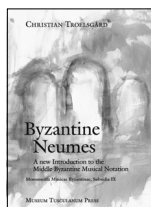


## Reviews



Christian Troelsgård

*Byzantine Neumes: A New Introduction to the Middle Byzantine Musical Notation*

Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae, Subsidia, 9

Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2011

142 pp., illus., music exx.

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Christian Troelsgård's well-written new introduction covers a wide range of aspects concerning the middle Byzantine musical notation (*'neumes'*) – that is, of the Eastern Orthodox Church since c.1100 in Byzantium, also known as the East Roman Empire (ended with the fall of Constantinople in 1453). The basic principles of the notation continued well into the nineteenth century having a profound bearing on the musical system in use in the Greek Orthodox rite to this day.

The volume is a most welcome update of H.J.W. Tillyard's *Handbook of the Middle Byzantine Musical Notation* (1935), one of the first publications to appear in the *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae* (MMB) series. Together with the philologists Carsten Høeg and Egon Wellesz, Tillyard founded the international centre for the study of Byzantine musical notation in Copenhagen in 1931. They had been interpreting musical neumes since the 1910s, and new findings around the time of World War I led them to convene this founding meeting where, among other topics, the transcription of Middle Byzantine musical notation was discussed. Already in the 1920s, Byzantine studies had been established as a discipline at the University of Copenhagen by Høeg. When Tillyard's *Handbook* was reprinted in 1970, Oliver Strunk, the then director of MMB, admitted in his postscript that the volume had become outdated with respect to many details. In 1993, it was decided that Jørgen Raasted should initiate the work on an up-to-date introduction; however, Raasted died two years later leaving only a five-page sketch. This sketch was the point of departure for Troelsgård, who, at the 1996 MMB Editorial Board Meeting, was given the opportunity to bring the project to an end – he has published widely on Byzantine chant and is a leading capacity within the field. Most of the writing of the present volume was completed in 2000, yet, for various reasons the publication has been delayed a decade. But the waiting has been worthwhile.

Troelsgård's introduction to the deciphering of Middle Byzantine notation is structured through seven chapters and 79 forth-running paragraphs across chapters. The volume introduces Byzantine chant in a wider sense, as it deals with topics such as oral transmission, problems of cheironomy (hand gestures), the relation between poetry and melody, and the many genres and varieties of notational practice within the immensely rich history of Byzantine music.

In Byzantine chant, defined as the liturgical music of the Greek Orthodox Christianity following the Byzantine Rite, there is an intimate relationship between the sacred texts and the melodies. Chapter 1 points to this relationship mentioning that the 'Book of Psalms and other poetic portions of the Bible form the basis for the chant at the Byzantine Offices and Divine Liturgy ... The majority of chants transmitted in the musical manuscripts of the Middle Ages, and probably the chant types for which notation was eventually invented, belong, however, to various classes of non-scriptural poetry, which collectively are designated

“*tropária*” (p. 16). These *tropária* were sung as refrains between biblical verses or otherwise as hymns. The chapter touches upon the poetic language (ecclesiastical Greek), textual and musical accents, syntax and syllables. A considerable amount of Byzantine hymns (or *tropária*) was produced to already known melodies – a practice also known in Latin traditions as ‘*contrafacta*’, in Greek context known as ‘*proshómia*’. A tiny confusion arises here as the title for §5 (p. 20) is ‘Automelon – Proshomion’, but the term ‘automelon’ is not explained here. It is revealed, however, in the next chapter on the following page that ‘*autómela*’ refers to a body of model melodies to which the ‘*proshómia*’ were adapted (p. 21).

Chapter 2 (§§7–11) consists of preliminary remarks concerning various problems in relation to working with Byzantine musical notations. The arguments as to when, how, and why a written tradition was established are thoughtful and instructive and point to ways of controlling the chant repertoires and to stabilize oral transmission. Troelsgård points to the restoration of Orthodoxy in 843 (after the turbulent period of Iconoclasm) as a basis for a more uniform liturgical and musical practice. Around this time the ‘monasteries contributed substantially to the process of re-establishing and consolidating the Byzantine church and society, and very likely it was due to monastic influences that new liturgical books and collection of chants were brought in circulation’ (p. 21). Troelsgård’s remarks on Byzantine and Western neumatic notations, the unknown origins, and possible musical changes and aesthetics (how did the music sound in the Middle Ages?) are weighed with timely scholarly caution.

In §11, on ‘The problem of “scales” and tuning’, the musical intervals are compared to those of the equally tempered scale (and not to Turkish or Persian material). Alexander Ellis’s cent-system is drawn upon as a pedagogical means, or, so I guess, for introducing the musical structure to new students and colleagues. But this comparison is strikingly *old school* – unlike the standard of the rest of the volume. The ‘cent’ (technically defined as 0.01 of an equal-tempered semitone), I contend, is neither a culturally neutral nor a scholarly objective measure – its claim to universality is based on the western, equally-tempered scale, which like any other musical phenomenon is historically and culturally positioned. The implied, albeit unintended, cultural bias becomes all too clear in the figure were the Chrysanthine (nineteenth century) intervals are represented in terms of ‘deviation’ (p. 25). This represents a particular western reading that identifies Byzantine music as other and the equally tempered scale as self, as the possessive pronoun in the following phrase suggests: ‘We can be fairly certain that the scale system differed from *our* equally tempered scale’ (p. 24, emphasis mine).

Chapter 3 (§§12–16) provides an overview of the Byzantine notational forms. Other than the Middle Byzantine musical notation, notational forms that predated it are mentioned, such as the early ‘Ekphonic’ (lectionary) notation, and the ‘Theta’ notation dating back to the eighth century, and the more developed ‘Coislin’ and ‘Chartres’ notations from tenth century. The basic principles of the ‘Middle Byzantine’ notation were in use for around 650 years until the reform of the Byzantine musical system in the first decades of the nineteenth century, in the text defined as ‘c.1815’ – the year when the new system was introduced in the Patriarchal School of Music in Constantinople by the reformists themselves. Whether and to what extent this in practice actually put the old system(s) out of use is subject to scholarly controversy still. Also the modern notational form, the ‘New Method’ or ‘Chrysanthine Notation’, is briefly mentioned here (p. 33) and throughout the book. This is a welcome novelty in paleographical approaches to Byzantine music, tending otherwise to draw a firm distinction between what was ‘before’ the reform (Byzantine and post-Byzantine music), and what was ‘after’ (modern Greek church music).

Chapter 4 (§§17–22) is focused on ways Byzantine music is transcribed throughout the scholarly discipline commenting critically on the transcription conventions in the MMB *Tran-*

*scripta* series, where transcriptions of huge portions of manuscripts were published. The inclusive approach employed brings information to the fore about the work of Byzantine musical scholars also outside MMB, such as Petrescu, van Biezen, Raasted, and Stathis. The guidelines for the author's own transcriptions in the volume is also presented: Troelsgård prefers to show the original Byzantine neumes together with the transcribed version in Western staff notation, and the staff notation in use is modified to communicate what the transcriber knows and cannot know about the melodies; for example, the use of note heads without stems and quavers signals that the rhythmic values of the various signs cannot be determined with certainty. These are transcription principles that must be highly recommended as they do not only portray a particular graphic representation of the studied Byzantine notation, but include the transcriber's dialogue with the material and consequently also represent the gaps. Some level of discussion of the many general problems concerning the transcription of the Byzantine musical system into western staff notation (and other notations) would have been welcome at this point, though. Allow me to briefly inform the reader that such a discussion is offered in a new publication of my own, which deals with the late end of the historical spectrum drawing in the main on the discussion about transcription from the field of ethnomusicology (*The Past is Always Present: The Revival of the Byzantine Musical Tradition at Mount Athos* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012)).

Chapter 5 (§§23–54) introduces each sign of the middle Byzantine musical notation meticulously with dense and detailed information, but a number of easy intelligible tables give an excellent overview: the *ison* (for repeated note), and the interval signs called '*semádia phonetiká*', meaning the signs that have a 'voice' (*phoné*), here referring to 'interval'. These are divided into 'bodies' (signs indicating the stepwise interval of a second) and 'spirits' (signs indicating leaps of a third or more in the melody). No less than six signs indicate an ascending second, each with a distinct quality or accentuation. These and the many other signs combine in many ways, though in practice composers and scribes had to observe specific rules for their application. Often these rules were related to specific genres: 'As a consequence of the use of 'pitch accent', a single *oxeia* or *petasté* [signs for ascending second] is normally followed by a descending interval in the sticheraic and heirmologic genres' (p. 42). A minor error in the first 'conspectus' or table (p. 43), and in the 'Quick Reference Card' (inserted at the back of the book) might cause slight confusion: the signs '*elaphrón*' and '*chamelé*' represent *descending* intervals of a third and a fifth respectively (and *not* ascending), but the transcriptions show the correct descent.

In chapter 6 (§§55–72) Troelsgård deals with Byzantine music theory and practice in more detail addressing modes and modality, modal signatures, and intonation formulas, among other things. A renewed interest in much of this material in Greece today is related to Byzantine musical revivalism at the monasteries of Mount Athos, for example, intonation formulas have been reintroduced in modern musical performance practice (cf. above mentioned Lind, 2012). A number of paragraphs about modulation lead to a very interesting discussion about chromaticism (pp. 72–75), a long standing issue in Byzantine musical scholarship. Based on an assumed parallel with the Gregorian tradition, the founders of MMB 'were in favour of a strictly diatonic interpretation of medieval Byzantine chant' (p. 72). They saw the modern tradition with its chromatic scales and tetrachords as the result of a corrupting orientalizing process – 'as an effect of the contact between Greek singers and their Ottoman overlords' (p. 72). Troelsgård questions this view in maintaining that the 'theory of Turkish/Persian influence as a reason for 'introduction' of chromaticism in Byzantine chant seems to be too simple. It appears that Byzantine chant shared practices of melodic alteration already before the Ottoman domination was established' (p. 73, n. 222). Troelsgård then goes on to

demonstrating how chromatic ‘accidentals’ (*phthorai*) can be located in manuscripts from the fourteenth century onwards and suggests that these signs are related to ‘other additions to the sign repertory of the Middle Byzantine notation around the year 1300’ (p. 75). A single but well placed reference to an article on ‘historical ethnomusicology’ by early Indian music researcher Richard Widdess points to the problems of distinguishing between interior and exterior changes in a historical chant tradition. Such interdisciplinary discussion strengthens the arguments considerably, and indicates that Byzantine music research benefits from dialogical contact with studies of other chant traditions from around the globe, early as well as late.

The final chapter (§§73–79) discusses the aspect of ‘style’ in Byzantine chant, more narrowly defined as the different styles that can be identified in the various parts of the repertoire. The simplest style of chanting is known as ‘simple psalmody’ and is transmitted orally until the end of the thirteenth century. A slightly more elaborate style is found in the above mentioned ‘*autómela*’ and ‘*proshómion*’ singing and in the *Heirmológion*, a collection of model melodies (*heirmoi*) used for the ‘*kanón*’. The latter belongs to the earliest repertoire found with musical notation, and is characterized by a great deal of formulaic melodic material. It is syllabic-neumatic in style, a trait it shares with yet another part of the repertoire, the *Sticheráron*, referring to the collection of the ‘*sticherá idiómela*’, which is chanted only once a year. This part of the repertoire contains melismatic passages for the longer pieces. The soloist pieces of the *Psaltikón* and the *Asmatikón* have their origin in the cathedral rite of Constantinople. Despite its formulaic character these melodies are ‘rather melismatic’ (p. 85) in comparison with the other styles. Finally, there are the kalophonic styles, first documented in the fourteenth century, which are characterized by excess melodic elaboration.

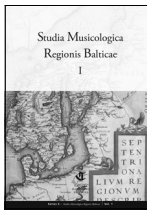
This is not an introduction to Byzantine chant as sacred music, but to the study of its musical notation, which narrows the subject considerably. *Byzantine Neumes* deals mainly with the technical aspects of the musical tradition, and it does so thoroughly and convincingly. Yet, I would have loved to see a few comments on religious and spiritual aspects of the Byzantine musical tradition. We read about the so-called ‘nonsense syllables’ in the kalophonic repertoire (pp. 88–89), but we know so unbearably little about the spiritual meaning of these and other musical phenomena. Also, lurking somewhere behind the back stage curtain is the ghost-like, hard-to-define concept of tradition: what does tradition in a Byzantine-Christian Orthodox context mean? What are the possible relations between the tradition of musical notation and that of Orthodox rite?

The rich bibliography is updated with relevant publications from the period 2000–11 (that is, after the main parts of this volume was written), which serves as a service and an invitation to new scholars and students. The index is divided into three for convenience: one for proper names, one for manuscripts, and one for neumes and subjects. Despite the complex nature of the subject, it is rather easy to get an overview of the volume as a whole. And this owes partly to how the book is structured, partly to how it is presented visually: *Byzantine Neumes* is richly illustrated with notational examples, parts of which are handwritten by Troelsgård himself, and contains reprinting of selected specimen of manuscripts taken from MMB’s facsimiles (pp. 95–116), providing a useful and illustrative compendium.

Reviews of academic publications rarely dwell on the design, but here is plenty of reason to make an exception and credit both author and designer. The beautiful layout of the book makes it most inviting. The graphic designer – he deserves mentioning here – Kim Broström, has wisely chosen a red-brown (and not a hot red) to highlight necessary details in the musical notation (the so-called ‘red signs’), but also successfully uses this colour for chapter titles to counterpoint the black text (see for example pp. 26–27). This detail and its relation to the overall typesetting caresses the eyes of bibliophiles, palaeographers, and calligraphers, and

whispers: read me! Keep me company! And there is more: the hard back cover of the book is kept in the MMB's classy cardboard-grey design to match the previous publications in the series, yet the dust cover creates a striking contrast portraying in aquarelle burnt orange and yellow abstract brush strokes with the hint of dark monumental arches in the background: there's a fire in the old monument! It is striking because it dares presenting the study of Byzantine music in new ways which pinpoints the novelty of the volume: *Byzantine Neumes* brings the palaeographical study of Byzantine music well into the twenty-first century and reconfirms the leading status of MMB. The 'Quick Reference Card' inserted at the back of the book is handy and helpful for the transcriber at work, and the idea to give it a plastic coated finish – really practical when messing with pencil, ink and pen while transcribing – could only have been the product of a mind of many years of scholarly experience and passion.

Tore Tvarno Lind



*Studia Musicologica Regionis Balticae I*

ed. Ole Kongsted

Copenhagen: Capella Hafniensis Editions, 2011

304 pp., illus., music exx.

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A new Danish series of musicological studies is now being published from *Capella Hafniensis Editions* in cooperation with The Royal Library (Copenhagen). It is dedicated to publishing articles that are dealing with 'Themen der Ostseeraumkultur' (the culture of the Baltic Sea area; p. 10). Musical culture in the Baltic Sea area as a concept was put forward by the Swedish musicologist Carl-Allan Moberg in 1957, and it was criticized and developed further by among others the members of the research project 'Östersjöområdet som musiklandskap' that was launched in 1990. The present volume works as an 'anthology' bringing together some of the writings of the working group from 1990. Three of the six former members are represented, contributing with nine of the ten articles. To readers who want to get familiar with some of the central concepts of research in 'der Ostseeraum', a publication like this must be welcome.

The editors give no information why this newly initiated journal should have a Latin title. It is in line with the other series that are being (or will soon be) published from the same publisher: *Monumenta Musica Regionis Balticae*, *Ars Baltica Musicalis*, and *Documenta Musica Regionis Balticae*. The 'Hauptsprache' of the series is German, but the current volume includes contributions in English, Swedish, and Danish as well. Thus, the series has both a national and an international profile, and since it covers a large thematic field it should naturally embrace the variety of studies that are conducted by many music scholars worldwide. However, the journal is intended to be a forum 'das offensteht für Beiträge aus allen Ostseeländern, Norwegen eingeschlossen' (open to contributions from all Baltic Sea countries including Norway; p. 10). One wonders, why scholars from outside the region are to be excluded. Over the last decades there has been a growing interest in the musical cultures of the Baltic Sea area – also from scholars outside the region, who have contributed to new perspectives on the field. I am sure they too would welcome a series dedicated to this subject. The volume makes room for different kinds of contributions, for instance lengthy studies, short report-like articles, and source presentations. This seems like a good way of arranging