical environment at the Conservatory level, were highlighted. Some of them, such as George Breazul, Grigore Panțiru, Nicolae Lungu, Dan Eugen Drăgoi, Gabriela Ocneanu, Marian Vasile Duță or Vasile Grăjdian, deserve to be brought forth. The theological and musical perspective of the authors in this chapter has brought necessary clarifications on how the recitative should be used in church, a manner that is declamated, not spoken or read.

Logically, the fourth chapter has revealed the compositional EXAMPLES OF THE RECITATIVE IN OUR COUNTRY, of important names from the classical period - we refer to the 19th century - such as Macarie the Hieromonk, Anton Pann, Theodor Stupcanu, Ion Popescu-Pasărea but also from the contemporary period, very little or not at all addressed: Archdeacon Ioan Evghenie Dascălu, Frs. Marcel Manole and Constantin Z. Grigorescu or Marian Moise, who produced oral interpretative examples, which were later transcribed on linear notation after audio recordings. Also in this chapter, transcriptions were made from psaltic notation to

linear notation of the recitatives, and musical analyses were unfolded, from a rhythmic-melodic and aesthetic-stylistic point of view.

The last three chapters (5, 6 and 7) of the present work are a particular novelty, proposing a historical and musical approach to liturgical worship in the Coptic Orthodox Church, circumscribed to the great family of the Old Eastern Churches. They have been divided as follows:

Chapter 5: HISTORICAL-MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH, in which the linguistic, historical and patristic boundaries of the Coptic Orthodox Church were established, followed by a discussion of the stylistic and content elements of the music used in the Coptic Church. At the end of this chapter some unpublished manuscripts from the first centuries AD were presented which prove the existence of Christian musical notations, some of them with a clear ephonetic aspect. These are the *Oxyrhynchos 1786*, *Gulezyan* and *Crum* manuscripts.

Chapter 6 presents some THEORISATIONS that have been carried out ON COPTIC MUSIC from the 13th century through Ibn Kabar to the 19th century, a period represented by Athanasius Kircher, Francois Fetis, Ernest Newlandsmith and Ilona Borsai. The characteristic of this period is defined by the attempts to transcribe Coptic music into linear notation, a music recognised by its exclusively oral aspect, as no musical notation of any kind exists in the Coptic Church, even to this day. An analysis of these musical theorisations demonstrates the indissoluble link that Coptic music has with that of the Pharaonic period.

The seventh and last chapter of this doctoral thesis presents the PARTICULARITIES OF THE COPTIC LITURGICAL RECITATIVE and then proposes a comparison

with the Romanian recitative, part of the Byzantine liturgical recitative. While the Romanian Byzantine recitative may constitute a separate musical genre, with its particularities of form and content, the recitative in the Coptic Church does not enjoy the same status, but rather belongs to the vocal musical style that defines the whole of Coptic music. The Coptic recitative does not strictly follow the emphasis of the text, and the melody does not play the role of the latter's discrete melodic doubling. Nevertheless, similarities can be found between the Coptic recitative and the Byzantine Romanian one, similarities that point to the Christian musical background of the first centuries and to the common sources that define the two musics, especially the folkloric one.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent decades, more and more musicologists have tried to explain, compare, separate or even downplay two distinct but not so well assumed typologies: modal music and tonal music. The most correct approach to the two, however, is to see them through each other or as reflections of one other. Putting them separately under analytical scrutiny might be a sterile and incomplete approach, an approach that has led to ideas such as atonalism, avant-garde music, such as John Cage's "4'33'", etc. Staying or returning to simplicity at the expense of complexity gives more time for thought and reflection.

The Old Eastern churches, such as the Egyptian and Ethiopian Coptic, at first glance fall along the lines of a sonorous paucity. In their worship, music seems to be stuck within its own limits: excessive vocalisation, syllable clusters, rhythm, clapping, liturgical dancing and even a complete lack of a system of musical notation, as in the case of the Coptic Orthodox Church. These ancestral components may lead some specialists to approach the music of their churches from a "top-down" perspective of superiority, or even to disregard it. The Byzantine liturgical recitative is placed on the same line of simplicity, within the limits of which the Romanian one is also placed.

The present work aims at a gradual approach, "from the bottom-up", from the simple to the complex, in order to try to clarify how liturgical music has formed its own soundtrack in the worship of the latter churches, which only since the 20th century have discovered the "mysteries of simplicity" towards a complex, complicated and speculative world.

The Coptic Church has not developed elaborate musical forms, but has amazingly and for a long time preserved a homogeneous, not quite simple, musical structure, managing

to avoid as far as possible foreign influences, often irreverently imposed.

For the Coptic religious community, music was the cultural and spiritual link between the glorious pre-Christian past and the spiritual permanence of 'Nitrean' Christianity; it was a vector and force of a religious nationalism, but without ever reaching a level of extreme nationalism. Even if the liturgical organization of the form of the Octoih approached the Egyptian Coptic cult, it did not impose itself on the conscience of this church, immodia taking on another, obviously non-byzantine, but not necessarily less spectacular face.

The ephonetic recitative in Egyptian Coptic culture is not as much of a declamatory emphasis as in the Greek and Romanian Churches, for example, the Greek-Syriac genius there being redeemed in another way here. In a Coptic apostolic or evangelical reading, one can at one point notice a horizontal distribution of some of the sounds, giving the impression of a recitative, but they have more the role of "rest" in the discourse of the pericope, the reading continuing immediately in the characteristic vocal modal manner.

The lack of a system of musical notation from a particular culture would have led us ab initio to draw some hasty conclusions. Even if the presence of musical notation has its proven advantages, in the Coptic Orthodox Church, by various means, it has been possible to outline, preserve and above all to transmit over time a fairly well-knit oral musical treasury. Whether it is the blind professional singers with their ability to memorize melodies, or the active and effective involvement of all age groups in long services, or any other motivation, orality has borne fruit here. Of course, musical systems with developed notation also have their shortcomings, directed towards a smaller or larger niche of specialists, depending on historical favour, but it is precisely this shoulder-

to-shoulder walking of the two idioms that gives them even greater musical and spiritual value. The Coptic Orthodox Church today can offer a much-needed kaleidoscopic perspective on early Christian worship with all its constituent elements, of which music is no exception.

Indeed, the Coptic liturgical recitation and the Byzantine ecphonic recitative (in which the Romanian one is also included) have fundamental elements in common: orality and a certain explanatory-scientific "subtlety" of the ecphonic signs, theological content based mainly on the scriptural text, the vocal character of both - even if it is quite easily subject to external stylistic cautions. Last but not least, both are based on collective memory and traditions of which the Eastern peoples in particular were capable. It is not by chance that one of the sources of Coptic and Byzantine liturgical music is folklore.

It must continue to provide the essence of its simplicity and orality to these liturgical musics par excellence; when it no longer does, we will witness abstractions of all kinds that will be spiritually impoverished by their weightlessness.

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