



**THE RHETORICAL BIAS OF  
ROMANOS' THOUGHT-WORLD:  
MUSICO-TEXTUAL IMPLICATIONS FOR HIS  
KONTAKIA**

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts,  
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February, 1991

δύναμις περὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ θεωρῆσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν  
a faculty for observing in each case the available means of persuasion

Aristotle: *Rhetoric*



... Like the angels on Jacob's ladder, he comes and goes between heaven and earth,  
uniting spirit and matter within the folds of his song ...

E.C. Topping: *The Poet-Priest of Byzantium*



... My godlike songs set to those heavenly melodies ...

Kostis Palamas: *The Dodecalogue of the Gypsy*



This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, and to the best of the author's knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

M. C. Patrikeos Cominos

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## ABSTRACT

The intricate technical exercise of transcribing kontakia from the *Codex Ashburnham 64*, brought me into intimate contact with the minds of the Byzantine hymnographers, Romanos the Melode in particular, and encouraged speculation on the extra-musical elements which influenced their work.

From my investigation of the intellectual milieu in which the hymnographers composed, it was rhetoric which began to emerge as the one continuing classical influence which shaped not only the literature of the Byzantine era, but its thought patterns as well.

Because of his stature as the greatest musician-poet of Byzantium, Romanos appeared to be an obvious starting point in the search for evidence of rhetorical influence on hymnography, while the great dramatic liturgical medium through which he worked, the kontakion, or homiletic hymn, became the other focus of this research.

The features of this 'evolved' rhetoric, ranging from the classical rhetorical theories expounded by Aristotle and Plato to the rhetorical treatises of Hermogenes, which influenced Romanos, and how he drew upon its techniques, are the major themes of this study, and by inference, the contention that classical rhetorical principles were well known and used by the Byzantine hymnographers in their works.

Before proceeding, however, one must first take into consideration the way in which Byzantium's enclosed – almost encapsulated – nature, and its distinctively theocratic milieu, affected its cultural products, which present special problems of interpretation, calling for a reorientation of the mind of the researcher in realising the futility of attempting to apply Western conventional aesthetic values to its creative output.

Because of the unique world-view espoused by the Byzantines, research on Romanos' kontakia involves more than a study of the prevailing musico-literary climate. Rather it calls for a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach encompassing the entire cultural, social and political ambience that informed the mind of the hymnographer.

Viewing the *oeuvre* of Romanos from this aspect, it becomes a paradigm for all Byzantine studies in that it demonstrates that if one is to penetrate beneath the surface forms of this unique civilisation, one first has to comprehend the *Weltanschauung* that distinguishes the Byzantine ethos from all others.

It can be seen then, that in order to trace the rich and diverse cultural streams which found their confluence in Romanos' kontakia, the first step is to reconstruct his thought-world.

To provide a starting point for this investigation into relevant aspects of Byzantine life and thought which may have affected his creative output, Romanos is first placed in context. This is followed by a brief survey of some of the cultural and intellectual attitudes prevailing in the Empire, and the wide-ranging effects of changes taking place in the Greek language.

The significance of rhetoric in the Empire is acknowledged by an extended discussion on its origins and development from classical antiquity to its dominance of the Byzantine world, followed by the application of some of the mainstream theories to the work of Romanos, and a study of the rhetorical concept of Obscurity.

After touching upon dramatic aspects of the liturgy, attention is concentrated on the kontakion, tracing its antecedents, and applying in detail rhetorical theories to some of Romanos' greatest achievements in the kontakion genre, while a discussion of the performance practice of Byzantine chant brings this study to its conclusion.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the long ingestion process which has created this thesis, I am indebted to Professor Andrew McCredie on a number of fronts. Chief among these has been his placing at my disposal his vast knowledge of resources; his constant guidance and sense of proportion and balance, which has kept me from straying too far into the exotic bypaths uncovered by my investigations; and his committed attitude towards his postgraduates which saw him take care of the numerous administrative details involved in enabling me to pursue my studies under workable conditions, not least the gaining of a University of Adelaide Postgraduate Scholarship, which I hereby acknowledge with deep gratitude.

With his enthusiastic support I was able to obtain also an Australian/Greek Travel Award, which proved to be seminal to my research in several ways: it enabled me to meet other scholars in the field and to gain access to source material in Greece which was unavailable in Australia; and also enabled me to present a paper at an international Byzantine conference held at Bydgoszcz in Poland, and exchange ideas with colleagues in the field.

My thanks are due also to University of Adelaide staff, Dr David Swale, Elder Conservatorium, and Professor Robert Ussher, Classics Department, for their close reading of the text and positive, helpful comments, and Dr John van der Hoek, Mathematics Department, who is highly skilled in the theory and practice of Byzantine chant, and who has shared his insights into performance aspects of psaltic art, as well as putting me in touch with vital resource material.

Finally, my thanks go to the late Dr Gordon Anderson, who first set my feet upon this path, and to him I am grateful for opening up this rich and rewarding area of research.

In the words of the Alexandrian poet, Kavafy:

Πάντα στὸ νοῦ σου νάχεις τὴν Ἰθάκη.  
τὸ φθάσιμον ἐκεῖ εἶν' ὁ προορισμός σου.  
Ἄλλὰ μὴ βιάζεις τὸ ταξείδι διόλου.  
Καλλίτερα χρόνια πολλὰ νὰ διαρκέσει.  
καὶ γέρος πιά ν' ἀράξεις στὸ νησί,  
πλούσιος μὲ ὅσα κέρδισες στὸν δρόμο,  
μὴ προσδοκῶντας πλούτη νὰ σὲ δώσει ἡ Ἰθάκη.

Ἡ Ἰθάκη σ' ἔδωσε τ' ὠραῖο ταξείδι.  
Χωρὶς αὐτὴν δὲν θάβγαινες στὸν δρόμο.  
Ἄλλα δὲν ἔχει νὰ σὲ δώσει πιά.

Κι ἂν πτωχικὴ τὴν βρεῖς, ἡ Ἰθάκη δὲν σὲ γέλασε.  
Ἔτσι σοφὸς ποῦ ἔγινες, μὲ πείρα,  
ἤδη θὰ τὸ κατάλαβες ἡ Ἰθάκες τί σημαίνουν.

## INTRODUCTION

The original *topoi* set out for this thesis have undergone many significant extensions and developments as new themes for investigation have continued to emerge.

The main thrust of this dissertation, however, has been to find evidence of the deliberate use of rhetorical devices in both the texts and musical settings of the kontakia of Romanos the Melode, or hymnographer. Literary research has seen to it that there has been little need to establish the rhetorical bias of his texts, however, whether Romanos drew upon rhetorical theories in his setting of these texts to music is an area open for further investigation.

I believe that the primary aim of this thesis has been achieved in that I have been able to demonstrate in some detail a number of instances in which Romanos appears to be consciously applying rhetorical principles to his settings, drawing upon classical, Roman and Byzantine rhetorical sources.

In the pursuit of this thesis, however, what emerged very powerfully was the question of the true role of chant in the setting of so-called 'inspired' religious texts, a topic which is examined in some detail in the Prolegomenon.

The answer to this query is intricately bound up with the concept of the *Logos*, and the rhetorical associations of the religious texts in use. And while the parameters of this research do not allow more than a cursory investigation of this aspect of Byzantine chant, it has demonstrated the need to come to terms with the overpowering influence of rhetoric on every aspect of Byzantine life and thought, before any useful research can proceed.

Accepting the fact of this rhetorical dominance, then, there is no reason to suppose that music would be excluded from its influence. In fact, a certain alignment of musical theory with that of rhetoric is explicitly stated by Kennedy when he notes:

... rhetoric was the only one of the learned disciplines which was sufficiently developed and agreed upon to furnish a standard basis for education ... Because of its degree of early development and its clarity rhetoric became a model for the codification of the other arts, among them grammar and music.<sup>1</sup>

My endeavour now will be to examine these and related *topoi* in an attempt to establish an overall concept of the *Weltanschauung* that was unique to Byzantium, insofar as it has relevance to ecclesiastical texts and music written in the Early Christian era up to the sixth century, and to demonstrate that hymnographers like Romanos were well aware of, and made extensive use of rhetorical theories in their work.

In order to narrow the focus of this review, I have concentrated my research on Romanos, who perfected the *kontakion* or homiletic hymn, and has been acclaimed as the greatest poet of the Byzantine era. I have attempted to piece together the influences shaping his thought-world and how these affected his approach to hymnography.

As a corollary, the great musico-literary genre, the *kontakion*, is also at the centre of my research, in the study of which rhetorical and philosophical ideas about literature assume great significance. The *kontakion* can lay claim also to being the major medium of communication through which Christian dogmatic pronouncements were promulgated in that extraordinary union of church and state that comprised the Byzantine theocracy. In this milieu, in which pagan drama was suppressed, the *kontakion* served also as a

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1. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 272.

repository of classical Greek drama, and was to play a significant role in later western musical developments, such as the medieval mystery play.

The significance of the kontakion as an art form and of Romanos as a creative artist of the highest order is summed up by Ševčenko:

This poetic genre [the kontakion] is the greatest original creation of Byzantine literature. It is not a product of simple piety; its strictly observed correspondences from strophe to strophe are more complicated than are elegiac distichs, let alone iambs following one upon another in monotonous lines. But ... in its structure and devices the kontakion owed no direct, and only some indirect, debt to Greek antiquity. We may speculate that in terms of classical culture, the greatest writer of kontakia, Romanos the Melode, would hardly meet with the approval of his contemporary, Paul the Silentiary [the type of secular poet who used poetry as a display of linguistic erudition only, using outmoded ancient forms of the language]. For if Romanos knew the names of Plato, Aratus, Demosthenes, and Homer, he used them solely to make unflattering puns. Yet, Romanos, in whom later Byzantine biographers saw a Jewish convert from Beirut practiced a new literary form, and Paul the Silentiary did not.<sup>2</sup>

While I am in agreement with Ševčenko's assessment of Romanos' contribution to Byzantine letters, I cannot support the contention that he was unacquainted with the classical tradition except at second hand through the work of the Cappadocians and other early homilists who were well versed in classical rhetorical techniques, or through florilegia, and have examined this question at some length in Part I, Chapter 1, of this thesis.

The evidence at hand, and a careful study of Romanos' texts and musical settings leave no doubt that he availed himself of the techniques of rhetoric. Whether he drew directly upon the works of the great rhetoricians, like Aristotle, Cicero and Hermogenes, is difficult to establish; however, by applying some of their theories to specific passages in

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2. Ihor Ševčenko, *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1982, p. II 63.

his kontakia, I hope to have provided strong evidence that he had a much more detailed knowledge of them than is generally assumed.

In fact, I hope to demonstrate that even if Romanos was not slavishly following the principles advanced in such treatises, he shows signs of at least being aware of the techniques of rhetoric which they advocated. Indeed, the pursuit of this line of thought seems to point rather strongly to the fact that the Melode was very aware of the rhetorical learning of his day and there are specific instances in which it is difficult not to see some correspondence between a number of the rhetorical theories put forward in this thesis and Romanos' deliberate use of such concepts in his work.

One must agree, however, with Carpenter that any research into the kontakion, ideally, should embrace music and texts together, as a single entity:

... it is important to remember that Romanos was known as a *melodist*. Interesting though the analysis of his poems as literature may be, it is probably true that one needs to hear the kontakion sung in order to appreciate its qualities fully.<sup>3</sup>

Once one begins a detailed dissection of Romanos' texts and music one can begin to form some impression of the extent of his debt to the Judaeo-Hellenistic, Egyptian and Syrian poetic tradition on the one hand, and the classically-inspired tradition of the great Christian homilists established in Byzantium at the time when he commenced his great bout of hymnwriting.

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3. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, p. xv.

However, although I have been concerned exclusively with the kontakion as a musico-poetic genre, my findings can as easily be applied to other musical texts of the Byzantine liturgy, and indeed possibly to Gregorian chant as well.

This study, then, sets out to recreate the thought-world of Romanos and to discover the extent to which it shaped his kontakia.

In the Prolegomenon the rationale behind the setting of 'inspired' text is discussed, together with the concept of the Logos. Part I, Chapter 1, examines Romanos' musical and textual sources, noting the poetic traditions which influenced him. An overview of the unique Byzantine world-view follows in Chapter 2, examining the effect of the classical rhetorical legacy, including the concept of the model, as well as the effect of theological concepts on its thought patterns, government and culture. Chapter 3 comprises a survey of some of the main features of the cosmopolitan world which awaited Romanos in Constantinople and the manipulation of public sentiment through a calculated display of audio-visual effects, chiefly through the liturgy and architecture, highlighting the political dimensions of hymnology and the Melode's role as one of the major communicators of his day, together with a discussion of the ruler cult leading to the evolution of Christian political theory. The final chapter in this section is an overview of some of the major changes which took place in the Greek language as it spread through the Hellenistic world, drawing attention to the subtle semantic and philosophical manipulation it underwent in the service of Christianity.

Following this identification in Part I of some of the social, linguistic and other changes that were taking place in the Byzantine world at the time of Romanos, Part II, in acknowledgement of the continuity and persistence of rhetoric from antiquity to the

Byzantine era, opens with a general historical survey of the development of this classical art, from its origins in classical Greece to its adoption by the Romans, and its transmission to Byzantium to become the cornerstone of education in the Empire. Romanos' work is examined under three broad rhetorical categories stemming from this historical survey: the Aristotelian; the Roman, represented by Cicero, Quintilian and others; and the Byzantine, represented by Hermogenes. Examples in Romanos' kontakia of the application of specific rhetorical techniques are demonstrated. The final chapter deals with the associated issue of the rhetorical concept of Obscurity in relation to Byzantine chant and the oral tradition.

Part III concerns itself with rhetorical, dramatic and political aspects of the liturgy in Chapter 1. The kontakion and its antecedents is the subject of Chapter 2, tracing both classical and Syro-Palestinian influences on its development, the rhetorico-literary and musical sources which shaped it, and its impact on western dramatic forms. This is followed by detailed musical analysis of the application of rhetorical theory to specific instances in three of Romanos' greatest kontakia. The final chapter deals with the performance practice of Byzantine chant in general and the kontakion in particular, drawing inferences from the living traditions of the contemporary Greek Orthodox Church and the chant of Christian Arabs in Israel.

#### **Codex Ashburnham 64**

The three kontakia from which the music examples have been drawn to demonstrate Romanos' use of rhetorical techniques in his compositions, have been taken from the *Codex Ashburnham 64*, a well preserved thirteenth century *kontakarion*, in the melismatic style, with musical signs written in the Round Notation above the texts.



Some of the texts in this collection have been attributed to Romanos, including the three selected works: the kontakion *On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, the *Nativity Hymn* and the *Akathistos Hymn*.

While a number of Byzantine scholars, who have taken a purely literary approach to Romanos' work believe that the music accompanying his kontakia has been lost, the discovery of these texts in a musically annotated manuscript raises hopes that the neumes could represent a melismatic overlay superimposed on his original musical settings, since they reflect elements of his rhetorically inspired style of literary composition.

There are a number of observations which could support this hypothesis:

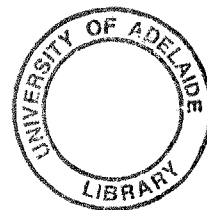
- 1) a measure of the conservatism of the musical tradition of Byzantine chant is the fact that musicologists can discern the original structure beneath later melismatic accretions. Such a tradition could have preserved Romanos' original structure and notation.
- 2) although these works are in the melismatic style, great care has been taken to prevent the ornamentation from obscuring the text, which would tend to suggest that the redaction is a facsimile of the homiletic kontakion style of the sixth century, when the text was paramount.
- 3) when considering the possibility of this redaction reflecting the basic modal and melodic structure of Romanos' original music, it is important to bear in mind that the notation was devised to capture an already established, continuous oral tradition, and should be viewed as an increasingly successful attempt to create a facsimile of traditional performance practice. Working on this hypothesis, it becomes possible to maintain that the increasing sophistication of the techniques of notation represented by the Round Notation may not necessarily have reflected a similar growth in

complexity in the performance of chant, but may be rather an indication that the notation was 'catching up' with an oral tradition which had been perfected earlier.

It then becomes possible to maintain that though this notation represents a later style, it could be simply a more accurate rendering of the highly developed chant performed in the sixth century, the period in which the kontakion reached its peak as an art form, suggesting later changes would have been in the direction of increased ornamentation, without disturbing the original underlying structure.

How faithful these versions are to the original manuscripts of Romanos can only be conjecture, but, allowing for the extreme conservatism of the Byzantine tradition, their unwillingness to alter or depart from melodic prototypes, the claim that the oral tradition is continuous and unchanged to the present day and the fact that the kontakion was superseded by the kanon in the seventh century, there would be little incentive to drastically change or develop the kontakion genre musically, so that there is some case for suggesting that the musical settings in the Ashburnham Codex referred to could reflect both the general outline and the psychological impact of Romanos' original music.

Even if these melismatic versions are not the work of Romanos, and represent later accretions, this does not invalidate one of the main contentions of this thesis, *i.e.* that the Byzantine hymnographers consciously used rhetorical devices in their compositions, since the three works under scrutiny stand up to the most stringent rhetorical criteria, regardless of their authorship.



*Prolegomenon*

**THE PROBLEM OF SETTING 'INSPIRED' TEXTS  
AND THE LITURGICAL ROLE OF MUSIC**

Although the main thrust of this thesis is concerned with the use of rhetorical theory by Romanos in the musical setting of his texts, it has inevitably led to an awareness of wider issues in the setting of religious texts in general. Not wishing to encroach upon my main theme too greatly, I shall confine myself to some brief observations on some of these issues that open up some research areas for the future.

One of the main outcomes in investigating this area of research has been the development of a changed perception of the function of the music accompanying the texts and the concomitant realisation that one is dealing with a thought-world and concept of the 'inviolability' of the text, which is alien to that prevailing in Western musical thought. So that, in this area, as in every other aspect of Byzantine culture, one has to avoid the pitfall of applying western concepts and aesthetic values to its cultural products.

Wilder touches upon this problem of applying criticism out of context in his comments on literary criticism in relation to the Bible, when he notes the 'wide range of the new procedures and perspectives associated with a contemporary literary criticism.'<sup>1</sup> Since the Scriptures comprised one of the main thematic and textual sources for hymnographers, these remarks can be applied as validly to Byzantine chant.

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1. Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1971, pp. xxi-xxii.

There is a new appreciation of the inseparable relation of form and content in all texts as well as of the individual writings, viewed as literary wholes or aesthetic objects in terms of their overall structure. This new approach [to sacred writings] so familiar in secular letters can be combined with wider investigations today of language in all its modes, both with respect to genres and to symbolics.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, my studies in Byzantine chant have demonstrated that it is only by concerning ourselves with the total world-view of a culture that we can hope to penetrate beneath its surface forms. As Wilder says: 'The forms of literature in any society are governed, if not by theology, at least by world-attitudes of one kind or another.'<sup>3</sup>

We need to be reminded that in all cultures men live by images. The meaning of things, the coherence of the world, its continuities, values and goals, all these are established for the multitudes and for societies of men by this or that world-picture or mythos, with its associated emblems, archetypes, paradigms, fables, heroes, cults.<sup>4</sup>

My approach to the subject of this thesis has been along these lines, dictated partly by the unique nature of Byzantine civilisation itself. Since my main focus is the profound influence of rhetoric on Byzantine culture and on hymnography in particular, Kustas' remarks are also relevant:

Modern scholarship in the field of rhetoric has concentrated ... on its inner history ... Less attention has been paid to the definition of the critic as a product of his age, using concepts and phrases which relate not only to rhetoric but to the broader cultural expressions of a period as well, and especially to its social and psychological patterns.<sup>5</sup>

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2. *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

5. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessaloniki, 1973, p. 11.

### **The rationale behind the setting of 'inspired' texts**

Once these concepts have been applied to the field of Byzantine chant, they bring in their wake a number of questions concerning the rationale behind the setting to music of so-called 'inspired' texts, or, to put it another way: How can one improve upon the inspired word of God, musically or otherwise? The answer to this query, in turn, begs the question of the true liturgical function of music in the Eastern Orthodox Church in particular, and in the ecclesiastical milieu of the Early Christian Church in general.

The two major forces at work in Byzantine thought which hold the key to these questions are the concept of the Logos, and the all-pervasive influence of rhetoric. A brief survey of each will serve to place in context my hypothesis that the role of music in the setting of sacred texts was mnemonic.

### **The concept of the Logos**

Epitomising the Greek gift for synthesis in reconciling within itself pagan philosophical and Christian elements, is the concept of the *Logos*. In moving from the classical to the Christian era, the interpretation of the '*logos*' underwent many changes of meaning, or more correctly, expanded in meaning to embrace many more concepts, as it provided what we might call, in Medieval terms, the 'quiddity' of both streams of thought.

Armstrong and Markus attribute the ultimate integration of this concept into Christian thinking to Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish thinker, for whom 'the doctrine of the Idea

in the mind of God encounters an idea which appears in Jewish thought in the Wisdom-books of the Old Testament.’<sup>6</sup>

This is the representation of the Wisdom of God as not merely an attribute but as a mysterious entity in some degree distinct from God, ... who was there ‘in the beginning’ with God, his companion and helper in creation.<sup>7</sup>

Philo, combined this concept with Platonic doctrine and the idea that ‘God works and manifests himself through Powers and a *Logos*, and in the *Logos* are the Platonic Ideas, the archetypes of all created things, the “architect’s plan” of creation.’<sup>8</sup>

This is the first appearance of the word *Logos* in Jewish or Greek theology. It is a word in Greek of many meanings: among the chief are, reckoning, proportion, relation, explanation, argument, reason (in many senses), story, language, grammatical sentence, and, in philosophical Greek from Aristotle onwards, formative principle.<sup>9</sup>

Noting that in Neoplatonic philosophical language, from Plotinus onwards, *Logos* comes to mean frequently ‘a power which represents or expresses a higher principle on a lower plane of being,’<sup>10</sup> Armstrong and Markus add:

When Christians began to develop a philosophical theology in the second and third centuries A.D. it was inevitable that they should ... be influenced by, and express themselves in terms of, the characteristic philosophy of the period; the penetration of contemporary philosophical ideas into Christian thought was helped by the sacred authority of the name *Logos*, with its Greek philosophical associations and its important place in the thought of Philo ...<sup>11</sup>

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6. A. H. Armstrong & R. A. Markus, *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy*, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, London, 1960, p. 17.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

Once this concept is understood, one begins to grasp the immense power that the *Logos* held for the ancients and their Byzantine successors. One begins to see also how this attitude affects the complex interaction of music and texts in liturgical chant, and raises the problem of interpretation in the setting of the 'inspired' Word of God to music.

Because the Stoics believed the universe was penetrated by a cosmic reason, a *logos*, it was possible to maintain that

those who lived and thought in accordance with the disseminated *logos*, even if knowing nothing of Christ, lived and thought in accordance with the truth. This is the first serious attempt in the history of Christian thinking to come to terms with pagan philosophy by representing the best of pagan thought as part of the 'preparation of the Gospel.'<sup>12</sup>

Kustas provides further insight into this powerful concept of the *logos* when he states:

*πάθος* returns to Greek literature in late antiquity through the conception of the living power of the *logos* with which words are now invested and the function of which they aim to serve. No doubt the popular Second Sophistic habits of public recital of one's literary productions contributed to a sense of the emotional vitality of the spoken word reinforced by intonation and gesture. It is, however, the very way words are looked upon that changes.<sup>13</sup>

An even more significant development from this line of thought is that

... the Christian now said that ... theology and rhetoric are one ... Rhetoric is now a sacred art ... It is a sacrament ... *α μυστήριον* ... for the act of formal expression in words is a religious act, charged with divinity and embracing at once the *logos* of man in the *Logos* of God.<sup>14</sup>

According to Clark, in linking the idea of 'logos' with discourse, Isocrates came closest among the ancients to the idea of rhetoric adopted by the Byzantines, since 'he

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

13. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

understands rhetoric to be discourse including all the arts of prose, written as well as spoken. He deals with it as a form of literature, not merely as Aristotle did later, as the art of persuasive public speaking ... He does not usually talk about "rhetoric", but about the "art of discourse".<sup>15</sup>

The Greek word translated as 'discourse' is *logos*, the 'word', wide and deep in significance. As M. H. Roberts points out, "The noun *logos* is an ablaut derivative of the verb *legein* "to choose to gather, to lay in order, to put into speech, to discourse." A *logos* is the substance of a speech or announcement, a selection, gathering, organization of thought ... *Logos* is used in Greek in a multitude of senses such as story, myth, proverb, discussion, reason, principle, proposition.' Norlin says that *logos* 'is both the outward and the inward thought; it is not merely the form of expression, but reason, feeling and imagination as well; it is that by which we persuade others and by which we persuade ourselves; it is that by which we direct public affairs and by which we set our own house in order; it is, in fine, that endowment of our human nature which raises us above mere animality and enables us to live the civilized life. The art of discourse may, therefore, be as broad as the whole life of civilized man, and this is just what Isocrates insisted that it should be.'<sup>16</sup>

While Kennedy's interpretation of the meaning of 'logos' reinforces this view, it takes us closer to the Byzantine world in expressing its links with mysticism and religion:

The Greek word for speech is *logos*, an ambiguous and sometimes mystical concept which may refer concretely to a word, words, or an entire oration, or may be used abstractly to indicate the meaning behind a word or expression or the power of thought and organization or the rational principle of the universe or the will of God. On the human level it involves man's thought and his function in society, and it further includes artistic creativity and the power of personality.<sup>17</sup>

Noting that classical rhetoric is unique in 'its degree of conceptualization', and citing Aristotle's three modes of proof – *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* – Kennedy interprets 'logos':

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15. Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, p. 52.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

17. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 8.



[In] Judaeo-Christian rhetoric ... the analogue of *logos* is the divine truth, as enunciated by God and as illustrated by his treatment of his chosen people or by his sending his Son into the world, the Christian Logos. But this truth is not proved, as in classical rhetoric. Its acceptance is dependent on God's grace in allowing each individual to understand the message.<sup>18</sup>

### Music and rhetoric in the service of Christianity

The preeminence of the sacred texts, and the manner in which both rhetoric and music were coerced into their service, as part of the Christianisation process which took place, is one of the main features that emerges from this study.

In the process of being adapted to Byzantine use, rhetoric went through a process of Christianisation which, while retaining its great intellectual disciplinary features, changed its object. Given its first impetus by the Greek legal system, when rhetoric was cultivated to enable citizens to defend themselves in the lawcourts, rhetoric became the handmaiden of Christianity, as it was used first to fight the heretics on their own ground, then to promulgate Christian doctrine, and finally to reinforce in the populace what were considered by the theocratic state to be desirable attitudes.

Tracing the evolution of rhetoric in Byzantine culture, and the way in which it was manipulated to serve the Christian ethos, one begins to see that the music, in a sense, suffered the same fate. It too was seen as an essential tool in providing a point of reference in relation to which the all-important, paramount texts were able to find proper utterance.

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18. George Kennedy, 'The classical tradition in rhetoric,' in M. Mullett & R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 25.

### Romanos' use of same melodic formulae raises questions

This reassessment of the role of music offers a partial solution to a certain anomaly in Romanos' setting of texts in his kontakia.

In the course of my transcriptions from the *Ashburnham 64* collection, it appeared to me to be aesthetically incongruous that the Melode appeared to be content to use identical musical formulae in the setting of widely different texts.

While *contrafacta* techniques were obviously well-known and widely used, the incidence of such a technique in individual dramatic works like the kontakia, in which great psychological depths were explored and dogmatic truths disseminated, seemed out of place. Allowing for the fact that hymnographers were obliged to abide by stringent rules controlling the use of formulae and modes, it was still a disturbing element for me to find that, for the *Akathistos Hymn* Romanos had used melodic formulae identical to those in the lesser kontakion, *On St Thomas*.

Trypanis has observed, in this same work, Romanos' application of a similar technique in the use of identical metres:

Modern scholarship tends to attribute to Romanos one of the most famous and most beautiful hymns of the Eastern Church, the *Akathistos*, so called because it is sung before a standing congregation. The metric structure, which is exactly that of the kontakion on Joseph by Romanos, seems to strengthen this thesis.<sup>19</sup>

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19. C. A. Trypanis, *Medieval and Modern Greek Poetry: An Anthology*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1951, p. xvi.

This would seem to indicate that the melodic formulae were not important in themselves, but perhaps played a more structural or rhetorical role in the overall scheme. Further research on the function of the musical component in chant has tended to bear this out.

For instance, if music were playing a subsidiary, mnemonic role, the actual melodic formulae would not be so important in themselves, but would be more in the nature of the skeletal material from which the composer was able to construct his musico-poetic edifice – presenting both chanter and congregation with a familiar canvas upon which the all-important texts could be delineated.

#### **Artists' conception of creative function**

Assuming the role I have posited for the music accompanying the texts, hymnographers like Romanos, would have perceived their role as artists quite differently from artists of later eras. In fact, it appears that they did not see themselves as creative artists in the western sense, that is, fulfilling their own aesthetic need for self-expression, but rather as media through whom the Divine Logos could find expression.

The attitude of Romanos and his contemporaries, could also have been influenced by the Aristotelian concept of *ethos*, which requires that the character of the speaker be impeccable in order to make his argument the more plausible. When applied to sacred texts, in which presumably the Divine Logos is the speaker, this theory, by inference, tends to render superfluous the input of orators, poets, artists and musicians in dealing with these sacred texts, by reducing them simply to the role of media through whom God's word is expressed.

In spite of the rhetorical emphasis of the age, artists, under these circumstances, would feel no compulsion to arm themselves with rhetorical theory in order to communicate God's word. As Kennedy explains

Since Christian truth cannot be demonstrated by rational argument, conversion and persuasion result from the grace of God, which allows acceptance or rejection of the message, and not from anything the orator can do ... This might seem to render the Christian orator superfluous, and some Christians thought that attempts at artistic expression were idle, or worse, a sign of pride in worldly achievements, but the Church always believed that the preaching of the gospel was necessary ... Moreover, many Christian leaders also came to feel that there was a place for eloquence in deepening and explaining the faith in such a way that it could be practiced in the Christian life.<sup>20</sup>

However, the acrostics accompanying many of Romanos' kontakia appear to indicate that he was prepared at least to claim for himself the authorship of these works, while, at the same time, employing the well-known rhetorical device of seeming to deprecate his own ability, with acrostics reading, for example, 'ΤΟΥ ΤΑΠΕΙΝΟΥ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ Ο ΥΜΝΟΣ' [by the humble Romanos].

In spite of this evidence, it is probable that Romanos still viewed himself as a medium of expression of the Divine Word. Kustas sums up the situation succinctly:

In other words, in the course of adopting pagan modes Christianity took upon itself a whole new definition of literature. It presumed to try to bring into a new union, under a single religious aegis, many of the contrasting achievements of ancient letters, such as prose and poetry, myth and symbol, philosophy and rhetoric, and it made the attempt under the felt compulsion to see literature as an instrument of an overriding divine scheme within which the individual writer in expressing his genius at the same time unfolded God's plan.<sup>21</sup>

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20. George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1983, p. 181.

21. Kustas, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-1.

Allowing for the 'dynamism' with which the sacred texts were already invested, the Byzantine hymnographer appears to be left with the task of merely 'gilding the lily' in setting these to music. My investigation of Romanos' works suggests, however, that he has moved beyond this concept, broadening the scope of the music to embrace a wider psychological milieu.

#### Why set 'inspired' texts to music at all?

Bearing this in mind, one is constrained to ask why there was any felt need to set these texts to music at all? Just what role was the music assuming in this instance?

It was only when I commenced an examination of the thought-world that the Melode had inherited, with its rich Classical, Hellenistic, Roman, Egyptian, Syrian, and even Persian tradition and the myriad transformations it underwent through the subtle Christianising process that took place in Byzantine attitudes towards literature, that I began to perceive that part of the answer lay in the Byzantine concept of the *logos* itself. And it is by proceeding on this basis that we begin to glimpse the complex interaction of music and texts in liturgical chant.

This psychological dimension is allied to a deliberate use of rhythmic devices in order to help the music fulfil the mnemonic role assigned to it in its earliest associations with the sacred writings. Rhythmic chant is a feature of all religious texts, and the mnemonic function which it served is now also being advanced, by Biblical scholars in particular.

Georgiades is concerned with that main aspect of language which is also shared by music, namely rhythm. He was struck by fundamental difference in rhythmic structure between

languages of the ancient world, Greek and Latin, on the one hand and those of the modern Western world on the other, and by the resulting differences in the demands thus placed on music. As his translator Marie Louise Göllner notes:

In exploring the effect which these differences have had on music as the rhythmic setting of language he arrives at an essentially new approach to an interpretation of its history, one in which music is placed in the center of man's creative-intellectual endeavours and is thus dependent not only on technical changes within its own boundaries but also on changing concepts of religion and philosophy.<sup>22</sup>

The question concerning the felt need to distinguish the sacred texts from ordinary speech is placed in context by Georgiades:

The tendency towards the combining of language and music is already present in the early Christian liturgy. The linguistic form is prose; it is defined, however, by the necessity to speak in terms of the Cult, in the language of the Christian-sacred community. The Word must sound forth. For within the community the Word exists only in its sounded and not in its written form. As the sacred Word it cannot, however, be made to sound in its natural form as subjectively colored speech. It demands a musically fixed performance...<sup>23</sup>

Part of the answer may lie also in the Syro-Palestinian origins of the Byzantine liturgy. The Jews considered the inspired word of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, to be too sacred to be communicated in the mundane form of common speech. They solved the problem by gradually devising a form of cantillation to communicate these sacred texts in a manner which would differentiate them from other forms of oral communication.

Viewed from this aspect, music or chanting would have assumed its position as an integral part of the liturgy, as the only fitting medium for the promulgation of the

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22. Thrasybulos Georgiades (trs M. L. Gollner), *Music and Language: The Rise of Western Music as Exemplified in Settings of the Mass*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. ix.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

scriptures, and it continued to mirror every nuance and change in the development of the liturgy, fulfilling a role that was beyond mere decoration.

### **Were melodic formulae rhetorical-type models?**

The influence of rhetoric in the setting of sacred texts can be discerned in the insistence on using revered prototypes as models. We may discern here a link between rhetorical theory and the techniques of composition of the Byzantine composers.

Hymnographers held to the notion that the musical formulae were divine prototypes, handed down from the angels and saints, while researchers like Egon Wellesz have traced the origins of this chant to Syro-Palestinian sources reaching back to the Church of Jerusalem. While this exercise has given us a starting point from which we can trace the evolution of the liturgy and its use of chant as a medium for expression, there seems to be no clear picture concerning when or how stereotyped musical formulae were established.

Ecphonic chant seems to represent the first attempts to differentiate sacred texts from secular, with the music only later gradually assuming a melismatic character, to the point where, as texts became less important following the extermination of heretical elements, music began to assume a dominant role.

The persistence of classical rhetorical influences on literature and, by inference, on the music these texts were set to, may throw new light on this problem.

Could these melodic formulae have been the counterparts of the literary paradigms used in the rhetorical handbooks, or *progymnasmata*, in use in Byzantium to demonstrate the application of rhetorical techniques?

That is, just as the rhetorical treatises drew their stock examples from the classical Greek masters to demonstrate their theories, so music could have begun to evolve and develop its own stockpile of formulae as paradigms for the application of rhetorical theory to musical composition.

Working from models, such as the *heirmos*, or original pattern stanza, reflects a very complex attitude towards the rhetorical shaping of the texts, and the many sources which inspired them.

We know that some 'thirty-nine types of "pattern stanzas" attributed to Romanos have survived,' and that these 'reveal a wealth of rhythmic effects ...'<sup>24</sup>

Carpenter also has some comments to make on the metres of Romanos:

Romanos himself appears to have written more than one kontakion in the same metre (and therefore to the same tune) though he usually added a new metre (and tune) to the prooemium that introduced the later work. He himself seems to have composed kontakia to fit famous metres and tunes composed by others, as can be seen from *On Joseph II*, which is fashioned on the metres of the long stanzas of the famous *Akathistos Hymn*. In the early Middle Ages Greek authors put no accents on their words. In later Byzantine copies we find the Hellenistic accents employed. The only means, therefore, by which we can discover early medieval Greek accentuation is a close examination of the regular set accents in the poetry and rhythmic prose of that period.<sup>25</sup>

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24. Paul Maas & C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*, OUP, 1963, p. xiv.

25. *ibid.*, p. 513.



The rhetorical technique of reliance on models bears further investigation in relation not only to the particular way in which chant developed, but also to the way in which the whole structure of the Byzantine state evolved – a theme which is explored further in Part I, Chapter 3, on Church-State relations.

#### Music as handmaiden to text

Music, then, is seen as playing the role of handmaiden to the text, just as rhetoric is subordinated to the needs of Christian exegesis and reinforcement of correct attitudes to dogma.

In attempting to describe the role of music in the setting of ‘inspired’ liturgical texts (that is, what, in contemporary terms, was *not* its function), one is tempted to have recourse to the Byzantine attitude toward describing the attributes of God, by resorting to the so-called ‘apophatic’ approach, which contents itself with defining what God is *not* rather than what he *is*, in order to circumvent the definition of God in limited human terms.

The Early Fathers had evolved the idea of negative or ‘apophatic’ theology to describe God, as Geanakoplos explains:

‘... it was the Greek East that developed the so-called apophatic approach to theology, the attempt to explain God by a process of negation – that is, by stating what God is not rather than what he is. For if one tries to define what God *is*, then by implication one tends to limit his nature; and God, of course, is uncircumscribable (*aperigraptos*).’<sup>26</sup>

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26. D. J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the “Sibling” Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330-1600)*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976, p. 27.

### The mnemonic role of music

In similar vein, this discussion, once freed from Western assumptions concerning the accepted role of music in accompanying texts, attempts to point out that Byzantine chant did not fulfil only the conventional role of complementing and illustrating the texts, but also appeared to be playing a mnemonic role by providing a rhythmic canvas against which the all-important texts could be remembered.

This is not to deny chant its essential role, but rather to illuminate that role in Byzantine terms, which means perceiving music in rhetorical terms as carrying out the vital function of supporting the stress accent of the texts.

The *Ad Herrenium* indicates that 'there were many Greek discussions of memory systems and that the basic technique described was the association of words with visual images which could be remembered against some familiar background.'<sup>27</sup> It recommends 'verbatim memorization' and the system described involves 'the use of *loci*, or backgrounds, and *imagines*, or images. A background is a real place with which the speaker is very familiar.'<sup>28</sup>

This series of backgrounds must be studied and reviewed with great care and can be used again and again just as a wax tablet ... can be erased and reused ... It is very important that the background form a continuous series in the mind ... It is possible ... to use the system to memorize words. Here our images are not the *meaning* of the words so much as something suggested by their *sounds*.<sup>29</sup>

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27. Kennedy, 1963, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-18.

28. George Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1972, p. 124.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

In this scheme it is possible to view music as assuming a 'background' function in carrying out its mnemonic role. Like the visual images, the icons and mosaics which adorned the walls of the churches, which, when associated with the words, assisted the mnemonic process, music could have provided the same assistance aurally. In other words, it could have been used to provide a familiar background, against which the listener could absorb the meaning of the text. This could be done by using well-known or popular melodic formulae and rhythms, which would then have the effect of freeing the listener from the distraction of coping with an unknown aural background, in order to concentrate on the text.

For example, when Romanos uses overt musical rhetorical figures, including extension and ornament, it is to give dramatic emphasis to the seminal doctrinal message being conveyed, while the rest of the kontakion is built on the standard formulaic material, with the music perhaps serving primarily the mnemonic function previously mentioned.

It now becomes possible to advance a reason why Romanos saw fit to use the same formulae over and over again in different works. The function of the music was primarily to act as a background against which the stress accents of the text could be superimposed, as a medium in which the words were embedded, obeying the syntactical structure with its changes of mode, medial signatures, and other forms of musical punctuation.

Allowing for this primary function of chant, it must be conceded, however, that Romanos' highly dramatic kontakia also exploited the more conventional functions of music in reflecting these dramatic aspects through the use of modes, melismatic extension, repetition, fermata and the like.

It is tempting to find here a parallel with classical Greek drama, in which the plots, so well known to the audience, eventually provided a familiar background against which the comments of the chorus on the action comprised the real message of the play.

### Rhythm as a major mnemonic factor

The mnemonic value of rhythmic chant is noted in a comment on the works of Ephrem, the Syrian, whose influence on Romanos is now established.

The hymns are usually provided with refrains which would have been sung by the audience in response to Ephrem as he sang the stanzas accompanied by his harp.... Written in rhythmic prose according to a metre of fixed syllables (usually seven), they are rich in Biblical references and vivid and apt metaphors and imageries.... The format lends itself to music and the regular form was a valuable aid to the memory.<sup>30</sup>

Wilder also acknowledges this rhythmic element in religious texts, when he notes:

'Rhythmic speech ... plays a large part in all religions from their earliest beginnings.'<sup>31</sup>

From the beginning Christianity selected forms of utterance and communication that were dynamic ... The new speech-freedom of Jesus and his followers, this new fruit of the lips and new range of meaning, inevitably adopted the rhythmic mode.... It is one of the primal categories of human gesture. Basically oral, it has a somatic-dynamic character like music and the dance. Yet only some kinds of poetry were specially destined for Christian use: those that convey its personal depth.<sup>32</sup>

Aristotle also notes the mnemonic value of periodicity when he says:

... language when in periodic form can be numbered, and number is the easiest of all things to remember. That is why verse, which is measured, is

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30. Judith M. Lieu (trs), 'Ephrem the Syrian,' in S. N. C. Lieu (ed.), *Translated Texts for Historians, Greek Series I*, Liverpool University Press, 1986, p. 101.

31. Wilder, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

32. *Loc. cit.*

always more easily remembered than prose, which is not: the measures of verse can be numbered.<sup>33</sup>

The classical concept of music as being concerned primarily with the enhancement of the text is brought out strongly in the assessment of Plato's attitude to the function of music by Fenelon, as cited by Howell:

Plato does not permit his republic any music with the effeminate pitch of the Lydian style ... Harmony which goes only so far as to flatter the ear is merely an amusement of weak and idle folk ... It is good only so far as the sounds of it agree with the sense of the words, and the words of it inspire virtuous sentiments.<sup>34</sup>

An additional moral dimension is added by eschewing pleasure in the music or poetry for its own sake:

All the arts which consist in melodious sounds, or in movements of the body, or in the use of language – in a word, music, dancing, eloquence, poetry – were devised only to express the passions and to inspire them in the very act of expressing them ... Thus all these arts appeared to be for pleasure, but were in reality among the ancients a part of their deepest striving for morality and religion.<sup>35</sup>

This element of high moral aspiration informing all the arts of antiquity was later to facilitate the gradual and subtle christianisation of pagan rhetoric and philosophy.

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33. Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (rev. Oxford trs), Vol. II, Bollingen Series LXXI.2, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984, p. 2248.

34. Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Poetics, Rhetoric, and Logic: Studies in the Basic Disciplines of Criticism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1975, p. 129.

35. *Loc. cit.*

### 'Popular' musical elements play mnemonic role

In spite of this ethereal role assigned to chant, there are intimations that it may have been obliged to use techniques drawn from less elevated sources to hold its own against heretical elements. In other words, there is evidence that it may have drawn upon secular rhythms and melodies to enhance the texts.

Trypanis supports this hypothesis, when he points out the possible connection between the rhythmic metres of religious poetry and acclamations to the emperor.

Most hymns of the first period, the *Troparia*, ... are written in a rhythmic prose ... But at the same time ... we have in verse a few hymns *κατὰ στίχον* (hymns in which all lines follow the same pattern in syllables and accents), in which for the first time the new rhythmic metre is seen in religious poetry. This metre is very similar to that of the acclamations to the Emperors – a fact which proves that it is of popular Greek origin, and not due to foreign, Oriental, influences.<sup>36</sup>

Kennedy notes the use of songs to promulgate religious ideas.

... Arius [who expressed views at variance with the orthodox stance on the nature of Christ] himself, but apparently not the orthodox, sought to popularize his views by writing songs which achieved some circulation among the working classes, and Arius published a work called *Thalia* defending his views in a mixture of prose and poetry.<sup>37</sup>

Politically aware hymnographers like Romanos would not have failed to recognise the great mnemonic value of these popular musical elements in promulgating the church's dogmatic pronouncements.

In fact, Ephraem, who has often been cited as the inspiration for much of Romanos' work, carried out just such an exercise against the heretical Bardasanes and his son.

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36. Trypanis, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

37. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 199.

The existence of this 'popular' element in chant could account for monastic opposition to genres like the kontakion:

Although it dealt primarily with Biblical themes, and often paraphrased Biblical texts, the kontakion nevertheless constitutes a substitute for the Biblical psalms or canticles themselves, and encouraged the use of music which the monks considered too secular.<sup>38</sup>

What is meant by the statement that the music was 'too secular'?

Apart from the acclamations to the emperors, no records of the secular music of Byzantium have come down to us, since it was considered that only the music written specifically for liturgical performance was worthy of being recorded. However, an analysis of the metrical structure of the acclamations to the emperor indicates that they could have been chanted. This, in turn, suggests the existence of secular melodies or rhythmic chants, which could have found their way into the church's repertory of chant.

In view of the claim by Maas and Trypanis concerning the rhythmic patterns of Romanos, it would be instructive to discover the sources he drew upon:

Some of the metrical patterns attributed to Romanos became very popular, e.g. On the Nativity, and later poets used them in their own works, obviously wishing to keep the same popular tune of the original.<sup>39</sup>

Carpenter provides further evidence of this secular invasion of church music:

St. John Chrysostom laments that in liturgical song not only is the rhythm and song modeled on profane music, but that the singers reproduce the movements, the gestures, the imitations of singers in the theatre.<sup>40</sup>

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38. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Mowbrays, London, and Fordham University Press, U.S.A., 1974, p. 122.

39. Maas & Trypanis, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

40. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

If these secular influences were infiltrating the liturgical milieu, it would reinforce my hypothesis that the chant served a mnemonic purpose, since it implies that it was using well-known themes, perhaps of secular origin, as a familiar background against which to project the dogmatic import of the texts.

In parentheses, one might draw attention here to a related instance in the history of the polyphonic liturgical music of the Latin church, when the alarm of the authorities at the use of popular melodic material for ground basses in the church's hymnody occasioned the reforms decreed by the Council of Trent.

The further claim that in Greek folk music can be found some of the original Byzantine melodies would tend to add some substance to this hypothesis. The destruction of so many manuscripts during the iconoclastic period has robbed us of the original musical notation to much of the hymnology of the Byzantine Church. However, Greek Orthodox Church authorities have maintained steadfastly that the original melodies have been preserved by virtue of the unbroken continuity of the oral tradition, and comparative work on the structure of Byzantine chant and Greek folk music has tended to point to a connection between the two traditions.

In his treatise on the theory and practice of Byzantine music, Savas goes even further, tracing the musical connection back to antiquity:

Byzantine Ecclesiastical Music, which constitutes also the basis of Hellenic folk music, is considered as the unbroken continuance of ancient Greek music.<sup>41</sup>

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41. Savas I. Savas, *Byzantine Music in Theory and in Practice*, Hercules Press, Roslindale, Mass., 1965, p. 2.



In the following chapters, this thesis will examine in detail these and other aspects of the intellectual milieu in which Romanos composed his masterpieces, and will attempt to discern what aspects of Byzantium's rhetorical heritage found application in these compositions.

Given the powerful influence of rhetoric on Byzantine thought, then, the study would appear to have wider implications than simply illuminating the work of one Melode and his contemporaries. In the final analysis it has application to the whole Byzantine artistic milieu, embracing the output of all the creative artists employing their gifts in the service of the liturgy.

One may even speculate that the findings of this investigation into the influence of rhetoric on Byzantine chant may also have some application to Gregorian chant as well, since Roman culture did not escape the ubiquitous influence of rhetoric, receiving its tradition through great exponents like Cicero, Quintilian and Tertullius.

*Part I*

**ROMANOS THE MELODE  
AND HIS THOUGHT-WORLD**

## Chapter 1

### ROMANOS — TEXTUAL AND MUSICAL SOURCES

Recognition of the genius of Romanos is reflected in his canonisation by the Greek Orthodox church for his musical and poetic gifts, which were believed to be of divine origin.

Now that Romanos' authorship of some of the greatest works in the kontakion genre has been established, his compositions and the influences surrounding him seem an obvious starting point for an examination of the thesis that rhetoric played a significant role in the approach of the Byzantine hymnographer to musical composition.

His great gifts as a hymnographer have called forth some extravagant epithets:

This 'Pindar of rhythmical poetry', 'the greatest religious genius', 'the Dante of the neo-Hellenes', is the author of a large number of superb hymns amongst which is the famous Christian hymn, 'Today the Virgin Brings Forth the Supersubstantial.'<sup>1</sup>

Who was this gifted artist who was able to effect a synthesis of Syro-Palestinian and classical elements to bring to perfection the liturgical form, the kontakion, and in the process to compose the greatest poetry of the Byzantine era?

Although the personal details of Romanos' life are scant, we know that he was born in the sixth century A.D. in Syria:

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1. A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire 324-1453*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1952, p. 122.

We can say with assurance that Romanos belongs to the early sixth century ... he was born in Emesa not far from Beirut and he was deacon in the Church of the Resurrection there. He came to Constantinople in the reign of Anastasius I and, probably, occupied a favored position at court. He evidently flourished between A.D. 536 and 556. It seems that he was by birth a Jew but was baptized into Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

Supporting the evidence for his nationality and birthplace 'in the Syrian city of Emesa', Cameron adds: 'This is of interest in the light of modern emphasis on the influence of Syriac poetry on Byzantine hymnography,<sup>3</sup> and 'Syria was not only the home of the form of the dialogued hymn-sermon, which has close analogies with kontakion; Syria was also devoted to drama ...'<sup>4</sup>

Cameron is in agreement with Carpenter that Romanos' prolific bout of hymnwriting took place roughly during the first half of the sixth century:

Earlier doubts seem now to have subsided into a general belief that Romanos lived and wrote in the first half of the sixth century. Thus he was perfecting Christian hymnography at the time of the flowering of the Hellenistic epigram and of the last Latin epics in Constantinople, a piquant juxtaposition ...<sup>5</sup>

### Romanos as forerunner in use of rhetoric in music

Since rhetoric, the single most powerful tradition to be carried over from antiquity, permeated every facet of Byzantine culture, there is no reason to suppose that hymnography escaped its ubiquitous influence. In fact, it is now recognised that Romanos

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2. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, pp. xiii-xiv

3. Averil Cameron, *New and Old in Christian Literature*, 17th International Byzantine Congress – Major Papers, Dumbarton Oaks, Georgetown University, Washington DC, August 3-8, 1986, p. 113

4. Marjorie Carpenter, 'Romanos and the mystery play of the East,' in R. P. Robinson (ed.), *Philological Studies in Honor of Walter Miller*, 1936, p. 38.

5. Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

and fellow hymnographers drew upon rhetorically-inspired writings for their texts. What remains to be established, however, is whether rhetorical concepts coloured their approach to musical composition in the setting of these texts.

Perhaps the art which separates Romanos from his contemporaries is his great attention to psychological detail in the texts of his kontakia, and his subtle manipulation of rhetorical devices in the accompanying music to underline these references.

In his profound psychological and dramatic approach, Romanos could perhaps be viewed as a forerunner of the later movement in music in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when composers sought to mirror the meaning of the texts musically by drawing upon the techniques of classical rhetoric.

While one should be wary of drawing comparisons with later western developments, lest one be accused of attempting to apply western aesthetic concepts to Byzantine cultural products – a process which has bedevilled Byzantine studies since their inception – in the case of Romanos, it is possible to discern certain similarities of approach.

The homophonic nature of Byzantine chant obviously excludes comparison with certain types of antithetical techniques exploited by these later composers. In the work of Romanos, however, there can be detected startling and vivid examples of word painting, achieved chiefly through repetition, extended melismatic treatment, and, at times, change of mode.

### Structural approach exploits rhetoric

On a broader scale, Romanos also achieves rhetorical effects by intricate structural means. An example of this type of structural treatment appears in *Oikos* III of the *Akathistos Hymn* in which ecstatic acclamatory hails are inserted into the music to signify Mary's ecstasy at the Annunciation, and to underline the dogmatic significance of the theme,<sup>6</sup> while the psychological effect on the angel in the same hymn is suggested by repetition of the key words ἐξίστατο καὶ ἴστατο accompanied by extended melismatic treatment. Part III, Chapter 2 of this study is devoted to specific examples of such rhetorical applications.

This structural approach applies also to the overall compositional method used, in which a series of melodic formulae related to a certain mode are strung together using brilliant centonisation techniques. This technique of stringing together melodic formulae is a well-documented oriental method of both oral and musical composition, as Wellesz has pointed out.

Separating out the threads of Romanos' inspiration, we look first at the literary and then at the musical sources.

### The literary sources

Romanos' literary ancestry can be divided roughly into two main streams: (1) the classical rhetorical tradition epitomised by the great Christian homilists, and (2) the Judaeo-Hellenic, Egyptian and Syrian traditions.

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6. Margaret Patrikeos Cominos, 'The Akathistos Hymn,' *Miscellanea Musicologica: Adelaide Studies in Musicology*, Vol. 9, 1977, pp. 1-24.

The extent to which Romanos was influenced by both streams is examined in more detail in Part III, Chapter 2, on the genesis of the kontakion.

The kontakion form through which Romanos perpetuated the Greek dramatic tradition, is a veritable compendium of these diverse literary traditions, which also were part of a continuous and powerful dramatic tradition.

Romanos had no need to look outside Hebrew poetry and the Syrian forms of the *Sūgithā*, *Memrā* and *Mādrāshā* for the structure and poetic form of his kontakia, while for the content, he was able to draw upon the Christianised classical rhetorical tradition either directly or vicariously through the earlier metrical sermons of great homilists like Proclus, the Cappadocians, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

From the pagan rhetorical tradition he took such rhetorical devices as the *ekphrasis*, *homoiooteleuton*, *antithesis*, and *metaphor*. Hunger lists other examples:

Romanos' Kontakia use many rhetorical tools so that they appear as real Christian homilies: alliteration and rhyme, rhetorical questions, *anaphora*, *paronomasia*, antithesis, metaphors, sequences of short *kommata* etc. That Romanos used language deliberately for theological teaching can be seen from the example of Mary's asking Jesus at the wedding in Cana why he felt bound by the 'hour.' The answer is given by explaining the notion of *taxis*. The author's interest in the style of the gospels points in the same direction.<sup>7</sup>

Another rhetorical element which Romanos used in a masterly fashion was the *dispositio*, one of the five-part rhetorical divisions. Using the techniques of the orator, and demonstrating the talents of a great story-teller, he holds his audience in suspense during the narration. Part III, Chapter 2 includes an instance of the use of this technique in

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7. Herbert Hunger, 'The classical tradition in Byzantine literature: The importance of rhetoric in Byzantium,' in M. Mullett & R. Scott (eds) *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 42.

which the heightening of suspense is facilitated a) by the fact that Greek is an inflected language, and therefore word order is flexible, allowing the poet to place key words in the optimum dramatic sequence, and b) by melismatic extension.

From Syro-Palestinian sources he had access also to the antithetical structures and parallel thought metres of Hebrew poetry, and the vivid characterisation, psychological insights and human touches of the Syrian poetic tradition, which humanised the Scriptural archetypes. Witness the expression of Joseph's doubts concerning Mary in the *Akathistos Hymn*, representing the human dilemma underlying the spiritual aspects of the theme. Both Carpenter and Topping have commented on Romanos' technique of writing on many different levels of consciousness. Carpenter also notes 'the frequent use Romanos makes of the *Acta Pilati*, which is of Syrian origin ...'<sup>8</sup> while among other arguments put forward for the eastern origins of the kontakion, are the use of acrostics, a characteristic feature of Romanos' works.

Romanos' texts indicate that he drew heavily upon the early homilists. Whether his classical references extended directly to the writers of antiquity is uncertain; however, if he was citing them through his access to florilegia, he was merely adopting the literary habits of the time.

Ševčenko comments on the dependence of both pagan and Christian writers on florilegia:

... the classical erudition of the apologists ... was not drawn from the sources themselves ... but from anthologies upon which the pagans of the time depended for their quotations as well.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Carpenter, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

9. Ihor Ševčenko, *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1982, pp. II 55-6.



It can be seen then, that it is no easy matter to establish his level of intimacy with classical texts, a process which is complicated also by the fact that he drew upon so many other diverse sources. A close examination of his work, however, seems to point to a detailed knowledge of the works of writers like Aristotle, Cicero, Hermogenes and others, in that instances can be found in which he appears to be following their dicta explicitly in his musical treatment of the text, as examples in Parts II and III will demonstrate.

### **Romanos' alleged hostility towards classical writers**

Romanos has been accused by some critics of hostility towards the writers of antiquity, and condemned for his supposed lack of direct knowledge of classical rhetoric.

While citing Romanos as 'the greatest poet of Byzantium,'<sup>10</sup> Lemerle deplores his apparent lack of sympathy towards ancient authors.

Ševčenko joins Grosdidier de Matons and Maas and Trypanis in deploring Romanos' lack of classical culture:

[In these literary texts] we find little understanding of classical culture and little respect for it. ... the author of the Acathist Hymn made fun of the 'polybabbling orators,' who were unable to express the mystery of the Incarnation, and bade the Virgin rejoice, for the 'writers of myths were withered' and she had broken the 'webs of the Athenians' ...<sup>11</sup>

Maas and Trypanis also deny Romanos any theological or philosophic training:

Moreover the lively dialogue is occasionally sacrificed to dogmatic or exegetical digressions, always tiring, but even more so when introduced by a

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10. Paul Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism: Notes and Remarks on Education and Culture in Byzantium from its Origins to the Tenth Century* (trs H. Lindsay and A. Moffatt), Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, Canberra, 1986, p. 78.

11. Ševčenko, *op. cit.*, p. II 62.

man with no real philosophic or theological training. For when Romanos attacks the teaching of Arius, Nestorius, the Manichees, or the Novatians, he shows hardly any understanding of their views, nor does he introduce any convincing argument to support his polemics. He is usually content with naming the heresy and adding an obvious play on words or a line of abuse.<sup>12</sup>

The authors also point to his lack of historical and literary knowledge:

Along with the heretics Romanos attacks the whole of pagan culture. It appears that his historical and literary education was limited. Homer, Pythagoras, Plato, or Demosthenes were mere names to him to be used for rhetorical tricks, a play on the sound of words. He shows none of that understanding of ancient culture which we find in the writings of the Cappadocian fathers. The attitude of Church and State in the sixth century, which culminated in Justinian's decision in 529 to close the philosophic schools of Athens is faithfully reflected in the cantica of Romanos.<sup>13</sup>

This polemical attitude, is noted by Carpenter when she says: 'He reviles the Jews, and he discounts the classic authors, on the grounds that they were pagans.'<sup>14</sup>

Carpenter notes that 'Romanos was not himself either a theologian or a philosopher. His work reflects, however, the preoccupation of the sixth-century Greek Christian with theological disputes.'<sup>15</sup> However, she is not prepared to say categorically that he was unacquainted with the classics, and sees some political motivation for his critical stance towards pagan authors.

It is not at all clear that he really knows Plato, Demosthenes, Homer, Pythagoras. Since Justinian had closed the School at Athens in 529, Romanos would speak against the classical philosophers.<sup>16</sup>

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12. P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*, OUP, 1963, p. xxii.

13. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

14. Carpenter, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. xxxi.

15. *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

16. *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

However, although she criticises Romanos' apparent lack of understanding of philosophical issues, Carpenter does concede his ability to present these issues successfully through judicious use of rhetorical techniques.

... he understood so little the philosophical implications of the various theological disputes he found it necessary to be repetitively arbitrary. Even so ... one must admire the manner in which a point of theology is woven into a dramatic situation and given poetic flavor by the use of antithesis and figure of speech.<sup>17</sup>

Though the evidence is inconclusive, if Romanos did *not* find it necessary to acquaint himself directly with classical writers and rhetoric in order to carry out his task as a hymnographer, it is possible to find some justification in Aristotle's theory of *ethos*, which advocates that the speaker be of good character. When applied to the divine *Logos*, this theory, by inference, tends to render superfluous the input of orators, poets and musicians working with these sacred texts, by reducing them simply to the role of a medium through which God's word is expressed. Under these circumstances, the artist would feel no need to arm himself with rhetorical theory in order to communicate God's word. As Kennedy observes, 'If persuasion lies with God, the orator is primarily a vehicle through whom God speaks, and knowledge of rhetoric, as of philosophy, is not necessary to him.'<sup>18</sup>

Evidence that Romanos saw himself as part of this tradition can be found in his self-effacing acrostics referring to himself as 'the humble Romanos,' as we have pointed out.

Kustas expresses succinctly how the Christianisation of literature embodied this principle.

... in the course of adopting pagan modes Christianity took upon itself a whole new definition of literature. It presumed to try to bring into a new union,

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17. *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

18. George Kennedy, 'The classical tradition in rhetoric,' in M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 25.

under a single religious aegis, ... prose and poetry, myth and symbol, philosophy and rhetoric ... [trying] to see literature as an instrument of an overriding divine scheme within which the individual writer in expressing his genius at the same time unfolded God's plan.<sup>19</sup>

In any case, by drawing upon rhetorically-inspired homilies, Romanos, in a sense, was able to use rhetorical techniques vicariously in his texts which borrowed heavily from the Early Fathers – Gregory of Nazianzus in particular. Carpenter also mentions parallel passages between Romanos and Basil of Seleucia, Proclus, Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa and Theodotus of Ancyra. She adds that 'there is obviously an Ephrem tradition, his works were translated into Greek, and Romanos, who came from Syria, must have known his works.'<sup>20</sup>

For present purposes, however, I feel it is not so important to establish whether or not Romanos drew *directly* upon classical sources, since the evidence is there to prove that he *used* them. Consequently, I have been able to demonstrate in this thesis that one can point out in certain kontakia of Romanos specific instances of the application of rhetorical theory in both music and texts, drawing upon Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, and Roman rhetorical theory, as well the 'evolved' form of rhetoric in use in Byzantium, represented by exegetes like Hermogenes and Aphthonius.

And, while it is not possible to state whether Romanos was drawing directly upon these sources, one can at least point to the concordances.

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19. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, pp. 40-1.

20. Carpenter, 1937, *op. cit.*, pp. xviii-xix.

### The musical sources

Moving from a general overview of the literary resources Romanos was able to exploit, we turn to the musical resources available to him. These are more difficult to define because they require a reorientation of viewpoint, divorced entirely from western perceptions concerning the function of music in the setting of sacred texts, as well as the possible influence of rhetoric on the forms and concepts employed in musical composition, as I have discussed in the Prolegomenon.

However, once one begins to study the musical applications of rhetorical theory in Romanos' kontakia, his debt to the classical tradition starts to emerge, as the evidence mounts for his knowledge of and application of specific rhetorical theory drawn from the treatises of Aristotle, Plato, Hermogenes, and Roman rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian, an aspect of his work which is treated in detail in Part II.

In the classical context, music was perceived in rhetorical terms, which in turn affected its function in the setting of texts. It was treated as a discipline which obeyed rhetorical rules and structures. The theory has been put forward also in the Prolegomenon that it was profoundly affected by the rhetorical concept of the model which could have generated the use of prefabricated melodic formulae.

Having defined this rhetorical basis for music, it is gratifying to find it being borne out by applying specific rhetorical theories to the kontakia of Romanos, so much so, that there is reason to believe that it exerted just as powerful an influence upon his compositional techniques as the literary rhetorical tradition which shaped his texts.

Specific instances of rhetorical application can be found in his use of repetition, melismatic extension and interpolation, the use of the fermata for dramatic emphasis, changes of mode to signal changes of mood or characterisation, or change of pitch for dramatic heightening of the texts, and antithetical structures. The placement of these rhetorical devices in a manner which reflects the syntax of the text gives them also the function of acting as a form of musical punctuation.

### **Political aspects of Romanos' art and character**

In the prevailing theocratic milieu in which theological deviance threatened the integrity of the Empire, hymnology began to assume political dimensions. In promulgating and reinforcing 'approved' texts to the populace, hymnwriters like Romanos, found themselves in the complex politico-social role of communicators as well as being poet-musicians.

Accepting the mnemonic role I have assigned to liturgical chant as providing a background against which the text could be projected, what more fitting medium than the *kontakion* could be devised to disseminate the Church-State edicts of the day.

In his need to communicate this official doctrine, Romanos' poetic language also stands in sharp contrast to that of secular court poetry, which had deteriorated into a vehicle for a display of virtuosity, exhibiting no felt need to communicate with its audience.

As Carpenter and others have pointed out, Romanos was careful to espouse the doctrinal trend of the day, in this case, the preferences of the Emperor Justinian, and as I have noted elsewhere, his so-called hostility toward the classical writers may simply have been a political stratagem to appear to conform to prevailing imperial and ecclesiastical

opinion. Maas and Trypanis also are prepared to concede his political astuteness noting that 'the dogmatic views of Romanos are very close to those of the Council of Chalcedon (451) and support Justinian's religious policy.' He treated Theodora's preferred party also with circumspection.

It is interesting, however, to notice that he treats Monophysites with caution, probably because the Empress Theodora was well known for her Monophysite sympathies. He rarely refers to them by name, but indirectly attacks them by praising the twofold nature of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

Carpenter sums up Romanos' politico-theological stance, noting that: 'His Christology, very closely associated with the edicts of Justinian, reflects the theological struggles against the Monophysites.'<sup>22</sup>

If Romanos did demonstrate a flair for diplomacy, one can find a precedent for this combination of poet-politician in a phenomenon of the fourth to sixth centuries in Egypt, comprising 'a regular school of poets, born and educated in Egypt, who spent their lives wandering from city to city throughout the Empire in search of fame and fortune.'<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this Egyptian school is mobility ... Attention has recently been drawn to the exceptional mobility, social and geographical, of professors and teachers of rhetoric. But it has not been remarked that professional poets travelled from city to city...<sup>24</sup>

We know that Romanos was not a native of Constantinople. So it is possible to speculate that he could have been drawn there, in the tradition of these scholar poets, to seek his fortune. Cameron notes that 'In the best tradition of the great Alexandrian school of the

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21. Maas and Trypanis, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

22. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

23. Alan Cameron, *Literature and Society in the Early Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1985, p. I 471.

24. *Ibid.*, p. I 484.

second and third centuries before Christ, these latter-day Egyptian poets were not mere panegyrists or *Gelegenheitsdichter*: they were scholar poets,<sup>25</sup> observing that:

... far from living the usual life of the poet in peaceful seclusion, they were often shrewd and worldly adventurers, equally proficient in the very different arts of poetry and politics.<sup>26</sup>

It is feasible to see these professional poet-politicians depicted by Cameron as prefiguring the kind of role that Romanos so successfully assumed in Constantinople as he carried out the role of being one of the major communicators of his day. Although we know that he was a convert to Orthodoxy, and evidence also points to his devoutness in the service of the church, there is also no doubting his political acumen.

In her introduction to the kontakion *On the Sinful Woman*, Carpenter points to an instance in which Romanos confesses to being worldly:

The inclusion of his personal testimony about his need of repentance is a bit unusual. In other kontakia he refers to the fact that he led a worldly life and held a high position at court. The final prayer is usually one of general intercession, with an emphasis on the moral lesson of the kontakion, but this kontakion ends with six lines of a personal prayer.<sup>27</sup>

This résumé has attempted to draw together the richly interwoven threads which comprise the artistic tapestry of the kontakion and the thought-world of its greatest exponent. Perhaps this very diversity of background of the kontakion, which was such a faithful reflection of the racial and cultural diversity of the Empire itself, united, however, by a common rhetorical tradition, accounts for its success in its time, as it became a truly representative symbol of the kind of civilisation Byzantium had become.

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25. *Ibid.*, P. I 491.

26. *Ibid.*, p. I 471.

27. Carpenter, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 99.



The following chapters probe deeper into Romanos' thought patterns, viewing them against the Byzantine noetic landscape, in an attempt to establish the rhetorical facets of his work.

## *Chapter 2*

### **THE BYZANTINE WORLD VIEW**

In this secular modern era, it is difficult to envisage life in the theocratic milieu of the Byzantine Empire, in which theology coloured every aspect of life and thought. The hermetic environment spawned a unique culture that only in recent times is being valued at its true worth. This re-evaluation requires the abandonment of conventional western ideas, particularly in regard to aesthetics and politics. As a consequence, any serious attempt to study the aesthetic products of this civilisation should first set out to establish the cultural milieu in which its artists worked. Therefore, in an attempt to place Romanos and his kontakia in context, a brief overview of some of the main trends in Byzantine thought follows.

The unique Byzantine world-view was shaped by two major factors: (1) the classical rhetorical tradition which provided the basis of the education system and which tended to hermetically seal off the Byzantine mind from outside influences, and (2) the gradual evolution of theological concepts of government from pagan elements, chiefly ruler worship.

Some of the main intellectual and emotional attitudes springing from these factors are discussed briefly here as they impinge upon the thought-world of Romanos, including the clash between paganism and Christianity and the Byzantine compromise; the dualism of the Byzantine inheritance; the manipulation of public sentiment through the liturgy and

the kontakion; the theological bias of the Byzantine State; the rhetorical concept of the model; the effect of this theological bias on iconography, hymnography and literature.

### **Failure of critics to understand Byzantine ethos**

The apparently static nature of Byzantine civilisation and the unique world-view espoused by its citizens, have misled some critics in the past, who, in assessing the products of this civilisation, have failed to take into account the profound effect exerted by the classical rhetorical tradition, together with theological concepts, on all aspects of life in Byzantium.

Instances of this lack of understanding are cited by Averil Cameron, who makes the important observation that such viewpoints are the result of an inability to understand the particular discourse involved.

It is not uncommon for historians to claim ... that the late empire had become more 'irrational' than the empire of the Principate which was after all the world of early Christianity. 'Where did all this madness come from?' asks E.R. Dodds. Edward Gibbon has taken a similar view in representing the transformation of Rome into Byzantium as the 'triumph of barbarism and religion.' We are more attuned today to the power of language, to the overwhelming importance of the prevailing discourse in defining the nature of a society. A different way of expressing the transformation ... would be to say that the nature of the discourse changed.<sup>1</sup>

### **The influence of rhetoric as a closed system**

Kennedy spells out the vital role played by rhetoric in this transformation when he says:

Rhetoric had been created by the needs of Greek society in the fifth century, but once created it perpetuated itself and began in its turn, through its influential role in education, to affect Greek society. The development of

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1. Averil Cameron, *Continuity and Change in Sixth Century Byzantium*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1981, p. 54.

rhetoric into a closed system was the prelude to a concept of life and thought as a closed system.<sup>2</sup>

However, although Byzantine civilisation appeared to be a closed system, it was not static, as Runciman has pointed out:

Byzantium has often been misrepresented as a static society. It was not static. Its arts and its sciences progressed, though the pace was sometimes slow. It adapted its administration from time to time, to suit changing circumstances. But it was conservative in the truest sense of the word ...<sup>3</sup>

The classical inheritance created and perpetuated this conservatism in its insistence on revering sacred prototypes, an attitude which was to have profound repercussions on the arts as well as statecraft.

Some of the effects of this conservative attitude can be observed in the concept of working from models, a characteristic feature of rhetoric, as well as of Byzantine musical composition in which prefabricated melodic formulae based on so-called sacred archetypes are used. The role of rhetoric in this scheme is spelt out by Hunger:

... Byzantine rhetoric had the task of presenting old pagan themes with a Christian understanding, of pouring old wine into new skins, so to speak, which they did again and again in *enkomia*, *epitaphioi*, and in all other speeches.<sup>4</sup>

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2. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 124.

3. Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, CUP, 1977, p. 161.

4. Herbert Hunger, 'The classical tradition in Byzantine literature: the importance of rhetoric in Byzantium,' in M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies 1979, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 40.

### The interfacing of paganism and Christianity

Byzantium was heir both to the great classical pagan tradition and to the new spiritual dimensions of Christianity. How its greatest minds reconciled these paradoxical elements is one of the outstanding achievements of this civilisation.

Armstrong and Markus observe that 'The process of reconciling these two positions within Christian thinking was gradual ...'<sup>5</sup>

... every major intellectual upheaval in Christendom has tended to precipitate a new crisis ... the first of such crises [was] that precipitated by the original encounter of Christianity with the Greek intellectual world ... The mere fact that the new faith had to make its message heard in Greek as well as in the native language of its country of origin meant that it was brought face to face with Greek civilization; and this inevitably meant, sooner or later, with Greek philosophy as well.<sup>6</sup>

Tracing the confrontation between philosophy and Christianity, Armstrong and Markus note:

There have been few longer, or, perhaps, more fruitful dialogues in the history of human thought than that between Christianity and Greek philosophy. It began in the second century A.D. when persons with some tincture of philosophical culture began to enter the Church and philosophers who felt no temptation to do so began to scrutinize with superior indignation this impertinent barbarian apparition: and this first encounter had of course been preceded by a long period during which Hellenic philosophy had exercised some influence on the thought of Greek-speaking Jews ... 'dialogue' is the only proper word for it.<sup>7</sup>

Armstrong and Markus go on to explain what they mean by 'dialogue.'

We mean ... the dialogue which went on in the mind of Christians who came to the Bible and the teachings of the Church with minds already trained in and full of Greek philosophy, or turned to read the philosophers with minds

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5. A. H. Armstrong and R. A. Markus, *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1960, p. 137.

6. *Loc. cit.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. vii.

already formed by Bible and Church, the tension and interplay of revealed doctrine and philosophical ideas.<sup>8</sup>

This dual heritage was to give to the civilisation which evolved its special character.

### **The dualism of the Byzantine inheritance**

The Byzantine imperial symbol of the two-headed eagle [dicephalous aetos], encompassing Roman and Greek civilisation as it looks, Janus-like, both east and west, expresses materially and spiritually Byzantium's dual Romano-Hellenistic inheritance.

This dichotomy presents problems in the classification and disposition of material, because so many facets of Byzantine thought and culture are interwoven as they reflect the material and spiritual aspects of life.

At the base of this dualism is the Greek pagan culture which was to clash with the emerging Christian ethos. Through its pagan rhetorical associations, this dualism was also to find expression in the concept of the model, characterised by excessive admiration for and emulation of divine prototypes.

This dualistic outlook affected the Byzantine world view as it took its cues from the dual philosophical and rhetorical inheritance of Plato and Aristotle, the confrontation between paganism and Christianity, the theological inheritance from eastern monasticism linked with Hellenistic ruler worship, which provided the foundation for the evolution of Christian political theory.

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8. *Ibid.*, pp. vii-viii.

In the area of language the dualism is reflected in the struggle between Atticism and Asianism, between the archaic versus the living or demotic forms of the language. In liturgical chant, it is reflected in the imitation of divine melodic prototypes, while in literature this mimetic attitude towards the pagan classics stultified creative effort.

### **The theological bias of the Byzantine state**

While recognising the classical component in shaping the Byzantine world view, Mango sees it more heavily influenced by Judaeo-Christian elements.

... the true culture of Byzantium, i.e. the body of received doctrine and opinion that defined the outlook of a representative segment of the Byzantine public and filtered down to the ordinary folk was dominated, not by classical antiquity as we understand it, but by a construct of the Christian and Jewish apologists built up in the first five or six centuries A.D. This body of doctrine was very consistently worked out and its ingredients were mostly biblical with an admixture from other sources, both classical and oriental, but always subordinated to the teaching of the Bible. By giving universal currency to this view of the world, Byzantium achieved a distinctive place in the history of thought.<sup>9</sup>

Once this view is accepted, Mango maintains, 'it is not hard to understand why the churches and church services were of such overwhelming importance for the Byzantines,'<sup>10</sup> nor the fact that 'Byzantine theology included a force virtually unknown in the West until the Renaissance or even later: the theological speculations of an educated laity.'<sup>11</sup>

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9. Cyril Mango, *Byzantium and Its Image: History and Culture of the byzantine Empire and Its Heritage*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1984, p. 57.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

11. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (2): The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 6.

### Liturgy as symbol of politico-theological view

The public forum in which this doctrine was hammered out to the populace was the Eastern Orthodox liturgy.

The central act of the liturgy gathered together all the diverse strands of their complex origins weaving them into a timeless and unending tapestry of spiritual and physical experience. In its complete and final form the liturgy conveyed, through an infinite sequence of visual and verbal imagery, poetic allegory and scriptural allusion, the Byzantine view of the Christian universe.<sup>12</sup>

In this theocratic milieu, the liturgy, and as a corollary, hymnology, assumed political dimensions. The brilliant diplomatic welding of Church-State relationships, and the triumph of Orthodoxy, found their official public expression in the ceremonies associated with the liturgy, while the presence of the emperor as Christ's representative on earth at its celebration made it a state occasion as well as a religious one.

The centralising political impact of this spectacle spread beyond Constantinople, acting as a unifying element as it affected Greek and 'barbarian' alike:

[Hagia Sophia] built by Justinian and dedicated to Christ 'the wisdom of God' [was] for centuries the greatest religious edifice in Christendom. The influence of the 'Great Church' was felt not only by the 'barbarians'; other Christian communities, possessing a tradition of their own, accepted it as well.<sup>13</sup>

Paying tribute to the contribution of Romanos and the kontakion to the cumulative audio-visual impact made by the liturgy, Maas and Trypanis note:

We are constantly aware of an aura of religious awe and hope. And this impression must have been still more arresting when the kontakia were chanted in church, where so many of the traditional subjects treated were also painted on the walls, or towered over the congregation in brilliant mosaics ... in the solemn surroundings of the Byzantine churches with their brilliant

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12. Mango, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

13. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Mowbrays, London, and Fordham University Press, USA, 1974, p. 116.



interiors and flickering candles it was Romanos who gave new life to the long and glorious tradition of Greek poetry; it was he who revived the dramatic element and handed it down to the medieval Greeks in the stanzas of his great cantica, for which he has been fittingly called θεορῆτωρ – ‘the Orator of the Lord.’<sup>14</sup>

Spectacle and ritual reinforced the theocratic foundations of the Empire, as Diehl notes:

It was not only that these people, avid as they were for spectacle, took delight in the magnificence of the ritual ... Every Byzantine of whatever walk of life took a fierce delight in theological disputation.<sup>15</sup>

While for Kennedy, this public demonstration of the interdependence of church and state acted as a form of external rhetoric:

... the Council of Nicaea illustrated the importance of external rhetoric in the late empire ... Ceremony ... must have contributed to inhibiting opposition and the expression of divergent opinions: it operated as an external rhetoric.<sup>16</sup>

This passion for public spectacle, no doubt inherited from the Roman origins of the Empire, was a feature of Byzantine life which the church exploited through the liturgy.

#### **Role of kontakion in political scene**

In the process, the kontakion became an integral part of this calculated political effect, filling the vacuum created by the suppression of pagan drama, and serving as a foil to the forbidden pagan mimes.

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14. Paul Maas and C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*, OUP, 1963, pp. xxii-xxiii.

15. Charles Diehl, *Byzantium: Greatness and Decline* (trs N. Walford; Introduction and Bibliography P. Charanis), Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1957, pp. 141-2.

16. George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1983, p. 203.

Carpenter underlines this function of the kontakion, and its further implications for Christian literature and sacred drama:

Under the influence in part of Syrian literature, and even more under the impulse of natural requirements of dramatic taste, sharpened by the need to offer a Christian spectacle to replace the licentious mimes, dramatic homily and sacred song gradually formed the sacred poetry of Byzantine literature, the *prototype of all subsequent sacred representational Christian literature*.<sup>17</sup>

The homiletic and didactic characteristics of the kontakion made it a peculiarly fitting medium for the promulgation of the official doctrinal stance on theological, and therefore political, issues of the day. In an environment in which religious dissension amounted to treachery against the state, and in which 'Heresy often masked political opposition'<sup>18</sup> one begins to perceive how vital it was to maintain conformity of religious outlook, and how through the medium of the kontakion Romanos became one of the official mouthpieces of the ruling body. This function of the Melode is discussed in more detail in Part I, Chapter 3.

### Byzantine theological concepts

The theocratic nature of the Byzantine State is difficult to comprehend without first gaining some sense of the religious principles underlying Orthodox theology.

In Orthodox spirituality perhaps the prime concept is that of *theosis* – that is, the belief that through prayer, dedication, and contemplation (*Hesychia* in Greek) one may, already in this life, achieve a degree of mystical union with God.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, p. xxi.

18. Diehl, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

19. Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the 'Sibling' Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance, 330-1600*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976, p. 29.

The influence of philosophy also played its part in shaping these concepts.

Philosophy for [the Byzantines], as indeed for Aristotle, was largely a matter of logic and dialectic; it was for this reason they called philosophy the handmaiden of faith. They were perfectly willing to use Aristotelian logic to explain Christian metaphysics; thus it was that basic Aristotelian terms took on a new content in Christian metaphysics. The conclusions between the two systems were necessarily different and it was this exactly that constituted the creativity of Byzantine thought.<sup>20</sup>

The writings of Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite 'which belong to the end of the fifth century, were an attempt to combine neo-Platonic theories and Christian dogma into a unified system of Christian mysticism.'<sup>21</sup>

In defining the character of eastern theology, Geanakoplos attributes to it 'a certain transcendent, mystical quality that may, at least partly, be attributed to the diverse influences of Syria, Egypt, the Jews, and even Persia.'<sup>22</sup>

... the early theology of Christianity developed almost entirely in the Christian East. The East ... tended toward a more mystical approach, that is, a type of spirituality that emphasized union with God. The West ... seemed primarily to be interested in what has been called a more 'legalistic' approach to theology.<sup>23</sup>

Tracing the evolution of this concept, Armstrong notes that 'By God's transcendence one of two things can be meant ... The first is that he is *remote* ... the other meaning ... is much more important for serious Christian thinking. This is that God is *wholly other*, different from and better than everything that we are or can know.'<sup>24</sup>

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20. Harry J. Magonias, *Byzantine Christianity: Emperor, Church and the West*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1982, p. 67.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

22. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

24. Armstrong and Markus, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

This kind of doctrine of transcendence expressed in negative terms was accepted by Christians, as soon as they began to think philosophically, as expressing their conviction of the mystery and majesty of God. Already before Plotinus at the end of the second century A.D. it appears in the thought of Clement of Alexandria, and it appears earlier still in the Gnostics. It has been accepted, and the language of negative ... theology used ever since, by great mystics to express the ineffability of their own experience.<sup>25</sup>

### The theological basis of Byzantine political concepts

However, even though theological concepts provided the basis of their political theory, the Byzantines held to the view that theology was above reason, and were 'Scandalised by St Thomas's constant emphasis on the role of the intellect in the knowledge of God.'<sup>26</sup>

To [the Byzantine] it is a matter of vision, of personal experience, vouchsafed through the uncreated energies of God. He utterly rejects the Aristotelian, rationalistic conception of God and man ...<sup>27</sup>

Neoplatonic theory was more compatible to the Christian mind. This relegation of reason to a subordinate role in politico-theological matters could help to account for the power of the various councils. Kennedy points out the contradictions inherent in this mental attitude, noting that decisions were made on the basis of 'the number of bishops and the moral authority and ecclesiastical power which they could muster.'<sup>28</sup>

The Church equated their decisions with the Holy Spirit moving in the minds of men ... It is characteristic of the mind of late antiquity that it could reject human reasoning powers, despise the world of men, and yet easily accord divine inspiration to a council of bishops.<sup>29</sup>

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25. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

26. Donald M. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, CUP, 1979, p. 84.

27. *Loc. cit.*

28. Kennedy, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

29. *Loc. cit.*

This attitude percolated into the ranks of the laity, who entertained similar beliefs.

[The Byzantines] were deeply conscious of eternity, and deeply conscious, too, that the divine is beyond human understanding and can only be interpreted through symbols. The earthly Empire was an ephemeral thing. It could only be justified if it were brought into relation with the Kingdom of Heaven ...<sup>30</sup>

Doctrine was defined reluctantly only in the face of heresy.

... all ecumenical councils ... emphasize explicitly that doctrinal definitions are not ends in themselves, and that the council fathers – reluctantly – proceed to define issues of doctrine only to exclude the wrong interpretations proposed by heretics ... the true theologian is free to express his own immediate encounter with the truth. This is the authentic message maintained most explicitly by the Byzantine ‘mystical’ tradition ...<sup>31</sup>

It is not surprising that this mystical tradition should induce an ‘other-worldly’ state of mind in the Byzantine:

The Church on earth, which implied the Empire on earth, was a reflexion of the Church in heaven. The Byzantines therefore lived in constant communication with the other world, in constant expectation of miracle or supernatural intervention in their material affairs ... The sacraments or ‘mysteries’ were the regular means of communication. But there were other channels: tangible ones like icons or relics; living ones like monks or holy men. Society within the Empire was under the special protection of God. But God would remove his protection if his people drifted into sin or lapsed into heresy.<sup>32</sup>

This intertwining of temporal and spiritual expectations had political repercussions:

... because Byzantine society was so permeated by religious feeling, theology in some sense was seldom far from men’s minds. If the ancient Greek was, as Aristotle said, ‘a political animal,’ the Byzantine was a theological animal. In the absolute monarchy under which he lived religion was almost the only form of politics available to him ... When Byzantine society was divided the division was usually on ecclesiastical or theological grounds.<sup>33</sup>

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30. Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

31. Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

32. Nicol, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Engaging in theological debate became almost a form of entertainment, according to Nicol, who points out that '[theology] was, after all, along with rhetoric, the favourite pursuit of the Byzantines.'<sup>34</sup>

This theological bias served to define the relationship between church, state and citizen.

Beginning with Byzantium's foundation ... the Byzantines looked upon their empire (*Basileia*) as *the* political organization sanctioned by God for the world. The chief requirement for admission to this *Basileia* was conversion to Orthodoxy. And through these means many barbarian peoples ... were able to enter into the Byzantine *ecumene*.... the overall principle of religious unity ... was considered to be absolutely indispensable for the survival of the empire as it was then constituted.<sup>35</sup>

Nicol enlarges on the concept of *ecumene*:

It is significant that there is no Greek word for 'Christendom,' no Byzantine equivalent for the Latin term *christianitas*. The word that would have sprung to a Byzantine mind is *oikumene*, or *basileia* – the Empire. The 'Christ-named people' (Χριστιάνουμος λαός) who formed the great Christian society were the privileged inhabitants of the oecumenical Empire, whose visible head was the *basileus*, the God-protected ruler, defender of the faith and order (ἐπιστημονάρχης) of the Church.<sup>36</sup>

The Church and the Empire were 'the two elements of one society, the soul and the body,'<sup>37</sup> and the emperor was God's regent on earth, the visible head of church and state, because the two were interdependent. The emperor has even been described as the 'thirteenth apostle,' while in the latter stages of the Empire, Patriarch Antonios IV wrote

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34. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

35. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

36. Nicol, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

37. Nicol, *Ibid.*, p. 2.

to Russia's Basil I that 'to talk of a Church without an emperor was an absurdity.'<sup>38</sup>

Geanakoplos reinforces the central role of the emperor:

Accordingly, the Orthodox faith served in a very real sense as the basis not only for the emperor's authority but for the very existence of the empire ... The cumulative effect of every peasant and city-dweller every Sunday in every parish of the vast empire, hearing the purity of the faith in effect equated with the power of the empire, cannot be underestimated.<sup>39</sup>

Though the empire gained its strength from this union of church and state, Runciman believes that it was detrimental to the development of the Church. While recognising Byzantium as 'an Empire whose constitution, to use too legal a word, was based on a clear religious conviction: that it was the earthly copy of the Kingdom of Heaven'<sup>40</sup> and perceiving itself as a 'universal Empire,' Runciman voices the concern of theologians concerning this union.

Some Orthodox theologians of today have deplored this Byzantine identification of Church and society. Alexander Schmemmann writes: 'The tragedy of the Byzantine church consisted precisely in the fact that it became merely the *Byzantine* Church, that it merged itself with the Empire, not so much administratively, as, above all, psychologically, in its own self-awareness. The Empire became for it the absolute and supreme value, unquestioned, inviolable, and self-evident.'<sup>41</sup>

#### **Rhetoric shapes world-view through the concept of the model**

One of the most profound contributions of classical rhetorical theory to the Byzantine world-view was the concept of the model. This imitative, mimetic aspect of Byzantine thought, involving reliance on a model, provides a salutary example of the hold that rhetoric gained upon the thought processes of the Byzantines. In the context of the

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38. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

39. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

40. Runciman, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

41. Nicol, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Empire, the *deisis*, with its 'as above so below' imagery, depicting the Emperor and his court as a mirror image of the celestial kingdom of God and his saints, represents the idea on a grand scale. 'Everything was understood from the Christian point of view: the emanation of the emperor from God, the imitation of God by the emperor.'<sup>42</sup> As Dvornik put it, this idea corresponds with 'the old Hellenistic principle that kings must imitate god and people must imitate kings.'<sup>43</sup>

According to the developed Eusebian formulation, the emperor is the viceregent of God, the mimesis or 'living icon of Christ' ('*zosa eikon Christou*'), and he rules the *Basileia*, the Christian commonwealth, which in turn the terrestrial counterpart of God's kingdom in heaven. Since there was only one God, it followed inevitably that there could be only one empire and therefore only one true religion.<sup>44</sup>

The fundamental rhetorical technique of working from models is noted by Kennedy:

Rhetoric in origin is the method by which the originator of a communication seeks to accomplish his purpose. Classical rhetoric is ... unique in its degree of conceptualization. Beginning in the fifth century B.C. it was formulated as a system with rules and examples.<sup>45</sup>

Clark sees in the use of models an explanation for the success of the training handbooks, or *progymnasmata*, which were used by the Byzantine populace at all academic levels.

One thing, common to all the *Progymnasmata*, accounts for their success and hence for their continued use ... They all give patterns ... to follow.<sup>46</sup>

Corbett also comments on the use of models in rhetorical training:

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42. Hunger, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

43. Francis Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background, Vol. II*, Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington DC, 1966, p. 553.

44. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

45. Kennedy, 1981, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-5.

46. Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, p. 181.



The *progymnasmata* were the first writing exercises, the 'themes' ... In addition to supplying technical rules for the construction of these minor forms of composition, the texts provided illustrations of the dozen or so common forms. The texts were clearly in the tradition of 'formularly rhetoric' – the kind of rhetoric that taught by models.<sup>47</sup>

This technique exerted a deleterious effect upon literary creativity, as Clark remarks:

Originality, far from being encouraged, would have been regarded as unscholarly and a breach of discipline. Such an attitude toward writing, inculcated in early youth and reemphasized by subsequent study of canonized examples of argument or style, had great effect upon the nature of Hellenistic and Roman literature.<sup>48</sup>

It is in this emphasis on models, that I believe I have found one of the most important aspects of rhetorical practice bearing on the theory of music.

As I have noted in the Prolegomenon, it is quite possible that, from rhetorical practice, musicians evolved the idea of imitating set rhythmic and melodic patterns as a method of composition and used this technique in association with the well-known oriental method of formulaic construction.

It follows that this established rhetorical technique of working from models could provide an explanation for the ready acceptance of such compositional devices by Byzantine hymnographers in their techniques of musical composition, in which prefabricated or set melodic formulae were used. The *heirmos* or model stanza from which the entire hymn derived its rhythmic and melodic patterns provides an excellent example of this technique.

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47. E. P. J. Corbett, *Classical rhetoric for the Modern Student*, OUP, 1965, p. 543.

48. Kennedy, 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

Nor did theological teachings depart from the useful concept of the model. Santayana points out that Plato had laid the groundwork for this attitude towards heavenly prototypes:

If for the Platonist goods and evils are everlastingly fixed and distinct, this moral dogmatism in him is no accident of temperament, no mere lack of moral elasticity, as in the bigot. If he is sure that some goods often passionately loved are nevertheless false goods, it is only because he attributes a definite and unchangeable constitution to the material world and to human nature. Life, he thinks, has been kindled and is alone sustained by the influence of pre-existing celestial models. It is by imitating these models in some measure that we exist at all, and only in imitating, loving and contemplating them that we can ever be happy. They are our good.<sup>49</sup>

### The effect of theology on aesthetics

Another area in which the Byzantine world-view departs radically from Western concepts is in the area of aesthetics. In Part I, Chapter 1, I have noted already the effect on the artist of the rhetorical concept of *ethos*, which moves into the theological area when it is applied to the divine authorship of the Scriptures. The dual influences of rhetoric and theology and their political manipulation can be seen in the deliberate attempt by both church and state to establish an audio-visual environment which embraced all of the arts in the service of Christianity. This need for 'a narrative or a symbolically interrelated art' for Christianity was observed also by Burckhardt.<sup>50</sup>

The contrast between Western and Byzantine attitudes to artistic activity is succinctly expressed by Nicol when he says:

Byzantine art is ... a genre on its own. It performs at once an aesthetic and a noetic function. Its artists worked in a style and idiom into which they were

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49. George Santayana, *Winds of Doctrine and Platonism and the Spiritual Life*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York, 1957, p. 227.

50. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1949, p. 234.

initiated and from which they hardly ever deviated ... to Byzantine eyes it was ... quite naturalistic. If the saints in their mosaics and icons really seemed so human to the Byzantines then their view of humanity, and of humanism, must have been different from ours, and also different from that of their western contemporaries ... art ... executed, as always, by anonymous artists, themselves, like the holy images they created or like the holy men on earth, media or channels of divine grace.<sup>51</sup>

This attitude applied equally to the production of literature and music. The contemporary concept of the artist as an individual using his creative powers to express his own individuality was foreign to the Byzantines. As Halliwell notes:

The developed Greek notion of poetic craft crystallised in the very noun 'poetry' (*poiêsis* = making), borrowed from the production of more tangible artefacts. It happens to be the case that this noun, as well as some cognates from the same verbal root, first appears in this sense in the fifth century; but to infer from this that the concept itself was new in this period would be to confuse terminology with conceptualisation ...<sup>52</sup>

Trypanis has described this peculiarly Byzantine approach to poetry in similar terms:

It is interesting to remember that no Byzantine poet is called *poietes*, creator, and that there was no one who dedicated his whole life to poetry, having it as his sole, or even as his main, occupation. Most of the Byzantine poets were primarily men of the Church or the State, or hungry begging-scholars who *also* wrote verse.<sup>53</sup>

### Iconography reflects rhetorical view

The graphic artist was subject to the same unique aesthetic view. Summing up the effect of rhetorical ideas upon the artist, Maguire says:

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51. Nicol, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

52. Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, USA, 1986, pp. 9-10.

53. C. A. Trypanis, *Medieval and Modern Greek Poetry: An Anthology*, Clarendon press, Oxford, 1951, p. xl.

Since John [of Damascus] believed that Christian painting had the same means and ends as Christian writing, it would follow from his arguments that the illustration of metaphors reflecting the world of the spirit should be an aim of Byzantine artists.<sup>54</sup>

Maguire enlarges on this view, noting that the 'sermons and hymns of the Byzantine church influenced the way Byzantine artists illustrated narrative texts.'<sup>55</sup>

Often the accounts given in the Gospels of important events are terse and succinct; Byzantine preachers and poets used their imagination, and especially their training in ancient rhetoric, to fill in the details that the Gospels failed to provide.<sup>56</sup>

Theologians, however, when forced to give a definition of a Christian icon versus a pagan idol, were quick to point out that

Neither the materials, usually wood and colors, nor the images themselves were being worshipped ... but the prototype behind the image which became manifest through the representation ... Moreover, John of Damascus ... agreed with his adversaries that God, being invisible, inconceivable, and limitless, could not be represented, but argued that because God had, through Christ, become man, Christ could and must be depicted in human form for the sake of man's Salvation.<sup>57</sup>

Rhetorical concepts found graphic depiction on the walls of Byzantine churches.

... particular rhetorical exercises and particular figures of speech influenced the decoration of Byzantine churches; these techniques of rhetoric passed from the schoolroom into the literature of the church, and from the literature of the church onto its walls.<sup>58</sup>

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54. Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1981, p. 10.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

56. *Loc. cit.*

57. Kurt Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images from the Sixth to the Fourteenth Century*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1978, pp. 7-8.

58. Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

St Gregory of Nyssa also referred to the coloured pictures on the walls of the church of St Theodore the Martyr as 'a book endowed with speech' adding 'for painting even if silent, knows how to speak from the wall,'<sup>59</sup> while John of Damascus praised St Basil for showing that 'form through colors is coupled with speech' and that 'the work of image and word is one.'<sup>60</sup>

The nature of the Greek language also encouraged this wedding of words and images.

The Greek language itself encouraged the Byzantines to think in these terms. The word *graphē*, for example, was used for both writing and painting, *historia* could mean either a written history or a picture, whereas *schema* was both a figure of rhetoric and a pose in painting.<sup>61</sup>

Kustas sees this 'process of developing a theology of pictorial images' as 'attended by a sharpened feeling for the symbolic function of discourse as well.'<sup>62</sup>

The habits of language ... could be better understood in relation to the habits of art. The Byzantine was constantly impressed with the metaphor of existence, an existence to which the Incarnation supplied metaphysical design. Already the early Fathers had adopted the collocation *λόγος-Λόγος* in relating to Christ the human faculty of reason.<sup>63</sup>

### The theological symbolism of icons

The 'model' concept also influenced the way the Byzantines perceived the icon.

Theologians viewed man as an icon of God, as Kustas notes:

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59. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

60. *Loc. cit.*

61. *Loc. cit.*

62. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, p. 120.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

According to John [of Damascus], we are εἰκόνες of the Trinity in that our νοῦς corresponds to the Father, our λόγος to the Son as Λόγος and our spirit to the Holy Spirit ... similarly the writings of the holy men of the Church are true εἰκόνες in the realm of words as Christ's image is in the realm of art.... The main business of the age was, after all, pictures not words.<sup>64</sup>

While the emperor himself was seen as an icon or image of God.

John of Damascus 'exploited the multiple meanings in the term *eikōn*, which, like the English word 'image,' could mean both a concrete representation, as in a painting, and a conceptual representation, such as might be created in writing.'<sup>65</sup> John of Damascus is also cited as saying that 'we see images in creation which faintly reveal to us the reflections of God ... In literature such ... "images" ... of the deity would be similes or metaphors.'<sup>66</sup>

Pseudo-Dionysius, the fifth century Neoplatonist, gave to the term image (*eikon*) yet another meaning. In his thought 'it referred to the objects that make up the visible world of the senses, because they act as reflections of the invisible world of the spirit.'<sup>67</sup>

The psychological effect of the icons and mosaics shimmering in the candlelight as they depicted events in the life of Christ which were the subject of the narration being chanted, surely must have added another dimension to the performance of the liturgy. The modern churchgoer, when realising the length of some of these performances and marvelling at the stamina of the listeners, would admit that the visual aids must have also

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64. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

65. Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

66. *Loc. cit.*

67. *Loc. cit.*

played a significant part in fixing the attention of the audience. The exalted place which the icon occupied in Byzantine worship is summarised by Weitzmann:

The icon plays a very specific role in the Orthodox Church, where its worship in the course of time became integrated into the celebration of the liturgy ... According to the Greek Church Fathers, such as Basil, the icon was considered equal in importance to the written word, the appeal to the eyes being just as authoritative as that to the ears.<sup>68</sup>

The vivid, visual writing that is characteristic of Romanos' kontakia can be viewed as part of this tradition. Perceiving the aural and plastic arts as having a common aim in this scheme to make the Scriptures live, Geanakoplos says: 'As in hymnody, Byzantine painting also sought to represent the sublimity of the other world.'<sup>69</sup> Examples of Romanos' use of such imagery are detailed in Part II, Chapter 2.

#### **Effect of theological bias on literature**

We have seen how the plastic arts and music were affected by this theological bias. Literature in general was also faced with the task of interpreting this new world-view, which is summed up by Kustas:

Christianity brought with it a new conception, the idea of universal history actualized in the central fact of the Incarnation of Christ. The supreme event of his Passion compelled a re-evaluation of human affairs in terms of relation to it ... pagan philosophies of history in their quest for causal connections ... give way before a view which sees the events of history already justified in the vastness of time between Creation and the Last Judgment. God and His world *are*: this is the point of departure from which the Christian proceeded to understand the pattern of existence.<sup>70</sup>

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68. Weitzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

69. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

70. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

Literature's role was to find a way to express this momentous change in human perceptions:

The new Christian philosophy of history required that a way be found to represent the supra-temporal valence of events. It is here that the various tropical and figural tactics carefully elaborated by ancient rhetoric come into their own.<sup>71</sup>

Cameron notes the attempts literature makes to come to terms with this task:

In all of these writings, metaphor, symbol and analogy function together to convey not logical propositions but the paradoxical language of religious experience. Christian discourse ... was able both to embrace a language of religion and to adopt the rhetorical forms and styles of classical culture. The latter enabled its eventual acceptance by educated pagans, who then often embraced the former with equal enthusiasm; the former persisted throughout the Byzantine period and gave to Byzantine literature much of its typical flavour of mysticism and spirituality.<sup>72</sup>

The mandate of creative artists, like Romanos, was to act as a medium for the proclamation of the Divine Word.

... the *raison d'être* of literature is itself transformed. It can no longer be the expression of new truths produced by man's creative insight ... What is required now is the characterization (*ἡθοποιΐα*) of the given cosmos ... The divine character of the universe will be extolled in limitless variations ...<sup>73</sup>

Kustas notes the role of the concept of the *Logos* in this process:

In such a setting a sense of the natural force of language and the immediacy of its symbols with their objects helps to identify and reserve man's place in the scheme of a living and variable universe. Supported by the Christian doctrine of the *Logos* become living and suffering flesh, the essence of literature undergoes a profound transformation. In passing from the pagan to the Christian age we pass from theories of rhetoric to a universal theory of *Logos* in the definition of which rhetoric will play a key role.<sup>74</sup>

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71. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

72. Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

73. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 56.



He sums up the profound effect that this concept has upon literature:

Propriety (τὸ πρέπον) [what is fitting] ... lies now in the recognition of the unique validity of every legitimate linguistic resource, decked out in fitting rhetorical dress, for conveying in its multiplicity the grand meaning of creation ... Ultimately, the eurythmic dynamizing literature ... expressive of a higher mystic symphony of existence, will impress and excite the mind of Byzantium.<sup>75</sup>

Kustas sees in Romanos' kontakia, a brilliant realisation in words and music of the cosmic implications of the new way of thought implied by Christianity, with its infinite ramifications:

The fertile rhetoric of the Byzantine Acathistos Hymn or the poetry of Romanus the Melode ... bespeaks the pious intensity (πάθος) with which the author seeks after ever new epithets and new modes of description for keeping ever before him the high majesty of his holy theme.<sup>76</sup>

Kustas is not alone in recognising that the liturgical poetry of Romanos fulfilled the literary and spiritual needs of the time; a glance at the state of the secular poetry of the time serves only to emphasise Romanos' true stature as a genuinely creative artist.

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75. *Loc. cit.*

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

### *Chapter 3*

## **CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN BYZANTIUM: THE MELODE AS COMMUNICATOR**

In reconstructing a picture of Constantinople in the time of Romanos, one has to take into account a number of factors including the composite nature of the Byzantine Empire and its evolution from the time of Constantine, together with the fusion of Christian and pagan elements, the deliberate promotion of ruler worship and the gradual Hellenising of the Roman court which set the stage for the evolution of a Christian political theory fusing Church and State, and the gradual triumph of Hellenism as Byzantine civilisation assumed an entirely Greek character.

The relevance to Romanos lies in the fact that, in this theocratic scheme, his role and that of hymnographers like him, began to assume political dimensions as they became the official communicators of the prevailing doctrine of the day.

Complementing this intellectual milieu was a deliberately orchestrated physical environment, in which the liturgy, iconography, hymnography, and particularly architecture were deliberately designed to reinforce the concept of the divinity of the emperor and his mandate to rule.

### **The diversity of the Empire**

The weakening of Roman power in the west and the brilliant political manoeuvre of Constantine's move eastwards to the strategic site on the Bosphorous brought in train the

migration of a motley populace, composed of many difference races, to people the new Rome.

This enormous complexity and variety is nowhere reflected more vividly than in the study of hymnography which provides 'abundant documentary evidence'<sup>1</sup> for this hybrid development that was to take on the character of Byzantine civilisation.

As the tide of Christianity swept over the Hellenistic world it encompassed this polyglot mixture of races to further enrich and diversify Byzantine civilisation.

The composite character of Byzantine civilisation can be glimpsed by following the spread of Christianity from its origins in Syria, then a province of Rome, administered by a Graeco-Roman governing class, with a mixed population of Aramaeans, Cappadocians, Armenians and Jews influenced by Hellenistic and Persian ideas, to Asia Minor with its mixture of Semitic, Iranian and Hellenistic elements.<sup>2</sup>

### **Christianity as the unifying factor**

It was an inspired political touch on the part of Constantine to perceive in Christianity the one mystical force which could draw these disparate elements into some semblance of unity. Geanakoplos reinforces this view:

Many medieval historians consider the empire ... to be the classic case of a multinational state which, despite an extreme diversity of peoples, was able not only to survive but to prosper. The sense of unity that maintained this empire is believed to have come primarily from the absolute authority of its

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1. Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd ed., OUP, 1961, p. 32.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1.

ruler, the Basileus and ... from its official religion, Orthodoxy, the very name of which means 'the one true religion.'<sup>3</sup>

In the early stages of the Empire, the identification of Church and Emperor as interdependent served to reinforce this unity, as Geanakoplos remarks:

... it did not seem to matter that the ethnic composition of the empire was a very heterogeneous one, because the church and its ideology were successfully identified, or intertwined, with the power and ideology of the empire, itself a genuine reality.<sup>4</sup>

This union of Church and State was a logical outcome of the gradual 'fusion of Western and Eastern elements'<sup>5</sup> as the Byzantine Empire started to take on a distinctive ethos of its own. Its legal and administrative machinery was Roman, its language Latin to the sixth century, its courts and other public institutions modelled on the Roman style, while the Greek tradition was preserved in its cultural life with the cultivation of classical literary forms based on the Attic idiom and excessive admiration for the archaic forms of the language.<sup>6</sup>

Cameron reinforces this view:

It was after all the marriage between Christianity and classical culture – an uneasy, uneven but nonetheless enduring marriage – that was the defining characteristic and backbone of Byzantine civilization.<sup>7</sup>

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3. Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the 'Sibling' Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance, 330-1600*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976, p. 36.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

5. Wellesz, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

7. Alan Cameron, *Literature and Society in the Early Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1985, p. III 287.

According to Dvornik, Clement of Alexandria 'attempted to do for the Christians what Philo had attempted for the Jews – to frame a compromise between Hellenistic thought and Christian doctrine.'<sup>8</sup> While it was Origen who 'supplied Christian patriotism with a principle ... the identification of the interests of the Church with those of the Roman Empire.'<sup>9</sup>

This 'remarkable fusion of its three basic cultural elements (Greek classical learning, Orthodox Christianity, and the Roman legal tradition) into a closely knit viable synthesis,'<sup>10</sup> meant that the Byzantine Empire, which was 'the Christian form or continuation of the old pagan Roman Empire' by the mid-seventh century 'had become almost entirely Greek in culture and outlook ...'<sup>11</sup>

By the time of Justinian [sixth century] the culture, at least that of the upper classes in the cities, had become predominantly Greek, as had the language of the court.<sup>12</sup>

Geanakoplos adds, though, that 'it is possible that, for the bulk of those outside the towns, their primary language could not have been Greek.'<sup>13</sup>

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8. Francis Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*, Vol. II, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies IX*, The Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington DC, 1966, p. 595.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 604.

10. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

13. *Loc. cit.*

### The evolution of Christian political theory

In defining this politico-theological stance, Lemerle finds more than one interpretation of what constituted heresy, with the explanation lying in 'The conflict between what might be called orthodoxy and heresy.'<sup>14</sup>

In the case of Christianity ... the main thrust of theological argument was directed against the 'heretics,' the enemies within, because they threatened the unity of the Church. In the case of paganism ... in the East in the fourth century the counterpart to orthodoxy was Hellenism, and the heresy was the political Romanization which Constantine the Great inaugurated by the foundation of Constantinople and all that flowed from that.<sup>15</sup>

Dvornik endorses this view: 'The evidence ... shows clearly that from the second half of the first century B.C. to the end of the third century A.D. Roman political theory was being slowly but surely Hellenized.'<sup>16</sup> At the same time he notes the far-reaching implications for both East and West:

The important consequence of this evolution was that the Western Latin world professed ... the same political philosophy as the Hellenistic East. In this field, too, the East obtained leadership over the West, a fact which is important to the formation of Christian political philosophy.<sup>17</sup>

The full impact of Hellenism on the Roman court, and its future ramifications for the monarchy in Europe is summed up by Dvornik, when he says:

Political Hellenism so fascinated the Roman principes and the majority of the Romans that it gradually turned the *Palatium* into a Hellenistic court. Just as it had absorbed and transformed Oriental customs, chiefly Persian, so it combined with Roman and Germanic traditions to grow into an imposing

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14. Paul Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism: Notes and Remarks on Education and Culture in Byzantium from Its Origins to the Tenth Century* (trs H. Lindsay and A. Moffatt), University of Sydney, Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, Canberra, 1986, p. 56.

15. *Loc. cit.*

16. Dvornik, *op. cit.*, p. 556.

17. *Loc. cit.*

imperial ritual which for centuries left its mark on both the national traditions and the ecclesiastical liturgy of Europe.<sup>18</sup>

The welding of politics and religion was facilitated by the Hellenistic attitude towards the ruler cult, as Dvornik notes.

... to the Romans' surprise, [the Greeks] personified Rome and her might as a goddess. [The Romans] realized that the Greeks needed such inventions, since their political life was rooted in the *polis*, or city organization, and it was customary for them to worship their gods as protectors of their cities ... Having created the *Thea Roma*, the Greeks found it natural to express their political loyalty in terms of religious worship ...<sup>19</sup>

As a result, 'it became possible to approximate and even to identify the interests of Church and Empire ...'<sup>20</sup>

The success of this political theory in easing the changeover from Rome to Byzantium and in the later Greek character which Byzantium assumed can be explained by its affinity with classical Greek philosophical concepts of the state.

The Greeks were finally reconciled to the rule of the Romans because they were convinced that the Roman political system most nearly resembled the ideal polity which was for centuries a favorite subject of speculation for Greek philosophers and political thinkers. The Romans, had, in fact, done more than that. They had also realized the dream of Greek philosophers, especially the Stoics, of the *oikoumene* – the universal empire embracing the whole of mankind and giving all men an equal chance.<sup>21</sup>

Constantine's task was thereby made easier by this subtle Christianizing of the Roman Empire. A powerful force working for Constantine in consolidating and uniting this

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 523.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 487.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 611.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 551.

Empire was 'the common assumption of a Roman monarchy based on Hellenistic principles.'<sup>22</sup>

Comparing the ruler cult instigated by Augustus with later Emperor worship in Byzantium, Dvornik notes that the origins of the former 'cannot possibly be explained in terms of old Roman religious beliefs without regard for Hellenistic influences on them. The concept of the numen, a personal spirit which could be venerated in distinguished men as a demigod, made its appearance in Rome only under Greek influence.'<sup>23</sup>

Dvornik cites a further example of Hellenistic influence in the use of the Hellenistic terminology of *theos epiphanes*, which influenced Ovid when he called Augustus 'present and visible god (*praesens et conspicuus deus*), seen among men as a deity, just as Jupiter is considered to be. Augustus is, therefore, a more visible god – *manifestior* – than the gods of heaven.'<sup>24</sup>

The political expediency of this cult is exemplified in the rule of Diocletian who 'finally completed the Hellenization of the court (A.D. 284-305), ... and the ruler cult was firmly established as the political and religious bond which united the subjects of the Empire.'<sup>25</sup>

'The theory of divine monarchy came into full flower during the reign of Constantine the Great,'<sup>26</sup> as Dvornik notes:

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22. *Ibid.*, p. 630.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 494.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 496.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 500.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 611.



... As soon as Constantine revealed his sympathies for the Christian religion, the Christians, already schooled in Christian-Hellenistic dialectics, were ready to find not only God in the reflection of an earthly monarchy, but also the emperor in the reflection of the divine monarchy.<sup>27</sup>

Runciman sums up the cumulative effect of these influences on the future direction of Byzantine government:

It was Platonic thought, transmitted by such interpreters as the pagan Plotinus, the Jew Philo, and the Christian heretic Origen, which was combined with the Oriental tradition of Hellenistic monarchy and the pragmatic authority of the Roman Emperor, that formed the foundation on which Eusebius built up his theory of government.<sup>28</sup>

From this heterogeneous mix of ideas, Constantine's biographer and eulogist, Eusebius, was to fashion the political theory at the base of the Empire.

The master stroke of Eusebius, in formulating a philosophy of government, was to place the Emperor at the centre of this scheme. 'He was now the wise king who was the imitation of God, ruling a realm which could now become the imitation of Heaven ... The king is not God among men but the Viceroy of God. He is not the *logos* incarnate but is in a special relation with the *logos*.'<sup>29</sup>

Geanakoplos sums up the result noting that 'the concept of the empire, and of its ruler the emperor, was now cast into the form of Christian political theory.'<sup>30</sup>

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27. *Loc. cit.*

28. Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy*, CUP, 1977, p. 162.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

30. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Whether Constantine's conversion to Christianity was due to expediency or sincere belief, Dvornik agrees with N.H. Baynes that 'Constantine was not an agnostic, but a man of his time, a believer in the spiritual and the divine ... the distance is after all not so formidable between the pagans' monarchized god and the Christians' monotheism and *Logos of God*.'<sup>31</sup>

The result of this 'coupling of the Emperor with the Divine Logos or Jesus Christ [by Eusebius] was of course the Christian version of the Hellenistic theory that the king was guided by the logos of philosophy and incarnated reason in the form of law ...'<sup>32</sup>

The ground was then laid for the future role of the Emperor in the theological debates of the early centuries of Christianity when 'in the latter half of the second century jurists came to look upon imperial decrees as laws.'<sup>33</sup>

This absolute legal power vested in the emperor, had the effect of strangling forensic rhetoric: 'traditional Greek freedom of speech was severely curtailed' – as far as rhetoric was concerned, first, 'political speech died out and forensic rhetoric became meaningless as the emperor made the final decisions.'<sup>34</sup>

Rhetoric therefore began to turn its talents to epideictic or display oratory. With its primary task of assisting Christian apologists to refute heresy now accomplished, rhetoric

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31. Dvornik, *op. cit.*, pp. 634-5.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 618.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 516.

34. Herbert Hunger, 'The classical tradition in Byzantine literature: the importance of rhetoric in Byzantium,' in M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 37.

began to be perceived more as a reinforcing agent in its epideictic aspect, for instance, in persuading its listeners to the correct moral outlook.

Kustas believes that the early sixth century fixes once and for all the essence of Byzantium in art, in secular and ecclesiastical politics, in the habits of literature, and in rhetorical theory as well. He notes that the relationship between church and state has been termed Caesaropapism.

... literature [was] also affected by a kind of cultural Caesaropapism wherein the free development of Christian writing has to coexist with the now firmly fixed jurisdiction of the Second Sophistic to provide it with superintendence and control. The evolving patterns of dogma and ecclesiastical administration had to establish a *modus vivendi* with the absolutistic Roman political authority.<sup>35</sup>

This constant dual between paganism and Christianity, could be solved only by compromise and rationalisation, skills in which the Byzantines were unequalled.

Ševčenko gives the overall view:

The picture of Byzantium that emerges ... is ... of a literary elite that solved the conflict between Antiquity and Christianity by a compromise which enabled it to have its cake and eat it, too ... It is a picture of a multinational state in whose heyday the Capital loomed large, but in which the provincials had their own cultural concerns and displayed varying degrees of awareness of the centre and of allegiance to it; a picture of elites who waged their international ideological battles with weapons all forged in the same literary workshops; finally, a picture of a society in which individual creativity, even if obscured by the shared adherence to literary and artistic norms, nevertheless could and did assert itself.<sup>36</sup>

An insight into the Byzantine gift for reconciling apparent paradoxes, no doubt another rhetorical legacy, has never been better demonstrated than in the rationalisation of the

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35. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, pp. 61-62.

36. Ihor Ševčenko, *Ideology, Letters, and Culture in the Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1982, Preface.

act of prostrating oneself before the emperor or his image. When taxed upon whether this constituted an act of worship, an anonymous contemporary of Jerome explained that for Christians, *proskynesis* or *adoratio* had taken on a special meaning. "They *did* the same things as pagans, but, in the doing, they *thought* differently. And besides, they didn't use incense."<sup>37</sup>

### Problems of communication and the role of Melode

The complexity of the ethnic composition of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, was matched by its size, and the problems of communication which this entailed.

Exactly how large a city Constantinople was at various times we do not know, mainly because the Byzantines had no means of knowing it themselves. But we do know that its growth was initially so rapid that the government attempted to limit it in the early centuries, and we may safely follow those conservative estimates which put its population at 400,000 in the sixth century ... This means that for centuries Constantinople was the most populous city in all Christendom.<sup>38</sup>

Themistios' pattern of *topoi* for Constantinople is outlined by Ševčenko:

... the city's close connection with the imperial power; hints at its coequality with the Rome on the Tiber; its favorable geopolitical situation on the confines of Europe and Asia; its propitious climate, sumptuous architecture, and ... its role as the 'hearth' of arts and letters. The tone was thus set in the fourth century ... between the fourth and sixth centuries Constantinople was a magnet attracting provincial talent ... Important works of art, texts, and at least one poetic genre absorbed by Byzantium in the early period were introduced not only from outside the capital, but even occasionally from outside the Greek cultural milieu. Romanos the Melode came from Berytus, and the *kontakion*, his literary vehicle, introduced Semitic forms into Byzantium's liturgical poetry.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Ramsay MacMullen, *The Meaning of AD 312: The Difficulty of Converting the Empire*, 17th International Byzantine Congress — Major Papers, Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University, Washington DC, August 3-8, 1986, Aristide D. Caratzas, Publisher, New Rochelle, New York, p. 6.

38. Ševčenko, *op. cit.*, pp. VI 712-13.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. VI 713-15.

Tracing the pre-eminence of Constantinople as a great intellectual centre, Lemerle notes that 'grammarians, rhetors and perhaps philosophers flocked to Constantinople from the time it was the capital of the Empire and the residence of the emperor,'<sup>40</sup> and that 'no other period has left us so many names of rhetors, of philosophers, of scholars ...'<sup>41</sup>

The prestige accorded Constantinople is particularly remarkable since there is no evidence of any ecclesiastical or imperial policy of imposing its usages by law or by administrative measures ... The adoption of a liturgical practice or tradition by the 'Great Church' meant a final sanction and, ultimately a quasi-guarantee of universal acceptance.<sup>42</sup>

Bearing in mind that Romanos' kontakia were conceived for performance in Hagia Sophia, the greatest liturgical centre in Christendom, one begins to glimpse the influence he must have exerted.

That communication posed a problem by the very nature of the Empire, is recognised by MacMullen:

Three quarters or more of the population were illiterate. Points of contact and media of communication that we take for granted in our world simply did not exist in antiquity ... Even those forms which we ... would readily call 'literary' nevertheless have an aim which is on the whole distinct from anything in secular literature: that aim is to convince, if not to convert. It is a literature of commitment, engaged writing. Christian literature meant business.<sup>43</sup>

Christianity and rhetoric were the two major factors which were able to provide the superstructure for the solution to this massive communications problem.

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40. Lemerle, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

42. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Mowbrays, London, and Fordham University Press, USA, 1974, p. 116.

43. Averil Cameron, *Continuity and Change in Sixth Century Byzantium*, International Byzantine Congress — Major Papers, Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University, Washington DC, August 3-8, 1986, Aristide D. Caratzas, Publisher, New Rochelle, New York, pp. 46-7.

Rhetoric, harnessed to the needs of Christianity, became part of the machinery by which this sprawling empire maintained its network of communications. Christianity was to be the integrating, binding factor in this polyglot, ethnically diverse empire, and the task of the churchmen and hymnographers was to help the emperor to impose this unifying philosophy on his subjects. The message therefore had to appeal to the masses, and be presented in highly dramatic, unmistakable, non-ambiguous terms, while yet being imbued with a mystical quality befitting its exalted subject matter.

To succeed in this demanding task Romanos found that he had to abandon most of the empty mannerisms of secular poetry, with its atticisms and archaisms, and write in a language that was easily understood, yet lofty enough to be worthy of the profound theological events he was at pains to communicate.

It has been generally agreed among literary scholars, that in the process, Romanos composed some of the greatest poetry Byzantium ever produced, while the *kontakion* itself is viewed as the repository of the classical dramatic tradition.

There are few archaisms in his texts, which was a remarkable achievement in the face of the prevailing attempt to resurrect the classical language, though, as the following chapter demonstrates, there were well founded historical reasons why he used the language he did.

One must bear in mind that he was essentially an artist and a communicator, writing for the not so learned masses, though there is some speculation that the population of Constantinople was more literate than has been previously supposed.

Therefore, because of the interlinked fortunes of Church and State in Byzantium, the Melode, by default, had a political role thrust upon him in communicating the official decrees of Church and Emperor. Hymnography implied more than the embellishment of the liturgy; it assumed a political dimension; and became also a primary means of communication in the vast, multinational melting pot of different peoples that comprised the Byzantine Empire.

Conveying the meaning of the text was paramount in the liturgical scheme, as we have noted earlier; however it was less significant in the secular realm, where a display of erudition, not communication was the driving force. While court literature, oratory and poetry merely provided opportunities for egocentric displays of erudition to an exclusive elite, the Melode became a key figure as a communicator to the rest of the Empire through the liturgy, not least because, as we have seen, whatever was sanctioned in Constantinople gained acceptance throughout the Empire.

The power of the word through the fostering of rhetoric, continued to be the basic concept behind the entire structure of communication in the Empire – a concept in which the *logos* was also *graphie* (word/picture), attempting to shape by visual and aural means the attitude of the audience.

It comes as no surprise to find this combination of word/picture being developed as part of the Empire's communication system, promulgated through the twin media of church and state, reaching its most elaborate and impressive expression in the Liturgy of the Divine Word in the great basilica of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

And at the centre of this was the Melode, whose role was rather more than that of a musician-poet. In contemporary terms he was the communicator of his day, working through the established, sophisticated audio-visual medium of the liturgy, to promulgate the decrees of church and state.

This communicative role of poetry is underlined by Howell:

... poetical utterance belongs to the enterprise of communication by virtue of the fact that it does actually convey to readers a something that they did not have before. What this something is has been variously described. To some it is a feeling, an attitude, a mood; to others, a meaning or a complex of meanings; to others, an idea, an ideology, a truth; to others, an insight, an intuition, an imaginative view of the world.<sup>44</sup>

The primary task of Romanos was to drive home the Church's teachings as dramatically and as effectively as possible. The dramatic relevance and intensity of imagery of his kontakia reflect how well he carried out this mandate.

In summarising the role of the Melode, Topping's metaphor is as apt as it is beautiful:

Like the angels on Jacob's ladder, [the Melode] comes and goes between heaven and earth, uniting spirit and matter within the folds of his song.<sup>45</sup>

### **The political role of architecture**

Among the more tangible external signs of the gradual transformation of Byzantium from a Roman to a Greek state, stood the buildings of Byzantium, both secular and religious. In their design they reflected the synthesising and compromising spirit of the Empire. The Roman basilica form was enhanced by the Byzantine solution to the engineering problem

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44. Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Poetics, Rhetoric and Logic: Studies in the Basic Disciplines of Criticism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1975, p. 217.

45. Eva C. Topping, 'The poet-priest in Byzantium,' *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, XIV, 1969.



of placing a dome on a square base. Justinian counted among his other engineering triumphs solutions to the problems of mass and space, from the first small experimental church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus to the crowning achievement of Hagia Sophia.

Geanakoplos perceives a deliberate political end in the building of churches:

The evidence ... would certainly seem to indicate that Justinian, like Constantine before him, followed a policy of encouraging the construction of churches in order to combat heresy as well as paganism.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, Geanakoplos cites 'a very striking and effective argument, based on John Malalas, regarding the emperors' building creations *ktiseis* ... in imitation of divine creativity — evidence which further emphasizes the parallel we have been drawing between God's power in heaven and his viceroy's activities on earth.'<sup>47</sup>

In the same manner as rhetoric and music, architecture was used to reinforce the precepts of Christianity. MacDonald outlines the creative vision demanded of Christian architects. At the beginning of the fourth century when Christianity was tolerated, 'a cognate visual and spatial setting was required.'<sup>48</sup>

The purpose of the architecture that was created was

to express the belief and house the celebrations of those for whom the Incarnation and the Atonement were the very substance and meaning of the Universe. The first Christian architects set out to compose spaces which imitated and intimated that universe in both transcendent and symbolic terms.<sup>49</sup>

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46. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

48. W. C. MacDonald, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, George Braziller, New York, 1962, p. 12.

49. *Loc. cit.*

Not only were the congregations 'given places for assembly and worship';<sup>50</sup> more important,

the buildings scaled down and made viable the abstract immensity of the fundamentals declared by the new religion, and each visual element, whether decorative or more purely architectural, was played to that end.<sup>51</sup>

Architects succeeded in creating another spatial and intellectual dimension as 'The interior of the Byzantine Church, by obliterating the distinction between architecture and decoration, became a magical image of the Christian cosmos.'<sup>52</sup> MacDonald describes the stunning visual effect:

With mosaic and polished marble surfaces washed by light from carefully scaled and positioned windows, or picked out by the flicker of hundreds of lamps dispersed through a hovering chromatic void, the Byzantine celebrant and worshiper were reverentially and gorgeously housed.<sup>53</sup>

The illusory process is carried still further in Hagia Sophia.

... The interior achieves an unequaled effect of majestic weightlessness and profound harmony through a paradoxical, even contradictory apposition of architectural phrasing ... Every aspect of the design works towards the desubstantiation of the physical reality of the building.<sup>54</sup>

Philosophical and rhetorical ideas unite with theology in the brilliant achievement of Byzantine architecture. Baldwin Smith notes:

... Christian architecture, with its mystic intent to express the invisible by means of the visible, appropriated the ideological concepts already associated with imperial Roman architecture ... Christian desire to make the church an apparent 'Gate of Heaven,' an impregnable 'Stronghold,' a 'City of God,' and

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50. *Loc. cit.*

51. *Loc. cit.*

52. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

a replica of God's cosmic dwelling was inspired by the ideas and ceremonies which had long been associated with the towered gateways, triumphal arches, and sacred palaces of the Roman emperors ... when these motifs are considered as significant forms in the figurative imagery and rituals of both Antiquity and the Middle Ages, are ... seen persisting as celestial and cosmic symbols in Christian art and architecture they begin to complement one another, revealing a pattern which links together in one tradition the thinking of the mediaeval period with that of Rome and the Hellenic East.<sup>55</sup>

In this replica of Rome, and the imitation of the hierarchy of the heavenly *deisis* reflected by the Emperor and his court we may discern a further subtle influence of rhetoric with its obsession with models for didactic purposes. Certainly the concept of the model is suggested in Geanakoplos' description of the relationship between church and state, which created a high incidence of 'lay participation in church affairs, a unique characteristic of Byzantine civilisation, and, in part, a result of the ideology of Byzantium.'<sup>56</sup>

For church and state were closely associated, in fact intertwined. They constituted one organic structure, the whole being an imitation (*mimesis*) on earth of the kingdom of heaven above. Over the entire structure on earth presided the Basileus, or emperor, as the representative of God.<sup>57</sup>

Geanakoplos points out that the basilica type of building had long been associated with government, and was ideally suited to the 'growing congregations of Christians,' adding that 'it does not have to be pointed out that the term "basilica" comes from the same root as the word *basileus* meaning emperor, the head of the imperial government.'<sup>58</sup>

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55. E. Baldwin Smith, *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1956, pp. 4-5.

56. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

57. *Loc. cit.*

58. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

MacDonald spells out the deliberate policy informing the style of architecture, outlining the reasons for the choice of the basilican shape.

Generally speaking, the basilican building, with its clearly defined hall set along a primary horizontal axis, was the usual form for congregational purposes in the Latin West ... The basic form had long since been in civil use in the Greco-Roman world and was a symbol of authority and social order.<sup>59</sup>

The subliminal effect of architecture and the arts in suggesting imperial power is reflected in

... the extent to which the controlling patrons of architecture, the State and the Church, succeeded in conveying ideas of heavenly powers, universal authority, and awe-inspiring grandeur by means of architectural forms ... the insignia, rituals, ceremonies, and palace architecture of the Roman Court, which had developed over the centuries from Hellenistic and Eastern customs in order to present the Emperor as a divine Kosmokrator, had a lasting influence upon the symbolic art and rituals of the Christian Church.<sup>60</sup>

Summing up this compelling visual, physical environment, MacDonald says:

As in so much Byzantine art, the effect of these churches was one of sumptuous elegance brilliantly and inextricably united with symbolic forms. Within this unity the flowing spaces, encased in an envelope of color, were functionally disposed for liturgical requirements ... A screen of painted icons stood athwart the main axis just beyond the eastern columns. Narthexes, and perhaps side porches, effected spatial and visual transition between the outer world and the jewel-like interiors. Incense, chant, ecclesiastical vestments, and ancient rites were combined with architecture and mosaic to evoke for the spirit and the senses that vision of another world around which Byzantine life revolved.<sup>61</sup>

Complementing this visual environment, the religious imagery embodied in the icons and mosaics, together with the emotional and intellectual effect of Byzantine chant,

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59. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

60. Baldwin Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

61. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

constituted another artful compromise in easing the transition from the secular Roman state to the Christian Empire.

But these trends, and the concept of ruler worship as a useful political stratagem had been set in motion long before, in Mithradatic, Egyptian, Persian and other civilisations, while the metamorphosis of pagan elements into Christian rites provided evidence of their political potential.

At the fringes of the Empire, the central image projected by the physical and metaphysical Constantinople, the liturgy and the Emperor as God's viceroy, served as an icon to which the people could relate, regardless of their own cults. They had their emperor-god and a ritual for worship. Certainly it must have undergone profound transformations in the process of transmission from the capital to the provinces; nevertheless the fundamentals would have been present, especially in the work of the hymnographers like Romanos, as they broadcast the message of Christianity throughout the kingdom.

## *Chapter 4*

### **CHANGES IN THE GREEK LANGUAGE**

The fact that Romanos owed much of his success, both as a poet and as a communicator, to his choice and use of language, warrants a brief overview of some of the more important linguistic developments which were taking place in the Greek language from antiquity to his time, particularly the way in which these changes affected the metre of poetry and, as a corollary, the musical setting of religious texts. One of the main features to be noted here is the change in pronunciation which gradually took place.

This inquiry must also embrace an investigation into the development of religious language and imagery, since these are interconnected in the work of Romanos. His achievement is even more outstanding when one views his writing against the backdrop of his contemporaries' attempts to revive the classical forms of Greek with the resultant literary aberrations.

At the same time, without detracting from the literary and musical genius of Romanos, such a survey helps to place in perspective his overall artistic achievement.

In discussing the changes which the Greek language underwent in the period from classical antiquity to its adoption as the 'lingua franca' of the Byzantine Empire, we are confronted with a number of issues.

It is obvious that only certain facets of a theme so broad can be touched upon in a study of this nature, and reference will be made to some of these linguistic changes only insofar as they are relevant to the literary influences on the kontakia of Romanos.

Perhaps the most convenient way to make a broad classification of the main changes is to divide them roughly into (a) syntactical and pronunciation changes, together with the change from quantitative to stress related metre, and (b) semantic changes.

The proposed divisions are no more than a stop-gap operation, since the number and subtlety of the changes which took place in the language as it spearheaded the spread of Hellenism through the Eastern world are too vast to be dealt with adequately here.

In the process of this dissemination, changes in syntax, pronunciation and associated metrical changes were complicated further by significant semantic changes as, under the brilliant manipulation of the great orators of the early Christian church, words began to lose their original meaning as they were adapted to encompass Christian modes of thought.

In Byzantium itself there was a further dichotomy as the court elite, who were under no compunction to communicate through language, abrogated to itself the classical language, involving a return to archaic usage, while artist-communicators like Romanos, were obliged to write in a language that the masses could understand.

In the meantime, in Byzantine schools, rhetoric held sway as the foundation of the education system, and students were taught the language and style of the classics. Because the examples held up as models were manifestly pagan, the Church Fathers were at pains

to substitute Christian paradigms in the *progymnasmata* or workbooks. They were able to effect this change only through the brilliant literary gifts of the great homilists of the fourth century, such as the Cappadocians and Gregory of Nazianzus.

### **Intrinsic musico-rhythmic nature of classical Greek**

This discussion is concerned mainly with the changes in the Greek language which exerted some influence on the evolution of liturgical poetry, and therefore chant. In the following outline an attempt is made to trace the protean career of the Greek language from its musico-rhythmic origins through the loss of its quantitative and musical character followed by a prose-like state, to its use in the metrical sermons of fourth century Byzantine homilists, forerunners of the central focus of our investigation, Romanos.

Georgiades reminds us that 'For the ancient Greeks, music existed primarily as verse. The Greek verse line was a linguistic and simultaneously a musical reality. The connecting element, common to both language and music, was rhythm.'<sup>1</sup>

... the musical rhythm was contained within the language itself. The musical-rhythmic structure was completely determined by the language. There was no room for an independent musical-rhythmic setting; nothing could be added or changed ... The individual syllables could be neither extended nor abbreviated. They were by nature long or short ... This substantive, concrete aspect of the the ancient Greek language was its musically conceived rhythm...<sup>2</sup>

This applied, however, only to ancient Greek:

By about the fourth century B.C. a singular process had set in, which can be viewed as the shrinkage of the musical component ... The language became increasingly uncertain in its handling of the musical-rhythmic component, the musical substance became even less distinct until it vanished altogether. This

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1. Thrasybulos Georgiades (trs M. L. Gollner), *Music and Language: The Rise of Western Music as Exemplified in Settings of the Mass*, CUP, 1982, p. 4.

2. *Loc. cit.*



process was completed during the first centuries of Christendom ... After the loss of that quality which was essential to the verse, namely its firm rhythmic-musical contour, there remained only a rhythmically amorphous mass. There emerged what we call prose ... As long as the musical-rhythmic principles of antiquity ruled, the accents were performed melodically rather than dynamically. Only after the musical substance had fallen away did they come into the foreground, now transformed into dynamic accents ... This process can also be documented historically: whereas we encounter verse (the Homeric hexameter) at the beginning of the ancient Greek linguistic tradition, it is the new prose which we find at the inception of Western Christian history ... Verses emerge from this base as a secondary and a later product, and they no longer contain the musical-rhythmic components which characterized the verse of Greek antiquity.<sup>3</sup>

The ramifications of these linguistic changes can be seen in the changed concept of *μουσική*. Georgiades notes that the ancient Greek verse line was 'music and poetry in one, and precisely because of this it could not be separated into music and poetry as two tangibly distinct components,' and that 'For this particular vehicle of meaning the Greeks ... had a special term: *μουσική* (*musike*').<sup>4</sup>

... in the process of the shrinkage of the linguistic-musical substance there remained ... a musical shell which became autonomous, which became what we call music ... From the original unity has resulted a duality: from *μουσική* have emerged poetry and music.<sup>5</sup>

Clark reinforces Georgiades concerning the primacy of rhythm.

... we should be aware constantly that the ancient speakers and theorists of prose style were dealing with the spoken word or the written word addressed to the mind's ear. Seneca betrays the ear-mindedness of the ancients when he says 'Even when we write we are in the habit of punctuating' (*Epistolae* II). For to him, as to the others, punctuation was a pause in speaking. Consequently it is only natural that the ancients conceived the sentence first as a rhythmical pattern and only second as a logical pattern.<sup>6</sup>

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3. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

5. *Loc. cit.*

6. Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, p. 94.

### Christianity provides platform for rhetoric

Together with linguistic changes, rhetoric also underwent modifications in its transmission from classical antiquity to Byzantium, which are discussed in Part II, Chapter 1. Suffice to say here that it did not reach the Byzantines in its undiluted form straight from the treatises of Aristotle and Plato, but from the hands of later rhetors like Hermogenes and Aphthonius.

And while classical rhetoric provided the foundation for the education system of Byzantium, it was the evolving Christian religion which gave rhetoric its thrust.

Byzantine rhetoric ... was primarily nurtured by opportunities for epideictic oratory in both Church and State. The church found a need for [rhetoric] in exegesis of the Scriptures, in theological disputation, and eventually in preaching.<sup>7</sup>

Since they needed the techniques of rhetoric to meet the heretics on their own terms, the Early Fathers at first had to tolerate the pagan texts associated with it. Sokrates (Scholasticus) justifies the study of classical philosophy on the ground that

the Scriptures do not instruct us in the art of reasoning, by means of which we may be enabled successfully to resist those who oppose the truth. Besides, adversaries are most easily foiled when we can use their own weapons against them.<sup>8</sup>

As we have noted, this impasse was able to be solved through the rhetorical genius of early Christian homilists, including the Cappadocians and Gregory of Nazianzus, whose command of classical rhetoric enabled Christian paradigms to replace the pagan examples, with no loss of virtuosity.

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7. George Kennedy, 'The classical tradition in rhetoric,' in M. Mullet and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 23.

8. George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1983, p. 189.

In this reliance upon and need for models, Kennedy emphasises the contribution of Gregory of Nazianzus:

The most important figure in the synthesis of classical rhetoric and Christianity is Gregory of Nazianzus, whose speeches became the preeminent model for Christian eloquence throughout the Byzantine period.<sup>9</sup>

Gregory became 'the great model for the union of Greek eloquence and Christianity and was so studied throughout the Byzantine period.'

It was his use of Attic or high style which effectively established it as the official language of the Church in contrast to even the more elevated forms of *koinē*.<sup>10</sup>

Though critical of much ecclesiastical language, Mango recognises its important role in the literary spectrum of Byzantium:

There can be no doubt that 'ecclesiastical' Greek was the main medium of Byzantine literature exclusive of belles-lettres, and, in one form or another, may account for as much as eighty per cent of it. Since it was used in church it must have been intelligible to a considerable segment of the population ... yet it was never forged into a sensitive tool of expression.<sup>11</sup>

Mango notes that there was 'something inherently flat and prosaic' about ecclesiastical Greek, with writers tending to 'pile adjective upon adjective, to line up a string of nearly synonymous phrases or else to entangle their constructions.'<sup>12</sup> From a syntactical point of view, he criticises the 'high incidence of paratactic constructions, which Greek seems to have inherited from the Semitic world,' which 'produced a pervasive monotony,' while

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

11. *Loc. cit.*

12. Cyril A. Mango, *Byzantium, the Empire of New Rome*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1980, p. 236.

'considerable ambiguity was introduced by an indiscriminate use of the third person pronoun (or adjective).'<sup>13</sup>

Romanos' poetry must have seemed revolutionary in such a literary wasteland.

### 'Simplicity' of Gospels challenges rhetoric

Another factor which profoundly affected the development of the Greek language in Byzantium was the efforts of the great homilists of the fourth century to overcome the so-called 'simplicity' of Scriptural literature by effecting a compromise between the classical forms of the language and Christian content.

...many churchmen actively championed the use of the lowly speech and rejected 'the fine style of the Hellenes' which they compared to the proverbial honey that drips from the mouth of a whore. They argued that to cultivate the epic and iambic metres was not only childish; it was an insult to Christ and the apostles.<sup>14</sup>

This was in contrast to the school of thought which attempted to make the Scriptures more linguistically sophisticated:

The Apologists of the Second Century, in their attempt to explain and defend Christianity, were necessarily addressing the pagan world and argued in terms which that society could understand; moreover they utilized Attic language and style in order to be taken seriously by an educated audience, though in their communications to each other they held to the humble *koinē*.<sup>15</sup>

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13. *Loc. cit.*

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-5.

15. Kennedy, 1983, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

The rationale behind this attitude was the embarrassment felt by intellectual Christians, educated in classical rhetoric, when confronted by what they felt was the artlessness of the language of the Gospels.

Bizarre efforts to compensate for this lack tested the ingenuity of Christian rhetors, who had been prohibited from teaching pagan authors and who, in order to have a subject to teach, attempted to 'transpose the Scriptures into an antique form or genre: the Old Testament was rendered in hexameters or iambs; the New Testament transformed into Platonic dialogues ...'<sup>16</sup> Ševčenko adds to the list:

About the middle of the fifth century, the Greek Psalter, the most frequently read part of the Septuagint, was translated into Homeric verse; a life of a saint – St. Cyprian – was rewritten in hexameters by the Christian empress Eudocia; authentic Homeric lines were put together by the same empress and others and made into *centos*, 'quilts,' or a continuous narration, in order to render, among other things, Gospel stories and parts of Genesis in epic diction ...<sup>17</sup>

### Changes in syntax and pronunciation

With its transmission to Byzantium, rhetoric underwent many changes as it was manipulated to serve the new Christian faith. Running parallel with these attempts to reconcile philosophical, rhetorical and theological concepts were continuous syntactical and semantic changes taking place in the Greek language itself. Some of these are detailed by Mango:

Like all living languages, however, Greek underwent a continuous development in phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary ... we must note one factor that was to have lasting consequences, namely the disappearance of the quantity of vowels (long and short by nature or by position) whose place was taken by the tonic accent ... diphthongs ceased to be pronounced, the dual, the

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16. Ihor Ševčenko, *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1982, p. II 60.

17. *Ibid.*, p. II 55.

middle voice, the optative, the dative case all went out of normal use ... To the extent that we know it, ordinary spoken Greek of the Byzantine period was much closer to modern than to ancient Greek.<sup>18</sup>

However, to gain a full appreciation of the state of the language, we have to read

Mango's remarks on the texts that have survived:

The linguistic chaos was even worse than we imagine, since the editions we use have been subjected to a process of correction. It is only when we consult the manuscripts of works that were not considered as 'classics' that we realize how much variation was allowed ...<sup>19</sup>

We gain some glimpse of the linguistic stratification which took place also from Mango:

There developed not so much a *diglossia* a double language, as a whole tier of linguistic levels. Attic was reserved for belles-lettres – not the Attic of the fifth century B.C. but that of the Atticists of the Roman imperial period, and the more recherché the better.<sup>20</sup>

On another level was 'the language of the Bible and liturgy which corresponded to the *koinê* of the Hellenistic period,' and on yet another 'common speech which had already moved a considerable distance from the *koinê*.'<sup>21</sup>

The development of the science of grammar came just at the time when the separate Greek dialects were giving way to a single common language (*κοινή*).<sup>22</sup>

The loss of a standard diction is noted also by Kennedy:

... In the third century, Greek prose style continued to develop naturally with marked changes in diction and rhythm from those of the fourth century ... the

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18. Mango, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

20. *Loc. cit.*

21. *Loc. cit.*

22. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, pp. 295-6.

development of the Greek language into a world tongue tended to produce a bizarre product with distinct loss of any standard of pure diction. According to Cicero, after the decline of oratory in Athens there followed a period when oratory was still in flower in the cities of Asia Minor, though the style was much affected by foreign ways of thought and speech.<sup>23</sup>

Referring to this trend to Asianism, Kennedy notes that critics of the first century BC see it as the most important development in early Hellenistic rhetoric. Conversely, by the mid-first century B.C. opposition to Atticism, which chose its models from the Attic orators of the classical period, increased.

#### **The effect of pronunciation changes on poetic metre**

It can be seen that this loss of a standard diction, together with changes in pronunciation, would have a profound effect upon poetry and poetic metre.

... the character of the Greek language changed during the early centuries of the Christian era, and by the fourth century was pronounced no longer according to pitch accent, but with a stress accent so heavy that the quantities were totally obscured. When a Byzantine read hexameter verses, therefore, (a purely quantitative metre) they did not sound like verse at all. The iambic trimeter ... could be easily adjusted to suit Byzantine pronunciation by regulating the number of syllables and making the stress accents occupy the position of the original long syllables – some quantitative iambic lines indeed automatically fulfilled these requirements – and it is not surprising that a metre so convenient to the new pronunciation should eventually begin to supplant the hexameter as the metre of elevated poetry.<sup>24</sup>

Hussey also draws attention to the effect of these changes on liturgical poetry, singling out the work of Romanos as an example of the new writing.

As with some ascetical works, the poetry of the liturgical office was not written in the accepted quantitative classical metres but was rhythmic and accentual. This poetry ranged from a simple verse or short hymn to the longer

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23. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

24. Alan Cameron, *Literature and Society in the Early Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1985, p. I 482.

dramatic hymn-sermons (*kontakia*) derived from Syriac sources and introduced by Romanus the Melodus in the sixth century, and it finally culminated in the elaborate cycle of nine hymns, known as a canon.<sup>25</sup>

Carpenter notes, however, that some early Christian poetry did use quantitative classical metre.

To explain the shift to an accentual basis for rhythmic poetry, three influences must be evaluated: the tradition of the Hebrew synagogue, the sermons of the day and some unusual Syrian hymns and homilies.<sup>26</sup>

All of these influences are discernible in the language of Romanos, who, according to Maas and Trypanis, used 'the Atticized "literary" *koine*, or Hellenistic Greek,' influenced by the 'simple popular language,' with elements of Scriptural (New Testament Greek), as well as many Jewish-Greek elements ('translation Greek').<sup>27</sup>

They add that the frequent 'semiticisms' or 'translation Greek' of certain passages of his cantica 'may be due to Syriac (Aramaic) sources he could have used.'<sup>28</sup>

In this context, Wilder notes:

How Jesus and his followers spoke and wrote could not be separated from what they communicated. In each such new cultural setting the primal dynamic reshaped the particular language-world and language-vehicles to its own purposes and in its own defence ...<sup>29</sup>

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25. Joan M. Hussey, *The Byzantine World*, Hutchinson's University Library, London, 1957, p. 154.

26. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, p. xvii.

27. P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*, OUP, 1963, p. xviii.

28. *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

29. Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p. 118.



Romanos' forging of a language that transcended the bankrupt literary forms of his day, was driven by that same urgent need to communicate.

#### **Semantic changes to accommodate Christian concepts**

Having observed the continuous changes in the Greek language, both syntactically and in pronunciation, to confuse the issue even further, in the effort to fit pagan rhetoric to the service of Christianity, crucial semantic changes were also taking place.

The gradual transition from pagan philosophical concepts to Christian thought processes was accomplished partly by semantic adaptation, for example, Psellus achieves this mutation simply by changing 'gods' to 'God.'

Hunger notes that the 'fusion of classical and modern elements ... became possible only as a result of the intellectual struggle between Christianity and Paganism.'<sup>30</sup> He continues:

This struggle took place mainly in the fourth century as a reevaluation of values. The weight of words is deliberately and aggressively changed by the Christians. They deprived a number of expressions of their previous usage and usurped them for their own cause. The best known examples of this procedure is the change in meaning of *philosophia*, *philosophos*, *philosophhein*. In this case the development had already begun among the Jews, for instance, by Philo of Alexandria, and was furthered by Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea and many others ... The important innovation was to move *philosophia* from the realm of theory to that of practical ethics so that the word was finally 'conquered' to mean 'Christian life' in the sense of the 'ascetic life of a monk,' so that *philosophos* could be equated with 'monk.'<sup>31</sup>

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30. Herbert Hunger, 'The classical tradition in Byzantine literature: The importance of rhetoric in Byzantium, in M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 40.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-1.

Part of this re-evaluation was done by means of metaphor, using, as in the case of St Paul, terminology associated with sport and military life, for instance: ἀγών, ἀθλητής, δρόμος.<sup>32</sup>

Some of the more flagrant examples are cited by Hunger:

... [Eusebius] compares paganism to the worst darkness, Christianity to bright daylight. He calls paganism a sickness (*nosos*) and the Christian faith a medicine (*pharmakon*); the gospel is healing from evil (*iasis kakon*), the cross is *soterion sema*. Eusebius knew very well that all these neologisms were useful for the ideological struggle. In this way he once defined Christianity as 'a new, true knowledge of God which indicated its newness already in its name'...In the sixth century Romanos Melodos still emphasized the newness of Christianity when he lets the Samaritan woman speak the slogan-like 'Let the old end and the new blossom.'<sup>33</sup>

Hunger sees these words being used with Christian and spiritual connotations as giving 'additional importance to the new teaching in the mind of the public,' summing up this complex process with the comment that 'The purpose was to change consciousness by changing language.'<sup>34</sup>

Kustas is in agreement with this assessment, seeing the whole process as changing 'the very way words are looked upon.'<sup>35</sup>

Meyendorff links this trend with hymnology:

The Christological debate [in the age of Justinian] consisted chiefly of a battle between exegetes of Scripture, about philosophical terms adopted by Christian theology in the third and fourth centuries, and about patristic texts making use

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32. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

35. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, p. 55.

of these terms. Liturgical hymnology, which began to flourish at this time, incorporated the results of the controversies and often became a form of credal confession.<sup>36</sup>

### Classical revival spawns literary aberrations

In defence of Atticism, however, it should be noted that though secular literature is open to some criticism on the grounds of its adherence to outmoded classical norms, it is now being viewed in a more sympathetic light as the context in which it was conceived is becoming better understood. However, it has had its share of savage critics in the past, one of the most implacable being Romilly Jenkins:

The Byzantine Empire remained almost the unique example of a highly civilized state, lasting for more than a millenium, which produced hardly any educated writing which can be read with pleasure for its literary merit alone  
...<sup>37</sup>

He extends this view of Byzantine literature to embrace the entire culture:

Byzantine civilization must be characterized from first to last, as wanting in that great gift which nature reserves for her favourites, poetic feeling and expression.<sup>38</sup>

Less easy to refute is Kennedy's summary of Byzantine literary taste, if it is applied strictly to secular literature:

Our literary taste is diametrically opposed to that of educated Byzantines. We appreciate originality, while they prized the cliché; we are impatient of

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36. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Mowbrays, London, and Fordham University Press, USA, 1974, p. 20.

37. Cyril A. Mango, *Byzantium and Its Image: History and Culture of the Byzantine Empire and Its Heritage*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1984, p. II 3.

38. *Ibid.*, p. II 4.

rhetoric, while they were passionately fond of it; we value concision, while they were naturally inclined to elaboration and verbiage.<sup>39</sup>

This latter criticism is justified by the fact that writers of secular poetry intended mainly for court consumption clung to the use of atticisms and archaic forms of the language, as Mango has noted:

Inasmuch as Attic was a dead language, the continued use of it had both a literary and a social dimension. On the literary side, very few Byzantine authors handled it creatively ... it is futile to look for literary merit in their stilted compositions.<sup>40</sup>

The social dimension was that knowledge of Attic was 'the badge of an elite';<sup>41</sup> access to the ancient language was conditional on a rhetorical education.

Burckhardt spells out the full extent of the catastrophe: 'The thing that was officially recognized as literature and admired in the age of Constantine was the most deplorable of all productions, grammatical tricks with words and verses.' While among objectionable artifices were:

epanalepsis, which repeats the beginning word of the hexameter at the end of the pentameter; figured poems, which when carefully written out take the form of an altar, a pan-pipe, an organ, or the like; the combination of all Roman meters in a single poem; enumeration of animal cries; anacyclic verses, which could be read backwards or forwards; and other such aberrations.<sup>42</sup>

Kennedy has already pointed out the emphasis on style at the expense of content, yet, according to Burkhardt, in spite of the atrocities inflicted upon the Greek language, there

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39. Mango, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

41. *Loc. cit.*

42. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949, p. 237.

was a consciousness on the part of the Byzantines of the detrimental process that was taking place, but apparently an inability to find a solution.

If almost all productions of the fourth century betray decline by labored and tortured form, by heaping up of *sententiae*, by the misuse of metaphor for the simple and commonplace, by modern turgidity and artificial archaic aridity, still a peculiar reflection of the classic period rests upon many of these writers. They still show the requirement of artistic style ... [what] emerges as something calculated and self-conscious is the fault of the sinking age, which felt quite clearly that it and its culture was something secondary and derivative and imitated the great models painstakingly and unevenly.<sup>43</sup>

### The achievement of Romanos

As I have shown in my survey of Romanos' sources in Part I, Chapter 1, and in the historical evolution of the kontakion form in Part III, Chapter II, Romanos had many sources to draw upon; however, in common with all great creative artists, he was gifted with that synthetic vision which, at a given historical moment, is able to draw together all the prevailing trends to achieve a brilliant creative and aesthetic result.

I have pointed out already the profound effect of the Word on Greek society in antiquity, and subsequent history has served to emphasise the continuing shaping influence exerted upon the Greek people by their language.

Bearing these changes and transitions in mind, one begins to appreciate the synthesis achieved by Romanos in adapting to these changes and evolving a language which combined the virtues of being intelligible to the masses, yet was of an elevated enough character to do justice to his sacred themes.

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43. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

While it is conceded that the bulk of secular poetry deserves castigation, the general consensus now among Byzantine scholars is that it was liturgical poetry that carried on the great creative literary tradition of antiquity:

... no one will deny that the hymns of Romanus the Melode, in particular, those of Cosmas of Maiuma, Andrew of Crete and John Damascene to a lesser extent, display a felicity of phrase and depth of feeling that are generally lacking in nearly all other works of Byzantine poetry ...<sup>44</sup>

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44. Mango, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-2.

*Part II*

**THE INFLUENCE OF RHETORIC  
AND ITS DIFFERENT TRADITIONS**



## Chapter 1

# GENERAL RHETORICAL THEORY: CONTRIBUTING STREAMS

In Part I, a role is posited for chant that broadens the conventional concept of the function of music in the setting of religious texts to encompass a mnemonic function.

The present investigation into Romanos' use of rhetorical devices in his kontakia has tended to support this theory in demonstrating the supremacy of the text, as well as providing solid evidence for the deliberate employment of rhetorical concepts in both music and texts.

Bearing this in mind, Part II presents a general survey of rhetoric from its classical origins to its transmission to Byzantium, followed by detailed examination of instances in Romanos' kontakia in which he appears to be drawing explicitly upon, or at least following the same line of thought as that expounded by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, the Roman rhetoricians, and later exegetes, like Hermogenes in his *De Ideis*. Therefore, for present purposes, our interest in the evolution of rhetoric covers the period from antiquity to the fifth and sixth centuries, when the art of Byzantine hymnography reached its peak.

### **The origins of rhetoric**

Rhetoric was the main carrier of the classical tradition, as Mullett and Scott note: 'The classical tradition itself was not taken for granted: precisely what was passed on and why?



Only with rhetoric did we feel that we had found an important "carrier" of antique standards ...<sup>1</sup>

Burckhardt provides the reason for the persistence of rhetoric and the central place it occupied in classical Greece: 'To the ancients, rhetoric and its collateral sciences were the indispensable complement to their norm of beautiful and free existence, to their arts and their poetry.'<sup>2</sup>

The oral nature of Greek society is evident in Greek literature, which flourished long before it was written down.<sup>3</sup>

Further evidence of the oral bias of Greek society can be found in the Greek legal system, under which citizens conducted their own defence in court. This provided a fillip to the development of rhetoric which played the central role in ancient education.<sup>4</sup>

A parallel instance of the primacy of the oral tradition can be found in the notation of Byzantine chant, which was written down only after the establishment of an oral tradition.

... in the classical tradition written composition is secondary to oral composition ...Great poetry, like great oratory, is a civic phenomenon: the epic, the drama, and even the lyric poetry of the Greeks show this clearly.<sup>5</sup>

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1. M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 1.
  2. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1949, p. 240.
  3. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 3.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
  5. George Kennedy, 'The classical tradition in rhetoric,' in M. Mullett & R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 22.

Certain outstanding early orators colour the development of rhetoric, from the extravagances of Gorgias, in whose hands it became a type of prose poetry more concerned with sound than content, not unlike later French symbolist poetry, to Isocrates, who aspired to greater heights for rhetoric moving it towards the realms of philosophy.

### **The continuity of the rhetorico-classical tradition**

Hunger refutes any lingering doubts concerning the continuity of the classical tradition in Byzantium.

The classical tradition was never completely disrupted in Byzantium and therefore should be considered more as survival than as revival. The classical tradition lived on in all those works of theological or secular literature which were written in the literary language.<sup>6</sup>

Maguire acknowledges the powerful influence of rhetoric in this process:

There have been few cultures in which the influence of rhetoric has been as pervasive as in the Byzantine empire during the Middle Ages. In Byzantium the art of eloquence was one of the cornerstones of higher education, from the fourth through to the fifteenth centuries. Some Byzantines went so far as to consider rhetoric the equal partner of philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

### **Rhetoric criticised for its 'immorality'**

However, not every student of Byzantine culture has placed rhetoric on this pedestal. Maguire cites Byzantium's trenchant critic, Romilly Jenkins, who suggests that the practice of rhetoric influenced not only the philosophy of the Byzantines but also their

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6. Herbert Hunger, 'The classical tradition in Byzantine literature: the importance of rhetoric in Byzantium,' in M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds) *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 35.

7. Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1981, p. 3.

character, intimating that certain exercises ‘in which pupils alternately attacked and defended the same proposition with equal ardor and persuasiveness,’ made for instability, and characterised rhetoric as ‘the most powerful and pernicious influence of Hellenism on the mind of Byzantium.’<sup>8</sup>

Plato also distrusted rhetoric and considered it immoral on the grounds that it was used with the sole object of swaying a jury regardless of the justice or otherwise of the result, intimating that such a use of rhetoric ignored its great philosophical potential to reveal the truth of whatever topic it had under consideration.

The Romans also had reservations about the morality of rhetoric, while the Early Fathers of the Church openly spurned it at first. Passages in Romanos’ kontakia also appear to display a contempt for rhetoric, though, in view of my findings in this study in which Romanos has obviously drawn upon rhetoric in his compositions, one can only assume that he was taking up this conventional stance in order to align himself with official attitudes, and that, like the Early Fathers, he perceived the need to use its techniques in order to enhance his art, and to fight the enemies of Christendom with their own weapons.

Hunger sums up the general attitude when he says:

Radical proponents of the new doctrine attacked on the one hand the unacceptable pagan content of Greek literature, and on the other the element of persuasion in rhetoric. This core of rhetoric had been formulated by the ancient sophists to make the weaker case the stronger ... without regard for truth or moral values – which brought about Christian criticism on ethical grounds ... This judgement applied equally to the rhetorical means of persuasion, and to the whole array of rhetorical topics and metaphors.<sup>9</sup>

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8. *Loc. cit.*

9. Hunger, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

### The moral dimension of classical rhetoric

In defence of classical rhetoric, however, it must be conceded that it did have a moral dimension, in that it also carried over some of the classical concepts of virtue.

Halliwell notes 'a certain concept of morality which permeated the writings of antiquity, and which was to make them more acceptable and compatible later with Christian values,' and that this can be seen in the classical attitude to poetry which 'ranged between falsehood or literal truth.'<sup>10</sup> He continues:

On the positive side, the notion of epic poetry as a preserve of historical truth made it the ideal vehicle for the expression of the narrative aspects of the lives of Jesus and Mary. The claim in antiquity for 'poetic truth' depended upon the supposition that poets could claim to portray, as no one else before the philosophers could plausibly do, the nature of the divine world and its control over the world of men.<sup>11</sup>

Extending the concept further, Halliwell says:

And if poets had religious truths to offer, they could also arrogate moral wisdom, for much Greek moral thinking and practice was shaped by the challenge of understanding the human predicament in relation to the gods' interest in, and power over, human affairs ...It was a simple matter for this view to encompass poetry as having also an educational purpose.<sup>12</sup>

In the light of these concepts, the didactic purpose of the kontakia of Romanos in propagating the Divine Word represents a continuous thread of thought reaching back to antiquity.

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10. Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, USA, 1986, p. 10.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

12. *Loc. cit.*

Kustas is in accord with Halliwell when he says that in reconstructing the framework within which much Byzantine literature was written we see it as 'a literature that could be gauged and admired in terms of how well it subscribed to a distinctive synthesis of moral and aesthetic purpose, and that enjoyed the added sanction of being rooted in ancient modes.'<sup>13</sup>

### The systematisation of rhetoric

Though some writings on rhetoric existed before his time, Aristotle is credited with writing the first systematic treatise on the subject. The earliest attempts to form divisions of rhetoric involved primarily discussion of the parts of a judicial oration: prooemium, narration, proof, and epilogue comprising the basic parts, with others sometimes added. Aristotle concerned himself with means of persuasion, which he divided first into artistic techniques and the use of direct evidence. Artistic techniques were, in turn, divided into proof based on logical argument, on *ethos*, and on *pathos*. These are found in three kinds of oratory: deliberative, epideictic, judicial.

Eventually a five-part division of rhetoric became standardised: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *actio*.

An important development, for later Byzantine theory, was the adaptation of Theophrastus' four virtues of style: purity, clarity, propriety, and ornamentation, which were termed *Res*, and comprised elegance, composition, and dignity. This aspect was to find expression later in the works of Hermogenes.

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13. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, p. 32.

By the fourth century the Greeks had systematised the art of public speaking and rhetoric had begun to amass sets of rules and textbooks, which had the long term effect of ossifying it into a genre art.

With the decline of the Athenian democracy, rhetoric also lost its impetus so that in the Hellenistic age rhetoric became the province of the schoolmasters.

Gradually an educational system evolved in which 'grammar,' the study of language and literature, was followed by rhetoric, and a series of preliminary exercises known as *progymnasmata* became part of the training for oratory.

#### **Roman interest in rhetoric**

The Romans were not slow to perceive the advantages of rhetoric, whatever they thought of other Greek intellectual contributions, though rhetoric also had its detractors in Rome, who distrusted rhetoric for the same reasons that Plato had, and resented the insidious escalation of Greek influence that it represented.

According to Kennedy the second century was 'the time when the Romans first became aware of Greek culture on a large scale,' and this was followed by a widespread desire to learn the oratorical techniques of the Greeks.<sup>14</sup>

By the first century it was already evident that rhetorical studies were as much at home in Rome as in Athens and that conditions of Roman oratory, the attitudes of Roman students, and the problems of adapting Greek rhetoric to the Latin language were the most potent factors in contemporary rhetoric.<sup>15</sup>

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14. Kennedy, 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

In spite of some Roman opposition, treatises on rhetoric began to be written in Latin, the two earliest being the *Ad Herennium* and Cicero's *De Inventione*.

The teaching of rhetoric also began to take place in Latin, one of the first instructors being Plotius Gallus who attempted to 'popularise rhetoric and adapt it to Roman needs by teaching it in Latin, by dispensing with some of the complications of Greek theory and by using illustrations from Roman history and literature.'<sup>16</sup>

The Roman desire to substitute for the Greek examples those drawn from Roman history and literature is instructive in view of a similar development in Byzantium, when the Early Fathers also replaced pagan examples with Scriptural paradigms. It also serves to demonstrate the flexibility of rhetoric, possibly one of the factors that contributed to its survival from antiquity.

#### **Roman systems of rhetoric developed**

Clarke notes that complete systems of rhetoric are given in two works of the Republican period, *Ad Herennium* and *Partitiones Oratoriae*, together with Cicero's *De Inventione*, covering one division of the whole, parts of *De Oratore*, based on the main divisions of traditional rhetoric, and *Topica*, while from the Imperial period we have Quintilian's comprehensive summary of ancient rhetoric down to his own time.<sup>17</sup>

In the Roman system, the material of rhetoric was traditionally divided according to the different types of oratory, the different functions of the orator and the different parts of

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16. M. L. Clarke, *Rhetoric at Rome: A Historical Survey*, Cohen & West Ltd, London, 1953, p. 15.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

a speech. The three types of oratory are forensic or judicial, deliberative and epideictic (*genus iudiciale*, *genus deliberativum* and *genus demonstrativum*).

Where Roman rhetoric begins to touch upon the kind of rhetorical development that took place in Byzantium is in the *elocutio*, which was a step in the direction of literary criticism, leading to the development of a doctrine of style.

In *Ad Herennium* the first two virtues of style, correctness and clarity, are regarded as subdivisions of *elegantia*, and appropriateness is replaced by *compositio*, euphony, while part of *elocutio* was concerned with *ornatio*.

Among the figures listed in *Ad Herennium*, there are a number which can be discerned in Romanos' texts, for example, *repetitio*, better known as *anaphora* in Greek,<sup>18</sup> the allied figure *conduplicatio* (*anadiplosis*) the doubling of a word or words, *demonstratio* (*hypotyposis*) a vivid word picture of events, which could also come under the heading of *ekphrasis*, the Byzantine concept of 'seeing,' which is dealt with in detail in the following chapter.

Certain figures were to be used with discretion, such as (a) *exclamatio* (*apostrophe*), for instance, in the addressing of a person, city or place. Romanos has ignored this admonition in the Akathistos Hymn where he addresses the Virgin directly, praising her in a long series of 'Hails'; (b) *similiter desinens* (*homoiooteleuton*) the use of words with similar terminations, a favourite rhetorical device of Romanos, examples of which can be found in Chapter 2 of this section, also in his *Akathistos Hymn*; and *annominatio* (word play), which Romanos indulged in, usually at the expense of the classical writers. An

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 34.



example of this play on sound taken from the Akathistos Hymn is given also in Chapter 2, in which Romanos uses the sound 'bas' several times in different contexts.

Quintilian was an academic rhetorician, an eminent teacher and educationalist, and barrister. He combined the theoretical, educational and practical in the *Institutio Oratoria*, in attempting to clarify existing doctrine.

In company with the Stoics, Quintilian saw the need for rhetoric to throw off its 'immoral' image, insisting that the orator should be a good man. In adopting this stance, Quintilian unwittingly helped pave the way, with the Neoplatonists, for rhetoric to enter into the service of Christianity.

The fact that rhetoric became the foundation of Byzantine education could also owe something to Quintilian's contention that the art of oratory included all that was necessary for the training of an orator from his earliest years, though, like Cicero, he believed that the orator should be widely read in subjects like history, philosophy and literature. Hellenistic education included music and mathematics, and Quintilian gives these a place among studies preliminary to entry to the rhetorical schools. Music was originally united with philosophy, however, since philosophy had usurped the function of oratory, music really belonged to the latter (oratory) since it was useful to know about gestures, arrangement of words and inflexions of voice.

### **The Second Sophistic**

The age of the Antonines, was a golden age for the art of speech.<sup>19</sup> It was the age of the so-called Second Sophistic, an essentially Greek phenomenon, characterised by rhetorical virtuosi who travelled round from city to city, at a time when rhetoric was honoured in the highest quarters. The Egyptian poets were part of this peripatetic scene, and, as I have noted in Chapter 1, Part I, could have had a formative influence upon Romanos, in his political as well as poetic development.

It was, however, the Greeks who were foremost in theorising. 'Hermagorean doctrine came down to the lesser rhetoricians independently of earlier Roman rhetoric; there was added the influence of Hermogenes, the ablest Greek rhetorician of the imperial period.'<sup>20</sup> In the field of rhetorical theory, Hermogenes, 'a sophist who lost his powers and took to writing, added new refinements to traditional theory,' and went on to become 'the major source of Byzantine rhetorical studies.'<sup>21</sup>

### **The transmission of rhetoric to Byzantium**

Since we are concerned with the rhetorical influences which shaped the thought-world of Romanos, the object of our attention must be the form of rhetoric which dominated the Byzantine educational system.

We now know that rhetoric was not transmitted to Byzantium in its undiluted form directly from the hands of Aristotle and Plato, but was shaped by many influences,

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19. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

including Roman, before reaching the Byzantines via the treatises of great masters like Hermogenes and Aphthonius.

The standard method of teaching rhetoric was through the *progymnasmata* or exercise books, which held up the oratory of the great classical rhetors as examples for the students to emulate.

### The dominance of Hermogenes

What were the features of Hermogenes' treatises which made them the main texts for the teaching of rhetoric in Byzantium?

It appears that the stream of rhetoric favoured by the Christians in trying to effect an interface with pagan thought, evolved from Plato's theory of Forms, which found its Byzantine expression in the *De Ideis* of Hermogenes, whose works gradually gained supremacy, as Clark notes:

Also of the second century ... was Hermogenes of Tarsus, who, in addition to his *Progymnasmata*, left rhetorical treatises on *status*, *inventio*, and the laws of style, derived from Demosthenes and Plato as models.<sup>22</sup>

There is, therefore, a continuous line of influence from Plato, through the Neoplatonists to the theories of Hermogenes, whose 'Christianization' gives us an insight into 'the interrelation of Neoplatonic and Christian thought and its application to rhetorical questions.'<sup>23</sup> Cameron confirms the ongoing development of Christian literature over the

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22. D. Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, p. 179.

23. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

first six centuries of the millenium, as well as the fact that Christianity had become firmly established by that time.

### Hermogenes' De Ideis and the theory of forms

In seeking a text of the work of Hermogenes to study in detail how these rhetorical concepts, which so powerfully influenced Byzantine thought, might bear on a combined study of the music and texts of Romanos, I have found George Kustas' *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric* a most useful basic document.

In outlining the theory of Forms presented in Hermogenes' *De Ideis*, Kustas traces the evolution of rhetorical theory, practice and ethics, and its role in the semantic convolutions which bridged the gap between it and philosophy and theology as every effort was bent towards the exegesis of the new Christian concepts.

Kustas recounts how Hermogenes, among several contenders, 'survived to become the basis of Byzantine rhetoric,' adding that 'After the end of the fifth century there is hardly any Byzantine intellectual who is not touched by him. His works, following the extensive scholarly effort expended on him by the Neoplatonists, come to stand for rhetoric itself.'<sup>24</sup>

Kustas notes that Neoplatonic interest in rhetoric was very strong, while Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was 'less in evidence than perhaps one might expect.'<sup>25</sup>

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24. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

### Reasons for Neoplatonic interest in rhetoric

Neoplatonic interest in rhetoric was stimulated because ‘... the movement, as the successor to Plato, had catholic interests touching on many departments of ancient culture, including religion, literature, science, and philosophy,’<sup>26</sup> while the Neoplatonists’ preference for Hermogenes was because ‘the underlying principles of his system appeared more in keeping with their own speculations ... Hermogenes survived because he had more to say to the emerging order of things, both pagan and Christian, and because he said it better.’<sup>27</sup>

Further reasons advanced by Kustas for the adoption of Hermogenes’ theoretical base by the Neoplatonists lie in the fact that his work is ‘all-inclusive.’

... he is the only author to deal with the whole of rhetoric. Further, his observations are not limited to the courtroom. Being of wider application they could become, as indeed they did, a general school text for training in all manner of discourse. In addition, the matter-of-fact style, the careful definitions and distinctions, and the pedagogical tone must have appealed to the dialectical interests of the Neoplatonists at a time when they were themselves developing their philosophical commentaries along the same lines, and may well have found a ready welcome in Christian exegetical circles insofar as they too were adopting similar techniques.<sup>28</sup>

Pointing out that ‘Hermogenes became popular at a time when the Neoplatonists sought not to continue the old conflict but to find accommodation between philosophy and rhetoric,’<sup>29</sup> Kustas discusses how philosophical analysis was applied to rhetorical questions and philosophical terminology was used to define rhetorical issues.

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

From the corpus of Hermogenes which consisted of five works: *Progymnasmata*, *De Inventione*, *De Statibus*, *De Ideis*, *De Methodo Vehementiae*, (the first two spurious), Kustas has chosen the *De Ideis* because 'it is particularly attuned to the rhetorical temper of the age.' He explains the adoption of Hermogenes' views as the base upon which subsequent Byzantine literary practice was built by the fact that they are related not only to pagan rhetoric, but also encompass the literary experience of Christianity.

In late antiquity the cultural forces laying claim to men's souls dip from common reservoirs of metaphysical and aesthetic belief. The sense of the mystical, the understanding of the relation between universal and particular, the fascination with the complex and the feeling for the sublime, color not only the metaphysical speculations of the philosophers but theories of art and of language and literature as well.<sup>30</sup>

Hunger also draws attention to the significance of the five-part *Corpus* of Hermogenes which 'gained acceptance only slowly' but which 'served as the theoretical foundation for all Byzantine rhetoric.'<sup>31</sup>

#### The structure of the De Ideis

The structure of the *De Ideis* is set out in detail in Chapter 4 of this section, which applies Hermogenes' theories in detail to the music and texts of selected kontakia of Romanos, therefore only a general outline will be given here.

The *De Ideis* lists seven *ideai* or Forms of style: Clarity, Loftiness and Grandeur, Elegance and Beauty, Conciseness, Ethos, Sincerity, and Force, together with their appropriate subdivisions, which may also properly be called Forms, while each Form is described

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30. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

31. Hunger, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

under eight Categories: Sentence, Mode, Diction, Figures, Cola, Composition, Cadence, and Rhythm.

The direction which rhetoric took in Byzantium was conditioned by the theocratic nature of its civilisation, in that forensic rhetoric became redundant in an environment where imperial edicts carried the force of laws, so that the deliberative and epideictic aspects were developed. The former was cultivated against the heretics, and to persuade the populace to the correct doctrinal stance, while the latter, once these elements were under control, was used to deepen the conviction of the hearers.

The kontakia of Romanos display both of these characteristics, as he went about his task of promulgating the dogmatic pronouncements of the councils, reinforcing the church's teaching, and inculcating desirable socio-religious attitudes, with Mary and Jesus as his great role models.

### **The rationalisation of pagan and Christian thought**

Part of the rationalisation of pagan and Christian thought came from the recognition of the genuine claims of philosophy as a means of discovering the truth, as Lemerle points out:

Hellenic culture (παιδείσις), was neither approved nor condemned by Christ and his disciples ... On the one hand, many Greek philosophers were not far from having a knowledge of God. Thanks to their knowledge of logic (μετὰ λογικῆς ἐπιστήμης) they successfully fought the Epicureans and others who denied the existence of a providence, and thus, though not attaining to true knowledge which was still hidden, they became useful to pious men.<sup>32</sup>

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32. Paul Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism: Notes and Remarks on Education and Culture in Byzantium from its Origins to the Tenth Century* (trs H. Lindsay and A. Moffatt), Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, Canberra, 1986, p. 50.

This identification of the ideal with literature helped to endow it with its distinctive mystical flavour.

... the Platonizing impulse of Hermogenes' rhetorical message, by projecting literary value into the ideal, not only exalts the act of literature itself, but places it in the realm of the distant, hence, perhaps hidden and obscure. In this way it contributes to the mysticism of the Fathers and the whole later Byzantine view.<sup>33</sup>

Kustas sums up the general argument when he says

We are dealing ... with common associative patterns of thinking about character and about style ... Both Christian and pagan interest in late antiquity is focusing attention on the relation of the soul to the terrestrial and ethereal cosmos ... When [Proclus] ... remarks on the basic relationship between poetry and myth in Plato he is putting his finger on a feature of the dialogues which was to serve Christian homiletic needs as well. For in addition to the tendency of the homily to follow the more external prescriptions of style, it could now as regards subject matter substitute Christian narrative for pagan myth and Scriptural quotation for poetic allusion.<sup>34</sup>

#### Formative period of Christian letters

Christianity was firmly established over the first three centuries of the establishment of Byzantium.

... the formative period of Christian literature, viewed from the Byzantine perspective, lay in the centuries between the conversion of Constantine and the crisis of the seventh century. At the time of the crisis, which broke the continuity of the classical cultural tradition, Christianity was firmly established as part of the very structure of the Byzantine state.<sup>35</sup>

This same period saw the remarkable semantic manipulation of rhetoric in the struggle of the Early Christian apologists to combat heresy and to reconcile philosophy and

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33. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

35. Averil Cameron, *New and Old in Christian Literature*, 17th International Byzantine Congress – Major Papers, Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University, Washington DC, A. D. Caratzas, Publisher, New Rochelle, New York, 1986, p. 54.



rhetoric in the service of Christianity. As Hunger notes: 'The victory of the new ideology, Christianity, necessarily brought about major changes in the classical tradition of literature and therefore in rhetoric.'<sup>36</sup>

... there is a large number of rhetorical works in Byzantine literature where pagan themes or whole systems of thought were modified by Christian influence. They result from the tendency to integrate pagan thinking and philosophy into Christian theory ...<sup>37</sup>

Among those willing to integrate these two streams was Clement of Alexandria, who, according to Deiss, instead of challenging pagan literature and culture, 'preferred to have Christianity enter into dialogue with paganism. His view was that culture and faith should complement each other ...'<sup>38</sup>

This general attitude of compromise rather than conflict ensured that the education system remained undisturbed, as Lemerle observes: '... Christianity ... had not felt impelled in the Greek East to create and impose schooling which was Christian in inspiration and curriculum. School and university education remained as it was, and Christianity, while taking its own precautions, accommodated itself to it ... The break, basically, between Christian faith and ancient, that is pagan, tradition is clear and inevitable.'<sup>39</sup>

... they [Christian teachers like Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Cappadocia] came very quickly to a sort of compromise: they admitted that it was necessary to be familiar with the ancient culture in order to fight the pagans with their own weapons, and they admitted that the *artes liberales*, if not an end in

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36. Hunger, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

37. Lemerle, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

38. Lucien Deiss CSS, *Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries* (trs M. J. O'Connell), The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1967, p. 114.

39. Lemerle, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

themselves, did represent a technique which could be put to the service of religion.<sup>40</sup>

The effect of this attitude on the average student is described by Lemerle:

Rather than a revolutionary overthrowing of existing structures, the genius of Christianity lay in choosing to accommodate itself to them ... We have in the last analysis no reason to think that the education a young Greek received in the fifth century differed profoundly from that which he would have received in the second century.<sup>41</sup>

### Church acknowledges need for rhetoric

While officially eschewing the amoral aspects of classical rhetoric, and the egocentric displays in court circles which were attempting to resurrect the ancient language, the Early Fathers nevertheless were obliged to use the techniques of rhetoric to match the subtlety and skills in disputation of their opponents who were well skilled in the sophistic tradition of rhetoric.

This meant that they were constrained to allow pagan texts to be studied. However, as part of the relentless Christianising process which took place, selected classical texts were read for style only, with the content virtually ignored, in an attempt to make them safe for Christian consumption.

With the heresies effectively put down, the emphasis of rhetoric had begun to change also, with the accent less on persuasion and more on reinforcement of beliefs, that is,

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40. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

'rhetoric not so much a study of effective oral exposition (persuasion) as a system of literary composition and ornamentation.'<sup>42</sup>

However, there were still 'grey' areas:

By the seventh century, what we have called 'catholic orthodoxy in the East' bore its own doctrinal identity and had begun to move in its own theological direction. Some of the questions that had been agitating it since the fourth and fifth centuries continued to be central to the doctrinal life of the Church. It was above all the Christological question – or cluster of questions – that refused to remain settled in the East, as one council after another, one theologian after another, one emperor after another, came up with supposedly definitive solutions that failed.<sup>43</sup>

Lemerle cites Sokrates who voices the fears of the Early Fathers concerning Christian writing, pointing out the rhetorical weakness inherent in its simplicity and directness.

On the other hand, the Scriptures, admirable and divine though they may be, do not teach the art of logic (λογικὴ τέχνη) which is necessary for replying to these enemies of the truth whom Christians should be able to fight using their enemies' own weapons.<sup>44</sup>

Sokrates admits, however: '...teachers of the Church, on the contrary, have not ceased to practise it, both in order to acquire fluency of expression and agility of mind (εὐγλωττίας χάριν καὶ γυμνασίας τοῦ νοῦ), and in order to refute the errors of the Hellenes.'<sup>45</sup>

Under these circumstances, The Church Fathers adopted a pragmatic approach:

Whereas the New Testament was devoid of atticism, and whereas some of the early Church Fathers repeatedly criticised the rhetorically embellished writings of pagan authors for their lack of spiritual substance, influential writers in the fourth century

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42. Kennedy, 1981, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

43. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (2): The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974, p. 6.

44. Lemerle, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

came to feel that the further propagation of Christianity would depend on the integration into Christian literature of the entire range of formal pagan culture, which meant a culture steeped in rhetoric.<sup>46</sup>

The embarrassing fact was that, to the Attic-ridden adherents of classical rhetoric and grammatical usage, the Biblical and New Testament texts appeared too simple and artless. Ways had to be found to make rhetoric 'respectable' and to give it a Christian application.

Averil Cameron reviews the situation:

... the early Christian writings and excluding only the works by Hellenised apologists, could be represented as 'simple,' indeed, sophisticated Christian writers themselves ... paradoxically made a virtue out of this 'humilitas' – Christian writing, they said, used the 'language of fishermen' ... Its simplicity could therefore stand for truth, classical culture for conceit.<sup>47</sup>

#### **Substitution of Christian for pagan paradigms**

In effecting this compromise between classical rhetoric and Christian writing, the Early Fathers used typical Greek ingenuity by substituting Christian examples for the pagan texts used to demonstrate the rhetorical principles outlined in the workbooks. This process was facilitated by the fact that, well-educated clerics like the Cappadocians, Gregory and Basil, and Gregory of Nazianzus, had mastered the principles of classical rhetoric and were able to provide the necessary paradigms for students to study in their exercises, as Maguire points out:

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46. Hunger, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

47. Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

The textbooks of rhetoric became partially Christianized by the inclusion of examples drawn from the Bible and the Fathers alongside those from pagan literature.<sup>48</sup>

#### Later development of epideictic aspects of rhetoric

Once the pagan implications of rhetoric had been successfully rationalised by the Church Fathers, and once the crystallisation of doctrine had taken place, they began to perceive for rhetoric a new, epideictic role – that of reinforcing and deepening the conviction of the audience concerning the, by now, established dogma.

As Kennedy comments:

... later Christians ... have often rejected rhetoric as specious and unnecessary adornment ... But in subsequent centuries the Christian orator was often addressing the converted, those on whom God's grace has acted, and was thus preaching to the faithful to deepen their conviction of the Truth. Under these circumstances the devices of classical rhetoric gradually emerge as legitimate tools. The climax of this development in antiquity comes in the panegyric sermons of the great fourth-century preachers like Gregory of Nazianzus. Speaking in an age when Christianity is legal, prestigious, and even fashionable, they adapted all the techniques of the sophist to the exposition of the Truth.<sup>49</sup>

#### The creation of a new Christian rhetoric

The process by which a new, Christian rhetoric was created can be traced also through the Stoics, who 'share with Aristotle the conviction that rhetoric has a philosophical base.'<sup>50</sup>

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48. Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

49. Kennedy, 1981, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-6.

50. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

Indeed, philosophy – we shall come to say theology – is the context in which both clarity and truth were in late antiquity to find ultimate justification within the emerging Christian order.<sup>51</sup>

This blending of philosophy, theology and rhetoric, makes possible the concept expressed by fifth-century philosopher, Isidore of Pelusium, that truth together with its opposite, is a virtue of style, leading Kustas to observe that ‘It is remarkable to see truth and falsehood listed as rhetorical yardsticks.’<sup>52</sup> This theory, according to Kustas, is Isidore’s attempt to supply a Christian counterpart to the relation between philosophy and rhetoric being worked out in Neoplatonic circles.

The identification of style with virtue paves the way for a unique view of literature.

We see here an essentially moral line of thought in the sense that moral terminology is used to describe distinctions of style. Christian composition of whatever kind might thus ultimately be justified not only on its intrinsic merits but also through its use of a classicizing rhetorical tradition which in some of its language appeared to have common moral concerns.<sup>53</sup>

Kustas enlarges on this theme:

To the Christian cleric or layman of late antiquity exposed ... to a text such as Hermogenes, two elements in the Form-structure especially must have rung true in their identity with the claims and features of Christian literature and the definitions of the Christian person.... [These were] *αφέλεια* (simplicity) and *σεμνότης* (dignity) as marking the definition of the style of the Biblical text, and of Patristic literature generally.<sup>54</sup>

This development presented a solution to the ‘problem’ of the ‘simplicity’ of the Gospels.

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51. *Loc. cit.*

52. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Hermogenes in effect gave a handle to generations of Christian writers who, though embarrassed by the simple style of the New Testament, could escape their dilemma by emulating the classical Platonic model, which now shared a common definition with the language of the Gospel ... The same cooperation could now help to define and justify Biblical and Patristic style. The Christian now had at his disposal not only Scriptural authority but also the sanction of pagan learning, the link between the two provided by a common vocabulary of criticism.<sup>55</sup>

Kustas sees the strong interest throughout late antiquity in both logic and rhetoric leading to 'a search for the ἀληθινὴ ρητορικὴ [the true rhetoric],' interpreted by Isidore as 'a synthesis of style and content into a higher Christian unity.'<sup>56</sup>

This synthesis represents the 'idealization of the function of logos in terms of rhetoric.'

It is the equivalent to the idealization of man in the image of God within Christian theology. Such a development was assisted by the adoption in the early Empire of a theory of Forms for the purpose of explaining the operation of literature. By defining stylistic behavior in terms of Platonic ideals the theory recast the whole understanding of rhetorical process and paved the way for supplying not only ethical and moral but metaphysical substance to literary creation.<sup>57</sup>

As Kustas points out, Hermogenes in his theories of rhetoric is 'developing for the world of the literary logos a scheme of interplay between universals and particulars which will have its counterpart in Neoplatonic and Christian speculations about the divine logos.'<sup>58</sup>

... the habits of Christian literature will flourish now within the latitude of the prescriptions of rhetoric, itself adjusted to accommodate new Christian impulses. The subsequent history of Greek letters as of Byzantine politics is one of the conscious or unconscious, ever-shifting interrelation of the two forces.<sup>59</sup>

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55. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

These are strong words – equating rhetoric with political force – but not difficult to understand once the power of the Word in Greek civilisation and thought is grasped.



## Chapter 2

### CLASSICAL RHETORICAL THEORY: ARISTOTLE

This Chapter, which examines the influence of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* on Romanos, together with Chapters 3 and 4, deals with specific applications of rhetorical theory to the music as well as the texts of Romanos.

Later in this Chapter, the rhetorical devices of antithesis, metaphor and ephrasis will be given more detailed treatment, since they are used to great effect by Romanos, and are featured in all the treatises he drew upon. These rhetorical elements are also characteristic of Judaeo-Hellenistic and Syrian poetry, which comprised Romanos' other mainstream source of inspiration.

#### The wider implications of rhetoric

Aristotle, after stating his main theme, i.e. that rhetoric may be defined as 'the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion,' says that:

The man who is to be in command of [the means of effecting persuasion] must, it is clear, be able to reason logically, to understand human characters and excellences, and to understand the emotions – that is, to know what they are, their nature, their causes and the way in which they are excited. It thus appears that rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies. Ethical studies may fairly be called political; and for this reason rhetoric masquerades as political science ... (1358<sup>a</sup>23)<sup>1</sup>

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1. W. Rhys Roberts, 'Rhetoric, Books I, II & III,' in Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (rev. Oxford trs), Vol. 2, Bollingen Series LXXI.2, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984, pp. 2155-56.

We have noted already the political dimensions of Romanos' hymnwriting, as well as his own highly-tuned political acumen. His ability to 'understand human characters ... and ... the emotions' has also been observed by scholars who have investigated his texts, and who are unanimous in their praise of his psychological insights into the characters he portrays in his kontakia. Maas and Trypanis endorse this opinion:

The bewilderment and sorrow of the Virgin in *On Mary at the Cross*, for example, truly reflects the suffering and the hope of all mothers, who have loved and lost their children; it purges the emotions through genuine tragic pity and fear.<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle's remarks on tragedy, also may readily be applied to the kontakion, when he says that

A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories ... in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. Here by 'language with pleasurable accessories' I mean that with rhythm and harmony; and by 'the kinds separately' I mean that some portions are worked out with verse only, and others in turn with song. (1449<sup>b</sup>24)<sup>3</sup>

### Romanos fulfils Aristotle's requirements for poetry

Concerning the attributes of a poet, Aristotle adds:

... poetry demands a man with a special gift for it, or else one with a touch of madness in him; ... His story ... he should first simplify and reduce to a universal form, before proceeding to lengthen it out by the insertion of episodes. (1455<sup>b</sup>32)<sup>4</sup>

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2. Paul Maas & C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*, OUP, 1963, p. xxii.

3. I. Bywater, Poetics, in Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (rev. Oxford trs), Vol. 2, Bollingen Series LXXI.2, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984, p. 2320.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 2329.

According to Maas and Trypanis, when drawing on biblical material, Romanos generally expanded and elaborated on the theme; however, when using the writings of the early Fathers or the hagiographers, he compressed and curtailed the material. In view of this 'dependence on a multitude of sources' they accuse Romanos of a 'lack of uniformity and therefore of individuality of style.'<sup>5</sup>

Carpenter notes generally the similarity of expansion techniques between Greek and Syrian homilies:

Clearly, the Syrian hymns and homilies are related to the Greek homilies, for the same type of biblical allusions and the same sort of reference to the Gospels appear in both ... The method of expanding the stories so that they become dramatic and are clothed in rhythmic phrases is, however, a characteristic that supports the theory of common origin for both Greek and Syrian expressions.<sup>6</sup>

#### **'Ethos' and the character of the speaker**

In Book I, among the modes of persuasion, Aristotle notes the 'personal character of the speaker,' and adds that 'We believe good men more fully and more readily than others ...' (1358<sup>a</sup>2)<sup>7</sup> Also in Book I, in the same vein, he adds later 'it helps a speaker to convince us, if we believe that he has certain qualities himself, namely, goodness' (1366<sup>a</sup>10), while in Book II, he notes that 'the orator's own character should look right ...' (1377<sup>b</sup>29)<sup>8</sup>

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5. Maas and Trypanis, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

6. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, p. xix.

7. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2155.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 2194.

The fact that Romanos was a priest and a convert to Orthodoxy, as well as possessing undeniable artistic gifts, which excited legendary speculation that they were handed down from the Virgin herself, all possibly contributed to his stature in his own time as an outstanding hymnographer.

On this point, as I have noted in Part I, Aristotle's theory of *ethos* which concerns itself with the impeccable character of the speaker could have had aesthetic repercussions when applied to 'inspired' texts, since, with God as author, any other action upon, or arising from, such texts could be viewed as superfluous. However since the hymnographer or the iconographer would be viewed as a medium through which the Divine Logos was expressed, his character, ideally, should be impeccable. Indeed, this concept is supported by Savas in his reference to the demeanour expected of the singer of Byzantine chant (Part III, Chapter 3).

In keeping with the concept of *ethos* expressed above, Byzantine hymnographers and artists usually were content to remain anonymous. Romanos, on the other hand, used the eastern technique of acrostics to establish subtly his authorship of a number of kontakia.

Kennedy probes into the deeper meaning of *ethos*, *pathos* and *kairos*: 'Aristotle was able ... to make psychology, in the form of the study of *ethos* and *pathos*, into two significant parts of rhetorical persuasion....'<sup>9</sup>

Proof found in the character of the speaker is called *ethos* ... most important to Aristotle is the moral character which the speaker exhibits and which causes the audience to trust him ... the character of the audience to which the speaker must suit his language and argument, this is the psychological approach to rhetoric inherent in Gorgias' theory of *kairos*, or the opportune ... Aristotle's second kind of proof, that resulting from putting the audience

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9. George Kennedy, 'The classical tradition in rhetoric,' in M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 79.

into a certain state of mind, is known as pathos and is, like ethos, another element common to drama and oratory.<sup>10</sup>

While Mango develops the theory of *to kairon* in relation to style:

Gorgias also influenced the theory of style ... through the concept of the opportune, *to kairon* ... Any given problem involves choice or compromise between two antitheses so that consideration of *kairos*, that is of time, place, and circumstance ... alone can solve the dilemma and lead to the choice of relative truth and to action. In rhetoric *kairos* is the principle which governs the choice of the organization, the means of proof, and particularly the style. It has been defined as 'the adaptation of the speech to the manifold variety of life, to the psychology of the speaker and hearer: variegated, not absolute unity of tone.' ... Allied with the concept of *kairos* is *to prepon*, the fitting ... The two together constitute what may be called the artistic element in rhetorical theory as opposed to the prescribed rules.<sup>11</sup>

#### The 'mixed' style

This description seems to fit Hermogenes' idea of the 'mixed' style, which is discussed in Chapter 4 of this section. Certainly, Romanos' texts demonstrate the application of this theory concerning the adaptation of the speech to the psychology of the hearer. This is particularly evident in his choice of language, which drew upon Classical, Jewish, Syrian, and Hellenistic sources, as well as the *koinē* and the popular language of his day.

Whatever its sources, the effectiveness of Romanos' language owes much to its balance between rhetorical usage and psychological insight, as noted by Trypanis:

In his language there is nothing obscure or too archaic; it is rich in metaphor and beautiful imagery. He also interweaves whole passages from Holy Scripture ...<sup>12</sup>

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10. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

12. C. A. Trypanis, *Medieval and Modern Greek Poetry: An Anthology*, clarendon Press, Oxford, 1951, p. xvi.

This lack of obscurity in Romanos' use of language, so rare for its time, is in accord with

Aristotelian principles also:

... language to be good must be clear, as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do ... Clearness is secured by using the words (nouns and verbs alike) that are current and ordinary. (1404<sup>b</sup>2)<sup>13</sup>

However, this is not meant to imply that Aristotle was averse to ornamentation.

Freedom from meanness, and positive adornment too, are secured by using the other words mentioned in the *Art of Poetry*. Such variation makes the language appear more stately. People do not feel towards strangers as they do towards their own countrymen, and the same thing is true of their feelings for language. It is therefore well to give to everyday speech an unfamiliar air ... (1404<sup>b</sup>6)<sup>14</sup>

Here, Aristotle seems to be advocating a mixture of styles, blending the ordinary with the ornate, reminiscent of the advice given by Hermogenes on 'mixis,' which is treated in detail later in Chapter 4 of this section. One of Romanos' great achievements was the personal language he forged that was at once understandable, yet elevated enough to do justice to his great themes. Aristotle reinforces this advice in Book III:

Again, style will be made agreeable by the elements mentioned, namely by a good blending of ordinary and unusual words, by the rhythm, and by the persuasiveness that springs from appropriateness. (1414<sup>a</sup>25)<sup>15</sup>

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13. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2239.

14. *Loc. cit.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 2257.

### Metaphor as ornament

In his *Rhetoric* Aristotle strongly recommends the use of metaphor noting that 'it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh' (1410<sup>b</sup>12),<sup>16</sup> and that 'good similes, give an effect of brilliance.' (1410<sup>b</sup>16)<sup>17</sup>

It is also good to use metaphorical words; but the metaphors must not be far-fetched, or they will be difficult to grasp, not obvious, or they will have no effect. (1410<sup>b</sup>31)<sup>18</sup>

He elaborates further on this theme:

These, the strange word, the metaphor, the ornamental equivalent, etc., will save the language from seeming mean and prosaic, while the ordinary words in it will secure the requisite clearness. What helps most, however, to render the diction at once clear and non-prosaic is the use of the lengthened, curtailed, and altered forms of words. (1458<sup>a</sup>32)<sup>19</sup>

Romanos' extended use of metaphor in his texts is heightened by his use of musical techniques, which draw attention to significant words in either of two ways: (1) by melismatic treatment of the word itself, or (2) by ornamenting an unimportant word preceding it. However, aware of the preeminence of the text, Romanos, when he does use ornamentation, never allows the melisma to obscure the words.

Kennedy notes that Aristotle 'seeks to penetrate to an understanding of the psychological effect of a metaphor'<sup>20</sup> and treats metaphor as 'the principal device of ornament.'<sup>21</sup> In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines four classes of metaphor: 'metaphor is the substitution of the

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 2250.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 2251.

18. *Loc. cit.*

19. Bywater, *op. cit.*, pp. 2333-4.

20. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

name of something else, and this may take place from genus to species or from species to genus or from species to species or according to proportion.<sup>22</sup>

But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars. (1459<sup>a</sup>5)<sup>23</sup>

Metaphor can both conceal and reveal, as Aristotle points out. An acknowledged master of metaphor, as is demonstrated later in this chapter, Romanos' work repeatedly underlines his affinity with the ideas of Aristotle:

... metaphor is of great value both in poetry and in prose ... Metaphor ... gives style clearness, charm, and distinction as nothing else can; and it is not a thing whose use can be taught by one man to another.' (1405<sup>a</sup>5)<sup>24</sup>

For the Christian writer, metaphor has another dimension, as Maguire notes:

... in their use of [metaphor] Byzantine writers received a philosophical justification from Neoplatonic thought, which perceived the world of visible objects as a reflection of the unseen world of the spirit.<sup>25</sup>

### **Ekphrasis: 'seeing' with the mind's eye**

Associated with the metaphor was the *ekphrasis*, a rhetorical technique which sought to make the listener 'see with the mind's eye' what was being described to him.

This concept of 'seeing' aurally is a central theme in rhetorical theory, as Maguire points out:

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22. *Loc. cit.*

23. Bywater, *op. cit.*, pp. 2334-5.

24. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2240.

25. Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1981, p. 15.



Among the rhetorical genres cultivated by the Byzantines one of the most popular was ekphrasis or formal description. The textbooks on rhetoric emphasized that the purpose of the formal description was to make the writing as vivid as possible, so that the reader would seem to see what was described, before his own eyes.<sup>26</sup>

Clark describes the use of the *ekphrasis* in training students in 'vivid presentation of details.'<sup>27</sup>

It taught them to describe graphically and to display particulars to the eyes of the mind. Indeed Quintilian, Theon, Hermogenes, and Aphthonius all used the image, 'bringing before the eyes what is to be shown.'<sup>28</sup>

He cites Hermogenes on this rhetorical device:

An ecphrasis is an account in detail, visible, as they say, bringing before one's eyes what is to be shown ... The virtues of the ecphrasis are clearness and visibility; for the style must through hearing operate to bring about seeing ... In the hands of the sophists of the second and third century the ecphrasis became a literary form that delighted audiences with epideictic word-painting.<sup>29</sup>

These concepts, which influenced so much Byzantine writing, and were particularly applicable to the *kontakia* of Romanos, may have found their earliest expression in Aristotle's perception of the dramatic capacity of words to paint the scene for the listener.

In the *kontakia* of Romanos, we are no longer dealing with the undiluted Scriptures but, rather, dramatic paraphrases of Biblical incidents, which examine the human dilemma

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26. Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

27. Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, p. 202.

28. *Loc. cit.*

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 202-3.

with penetrating psychological insight, making the audience 'see,' in the Byzantine sense, the action taking place before them.

The ekphrasis, meaning 'revelation,' has Hellenistic roots, and is fundamentally a description of people, places and things. It is also one of the *progymnasmata*, and 'As with so many of the literary formulae of late antiquity it becomes affected by the interest in the personal.'<sup>30</sup>

Its popularity also rested on its ability to evoke 'the inner experience of the beholder before the sacred objects of his religion.'<sup>31</sup>

A famous example of this power of the *ekphrasis* is Procopius' account of the basilica of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which includes a description of the awesome effect of the structure on the viewer.

Aristotle sums up the rhetorical effect:

The words, too, ought to set the scene before our eyes; for events ought to be seen in progress rather than in prospect. So we must aim at these three points: antithesis, metaphor, and actuality ...(1410<sup>b</sup>33)<sup>32</sup> ...liveliness is got by using the proportional type of metaphor and by making our hearers see things. We have still to explain what we mean by their 'seeing things,' and what must be done to effect this. By 'making them see things,' I mean using expressions that represent things as in a state of activity. (1411<sup>b</sup>24)<sup>33</sup>

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30. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1937, p. 58.

31. *Loc. cit.*

32. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2251.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 2252.

### **Antithesis: Classical and Jewish-Hellenistic origins**

Romanos' texts display not only their classical origins, but also Jewish-Hellenistic elements in his frequent use of antithesis and parallel structures.

Carpenter observes that 'Assonance and homoioteleuton necessarily abound wherever there is parallel structure, even though there is no rhyme in the strict sense of the word. Usually, groups of similarly accented phrases are tied together so that antithesis in idea is underlined.'<sup>34</sup>

Maguire draws attention to two types of antitheses: '(1) simple opposition, (2) combined opposition with formal emphasis.'<sup>35</sup>

Patterns could be created by content alone or by an interplay of words and content in combination ... Figure is created by juxtaposition of words that are related in form but opposed in meaning.<sup>36</sup>

The following examples, taken from the *Akathistos Hymn*, demonstrate Romanos' use of antithesis and metaphor, and his musical enhancement of these rhetorical devices.

#### **The Akathistos Hymn**

The Hymn consists of twenty-four stanzas, with appended to each a series of ecstatic 'Hails' enumerating the attributes of the Virgin. Each set of Hails exhibits an ingenious arrangement of antithetical words and sounds, each occupying the same place in the metrical scheme, as the kontakion form demanded, while displaying the rhetorical device

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34. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiii.

35. Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

36. *Loc. cit.*

of *homoioteleuton*, with certain pairs of words ending with the same sound – the nearest that the ancients came to rhyme.

The following examples, which demonstrate these rhetorical features, are taken from the first four sets of Hails appended to the first stanza or *oikos*.

Hail! To You through Whom *joy shall shine forth*.  
 Hail! To You through Whom the *curse will vanish*.  
 Χαῖρε, δι' ἧς ἡ χαρὰ ἐκλάμψει.  
 Χαῖρε, δι' ἧς ἡ 'αρὰ ἐκλείψει.

Hail! The *recalling* of the fallen *Adam*.  
 Hail! The *redemption* of *Eve's* tears.  
 Χαῖρε, τοῦ πεσόντος Ἀδαμ ἢ ἀνάκλησις.  
 Χαῖρε, τῶν δακρῦων τῆς Εὔας ἢ λύτρωσις.

Hail! O *Height* beyond human *logic*.  
 Hail! O *Depth* invisible even to the *eyes* of the *Angels*.  
 Χαῖρε, ὑψος δυσανάβατον ἀνθρωπίνοις λογισμοῖς.  
 Χαῖρε, βάθος δυσθεώρητον καὶ Ἄγγελον οφθαλμοῖς.

The fourth set of Hails also presents an excellent example of the opposition of Mary with the throne of heaven, extended by Romanos into the beautiful metaphorical image:

Hail! For you are the King's throne.  
 Hail! That You bear Him Who bears the Universe.

There is also a play on the sound 'bas' here:

Χαῖρε, ὅτι ὑπάρχεις βασιλέως καθέδρα.  
 Χαῖρε, ὅτι βαστάζεις τὸν βαστάζοντα πάντα.

Maguire cites the opposition of Mary with the throne of heaven as a favourite theme in liturgical poetry.

The sixth-century poet Romanos described how the angel of the Annunciation wondered at the mystery of the Incarnation: 'The whole sky ... and the fiery

throne do not contain my master; and this poor girl, how does she receive him? Above he is terrible: and how can he be seen below?<sup>37</sup>

While the final pair of Hails produce another vivid example of opposition of a type which Maguire sees as a common motif in ecclesiastical literature, that is 'the juxtaposition of Christ the human child with Christ the divine creator of the world.'<sup>38</sup>

Hail! To You through Whom *Creation* is re-made.  
 Hail! To You through Whom the *Creator* is born a Babe.  
 Χαῖρε, δι' ἧς νεοργεῖται ἡ κτίσις.  
 Χαῖρε, δι' ἧς βρεφουργεῖται ὁ Κτίστης.

Maguire cites also Gregory of Nazianzus, who 'demonstrated the combined humanity and divinity of Christ with a torrent of antitheses that runs through the whole career of Christ on earth: e.g. He was hungry, but he fed thousands. He was weary, but he is the rest of the weary and of the burdened. He dies but he gives life, and by death he destroys death.'<sup>39</sup>

#### Byzantine theocracy limits choice of topics for poets

The didactic bias of Romanos' kontakia also ensured that he was in harmony with Aristotle's contention that 'rhetoric draws upon the regular subjects of debate.' (1357<sup>a</sup>1)<sup>40</sup>

In the theocratic milieu in which Romanos composed, theological debate was, as Nicol noted, the chief pastime of the populace, and indeed their only form of politics.

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37. *Loc. cit.*

38. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

40. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2157.

### Romanos shares Aristotle's consciousness of audience

Aristotle relates the topic to the type of audience the orator is addressing.

... the duty of rhetoric is to deal with such matters as we deliberate upon without arts or systems to guide us, in the hearing of persons who cannot take in at a glance a complicated argument, or follow a long chain of reasoning. (1357<sup>a</sup>2)<sup>41</sup>

In other words, he is talking about dealing with 'an audience of untrained thinkers.'

(1357<sup>a</sup>12)<sup>42</sup>

We may assume that, apart from the educated court elite, Romanos was addressing just such an audience, and that he found it expedient to follow Aristotle's advice on how to communicate with such listeners:

Moreover, before some audiences not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction. For argument based on knowledge implies instruction, and there are people whom one cannot instruct. Here, then, we must use, as our modes of persuasion and argument, notions possessed by everybody, as we observed in the *Topics* when dealing with the way to handle a popular audience. (1355<sup>a</sup>24)<sup>43</sup>

Aristotle has some specific advice to offer on the technique of addressing large assemblies:

Now the style of oratory addressed to public assemblies is really just like scene-painting. The bigger the throng, the more distant is the point of view: so that, in the one and the other, high finish in detail is superfluous and looks bad ... high finish is wanted least where dramatic delivery is wanted most.<sup>44</sup>

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41. *Loc. cit.*

42. *Loc. cit.*

43. *Ibid.*, p. 2154.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 2257.

As we have noted elsewhere, one of the distinctions between Aristotle and Cicero was the former's concern with the audience.

Clark notes that in using rhetoric, Aristotle will 'adapt his methods to his audience,'<sup>45</sup> and even goes so far as to comment that

This constant attention to audience is the most fruitful thought in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* ... Aristotle the philosopher has demonstrated that communication with an audience is essentially the end and aim of all rhetoric, both spoken and written.<sup>46</sup>

Aristotle himself said 'It is the hearer that determines a speech's end and object.'<sup>47</sup>

Faced with the multinational, partly illiterate populace that comprised early Constantinople, Romanos would have found it no more than expedient to follow Aristotle's advice, since, through his dramatic homilies, which expounded the official Church-State stance on doctrine in comprehensible terms, he was one of the main channels of communication.

Not for him the indulgence of the court poets, whose literary endeavours were unconcerned with communication and intended only as displays of erudition. Romanos was obliged to communicate with his listeners and in so doing wrote, what comprises, for some critics, the only genuine poetry to emerge from the Byzantine era. The poetry of Romanos and his contemporaries 'has not been matched in subsequent centuries, and the *kontakion* remains the only great original achievement of Byzantine literature.'<sup>48</sup>

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45. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

48. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

With the official acceptance of Christianity, and the building of huge basilicas such as Hagia Sophia for the celebration of the liturgy, it was inevitable that some of the intimate character of the early Christian gatherings was lost, as well as the ease of communication between groups. For Romanos, this would have meant that whatever message was being relayed to the congregation had to be communicated in simple, and unambiguous terms, yet in language lofty enough to be worthy of its divine subject.

This gradual usurpation of the function of the congregation by solo singers and choirs and the rise of the virtuoso singer – the *protopsaltes* – could be interpreted as yet another reflection of the later Ciceronian rhetorical concern with the orator rather than with the audience.

Kennedy links this development to the debate on whether rhetoric was to be considered as an art and therefore subject to rules.

The acceptance of rules of art ... meant the beginning of that process of ossification which overtook all of ancient creativity. Practice within the art was controlled more and more by strict rules. The artist was more and more a virtuoso, exulting in the game and its rules.<sup>49</sup>

### **Romanos' successful application of Aristotle's dramatic guidelines**

In the vast expanse of Hagia Sophia, Aristotle's dramatic guidelines could be applied successfully to the kontakia of Romanos, in which characterisation, vivid description, and dialogue are integrated to great dramatic effect. Citing two of Romanos' greatest works, the *Nativity* and *Akathistos* Hymns, Hussey observes 'the dramatic tension of the narrative

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49. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 124.



and the lyrical quality of the praise which place the *kontakia* in the first rank of medieval poetry.’

Carpenter can discern Romanos’ *kontakia* operating on three levels: dealing with the heavens, and the worlds of the living and the dead. Assuming that chant added yet another dimension, it is possible to see his work fitting the ideal expressed in Aristotle’s *Poetics* concerning the plot-structure or *muthos* of a play. As Halliwell notes:

Aristotle does not deal with form at the expense of substance, since the plot-structure (*muthos*) with which they are concerned is not simply the abstract shape of the plot, but the totality of the represented action with all its causal connections and logic of development, as well as the integrated relation within it of action and character. That is also why the plot-structure of a play is compared in Chapter 6 to a visual image – a *significant* form, to be perceived (like all Aristotelian forms) not as mere pattern but as the design of a particular entity.<sup>50</sup>

#### Epideictic aspects of rhetoric

Noting that ‘there are three divisions of oratory - deliberative, forensic, and epideictic’ (1358<sup>b</sup>6),<sup>51</sup> Aristotle states that ‘Epideictic oratory either praises or censures somebody.’ (1358<sup>b</sup>11)<sup>52</sup>

Romanos concerned himself with the epideictic aspects of rhetoric, with one of his most famous works, the *Akathistos Hymn*, virtually amounting to a paean of praise to the Virgin.

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50. Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, USA, 1986, p. 5.

51. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2159.

52. *Loc. cit.*

### Proper use of connecting words: Byzantine centonisation techniques

Another rhetorical technique advocated by Aristotle was 'the proper use of connecting words.' (1407<sup>a</sup>21)<sup>53</sup>

The foundation of good style is correctness of language, which falls under five heads. First the proper use of connecting words, and the arrangement of them in the natural sequence which some of them require. (1407<sup>a</sup>19)<sup>54</sup>

One of the outstanding skills of the Byzantine hymnographer was his skill in fitting music and text together, obeying this 'law of style.' Again, in his *Poetics*, Aristotle emphasises the importance of skilled centonisation techniques:

The musical prelude resembles the introduction to speeches of display; as flute-players play first some brilliant passage they know well and then fit it on to the opening notes of the piece itself, so in speeches of display the writer should proceed in the same way ... (1414<sup>b</sup>21)<sup>55</sup>

The need for the application of this joining or centonisation technique is noted also by Raasted, when he comments:

...both bodies of chant, Eastern and Western, are ... governed by a single law of style – the law of melodic adjustment ... when two melodies stand in immediate succession, the first must be accommodated to the second by means of an appropriate treatment of its ending.<sup>56</sup>

### Aristotle's laws on 'delivery' and performance practice in chant

While the kontakion has been acknowledged as a great dramatic vehicle, there is little evidence concerning its actual performance, though there is evidence that it was meant to pose an alternative to the pagan mimes, so that some kind of performance may be

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53. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2244.

54. *Loc. cit.*

55. *Ibid.* p. 2258.

56. Jørgen Raasted, 'Intonation Formulas and Modal Signatures in Byzantine Musical Manuscripts', *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*, Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1966, p. 3.

assumed. Under these circumstances, the presentation or delivery of the kontakion must have assumed great importance.

Aristotle's suggestions regarding delivery, therefore, could have exerted significant influence on the performance of the kontakion, and upon the performance of liturgical chant itself, since they could be applied both to ecphonic chant and to later more elaborate melismatic forms, such as the kontakion.

In Book III particularly, Aristotle pays great attention to 'the proper method of delivery,' adding that 'this is a thing that affects the success of a speech greatly.' (1403<sup>b</sup>20)<sup>57</sup>

It is, essentially, a matter of the right management of the voice to express the various emotions – of speaking loudly, softly, or between the two; of high, low, or intermediate pitch; of the various rhythms that suit various subjects. These are the three things – volume of sound, modulation of pitch, and rhythm – that a speaker bears in mind. (1403<sup>b</sup>26)<sup>58</sup>

Kennedy's interpretation of these thoughts of Aristotle on delivery, is that 'it implies that a high degree of accuracy is attainable in fitting the correct tone and gesture to the word and content.'<sup>59</sup> This reference to quantitative (musical) Greek, could find a musical application in the later performance of chant.

The kontakia called for virtuosic vocal skill, and appear in books for the solo singer, or *psaltes*. In view of Kennedy's comments, it is, therefore, possible that Aristotle's theories on delivery had a place in the training of these performers.

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57. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2238.

58. *Loc. cit.*

59. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

Aristotle has this to say about presentation:

Bring yourself on the stage from the first in the right character, that people may regard you in that light ... How easily such impressions may be conveyed we can see from the way in which we get some inkling of things we know nothing of by the mere look of the messenger bringing news of them. (1417<sup>b7</sup>)<sup>60</sup>

In the *Akathistos Hymn*, Romanos' depiction of the Angel's awe-struck reaction as he sees Christ embodied in the Virgin would have produced the effect Aristotle sought here. In this work, which is discussed in more detail in Part III, Chapter 2, Romanos increases the dramatic effect on the angel by repeating the phrase ἐξίστατο καὶ ἴστατο [awe-struck and transfixed] three times, each time with a different musical setting.

#### Rhythm as a mnemonic device

In the *Prolegomenon*, I have examined the problem of setting 'inspired' texts, and in so doing have posited the preeminence of the text, and suggested, among other things, a supportive and mnemonic role for music, in which rhythm becomes a key element.

On the subject of rhythm, Aristotle says that

The form of a prose composition should be neither metrical nor destitute of rhythm. The metrical form destroys the hearer's trust by its artificial appearance, and at the same time it diverts his attention, making him watch for metrical recurrences ... On the other hand, unrhythmical language is too unlimited; we do not want the limitations of metre, but some limitation we must have, or the effect will be vague and unsatisfactory. Now it is number that limits all things; and it is the numerical limitation of the form of a composition that constitutes rhythm, of which metres are definite sections. (1408<sup>b22</sup>)<sup>61</sup>

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60. Rhys Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 2264.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 2247.

Aristotle develops this theme to encompass the mnemonic aspects of number in a discussion of the function of the period.

By a period I mean a portion of speech that has in itself a beginning and an end, being at the same time not too big to be taken in at a glance ... It is easy to follow, because it can easily be remembered; and this because language when in periodic form can be numbered, and number is the easiest of all things to remember. That is why verse, which is measured, is always more easily remembered than prose, which is not: the measures of verse can be numbered. (1409<sup>b</sup>35)<sup>62</sup>

One can discern in the texts with musical notation, that the function of the period is represented by the Medial Signatures of Byzantine chant, which play a syntactical role as well as being a valuable aid to the singer, not only as punctuation, but musically, since they also indicate pitch. For both singer and listener, they also obey the Aristotelian dictum that 'one always likes to sight a stopping-place in front of one.' (1409<sup>a</sup>32)<sup>63</sup>

Another aspect of Aristotle's theory of the function of the period is its link with antithesis. Kennedy notes:

Aristotle's account of a period is based largely on antithesis ... Though the antithetical style was no doubt the beginning of Greek periodicity, and the 'rounding' demanded of a period was most clearly seen in an antithesis ...<sup>64</sup>

Aristotle in his *Poetics*, speaking of the change of metre in tragedy from trochaic to iambic, as it became less connected with dancing, and more with the spoken part, observes:

The iambic, we know, is the most speakable of metres, as is shown by the fact that we very often fall into it in conversation, whereas we rarely talk

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62. *Ibid.*, p. 2248.

63. *Loc. cit.*

64. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

hexameters, and only when we depart from the speaking tone of voice.  
(1449<sup>a</sup>25)<sup>65</sup>

The foregoing attempt to point out a number of instances in which Romanos, in the texts of his kontakia, appears to be following Aristotle's dicta on rhetoric and poetics, are meant to serve only as a general indication of the classical rhetorical influence observable in his work. There is insufficient evidence to assert that Romanos drew his rhetorical techniques directly from a study of Aristotle's writings, and, as I have pointed out elsewhere, there was no need for him to do so, since his models, the Cappadocians and others, had already absorbed the classical rhetorical tradition in their homilies. It is designed merely to show that the influences are present, whatever their sources.

More specific application of rhetorical theory to the music and texts of Romanos will be made in the following chapters, when they will be examined in the light of Roman rhetorical theory and Byzantine rhetoric, represented by Hermogenes' *De Ideis*.

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65. Bywater, *op. cit.*, p. 2319.

### Chapter 3

## ROMAN RHETORICAL CONCEPTS: CICERO AND QUINTILIAN

This chapter examines some aspects of mainstream Roman rhetorical theory which appear to have influenced Romanos' compositions, and which also provided the basis for later western musico-rhetorical theory and practice.

### Roman rhetoricians modify Greek tradition

The Roman rhetoricians carried on the Greek tradition, with, however, certain modifications, as Kennedy points out:

During the period from the death of Aristotle to the foundation of the Roman empire, the theory of rhetoric which had been reasonably fully developed in the fourth century was greatly augmented into a detailed system. This system, together with practical exercises, gained a central place first in secondary and then in advanced education.<sup>1</sup>

The theory of *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* was restated by Cicero as the three *officia oratoris*: to teach, to charm and to move. There was also a shift in emphasis from Aristotle's concern with speaker, message and audience, to Cicero's almost exclusive concern with the speaker and what he does. Aristotle's awareness of the importance of the audience is noted also by Clark, who sees it as 'the most fruitful thought in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* ...'

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1. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 264.

Aristotle the philosopher has demonstrated that communication with an audience is essentially the end and aim of all rhetoric, both spoken and written.<sup>2</sup>

Kennedy, however, believes that Aristotle should have gone further:

... Aristotle's system in several ways fails to recognize the importance of the surrounding occasion ... Aristotle needed to add a fourth element ... not only speaker, speech, and audience, but also occasion ... Invention ... and dialectic and the topics are the most important parts, but clearly style and arrangement have some influence on the whole ...<sup>3</sup>

For Kennedy, the theory of topics was probably 'the strongest part of the Aristotelian tradition ... but even this is radically changed by Cicero and Boethius.'<sup>4</sup>

Arguments, according to Cicero in the *De Partitione*, 'are derived from the places (*ex locis*), i.e. 'the places in which arguments lurk.' These 'places' are also called 'topics' from the Greek word 'topos' meaning 'place.'<sup>5</sup>

Clearly the doctrine of the 'places' or 'topics' of argument is based on a metaphor. One goes looking for arguments in some 'places' of the mind as one looks for a book on a shelf or a letter in a pigeonhole ... In addition to these places or topics of argument that are applicable to the investigation of all sorts of situations, hence called commonplace or common topics, there are special places for special situations.<sup>6</sup>

Aristotle himself felt that his great contribution was 'the introduction of logical arguments into a discussion of rhetoric' for 'earlier treatises were devoted almost exclusively to

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2. Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, p. 50.

3. George Kennedy, 'The classical tradition in rhetoric,' in M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 33.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

5. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

6. *Loc. cit.*



rousing the feelings.<sup>7</sup> Plato also saw a wider, philosophical role for rhetoric in its unrealised potential for uncovering the truth of whatever topic it had under investigation.

### Cicero on style

Having decided on the *topos*, the next step was to find the best arrangement or style in which it could be expressed. Clark cites Cicero on style:

Cicero points out that there is a style appropriate to each of the literary forms as well as to oratory. Thus the style appropriate to the orator differs from the styles appropriate to the philosopher, the epideictic speaker, the historian, and the poet.<sup>8</sup>

In the mould of this classical tradition, the kontakion can be said to have a recognisable style. Wellesz says 'We can speak of the style of the Kontakia just as we speak of the style of the Graduals and of that of the Offertories of the Western Church.'<sup>9</sup> He notes that the melodic style 'was not an individual one, but characteristic of this genre,'<sup>10</sup> and points out certain similarities between the *Nativity* and *Akathistos* Hymns: 'the musical structure of the Kontakion on St. Symeon Stylites of Romanos shows its form to be very similar to that of the Akathistos Hymn, with textual parallels also ...'<sup>11</sup>

The astonishing similarity of the formulae, however, may be taken as proof that the technique of ornamentation was applied according to fixed rules, which must have been developed in the two great centres of liturgical chant, Jerusalem and Constantinople, from their origins in the psalmody of the Synagogue and taught by the singing masters to their pupils.<sup>12</sup>

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

9. Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd ed., OUP, 1961, p. 332.

10. *Loc. cit.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 338.

12. *Loc. cit.*

### The function of the *prooimion*

Another feature of the kontakion – the *prooimion* – has its roots in classical rhetoric, in which it was used to secure ‘the interest and good will of the audience.’<sup>13</sup> The use of the *prooimion* was also a Byzantine addition to the kontakion which distinguished it from its Syrian forebears.

Hunger points out the function of the *prooimion* in antiquity, which can also be applied to its function in the Byzantine era:

Already the oldest texts on rhetoric see the task of the *prooimion* in preparing the audience psychologically for the following speech; the technical term for this was *therapeia*.<sup>14</sup>

### Cicero’s idea of the orator

Viewing Romanos as part of this rhetorical tradition, we can apply to his work the principles of Cicero in speaking of the province of the orator in his *De Oratore*:

All the activity and ability of an orator falls into five divisions ... He must first hit upon what to say; then manage and marshal his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight as it were of each argument; next go on to array them in the adornments of style; after that keep them guarded in his memory; and in the end deliver them with effect and charm.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, Cicero is spelling out the standard five-part rhetorical format, concerning which Clark writes:

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13. Kennedy, 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

14. Herbert Hunger, ‘The classical tradition in Byzantine literature: the importance of rhetoric in Byzantium,’ in M. Mullett and R. Scott (eds), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 13th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1981, p. 38.

15. Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms: A Guide for Students of English Literature*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968, p. 106.

In the conventional idiom of the treatises on rhetoric we find the five parts named as follows:

- (1) *Inventio*: 'To find out what he should say,'
- (2) *Dispositio*: 'To dispose and arrange what he has found,'
- (3) *Elocutio*: 'To clothe it with language,'
- (4) *Memoria*: 'To secure it in his memory,'
- (5) *Pronuntiatio* or *Actio*: 'To deliver it.'<sup>16</sup>

#### Five-part rhetorical format applied to Romanos' kontakia

The next step is to apply this formula, point by point, to Romanos' kontakia, to see whether his work stands up to the criteria laid down by the architects of this rhetorical scheme.

(1) *Inventio* (heuresis) '... what to say ...'

Kennedy outlines the theory of topics:

*Topos* means place and may be translated into Latin as *locus* – the place where the orator finds the needed argument. The topics ... become a kind of check list which enables the orator to make sure he has left out nothing.<sup>17</sup>

The topic or *topos* posed no problem for the Byzantine hymnographer. His material was confined to the Life, Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ; the Lives of the Saints and Martyrs; and the Old and New Testaments. When comment was called upon, his opinion reflected that of the Church-State dichotomy in power at the time. The *raison d'être* for his work was to reinforce the dogmatic pronouncements of the Byzantine theocracy.

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16. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

17. Kennedy, 1963, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

Wilder lists some of the main topics treated by the Christian hymnographer or artist, and some of the rhetorical devices used to bring them to life.

In the case of so important a topic as that of the Christ we find a multitude of special dramatizations bearing on such matters as his origin, birth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, cross, descent into Hell, Resurrection, ascension, Second Coming. Here the gamut reaches from single metaphors and tropes through parables, allegories, visions, hymns, doxologies and oracles to extended mythological sections.<sup>18</sup>

Salaville contrasts the western and eastern treatment of these topics:

But whereas the genius of ... the Roman rite in particular expresses itself ... in simple and short affirmations, the Eastern liturgical genius, by way of contrast, tends to amplify and develop the dogmatic truths ... in accordance with its prevailing literary practice.<sup>19</sup>

He finds justification for this treatment in the theological turmoil in the East:

Since, moreover, the East was for many centuries the breeding-ground of the great heresies and the permanent arena for doctrinal disputes, it is understandable that its liturgy has preserved with greater intensity the echo of ardent declarations of the orthodox faith.<sup>20</sup>

(2) *Dispositio* (taxis) '... then manage and marshal his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight as it were of each argument ...'

In the matter of *dispositio*, Romanos, in common with his Latin colleagues, enjoyed the advantage of using an inflected language in which word order could be manipulated to suit artistic and metrical convenience.

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18. Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, pp. 119-20.

19. Seversen Salaville, *An Introduction to the Study of Eastern Liturgies*, Sands & Co., London, 1938, p. 74.

20. *Loc. cit.*

To illustrate the way in which Romanos applies this 'weight' to heighten the drama and import of the text, a number of examples, drawn from the kontakion *On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, are demonstrated in Part III, Chapter 2 on the kontakion.

(3) *Elocutio* (lexis) '... next go on to array them in the adornments of style ...'

Romanos' use of ornamentation, and the norms to which it conformed are treated in detail also in Part III, Chapter 2.

(4) *Memoria* (mneme) '... after that keep them guarded in his memory: ...'

(5) *Actio* (hypocrisis) '... and in the end deliver them with effect and charm ...'

The latter two techniques, *Memoria* and *Actio* are united in the art of the *protopsaltis*, whose function is to hold in memory the oral tradition enabling him to deliver the text in an approved vocal style.

In Romanos' kontakion *On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, a work that is truly representative of his style, we find these principles embodied, together with those of the Aristotelian and Byzantine schools of rhetoric. This work is analysed in Part III, Chapter 2, on the kontakion.

## Chapter 4

### BYZANTINE RHETORICAL THEORY: HERMOGENES

Having noted the influence of Aristotelian and Roman rhetorical theories on Romanos, it is now time to turn to some aspects of Byzantine rhetorical theory as presented in Hermogenes' *De Ideis*.

As I have observed already, rhetoric did not pass down to the Byzantines in its original classical form. It reached them through exegetes like Hermogenes and Aphthonius, whose workbooks or *progymnasmata* formed the basis of the Byzantine education system.

In George L. Kustas' *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric* I have found a scholarly exposition of the rhetorical principles expounded in Hermogenes' *De Ideis*, which also places them in a philosophical and theological context.

Kustas sees in Hermogenes' treatise an attempt to come to terms with the concept of the 'logos' which was such a formative influence in classical rhetoric. Kustas describes it as:

... developing for the world of the literary logos a scheme of interplay between universals and particulars which will have its counterpart in Neoplatonic and Christian speculations about the divine logos.<sup>1</sup>

Acknowledging the rhetorical basis of Byzantine civilisation, Kustas notes that the companion to Hermogenes in the rhetorical curriculum of Byzantine education is the *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonius:

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1. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, p. 19.

The two authors ... constituted the rhetorical cursus and continued to be so recognized throughout the life of Byzantium.<sup>2</sup>

### Rhetoric widely taught

We have no reason to doubt that these methods of teaching rhetoric were prevalent in neighbouring cultures, which shared with Byzantium a common Hellenistic heritage. It is not unlikely, therefore, that Romanos, a Syrian Jew, would have some acquaintance with classical rhetoric, while his kontakia demonstrate that he drew also upon the rich Syro-Palestinian tradition represented by the great Syrian religious poet Ephraem.

Kennedy supports the existence of a Hellenistic tradition:

... what we know about Hellenistic developments comes largely from works written by Roman authors or by later Greek authors who refer to Hellenistic rhetoricians and their writings.<sup>3</sup>

In these rhetorical developments, Hermogenes is a connecting link. As Kustas points out: 'Hermogenes, however, is related not only to pagan rhetoric. His rhetorical values are reflected also in the literary experience of Christianity.'<sup>4</sup>

According to Kustas, the reason why Hermogenes, the Neoplatonists and the Christians were able to work together was 'because they [were] addressing themselves to the same problems.'<sup>5</sup>

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

3. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 264.

4. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

5. *Loc. cit.*

Drawing together these common threads, Kustas sees emerging 'a specifically Byzantine view of the function of logos. Much of his view can be organized around one of the key principles of Byzantine rhetorical theory, viz., that obscurity (*ἀσάφεια*) is a virtue of style.'<sup>6</sup>

This concept seems to contradict Aristotle's insistence on clarity as one of the main objects of rhetoric. However, Kustas defends this usage:

While maintaining Aristotle's requirement on one level, the Byzantines evolved patterns of literary theory and performance which sought also to express their conception of the mystery of creation and man's place in it. Rhetoric was to contribute to the formulation of this ideal and at the same time adapt itself to it.<sup>7</sup>

In analysing certain aspects of Hermogenes' rhetorical theory, it becomes possible to gain some insight into the rhetorical concepts that were capable of realising this ideal.

### **The structure of Hermogenes' De Ideis**

Having established that Hermogenes' texts formed the principal basis of rhetoric taught in Byzantium, Kustas outlines the structure of the *De Ideis* in particular. This text deals with the rhetorical concept of Forms (*ιδέαι*) and their Categories. In attempting to relate it to the work of Romanos, I have found enough correspondences to suggest that he may have been aware of its theoretical base, either through direct experience or through its general application in the education system in operation throughout the Byzantine Empire. It is interesting to note here that Wellez in discussing the *Echos* sees

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6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.



it as 'the Scheme (ιδέα) of the melody.'<sup>8</sup> The work lists seven ιδέαι or Forms of style, together with their appropriate subdivisions, each of which may also be called a Form. Each Form is described under eight Categories, as follows:

1. σαφήνεια. Clarity.
  - a. καθαρότης. Purity.
  - b. εὐκρίνεια. Limpidity.
2. ἀξίωμα λόγου καὶ μέγεθος. Loftiness and Grandeur.
  - a. σεμνότης. Dignity.
  - b. τραχύτης. Ruggedness.
  - c. σφοδρότης. Intensity.
  - d. λαμπρότης. Brilliance.
  - e. ἀκμή. Climax.
  - f. περιβολὴ καὶ μεσιτότης. Amplitude and Ripeness.
3. ἐπιμέλεια καὶ κάλλος. Elegance and Beauty.
4. γοργότης. Conciseness.
5. ἦθος. Ethos.
  - a. ἀφέλεια. Simplicity.
  - b. γλυκύτης. Pleasantness.
  - c. δριμύτης καὶ ὀξύτης. Pungency and Sharpness.
  - d. ἐπιείκεια. Comeliness.
6. ἀλήθεια. Sincerity.
  - a. βαρύτης. Sternness.
7. δεινότης. Force.

Each of the subdivisions may also properly be called a Form. Each Form is described under eight Categories:

1. ἔννοια. Sentence.
2. μέθοδος. Mode.
3. λέξις. Diction.
4. σχήματα. Figures.
5. κῶλα. Cola.
6. συνθήκη. Composition.
7. ἀνάπαυσις. Cadence.
8. ρυθμός. Rhythm.

Commenting on the structure of the *De Ideis*, Kustas notes the dualism, which was reflected on many levels of Byzantine civilisation.

... the two contrasting bases on which the *De Ideis* is built peculiarly reflect the dual inheritance of Byzantium itself. The Christian stress on the individual urged the literary temperament in one direction; the demand for adherence to a classical ideal – the *μίμησις ἀρχαίων* – exerted a different kind of pull ... Essentially [Hermogenes] is grappling with that most difficult of critical questions ... what is meant by unity in a literary work. His Forms are

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8. Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd ed., OUP, 1961, p. 326.

structures which house the linguistic components represented by the Categories.<sup>9</sup>

### The influence of the model concept on musical thought

Is it possible to perceive in this rhetorico-literary image a model that could be applied to Byzantine chant, that is, seeing the structural model of the Forms housing the Categories reflected in the structure of chant as the modes housing the melodic formulae?

In Part I, Chapter 2 of this thesis, I have drawn attention to the pervasive concept of the model, which was the lynch pin of rhetorical teaching, and can be discerned as an underlying motif in many other aspects of Byzantine thought, not least the dualism. In this context, Kustas cites W. Schmid, who sees the Byzantine era as

an age which insisted on realism and individual personality traits and on strong and immediate effects. The choice of model forms part of the history of the struggle between Asianism and Atticism. Some of the favored qualities will ultimately contribute to the make-up of the Christian sermon ...<sup>10</sup>

In the musical concept of the *heirmos* or model stanza, and in the hymnographers' use of prefabricated melodic formulae and intonation patterns, the rhetorical obsession with models may also be discerned.

Could the signatures (*martyriae*) and intonations of Byzantine chant also be interpreted as providing models for the melodic formulae which follow?

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9. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Wellesz' comments are relevant here:

The *Martyria* ... is an abbreviation of a passage of transition from the *finalis* of the verse to the *initium* of the melody of the hymn. But ... it is also ... the 'layout' of the mode of the hymn; i.e. it gives the principal intervals of the melodic structure of the mode.<sup>11</sup>

Though these questions must necessarily be speculative, I feel that it is reasonable to pose them, in view of the pervasive influence of rhetoric on every aspect of thought and art in the Byzantine culture.

In the Prolegomenon of this thesis, I have mooted the possibility of a connection between the standard rhetoric models incorporated in the *progymnasmata* to demonstrate correct literary usage to students, and the prefabricated musical formulae with which the hymnographer worked.

The Byzantines seem to have perceived these melodic formulae as being of divine origin. Musicological investigations by Wellesz and others point to Syro-Palestinian sources. While the origin of the formulae themselves is uncertain, the fact that they became formalised and stylised, as well as being able to be used only in certain modal contexts, would seem to provide a case for my suggestion that perhaps they were originally formulated to provide ideal musical paradigms, in the same way that rhetorical treatises provided literary models for didactic purposes.

If we accept this premise, it becomes possible to see a number of parallel instances in which the rhetorical theory applied to literature can be extended to cover musical composition. For instance, we may find in the rule that certain melodic formulae can be

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11. Wellesz, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

used only with certain modes a parallel in the rhetorical strictures that certain Forms can be used only with certain types of rhetorical genres.

Kustas points out that, though the structure outlined by Hermogenes appears rigid, it is not in practice. For example, any of the Categories may serve a number of Forms:

At first glance we seem to be presented with a very rigid structure. Actually, the effect is quite otherwise. We do not have to contend with twenty different types of Cadence, for example, each specially fitted to the seven Forms and their thirteen subdivisions. Rather, Hermogenes repeatedly remarks that the same type of Cadence may serve a number of Forms. The same holds true for the other Categories.<sup>12</sup>

Is it possible also to apply this theory to the use of the melodic formulae in Byzantine chant, where although certain formulae are not permitted in certain modes, there are instances in which formulae are interchangeable between modes? As Wellesz points out:

The technical term for the transition from one mode into another is *Parallage* (παράλλαγή) ... [which] means to destroy the rule (λόγος) according to which a mode is sung, and its form (ἰδέα) and to transform its nature (φύσις) into that of another mode.<sup>13</sup>

### Connection between musical Echoi and Hermogenes' Forms

Whether the eight Categories of Hermogenes' Forms have any connection with the eight Echoi of Byzantine chant is speculative. However, Wellesz' description of the function of the Echoi bears a great resemblance to the role ascribed to the Forms by Hermogenes.

... Byzantine *Melopoia* or composition is fundamentally based upon the combination of a number of melodic patterns divided into eight groups, or Echoi, each of these groups consisting of formulae of a particular character, different from that of all the other groups. In other words: each Echo is built up of a number of melodic formulae which are interchangeable in melodies of the same mode. But if the composer wanted to introduce a section which

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12. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

13. Wellesz, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

did not belong to the patterns of the original mode, the character of the composition would be changed, and he would have to draw on a different group of formulae, those characteristic of the new mode.<sup>14</sup>

This seems to be an adequate description of the way in which Hermogenes' rhetorical Forms work also, and further supports the close link between musical and rhetorical theory already suggested earlier in this thesis.

Kustas sees the structural function of the Forms and Categories as enabling us to 'sense at least the structure of a passage and the principles by which it is constructed and may be understood.'<sup>15</sup>

We can find a musical parallel in the modes and intonation formulae, which set not only the mood and tone of the composition, but define also its intervallic and rhythmic structure – in other words, provide the model to which the musical formulae must conform. As Wellesz notes:

... the construction of the melody was based on the combination and linking together of a certain number of melodic formulae characteristic of the mode in which the hymn was composed. The mode ... is not merely a 'scale' but the sum of all the formulae which constitute the quality of an Echos.<sup>16</sup>

For Hermogenes, the interplay of the Forms and their Categories present 'an almost limitless variety of permutations and combinations based on the interrelation of these components.'<sup>17</sup>

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14. *Loc. cit.*

15. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

16. Wellesz, *op. cit.*, pp. 325-6.

17. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

In short, there is described to us in the *De Ideis* a flexible system which will take into account the ethos of an author as a whole as well as the individuality of a particular passage, defined systematically as variations drawn from specific common formulae.<sup>18</sup>

Transferred from its literary applications, this statement could as easily be applied to the function of the modes and formulae in Byzantine chant, if we apply Wellesz' interpretation of the *echoi*.

... the *Echoi* of Byzantine music should be thought of not merely as scales in the modern sense, but as groups of melodies of a certain type, built upon a number of basic formulae which characterize the *Echos*.<sup>19</sup>

Further, Kustas sees in the literary achievement of a particular author 'a unique pattern of these interlocking parts.'<sup>20</sup>

This comment brings to mind the remarkable centonisation techniques of the Byzantine hymnographers, which I have touched upon in this thesis, and treated in detail in an article on the *Akathistos Hymn*. This concept can also be applied to the sets of *Salutations* (*Χαιρετισμοί*) in the same work, which have been dissected in detail in Part II, Chapter 2.

### Hermogenes on style

For Hermogenes, the supreme stylist was Demosthenes, about whom he says

If we could describe the elements of this style ... we should have the basis for describing all discourse ... [Hermogenes] regards the Demosthenic *logos* as a unity of parts actively commingling with one another. Discourse is for him ...

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18. *Loc. cit.*

19. Wellesz, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

20. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

an organism, a living harmony of members. This is what he means by *μῖξις*, 'mixture,' a cardinal principle in his thinking about style.<sup>21</sup>

Romanos' use of language and imagery, drawn from many diverse sources, pagan and Christian, demonstrates the advantages of this 'mixed' style.

Developing this idea and the complexity and richness it produces, Hermogenes notes:

The Forms are not opposites in the sense of being unable to coexist ... On the contrary, they have a *natural* capacity for coexistence. Discourse achieves its excellence as a result of such a happy mixture of opposites.<sup>22</sup>

The theory of opposites applies to the structure of the *De Ideis* as a whole.

The treatise arranges the virtues of style in two groups. On the one side are Clarity, Beauty, Ethos, and Sincerity together with their respective subdivisions; on the other, Grandeur, Conciseness, and Force. Many crossovers between the two groups are possible ... Clearly, however, two general classes of style are held forth, which one might describe as the gentler and the rougher virtues, or the simpler versus the more complex.<sup>23</sup>

Is it too speculative to discern an attempt to provide this *μῖξις* in chant in the blending of the isosyllabic and melismatic styles, which though they imply different musical approaches to the text, can coexist within the one composition? Or, could this describe the melismatic development of a hymn from its isosyllabic origins to become a mixture of the simple and florid, a contrast between aural austerity and opulence?

In the kontakia of Romanos we see both techniques of expression used side by side, as the text or dramatic impulse demands.

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21. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

23. *Loc. cit.*

Though Hermogenes places Clarity first, he favours complex patterns, and therefore the best writer is one who 'mixes' the Forms, such as Demosthenes.<sup>24</sup> We might add also, such as Romanos.

Kustas sees virtue in a theory which recognises stylistic variety within an author and which seeks an explanation in psychological terms.

This leads him to the discerning observation that

One should emphasize the element of psychology because it is of a piece with contemporary rhetorical preoccupation with ethos and must surely be related to the sharpened sense of personality reflected both in Roman portrait art and in the developing Christian stress on the uniqueness of the individual soul before its Creator.<sup>25</sup>

#### **The theory of Forms applied to Romanos' kontakia**

Having raised these questions, and being aware of the need to narrow down the investigation, probably the best way to proceed to an examination of the interconnection between the rhetorical theories expressed in Hermogenes' *De Ideis* and the kontakia of Romanos is to take a particular Form and its Categories and see if it is possible to find correspondences of thought and technique in individual instances in selected works of Romanos, namely, the *Akathistos* and *Nativity Hymns*.

Treating aspects of these kontakia under certain specific rhetorical headings set out by Hermogenes in his *De Ideis*, with particular reference to the key form of Dignity (σεμνότης), which he considered to be one of the most significant of the six subdivisions

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24. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

25. *Loc. cit.*



of Grandeur, I shall proceed to apply this analysis to Romanos' works, feature by feature, and where possible adduce musical reflections of the rhetorical movements in the text, or in the music itself.

### How the Forms work

To demonstrate the way in which Hermogenes' Forms and Categories work, Kustas takes the first two general headings, *i.e.* Clarity, and Loftiness or Grandeur, noting that among the six subdivisions of Grandeur, Dignity and Amplitude stand apart. He chooses to use Dignity for his demonstration, citing the distinction made by Siceliotos:

Clarity befits the common crowd, Dignity the exalted ... *σεμνότης* [Dignity] belongs to the intellectual elite ... In this way obscurity might easily become a special preserve of a class from which the multitude is kept at a distance.<sup>26</sup>

Other reasons for his choice of Dignity are elaborated by Kustas:

Dignity is one of the oldest of rhetorical standards. Aristotle notices a contrast with clarity because it makes use of metaphorical or poetic language. It comes to be one of the most celebrated of rhetorical virtues ... in the form of sublimity it is the subject of the most celebrated of the ancient tracts on literary criticism, the *Περὶ Ἱψους* of 'Longinus'; and it is recognized early as a key element of the Platonic style ... Not only is *σεμνότης* one of Hermogenes' Forms; the *σεμνὸς λόγος* is one of the tropes listed in the fourth book of the *De Inventione* ... *τὸ σεμνόν* is in fact what *λόγος* is all about. The great appeal of the concept in pagan antiquity derives in large measure from the sense of solemnity which informs the aristocratic impulse of all ancient literature, both prose and poetry.<sup>27</sup>

Linked with Dignity is Amplitude, representing the 'two key pillars in the structure of Byzantine rhetoric.'<sup>28</sup> The importance of Amplitude is attributed by Kustas to the fact

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-9.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

that Hermogenes devotes more space to it than to any other topic in the *De Ideis*. It becomes 'a central stylistic value in mediaeval Greek literature ... It overshadows Force, Hermogenes' pinnacle of style, and in fact comes to stand for what was meant by style itself or even the very function of λόγος, the definition of formal language and how it worked or should work.'<sup>29</sup>

Kustas adds that '... in following Hermogenes' prescriptions for achieving Dignity the Byzantines were well aware that divinity is expressible only through metaphor.'<sup>30</sup>

One is also reminded that '... composition, together with metaphor and figures, provides access to the magnificence and fulness of the divine.'<sup>31</sup>

In carrying out his exalted role as the medium through which the Divine Logos reached the congregation, Romanos provides an exemplary instance of the efficacy of these concepts.

As Kustas sees it:

Thus Dignity and Amplitude cater to the Byzantine desire to see the world whole, to characterize through rhetoric the sublime oecumene of which they recognized themselves a part. It is not for nothing that in rhetorical theory the synonym for ἠθοποιία is μίμησις.<sup>32</sup>

Having selected Dignity as the Form to be analysed, Kustas presents a detailed list and explanation of its Categories. A study of these provides an amalgam of previous

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29. *Loc. cit.*

30. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

rhetorical theories and concepts, some of which have already been examined in Part II, Chapters 1 and 2. However, the emphasis here will be on finding any direct correspondences with the compositional techniques of Romanos.

### The Categories of Dignity

#### A. SENTENCE (ἔννοια)

Sentence, the first Category of Dignity, is defined by Kustas as '*sententia*, the standard Latin rendering ... The term refers to the topic or subject-matter of discourse, that is, the content of thought. Ancient Latin rhetoricians used *sententia* for a variety of Greek terms, such as γνώμη, διάνοια, ἐνθύμημα, νόημα, and ὑπόθεσις.<sup>33</sup> 'Despite the ambiguity in modern English, "Sentence" comes closest to expressing the variety of meaning that historically becomes compressed into what Hermogenes understands by ἔννοια.'<sup>34</sup>

Kustas lists the topics of *Sentence* as:

1. Discussion concerning the gods as gods ... theology in the broad sense.
2. Discussion of divine matters ... The nature of the seasons, the circuit of the universe ... natural phenomena ...
3. Matters basically divine but having to do with the human condition, such as the immortality of the soul, the nature of justice and temperance, the definition of life, and the question what is nature and what convention.
4. Significant human events.<sup>35</sup>

Both the *Akathistos* and *Nativity Hymns* deal with divine events that have changed the course of mankind. In the *Akathistos Hymn* we have Mary and Christ linked in the

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33. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

soteriological scheme by various subtle rhetorical methods. Similarly, in the *Nativity Hymn*, we are made aware of the enormity of the event of the Son of God taking flesh as a 'new born babe – the God before time.'

It is of interest that Siceliotos associates *σεμνότης* with the writing of Saints Basil and John Chrysostom and the 'theological' style as a whole, particularly the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, since Romanos drew heavily upon these writers in particular.

A further connection with theological writing can be seen in Hermogenes' recommendation that the main Sentence of Dignity should be concerned with gods or divine matters. In the semantic manipulation that characterised the Christianisation of rhetoric, later, 'Psellus changes "gods" to "God." In this way Hermogenes easily becomes a Christian.'<sup>36</sup>

#### B. MODE (*μέθοδος*)

The second Category, Mode, concerns 'the disposition of the Sentence, that is to say, the way it is expressed or the principle of organizing the subject-matter. Allegorical techniques, for example, are "modes" for describing the divine, which is one of the main Sentences of Dignity.'<sup>37</sup> The topics of Mode are:

1. Direct assertions.
2. Allegorical modes. Allegorical techniques, for example, are 'modes' for describing the divine.

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36. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

3. Mystical and ritual effects achieved through use of emphases. As Kustas puts it 'When we have knowledge of something but cannot express its essence, this technique provides grandeur and dignity to discourse.'<sup>38</sup>

However, it is when we come to the third Category of Dignity – *Diction* – that we find a remarkable concordance between Hermogenes' theories and the techniques Romanos has used in the opening strophes of the *Akathistos Hymn*.

### C. DICTION (λέξις)

Among the four subdivisions of Diction, (1) and (2) are concerned with the types of vowel sounds to be used to attain Dignity, as follows:

1. In general, sounds which require the distension of the mouth, especially alpha and omega, and particularly on the final syllables.

An examination of the first stanza (*Oikos I*) of the *Akathistos Hymn* reveals extensive use of alpha and omega, both at the beginning and at the end of words.

Ἄγγελος πρωτοστάτης οὐρανόθεν ἐπέμφθη εἰπεῖν τῇ Θεοτόκῃ τὸ Χαῖρε. καὶ σὺν τῇ ἀσωμάτῳ φωνῇ σωματούμενόν σε θεωρῶν, Κύριε, ἐξίστατο καὶ ἴστατο κραυγάζων πρὸς αὐτὴν τοιαῦτα:

The Archangel was sent from heaven to say 'Hail' to the Theotokos. And with his Celestial Voice, envisioning You O Lord embodied, he was wonder-rapt and stood crying unto Her:

Though, according to Pitra, Greek had lost its quantitative characteristics, Romanos may have still clung to the supremacy of those vowels in classical Greek, in order to set a lofty tone for the twenty-three stanzas to follow. There is also the possibility that the use of

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38. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-2.

alpha and omega had a spiritual connotation since these – the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet – were associated with the infinity of God.

In this connection, Wilder notes that, among the features of the Hellenistic hymns which provided a model for later works in this genre, was ‘the oracular self-identification of the Revealer-Redeemer’: ... “I am Alpha and Omega.”<sup>39</sup>

The frequency with which these two sounds occur in the opening stanza would appear to offer a case for believing that Romanos was aware of this classical usage, and was striving in those important opening lines, for the maximum effect of Solemnity, in words such as: ἄγγελος, πρῶτοστάτης, θεοτόκιο, ἀσώματω, φωνῇ, σωματοῦμένον, θεωρῶν.

Carpenter reminds us that ‘Romanos was known as a melodist, and that his poems should be heard so that we realize that the stress accents fall on the highest points of the melodic curve.’<sup>40</sup>

The melodic passages in which these sounds occur also appear to contain the highest note in the sequence, further suggesting that their use was intentional.

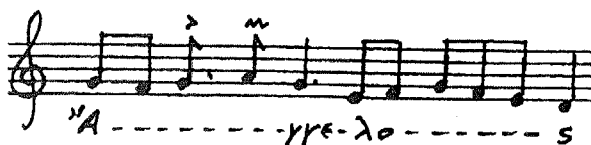
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39. Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p. 113.

40. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, p. xvi.

Ex. 1

'Αγγελος – highest point (a<sup>1</sup>) on *alpha* at beginning of word.



Ex. 2

θεοτόκω – *omega* on final syllable; highest points (b<sup>1</sup>) fall on stress accent.



The second subdivision of Diction, concerned with the types of vowel sounds to be used to attain Dignity, states:

2. The o-sound in words culminating in long syllables ... Also long vowels and diphthongs, particularly in final syllables, except for ei. The iota should be avoided.

This aspect of Diction is represented also in the long melisma at the end of **θεωρῶν**, preceding the significant word **Κύριε** (Lord), which also demonstrates another favoured rhetorical device, which was to elongate not the most significant word, but the word preceding it to, as it were, draw attention to it, create dramatic tension, and draw out the suspense (cf. the function of the trill in the classical concerto announcing the return of the main subject). Note also the fermata on the last syllable of **θεωρῶν** – immediately preceding the utterance of the word ‘**Κύριε**’ – the silence also accentuating the

importance of the word to follow. The comments of 'Longinus' on the divine aspects of silence are noted in Part III, Chapter 2.

Ex. 3

θεωρῶν – *omega* on final syllable, also stress accent; highest points (e<sup>h</sup>) on an *omega*.



The next two aspects of Diction are concerned with syntax:

3. Tropical expressions. These must be used with caution and moderation. 'One of the standard types of allegorical interpretation is τροπολογία. This Origen defines as having to do with the ψυχή that is, the "spiritual" interpretation of Scripture.'<sup>41</sup>

Kustas cites 'Longinus' on figures:

The large emphasis which 'Longinus' places on figures (σχήματα) is based on a sensitive feeling of the interrelation between principles and the materials of literary performance: 'Figures are somehow natural allies of the sublime and draw in turn marvellous reinforcement from the alliance.'<sup>42</sup>

Clearly tropes and figures serve a common function. Longinus observes that 'Tropical writing has a natural grandeur and metaphors make for sublimity.'<sup>43</sup>

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41. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

43. *Loc. cit.*



Summing up the role of tropical techniques in the evolution of a Christian rhetoric,

Kustas notes:

Allegory, emphasis, figure, metaphor, metonymy, symbol, trope: all such conceptions and habits of language now contribute in their distinctive ways to the assessment of the human as part of the scheme of superhuman value in accordance with the terms of Christian history.<sup>44</sup>

4. Participles, pronouns, and nouns abstracted from verbs. These are 'onomastic' words. Verbs should be used least of all. This section has been examined in more detail in Part III, Chapter 2.

Planudes uses philosophical language when he says the interest is in οὐσία (*i.e.* nouns), not ἐνέργεια (verbs), though like Hermogenes he is careful to insist on the verbal base.<sup>45</sup>

#### D. FIGURES (σχήματα)

Figures, the fourth Category of Dignity, have been dealt with in some detail also under DICTION, 3. Tropical Expressions. The topics of this subdivision are:

1. The same as under Purity: essentially ὁρθότης, that is, direct constructions using the nominative. These make for clarity.

The first statement in *Oikos I* of the Akathistos is a good example of a direct construction. It catches the attention immediately with the image of the Angel – the chief Angel – sent from heaven to greet the Mother of God.

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44. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

## E. COLA (κῶλα)

With regard to the colon, Kennedy notes that Aristotle refers to the two parts of the period, the beginning and the end: 'Each of these parts [he] calls a colon, which is not a clause in our sense, since it is not necessarily an independent grammatical unit, but simply a group of words balanced by some other group.'<sup>46</sup>

Kennedy notes that in Aristotle 'The discussion of the period follows that of rhythm, and presumably the two are to be viewed together ...'<sup>47</sup>

He later draws attention to the fact that:

Aristotle's account of a period is based largely on antithesis ... Though the antithetical style was no doubt the beginning of Greek periodicity, and the 'rounding' demanded of a period was most clearly seen in an antithesis ...<sup>48</sup>

Hermogenes goes on to remark that the topics of Cola are also 'The same as under Purity, that is, short cola forming complete thoughts by themselves. Periodic constructions and long cola are to be avoided, though the latter are sometimes possible depending on circumstances. Aphoristic expressions are particularly recommended.'<sup>49</sup>

In Part II, Chapter 2, which is concerned with Aristotelian influences on Romanos, I have discussed the period in more detail.

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46. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

49. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

The syntactical structure of the kontakion is echoed exactly by the chant accompanying it. The 'medial signatures' act as punctuation, thereby avoiding long cola. It should be mentioned, however, that at times the long melismas on a particular word could tax the singer's memory, as evidenced by the repeated syllables accompanying highly melismatic passages.

#### F. COMPOSITION (συνθήκη)

Kustas notes that 'Hermogenes understands two things by *συνθήκη*: (1) relation of the last syllable of one word to the beginning of the next, e.g. hiatus, though purely rhythmical considerations are also involved; and (2) general sequence of long and short syllables.<sup>50</sup>

Concerning (1), the centonisation techniques used by Romanos and other hymnographers fit this definition perfectly. These have been discussed in detail in Part III, Chapter 2.

The topics for Composition are:

1. Sequences which are not stunted for the sake of the congruence of vowels.
2. Dactyls, anapaests, paeonics, and occasionally iambics and spondees. Epitrites contribute to the dignified style. Trochaic and ionic meters do not.

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50. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Kustas notes that ‘Figures and tropes are the means by which we relate to something larger than ourselves. They offer us the opportunity of seeing ourselves *sub specie aeternitatis*.’<sup>51</sup>

For this reason ‘Longinus’ devotes special attention to *συνθήκη*, the composition or arrangement of words. Composition is ‘a kind of melody in words – words which are part of man’s nature and reach not his ears only but his very soul ... by the blending of its own manifold tones it brings into the hearts of the bystanders the speaker’s actual emotion so that all who hear him share in it, and by piling phrase on phrase builds up one majestic whole; by these means it casts a spell on us and always turns our thoughts towards what is majestic and dignified and sublime.’<sup>52</sup>

This could purport to be a description of the effect Romanos produced on his hearers as he explored the psychological depths of the protagonists in the divine mystery of the Incarnation, or ‘Christ drama’ as Topping called it.

A brilliant example of ‘piling phrase on phrase’ in a practical demonstration of this technique is to be found in *Oikos I* of the *Akathistos Hymn*, detailed in Part III, Chapter 2, when Romanos, in order to draw the listener into the great drama and miracle that is taking place, uses the reaction of the angel to express the awe and wonder of the moment. The listeners identify with the angel who is amazed and astounded, rooted to the spot at what he is witnessing – the bodily realisation of the Word of God, the *Logos* becoming corporeal.

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51. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

52. *Loc. cit.*

This powerfully dramatic image indeed achieves the effect described by 'Longinus.'

In his final summing up of the virtues of Composition, Kustas notes: 'In short, composition, together with metaphor and figures, provides access to the magnificence and fulness of the divine.'<sup>53</sup>

#### G. CADENCE (ἀνάπαυσις)

The seventh Category of Dignity is Cadence.

The cola must end in a suitable metric foot, as defined under Composition. The ending must be acatalectic in order to avoid a trochaic pattern. Cadence should not be jerky but should have a stately movement, which it will achieve if (1) the cola end in nouns or adjectives of not less than three syllables; and (2) if there is a preponderance of long syllables ... An especially dignified effect is achieved if the vowel in the last or penultimate syllable is one of those which distend the mouth, such as alpha or omega, as stated in the rules governing Diction.<sup>54</sup>

The application of this technique has already been noted in the opening stanza of Romanos' *Akathistos Hymn*.

#### H. RHYTHM (ρὺθμός)

'Rhythm is made up of and attends upon Composition and Cadence. One should maintain the metrical patterns proper to a particular Form unbroken throughout, not only in the body of a sentence but at the end of the individual cola.'<sup>55</sup>

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53. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

55. Wellesz, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

The constant maintenance of the metrical pattern is a feature of the kontakion form. Because of its relevance to the rhetorical structures of Hermogenes, Wellesz' summary of the structural principles upon which the kontakion is constructed is noted in some detail:

The Kontakion (κοντάκιον or κονδάκιον) consists of from eighteen to thirty, or even more, stanzas all structurally alike. The single stanza is called the Troparion; its length varies from three to thirteen lines. All the Troparia are composed on the pattern of a model stanza, the Hirmus (εἰρμός). A Kontakion is built either on the pattern of a Hirmus specially composed for it, or follows the metre of a Hirmus already used for another Kontakion. At the beginning of the Kontakion stands a short Troparion, metrically and melodically independent of it: this is the Prooemium (προοίμιον) or kukulion (κουκούλιον) ... [These] are linked together by the refrain, the Ephymnium (ἐφύμνιον) with which all the stanzas end, and by the musical mode (ἦχος).<sup>56</sup>

Wellesz continues:

To adapt the Troparia to the melody of the Hirmus it was not sufficient to make each line, corresponding to a line of the model strophe, of equal length, i.e. with the same number of syllables, but the stress accents must also fall on the same syllable as the Hirmus, in order to make the accentuated notes of the melody coincide with the accentuated syllables of the stanzas.<sup>57</sup>

Regarding the metres of Byzantine religious poetry, Maas and Trypanis note:

In the early Christian centuries ... the rhythms of the new religious poetry were governed by a stress accent and the number of syllables in each line. Thirty-nine types of 'pattern-stanzas' attributed to Romanos have survived and they reveal a wealth of rhythmic effects that is indeed impressive. The true precursors of these rhythms were the isocolons, in which the rhetoric of the fifth century delighted, and the rhythmic period endings found in fourth-century prose. But there is nothing comparable there to the regulated accents within a colon, which we find in the fully developed kontakion.<sup>58</sup>

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56. *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

58. Paul Maas and C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*, OUP, 1963, pp. xiii-xiv.

These skills required of the composer of religious poetry bear out the truth of Wellesz' prescription for the writer of a kontakion that the poet had also to be a musician, and that 'Music and poetry had to make a single entity.'<sup>59</sup>

Mastering these skills, Romanos and sixth century poets of kontakia like Anastasios, Dometios, and Kyriakos, saw the literary genre of the kontakion reach its peak.

This completes the section in which specific theories drawn from Hermogenes' *De Ideis* have been applied to the kontakia of Romanos. However, even this small selection of examples, appears to offer sufficient evidence to indicate that even if Romanos was not directly drawing upon the theories of Hermogenes, he was at least aware of mainstream Byzantine rhetorical thought.

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59. Wellesz, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

## *Chapter 5*

### **SPECIFIC ISSUES IN BYZANTINE RHETORICAL THEORY: THE CONCEPT OF OBSCURITY**

One of the most paradoxical aspects of rhetorical theory is the concept of obscurity; paradoxical because one of the chief rules of rhetoric was to aim for clarity. The classical Greek love of paradox is later matched by Byzantium.

Greek theological writing is shot through with obscurities in the form of paradoxes, juxtaposition of opposites, for example, 'God is never more distant than when He is closest to us.'<sup>1</sup>

Born of the need for citizens to conduct their own defence in the law courts, rhetoric won a reputation for being immoral, in that the practitioner was concerned not with justice but with winning the case. Under these conditions it is not surprising that ways and means to conceal the real intent of the words developed side by side with other more positive aspects of rhetoric.

Since the concept of obscurity was not a mere aberration but an integral part of rhetorical theory, and since this thesis is attempting to examine any relevant aspect of the influence of rhetoric on musical composition, new insights can be gained from a study of the evolution of this concept and its effect on the mind of Byzantium.

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1. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, p. 65.



Treating Romanos' kontakia as integrated musico-literary forms, it is possible to find instances of obscurity or, at least, subliminal suggestion in his work, for example, in extended melismatic treatment of the Annunciation theme in the *Akathistos Hymn*, which is dealt with in more detail later.

### **Obscurity reflected in the oral tradition**

Because of the existence of a strong and continuous oral tradition in Byzantine chant, the notation was merely an *aide-mémoire* to the singer who knew the run of the melody by heart. It is therefore possible that the notation was not perfect, but simply an attempt to evolve a facsimile of the living art for posterity. This leaves room for speculation that not all of the chant learnt orally was always represented in the manuscripts. In other words, certain passages or abbreviations could have been sung in performance, without being fully notated in the manuscripts; or, certain signs could have represented a kind of shorthand for a set of melodic formulae, as Stathis suggests, much as the abbreviations of the Main Signatures were often used.

### **The 'phthorai': part of the concept of obscurity?**

Recent dispute concerning certain signs (*phthorai*) appearing in musical manuscripts, which are alleged to represent an unwritten vocal tradition, could also be viewed as an example of the rhetorical theory of obscurity finding its way into musical composition.

According to Greek musicologist, Grigorios Stathis, these signs can be interpreted only by initiates who are acquainted with the oral tradition, the implication being that the

early transcriptions which relied solely upon the manuscript tradition, do not represent the entire run of the *melos* or melody.

Could this 'hidden' tradition, which is examined in more detail later, represent yet another aspect of rhetorical usage being applied to musical theory?

Drawing together these threads, one could discern the rhetorical use of obscurity by Romanos in his application of rhetorical theory to both music and texts; musically by melismatic devices, and textually, chiefly by the use of metaphor.

#### **Aristotle's definition of Obscurity**

An understanding of Aristotle's definition of obscurity and what constituted a legitimate use of this device makes it quite feasible to apply this rhetorical concept to this aspect of Byzantine chant. Aristotle's theory is that, although clarity is the overall aim of rhetoric, obscurity is permissible under certain circumstances, such as, making the listener work harder to understand, or preserving certain knowledge for initiates only. One might note in passing that, in fact, the Christian religion, which was to base itself so heavily upon pagan rhetorical theory, also practised the exclusion of the uninitiated from certain parts of the liturgy.

Being aware of the rhetorical influences on Romanos, one would expect to find in his kontakia instances of the application of the theory of obscurity, and, in fact, in Part III, Chapter 2 there is such an example in the extended melismatic writing accompanying the actual moment of the Annunciation in the *Akathistos Hymn*.

It seems then that, in order to place Romanos' use of obscurity in context, a brief overview of the origin and development of this rhetorical concept is useful.

### **The concept of obscurity: origins**

According to Kustas 'Greek literature found in obscurity a means for expressing some of its deep felt religious values,'<sup>2</sup> and notes its powerful influence on Byzantine thought.

We have, then, in the course of Byzantine history a very conscious and steady tradition of opinion and practice regarding obscurity. The habit ... is integral to the very thought-world of Byzantium. Through being a regular element in the scheme of Byzantine rhetorical education it forms part of the apparatus of learning in all periods.<sup>3</sup>

Kustas sees the use of obscurity in rhetoric as a positive force making for a given end, noting that it was part of general schooling: 'the knowledge which Byzantine students had regarding obscure writing reached them not abstractly but as an integral part of training in the progymnasmata ...'<sup>4</sup>

Since Aristotle was concerned with clarity, in his thoroughgoing way he also showed an interest in its opposite. As Kustas notes: Aristotle's identification of clarity as 'the chief merit of style' led him also 'to consider its opposite.'

He addresses himself to the problem of obscurity in two of his works, the *Rhetoric* and the *Topica*. The *Rhetoric* treats obscurity from the point of view of style and its underlying principles ... [Both works] give attention to the more external manifestations of obscurity and then pass on to consider the nature of metaphor.<sup>5</sup>

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

### The concept of Obscurity in antiquity

Among the ancients, there was always 'a recognition that obscurity is not merely a negation of an ideal but can serve a purpose of its own.'<sup>6</sup>

The attitude of Heraclitus provides further evidence for what was considered among the ancients to be a legitimate use of obscurity; he is alleged to have 'deliberately made [his writing] the more obscure in order that none but adepts should approach it, and lest familiarity breed contempt.'<sup>7</sup>

Demosthenes intermixed elements in his speeches because, according to Hermogenes, 'Clarity carried the danger of making the style too humble.'<sup>8</sup>

We can see this view reflected later in the embarrassment of the Early Fathers at the transparency of Christian writings. The Byzantine virtuosity with words saw to it that pagan rhetorical style was applied vigorously to these texts, at the same time defending their lack of literary sophistication by putting forward the idea that Divine Truth had no need of artifice. This application of rhetoric to exegesis is noted by Kustas when he says:

In the Christian realm recognition of the question of obscurity appears chiefly in connection with the development of exegetical works and their attempt to elucidate Holy Writ. Here the obscurity of a Biblical passage is often explained away through techniques of allegorical or typological interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

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6. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

7. *Loc. cit.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

The kontakia of Romanos could be classified as exegetical, and we have already seen evidence of his use of rhetorical devices to drive home the dogmatic import of the text.

### Obscurity and the oral tradition

Another aspect of obscurity can be seen in the oral tradition which persisted in the teachings of the church. Concerning Christianity, Sherrard points out that 'while much of the doctrine is written ... other aspects ... are the subject of oral, and symbolic, transmission,' not only because they could only be communicated to one ready to receive them, but also because by their very nature they could not be written. He adds that 'This sacred tradition of teachings orally transmitted is frequently referred to by the Fathers of the Church.'<sup>10</sup>

This tradition could have some bearing on the oral transmission of Byzantine chant, which is discussed in relation to obscurity in Part III Chapter 3.

In the hands of Christian exponents, rhetoric assumed a more moral stance, and links were established gradually between pagan philosophical concepts and Christian exegesis.

Just as Christian exegetes advanced the awareness of obscurity as an element of their religious texts, so the Neoplatonists helped give it mystical sanction within pagan philosophy ... Obscurity ... could now be justified on a number of grounds, rooted more widely in religious and social attitudes.<sup>11</sup>

For the Byzantines, hard at work on rhetoric to fit it to serve the evolving Christian ethos, obscurity was a way of coping with the mystical.

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10. Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West*, OUP, 1959, p. 28.

11. Kustas, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-4.

As Kustas put it: 'the Byzantines evolved patterns of literary theory and performance which sought also to express their conception of the mystery of creation and man's place in it.'<sup>12</sup>

### Obscurity associated with the mystical

Here we begin to glimpse the semantic process by which the pagan elements of rhetoric gradually assume Christian meaning, as Kustas points out:

The Stoics share with Aristotle the conviction that rhetoric has a philosophical base ... Christian theory ... was developing the principle that obscurity was a mystical means of expressing divine truth ... Moreover the Stoic statement provided the theoretical support for the transformation of the function of oratory, for the Christian preacher now dealt with truth and not, as in secular rhetoric, with what was probable or feasible (εἰκότα).<sup>13</sup>

The exegetical thrust of Romanos' work has already been observed, as well as his use of concepts outlined in Hermogenes' *De Ideis*, which bases itself on the Platonic theory of Forms, among which Hermogenes identifies Dignity with the divine.

... Hermogenes can provide the discussion of things divine as one of the first elements of a dignified style and so open the way for the Christians to describe their God in this manner.<sup>14</sup>

One begins to see the seeds of apophatic theology in these concepts, that is, the technique of describing God by saying what he is not, rather than reducing him to human terms by trying to define what he is.

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12. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

This overwhelming problem of finding an appropriate method of dealing with theological concepts through the medium of language, is succinctly stated by Kustas, when he notes:

In the developed Byzantine view ... language does not simply react to the obscurity of the world, seeking to resolve it through metaphor, but itself exemplifies it. Language at once bypasses metaphor in order to express the mystery of the cosmos and is also the ultimate metaphor in seeing God in and through man and his works.<sup>15</sup>

Acknowledging the Hellenistic influence, Kustas says:

A number of largely independent, though related, lines of rhetorical thought are being pursued in the early imperial age, most of them traceable to Hellenistic ancestry. Eventually they converge and form a dominant structure of opinion for which Hermogenes becomes the key spokesman. One of the chief elements in the structure is the definition of literary obscurity.<sup>16</sup>

In a general survey of the Byzantine attitude to obscurity, Kustas examines the comments of a number of scholiasts on Hermogenes, including Demetrius, Siceliotis, Doxapatres, Geometres, Ammonius and Elias: ‘... for Demetrius, as for Aristotle, elevation and obscurity are obviously related.’<sup>17</sup>

Demetrius recommends the use of metaphor, allegory, innuendo (ἔμφασις), hyperbole ... [types of] artificial speech (πλάσματα) – producing their effect through an economy of language.<sup>18</sup>

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15. *Loc. cit.*

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-7.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

### Metaphor and Obscurity

Aristotle, when dealing with metaphor, notes that it presupposes plurality, such dualism leading him to state that 'all metaphor is obscure' and that 'all unusual phrases are obscure.'<sup>19</sup>

Romanos' kontakia certainly embody this 'mixed' style which is the subject of further elaboration by 'Longinus' in his remarks on the metrical effect of a passage from Demosthenes: 'Nothing is of greater service in giving grandeur to such passages than the composition of the various members.'<sup>20</sup> Comparing this with the members of the human body, he concludes:

... if they are united into a single system and embraced moreover by the bonds of rhythm, then by being merely rounded into a period they gain a living voice ... In such periods ... the grandeur comes from a multitude of contributors.<sup>21</sup>

If we substitute for 'members' the word 'formulae,' and for the word 'period' the word 'cadence,' we could have an acceptable definition of the method of composition of the Byzantine Melode. This concept of style tends to supply a direct link between rhetorical practice and musical composition in influencing the structure of hymns.

Although his chief mandate was to spell out the official doctrinal position of both Church and State, Romanos had to use obscurity with discretion, since he was faced with the paradox of presenting doctrinal issues clearly and unambiguously, at the same time using language which suggested the mysteriousness and ineffability of his lofty themes.

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19. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 75.



### Romanos' use of metaphor

One of the ways in which he succeeded in this task was through the use of metaphor, of which he was an acknowledged master, as were the Cappadocians before him.

Brilliant examples of the use of metaphor can be found scattered throughout the texts of his kontakia. Musical metaphors are also in evidence, for example, in the *Nativity Hymn*, cited in Part III, Chapter 2, when the literary technique of likening Christ to a well ( $\phi\rho\epsilon\alpha\rho$ ) finds a musical echo in the extension of the melodic formulae.

Ever mindful, however, of the primacy of the text, Romanos' ornamentation conforms always to rhetorical considerations, that is, never allowing melismatic treatment to obscure the meaning of the words. He was content to achieve this mysteriousness by the use of metaphor and antithesis. In this practice he would appear to be applying the principle of separation implied in an anonymous tract, popular in the third century, the *Seguerianus*, which states that 'Obscurity ... occurs either in the subject matter or in the style.'<sup>22</sup> In the case of Romanos, the subject matter was already obscure, in that it presented the paradoxes and mysteries of Christian doctrine. Because he had the unenviable task of communicating as unambiguously as possible, these message, obscurity, if any, would underlie his structures and style.

The exaggerated application of melismata in later liturgical manuscripts also could be construed as yet another aspect of the musical application of the rhetorical concept of obscurity. Dragoumis provides a spectacular example:

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22. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

## MELISMATIC WRITING OBSCURING THE TEXT'

Vind. Theol. gr. 181, 283r.  
 Μουσική Βιβλιοθήκη, I. 1868, 116-7.

S Τὸν σταυρὸν σου τὸν τιμωρὸν, προσ-  
 ND Τὸν σταυρὸν (ra) ρὸν σου (σου) τὸν τιμωρὸν (ri) ον, προσ-  
 A κυρίου μεν Χριστέ, καὶ τὴν δ-  
 NB κυρίου μεν Χρι- στέ, καὶ τὴν δ-  
 A στα- σου, ἡμ-νοῦ καὶ δο-ξά-  
 NB στα- σι- (ri) - ρ σου, ἡμ-νοῦ - μεν καὶ δο-ξά- (ra)

'QUOTED BY MARKOS DRAGOUMIS IN *STUDIES IN EASTERN CHANT, I.*

A possible reason for this relegation of the text to a comparatively inferior position in the seventh century can be linked to the fact that heretical sects no longer posed a threat to the Church-State security, and the main corpus of Christian doctrine had been crystallised. Under these circumstances, there would be less need for hymns to assume a homiletic character, and, indeed, the triumph of the *kanon* over the *kontakion* could be a reflection of this development.

### Relationship between Obscurity and theology

The full acceptance of obscurity as a rhetorical virtue is expressed in the observations of Siceliotis when he refers to 'approved obscurity' (ἐπαινουμένη ἀσάφεια) which he even goes so far as to call an 'ιδεά'.<sup>23</sup>

Siceliotis also provides a concise definition of the relationship between obscurity and theology. He notes first that Hermogenes' ideal style, Force, is attained 'if one's Sentences are not only dignified and elaborate but obscurely expressed'.<sup>24</sup> He then elaborates on these rhetorical styles in relation to theology:

The obscurity of God lies in His being beyond our understanding and beyond limit. Thus obscurity contributes to Force. Further, the Sentence for which the use of the περιστάτικα is especially prescribed in Hermogenes' system is that of Amplitude ... [which] requires context and since the ultimate context is the Godhead, there issues an essential relation among ἀσάφεια, δεινότης and περιβολή.<sup>25</sup>

Kustas points out the significance of this association of ideas, which gradually penetrated all sacred texts, and their interpretation:

This pattern of ideas forms a remarkable instance of rhetoric in the service of theology. We are observing an attempt at the spiritualization and sanctification of the written and spoken word, done in terms of traditional rhetorical theory.<sup>26</sup>

Geometres reinforces this concept when he says 'clarity and obscurity depend not on the disposition of the listener but on the nature of the logos itself'.<sup>27</sup>

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23. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

27. *Loc. cit.*

This comment takes us back to the dilemma of dealing with the power of the Logos in the setting of inspired texts, which is examined in the Prolegomenon, and the effect of the concept of *ethos* on the artist, which is also touched upon in Part I.

Doxapatres states that clarity and obscurity are not direct opposites. 'Hermogenes' system works in such a way that it is possible to give more weight to any one of the Forms. Obscurity does not automatically issue once we downgrade Clarity.'<sup>28</sup> In espousing these theories, Doxapatres 'can now separate off the concept of obscurity and give it an existence all its own, a necessary step in the Byzantine process by which obscurity becomes a touchstone of rhetoric.'<sup>29</sup>

### **The Greek tradition of Obscurity**

Finally, Kustas sums up the three lines of approach to the Greek tradition of obscurity.

The first maintains the necessity for the clear exposition of one's thoughts ...  
The second recognizes the existence of special types of discourse, whether specific genres such as figured topics or various tropical techniques such as emphasis, metaphor, or allegory, which admit the positive value of obscurity designed for and contributing to a given purpose ...<sup>30</sup>

The third line of approach can be summed up in the theory that 'Style can be manipulated to serve the function of content; indeed, it may reflect that function and in its way contribute to it,' which Kustas considers to be 'the most original and rewarding, and the distinctive Byzantine contribution.'<sup>31</sup>

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28. *Loc. cit.*

29. *Loc. cit.*

30. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Borrowing selectively from the rhetorical tradition to which she fell heir, Byzantium enlarges and enriches its meaning through the leaven of her own theological and mystical purpose so as to guide the expression of some of the unique features of her life and thought.<sup>32</sup>

### Links between obscurity and hymnography

The concept of obscurity pervaded the other arts as well as music, as Meyendorff has pointed out, when he associates the veiling of the altar, with obscurity and mystery. He also attributes the proliferation of hymnography to the same causes: 'The liturgical evolution of the so-called "cathedral" rite [*i.e.* the practice of the major city-churches as distinct from the monastic communities] meant

Devoting comparatively little time to scriptural readings, or psalmody, this rite had favored the mushrooming of hymnography and the development of the liturgy as a 'mystery' or 'drama.'<sup>33</sup>

In similar vein, Ammonius, another Hermogenes' scholiast, notes:

... just as in temples priests use curtains or screens so that the mass of the uninitiated may not come into contact with what is forbidden, so Aristotle uses obscurity as a kind of cover for his philosophy.<sup>34</sup>

On this topic, Kustas adds the observations of two other prominent scholiasts, noting that Simplicius thought Aristotle chose obscurity 'because it gave more play to the intellect,' or, in the case of the more technical works, 'to discourage the casual reader',<sup>35</sup> while Elias sees obscurity as serving 'the same function for Aristotle as myths do for poets and

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32. *Loc. cit.*

33. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Mowbrays and Fordham University Press, London, 1974, p. 118.

34. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

curtains for priests ... All have to do with keeping the mysteries hidden from the profane.<sup>36</sup>

According to Kustas, 'Obscurity has enjoyed an appeal in all ages for it answers to something fundamental in the psychic make-up of man.'<sup>37</sup>

It is a feature of the poetry and scholarship of Hellenistic Alexandria, it underlies some of the ancient quarrel between Asianists and Atticists, it is a vital factor in the literature of religion ...<sup>38</sup>

Kustas sees also a relationship between literature and the other arts in the matter of obscurity, including the development of such features as *chiaroscuro*, as well as the conception of the obscure in Western mediaeval and in German and other literatures. He also connects the 'dark canvases' of El Greco with this concept.

Summing up the Byzantine view, and the contribution of the hymnographers, Kustas writes:

If the inherited rhetorical knowledge supplied her with the tactics and technique for her literary endeavors an even surer foundation lay in her own religious vision. In the literature of the Church Byzantine thought found room for both clarity and obscurity, striving for a relation between them which identified her with God's historical plan and gave expression to her deepest spiritual instincts ... The patterns of imagery by which poets hymned and exegetes interpreted the events of the Bible were part of [the Byzantine's] cultural inheritance.<sup>39</sup>

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36. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

38. *Loc. cit.*

39. *Loc. cit.*

*Part III*

**LITURGICO-MUSICAL APPLICATIONS**

## Chapter 1

# THE RHETORICO-DRAMATIC TRADITION OF THE LITURGY

When we talk about Eastern Christendom, we are discussing, among other things, the evolution of a complex liturgy surrounding the rite of the Last Supper, which reached its apotheosis in Byzantium.

At the height of its performance in the basilica of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the Eastern Orthodox liturgy comprised one of the great spectacles of its age. The audio-visual impact must have been overpowering, as it reflected not only the heavenly hierarchy, but also the full state panoply of the imperial tradition, as the Emperor presided over the service.

In fact, the liturgy has been viewed as one of the greatest creative achievements of Byzantium.

The Orthodox liturgy, in effect the enactment of the life and passion of Christ, is in every way – visually, symbolically, and musically – a true work of art. The liturgy, in particular the hymnody of the church, as is too little appreciated in the West, in fact constitutes one of the most creatively original aspects of Byzantine civilization. Egon Wellesz ... maintains that the greatest Byzantine hymns, as artistic creations, are equal to, and in some cases even surpass, the best of the Roman church.<sup>1</sup>

If one takes into consideration also the fact of the banning of secular drama or at least the forbidding of Christians to attend such performances, which may have been held

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1. Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the 'Sibling' Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance, 330-1600*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976, p. 29.



privately, one feels that there must have been a continuous dramatic tradition in the church, and that these enactments, Romanos' kontakia in particular, could be viewed as forerunners of the Medieval Mystery Plays. The suppression of pagan drama also meant that the church and the hippodrome comprised the two major public venues where people could congregate socially and be entertained, so that the liturgy had to provide a total environment for the Byzantine citizen:

The liturgy of the Church, a sacred play involving the *whole of man*, must assume and transform all forms of human feeling, and must not be restricted to satisfying only his intellectual capacity.<sup>2</sup>

Whether they realised it or not, these congregations of worshippers were expressing an historic change of consciousness concerning the world and the way it would be viewed for a millenium.

### **Music and language in the evolution of the liturgy**

The gradual evolution of the liturgy was accompanied by its musical elucidation, adding a further dramatic dimension to the revered sacred writings, and providing a mnemonic aid to the congregation in helping them to absorb the message of the texts. At the same time the texts were being affected by linguistic changes which would eventually influence the morphology of the liturgy.

Up until the third century the language of the liturgy was Greek, even in Rome, and only after that did Latin take its place. These two languages formed the basis of musical recitation, and they did so as prose ... The realization that it is basically prose which determines the liturgy is ... of primary importance. It indicates a fundamental alteration in the general intellectual-cultural outlook. Only within this new prose did it become possible in European history to differentiate between the poetic-perceptible reality of

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2. John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Mowbrays, London and Fordham University Press, USA, 1974, p. 124.

art on the one hand and religious content as truth on the other, to point to truths which are beyond the reach of sensory perception.<sup>3</sup>

It is in prose that the central act of the liturgy is expressed.

Prose envelops the secret of the transformation in Holy Communion, the center of the Mass. The sacramental words of Christ himself are simple prose, and the same holds true for the other texts which accrued to the liturgy of the Mass: passages from the New Testament, those from the Old Testament ... newly written prayers and other texts ... It is through the intonation of this prose that the sacramental event transpired.<sup>4</sup>

### The role of the Melode

In this scheme the Melode, though he dealt with such a restricted range of themes, was able to give rein to his creative ability in the way in which he handled the dramatic depiction of the life, passion, death and resurrection of Christ and the implications of the whole soteriological scheme. And in this area Romanos was an acknowledged master, through the medium of the kontakion.

The Melode worked in a milieu that was vibrating in the one direction, that is, attempting to create a consciousness in the Christian of the cosmic reality of the Incarnation. The liturgy became the heart of this transforming way of looking at life; while the very architecture and ornamentation of the churches were carefully and deliberately planned to reinforce the mystery and power of the divine message to the congregation.

This musical enhancement of the liturgy was complemented by a surge of visual stimuli in the form of iconography, illuminating the interiors of the churches with brilliantly

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3. Thrasybulos Georgiades (trs M. L. Gollner), *Music and Language: The Rise of Western Music as Exemplified in Settings of the Mass*, CUP, 1982, p. 8.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

coloured mosaics against a gold-leaf background, giving a visual account of the seminal events in the history of Christianity.

In this audio-visual environment the congregation could feel that they were part of a great dramatic exposition, which embraced the mysteries of the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection.

### **Congregation's participation in drama of liturgy**

The unique attitude of the Byzantine towards the liturgy, and the rhetorical concepts it reflected, are described by Meyendorff:

Byzantine Christianity is known for the wealth of its liturgy, a wealth which reflects indeed a theological – or, rather, an ecclesiological – position. Through the liturgy a Byzantine recognized and experienced his membership in the Body of Christ. While a Western Christian generally checked his faith against external authority (the magisterium or the Bible), the Byzantine Christian considered the liturgy both a source and an expression of this theology; hence, the very great conservatism which often prevailed both in Byzantium itself and in post-Byzantine times in matters of liturgical tradition and practice. The liturgy maintained the Church's identity and continuity in the midst of a changing world. In spite of its conservatism as a living Christian tradition, the Byzantine liturgy responded creatively to the changes of history.<sup>5</sup>

The parallels to be drawn with classical drama have been observed by Kustas:

The Byzantine liturgy gave the Christian the opportunity of participating in a surpassingly moving experience not merely as part of a congregation but as a member of a chorus in a drama unfolding before his eyes, a participant who through hymn and response voiced the depth of his religious emotion. Here surely *πάθος*, the subjective yet disciplined feeling of the heart in the presence of God, reigns supreme ...<sup>6</sup>

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5. Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

6. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, p. 55.

The congregation, in this carefully orchestrated audio-visual environment, could experience the full drama of the whole redemptive scheme in the celebration of the liturgy of the Divine Word in the great basilica of Hagia Sophia, where every artifice of Byzantine art and culture was brought to bear on the emotions of the audience. The scene conjured up is one of glittering mosaics, moving in the candlelight, and at the same time reflecting the aural images of the hymnographers.

We have to remember also that we are dealing here with a special kind of congregation. To the Byzantine, church and state were indivisible. Because Byzantium was a theocracy, heresy had the capacity to destroy the Empire. Therefore, the Melode, through the liturgy and dramatic vehicles like the kontakia, had a political role in reinforcing the church's teaching, and inculcating virtuous ideas and behaviour in the populace.

The sheer magnitude of the congregation, which tended to weaken the feeling of communal intimacy which was characteristic of the early Christian liturgies, made the role of the Melode even more important, as the singing of hymns began to constitute the only form of physical participation available to the congregation.

It was indeed difficult to preserve the communal concept of Christian worship, or the notion that the Eucharist is a communion *meal*, when the liturgy began to be celebrated in huge basilicas holding several thousand worshipers. But since the early Christian community was now transformed into a crowd of nominal Christians ... it was necessary for the Church to emphasize the *sacred* character of the Christian sacraments, to protect them from secular profanation, and to surround them with veils and barriers, thus practically excluding the mass of the laity from active participation in their celebration, except through the singing of hymns.<sup>7</sup>

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7. Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

The use of veils has already been cited in the previous chapter as an instance of the deliberate use of obscurity.

### **Liturgy adopts monastic typikon**

[The Byzantine church] adopted 'a monastic *Typikon* to regulate the liturgical life of the entire Christian community. By accepting monastic spirituality as a general pattern for its worship, the Christian East as a whole expressed the eschatological meaning of the Christian message. If properly understood, the Eastern liturgy places the church in a state of permanent eschatological tension.'<sup>8</sup>

Egypt's place in the development of Christianity and monasticism, which was to play such a seminal role in the evolution of the Byzantine liturgy, is noted by Cameron: '... Christianity made more rapid strides in Egypt than practically any other land of the Empire, and was the centre whence monasticism spread all over the Eastern and the Western provinces ...'<sup>9</sup> Syria too made a significant contribution to the development of the Byzantine rite. The influence of the 'Great Church' facilitated the adoption of a single system of liturgy for both secular and monastic churches.

Actually, the Byzantine rite was not Constantinopolitan by origin, but Syrian in its first version and Palestinian in the second ...<sup>10</sup>

The monastic tradition further encouraged the evolution of daily cycles in the life of the Church, as well as highlighting the asceticism of the spiritual life to offset the Church's concern with the mundane daily life of its followers.

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8. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

9. Alan Cameron, *Literature and Society in the Early Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1985, p. 1 477.

10. Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

Among the immediate effects of this constant round of ritual were the proliferation of hymns reflecting every aspect of the church's yearly cycle, and the rise of the kontakion. These constituted the main didactic forms through which the church expressed its theological beliefs:

... the hymnographical cycles constitute a real source of theology. For centuries, the Byzantines not only heard theological lessons and wrote and read theological treatises, they also sang and contemplated daily the Christian mystery in the liturgy ...<sup>11</sup>

The central role of Romanos in this great burst of hymn writing is observed by Meyendorff:

... the offices of the major feasts of principal saints are generally celebrated with hymns composed by the best liturgical poet of Byzantium ... the introduction of massive hymnology in the 'cathedral' rite is generally connected with the name of Romanos the Melode.<sup>12</sup>

### The kontakion as part of the liturgy

It must be noted that the influence of the monastic rite on the liturgy and on the *typikon*, gave to the Eastern Orthodox liturgy a special flavour of asceticism and mysticism. In keeping with the monastic tradition of the hours, 'In 528 Justinian decreed that there be three main canonical offices: Matins (Μεσονύκτικον), Lauds (Ὅρθρος), and Vespers (Ἑσπερινός).'<sup>13</sup>

Kontakia for special feast days were composed for the office of the day and not the Mass. The reading of the Gospels was to be followed by a sermon and

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11. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

13. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, p. xvi.

then a kontakion, or the metrical sermon might be sung in place of the homily.<sup>14</sup>

Though some of Romanos' hymns 'not in the ritual were lost, others continued to be sung all through the East and in various monasteries. His works exercised considerable influence on the liturgy.'<sup>15</sup>

Carpenter notes that 'If the metrical sermons for feast days are to be dramatic for the present-day reader it is important to feel in them the liturgical cycle; thus the reader partially enters into the annual consecutive drama that the East had developed by the sixth century, although it remained undeveloped in the West.'<sup>16</sup>

In noting that the kontakia were composed for the office and for feast days, Carpenter observes 'how thoroughly' [Romanos] covered the liturgical year,<sup>17</sup> as an extensive list of his kontakia compiled by her indicates that there were very few feast days not celebrated by one of his works.

Concerning the place of the kontakion in this monastic organisation of the liturgy, Meyendorff says

The long poetic pieces of Romanos of course had no organic place in the increasingly rigid and strictly Biblical framework of Vespers, Matins, and other liturgical units as they were being elaborated in the monastic *Typika*. Yet the fact that Romanos' poetry, though explicitly Chalcedonian and Cyrillian, generally stood aloof from the great Christological disputes of the sixth and

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14. *Loc. cit.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

16. *Loc. cit.*

17. *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

seventh centuries may also have contributed to the emergence of a hymnography more distinctly theological and doctrinal than the *kontakia*.<sup>18</sup>

I must part company with Meyendorff on the latter point, as even the most cursory examination of the *kontakia* of Romanos reveal a wealth of allusions to the Christological and Mariological disputes of the time.

### Political aspects of the liturgy

We have noted already the political aspects of the liturgy in Part I, Chapter 2, and how imperial patronage with its attendant splendour and ritual began to constitute a form of 'external rhetoric'<sup>19</sup> to the motley peoples of the Empire.

The liturgy itself was a political 'compromise,' as Meyendorff explains:

... the liturgy of the 'Great Church' was a synthesis of disparate elements, rather than an original creation. This synthetic and 'catholic' character reflects faithfully the role of Byzantium in politics and in theology. As an empire, Byzantium had to integrate the various cultural traditions which composed it, and as the center of the imperial church, it continually attempted to maintain a balance between the various local theological trends which divided Christendom after the fourth century.<sup>20</sup>

Constantine had the political perspicacity to see that for political unity it was necessary to have religious unity, and whatever other reasons he may have had for converting to Christianity, there is no glossing over the political expediency of the move.

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18. Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

19. George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1983, p. 203.

20. Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 116.



The unenviable role of the Melode in this milieu was to compose homiletic hymns which reinforced State-Church doctrine, and attempt to achieve aesthetically pleasing results while being obliged to conform to strict melodic and thematic parameters. He therefore fulfilled the multiple role of priest, poet, musician and politician, and, with the repression of secular pagan drama, became the living repository of the classical Greek dramatic tradition. In spite of these limitations, Romanos, in common with all great creative artists, was able to transcend these limitations to produce works of theological relevance for his own time, and, significantly, of psychological and aesthetic relevance to congregations today.

#### **Liturgy as embodiment of classical dramatic tradition**

The continuation of the classical tradition can be discerned not only in the rhetorical aspects of the liturgy, but in its dramatic elements.

The adoption of Christianity as the state religion ensured the suppression of pagan drama, though it survived in devious ways in secular life, such as in the acclamations to the emperor, the spectacles in the hippodrome, performances in private homes, mime, and various elaborate processional occasions.

It was in the Church however that the classical dramatic tradition was officially continued. The liturgy itself assumed the character of a universal drama as the events surrounding the life of Christ and the Virgin and Saints were portrayed throughout the church year in the various cycles of feasts.

The attempt of the hymnographers to portray this central drama in human yet elevated terms is expressed perfectly in Kustas' definition of 'pathos' as 'the subjective yet disciplined feeling of the heart in the presence of God.'<sup>21</sup>

This apt description provides the key to the understanding of the intent of the hymnographers as they sought to communicate this sensation to their audiences.

### **Rhetorical aspects of the liturgy**

With the recognition of the efficacy of rhetoric in furthering the cause of Christianity, it was inevitable that the liturgy would reflect its influence.

... since the association of oratory and theology had been both sanctioned by the Fathers and incorporated into Christian higher education, it is not surprising that rhetoric exerted a continuing influence on the liturgy of the Byzantine Church ...<sup>22</sup>

Maguire notes that this could be most clearly observed in the sermon: 'Naturally the sermon, which came closest in form and occasion to the secular oration, was most strongly affected ...'<sup>23</sup>

... the literature of the church absorbed many of the characteristics of late antique rhetoric, with respect to both structure and embellishment. The techniques of oratory were imprinted upon the minds of those who read Christian hymns and sermons or heard them in the liturgy, even if they had received no training in rhetoric; both learned patrons and less well educated artists were exposed to the forms of rhetoric.<sup>24</sup>

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21. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

22. Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1981, pp. 20-1.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

24. *Loc. cit.*

Rhetorical influences in the sermon can be discerned in the exploitation of the rhetorical device of *ekphrasis*, while Neoplatonism contributed to the mystical quality:

If we recall that the homily is part of the liturgical drama, we can appreciate the contribution which the *ἐκφρασις* made to the beauty of the divine service and its effect on the emotions of those participating in it. Nor can we doubt that the ground for expressing this mystical feeling was prepared in part by Neoplatonic notions of the ecstasy of the soul in its ascent to the contemplation of the cosmos.<sup>25</sup>

### Dramatic aspects of the liturgy

We have noted already that the development of the liturgy as a 'mystery' or 'drama' was encouraged by the liturgical evolution of the so-called 'cathedral' rite (*i.e.* the practice of the major city-churches as distinct from the provincial centres), according to Meyendorff, who sees this trend also favouring 'the mushrooming of hymnography.'<sup>26</sup>

Pondering on dramatic aspects of the liturgy, Carpenter asks 'To what extent is the liturgy itself a drama to the priest, the singers in choirs, the congregation? Is the procession that celebrated many feast days to be considered a kind of drama?'<sup>27</sup> She discerns in the processions at least a representational factor:

It is reasonable to suppose that such processions as the one on Palm Sunday, described as taking place in the fourth century in Jerusalem, had 'essential representational elements – symbolic space, stylized costume and dialogue based on the Gospel.'<sup>28</sup>

Carpenter, however, doubts whether stage performances as such took place.

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25. Kustas, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

26. Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

27. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. xxi-xxii.

In the East, no evidence remains of a sacred drama performed on the stage ... There is, however, sound reason to believe that the priest chanted the passages with accompanying gestures and that dialogue may well have been assigned to double choirs to increase the effects.<sup>29</sup>

Romanos enlarged on the antiphonal treatment of the text, by the use of triadic structures, for example, Christ, Mary and the Magi, interacting with each other in the *Nativity Hymn*. In the Chapter on the kontakion, it has also been noted that structurally, his kontakia also are played on two or even three levels.

The Incarnation, re-enacted annually in the Christmas liturgy of the Orthodox Church, is the *sacred drama* to which St. Romanos summons us... Through his poetry we watch and hear the *triad of actors*, the Divine Child, Mary His human mother, and the Magi ... With the dramatic intensity, solemnity and concentration of ancient Greek drama they act out the Incarnation drama, the universal and eternal Christian drama ...<sup>30</sup>

The full dramatic impact of the kontakion and the effect it had on the liturgy is the outcome of Romanos' conception of the meaning of the Incarnation:

St. Romanos regards the Incarnation as the genesis of a tremendous cosmic encounter of divinity and humanity. Christ, the God-Man, unites in His person the disparate worlds of heaven and earth, the eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite.<sup>31</sup>

Whether we should permit ourselves to go a step further and posit an actual theatrical re-enactment of the events described is difficult to say from lack of firm evidence.

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29. *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

30. *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

31. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

## Chapter 2

### THE KONTAKION AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

Any study of Romanos is necessarily linked with the kontakion which he brought to its culmination as a musico-dramatic form, so that in tracing its morphology and the rich sources from both east and west which it drew upon, we are able to discern at the same time some of the mainstream contributions to the thought-world of Romanos.

In assembling this composite picture, one needs to establish a connecting link between antiquity, the Hellenistic period and the Byzantine era. One way in which this link can be observed is by tracing the various cultural streams which found their confluence in the kontakion.

Some of these topics have been touched upon already in earlier chapters. In an attempt to extract the relevant features that contributed to the development of this 'unusual combination of sermon and song with elements of the dramatic,'<sup>1</sup> this chapter concentrates on (1) the dramatic features of the kontakion and its political implications, (2) its evolution from the metrical sermon, (3) its dissemination throughout the Empire, and (4) the debt it owes to Hellenistic and Syro-Palestinian cultures. This is followed by an examination of (5) the rhetorico-literary aspects of the kontakion, and (6) the musical realisation of these aspects, using examples drawn from three of Romanos' greatest kontakia – (i) the *Akathistos Hymn*, (ii) the *Nativity Hymn*, and (iii) the kontakion *On the*

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1. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, p. xvi.

*Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, concluding with two examples of the rhetorical use of modes, taken from studies by Stathis and Raasted.

### **The kontakion as a major musico-dramatic genre**

Romanos and the kontakion represent a high point in a spectacular flowering of hymnography in Byzantium, referred to as an art and 'a refined science, for it succeeds in rendering wonderfully the meaning of the content of the poetical works by means of the correct combination of musical tones.'<sup>2</sup>

... [hymnology] acquired a great brilliance mainly during the reigns of the Emperors Justinian and Heraclius (6th and 7th centuries), when the large choirs of Saint Sophia and of the Holy Apostles translated this most perfectly. But the epoch, during which the Byzantine Ecclesiastical Music reached its apex, was the period from the era of the famous hymnographer Romanos the Melode until the epoch of the father of ecclesiastical music and of the orthodox dogmatical teachings, St. John Damascene, i.e. from the 6th until the 8th century.<sup>3</sup>

Literary critics now perceive the kontakion as a great dramatic vehicle, in which the classical dramatic tradition is perpetuated. One has also to recognise its great didactic and propaganda potential, as a means of manipulating the populace politically and theologially, by inculcating certain moral attitudes. In these homiletic hymns the hymnographer performed these multiple functions, in dramatising the events in the life of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints, as well as Biblical themes, while at the same time reinforcing the Church's doctrinal stance.

Recognition of the dramatic qualities of the kontakion may be perceived in the attitude of the authorities, who saw it as a substitute for the mimes and the circus.

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2. Savas I. Savas, *Byzantine Music in Theory and Practice*, Roslindale, Massachusetts, 1965, p. 1.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

In the East, the kontakia and sermons that show germs of drama accompanied, not the Mass, but the special feast days. Christians were especially forbidden to attend the circus or mimes on these days. The special occasions offered ample opportunity for elaborating on religious narratives that were already dramatic. The birth of Christ and the incidents connected with this event, the miracles of Christ, the death of Christ, and the cycle of the liturgical year were available as materials and the kontakia of Romanos demonstrate the extent to which poetic skill and a flair for dramatic folk touches helped to develop the narrative line and the theological point of the feast.<sup>4</sup>

The psychological depth of treatment of the various protagonists in these kontakia, and the structural complexity would seem to suggest that they were given some kind of dramatic performance.

Many of [Romanos'] kontakia are conceived on two or even three levels of action, the heavens, the world of the living, and the world of the dead, in which lyrical and tragic elements are skilfully blended.<sup>5</sup>

Noting that the kontakion inspired Byzantium's greatest liturgical poetry, Maas and Trypanis leave us in no doubt of its aesthetic and dramatic stature:

In the hands of Romanos and other the sixth-century poets ... the literary genre of the kontakion reached its peak. These writers succeeded in combining the solemnity and dignity of the sermon with the delicacy and liveliness of lyric and dramatic poetry and out of their somewhat intractable form and material created some of the most vivid and yet impersonal masterpieces written in the Greek language. In Greek their poetry has not been matched in subsequent centuries, and the kontakion remains the one and only great original achievement of Byzantine literature.<sup>6</sup>

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4. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xxii.

5. P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*, OUP, 1963, p. xxii.

6. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

### The kontakion as link in cultural interchange in Empire

The influence of Romanos via the kontakion, and its dissemination throughout the Empire can be gleaned from Carpenter:

Mioni ... comments on the wide diffusion of the kontakia in Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, Egypt, and in scattered monasteries of the Byzantine type. He maintains that by the end of the sixth century Romanos' kontakia were sung in all of the Oriental world, even though it cannot be asserted that the widest dispersion came while Romanos was alive. It must certainly be true of the areas close to the rule of Constantinople.<sup>7</sup>

In following the history of the kontakion and other poetic genres, we become aware that there was a continuous cultural traffic and exchange between east and west in the early centuries of Byzantine history, as Carpenter points out:

Greek monks of Sicily and Calabria founded monasteries, built churches, ... and were, in truth, Byzantine colonizers ... Ceremonies of the Eastern Church were preserved in some of the Western rituals, and there is evidence that Greek homilies were known and read in the West during the ninth and tenth centuries – exactly the time when Latin liturgical drama was beginning ... In important liturgical ceremonies of the Latin Church, choruses of Greek were sung alternately by laymen and priests, and Latin monks of the ninth century considered the Greek liturgy the more venerable.<sup>8</sup>

Evidence of 'direct borrowing in the West' from Romanos, 'the great composer of kontakia,' is also noted by Carpenter, who adds that 'The cyclical play of the West, such as the Cypriot Passion cycle of the thirteenth century ... has its roots ... in homily, kontakion, and ultimately in Ephrem.'<sup>9</sup>

Elaborating on the influence of Byzantium on Western liturgical drama, Carpenter notes that:

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7. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xxxii.

8. *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

9. *Ibid.*, p. xxv.



The author of the mystery plays 'Descent to Hades' and 'The Annunciation' had under his eyes the Latin sermon 'Vos inquam convenio, O Judaei' and also the dramatic Greek homily for elements the Latin sermon had translated. The processions of the prophets in the West undeniably had their origin in Byzantine dramatic homily. Certainly the art of the Middle Ages is full of processions of prophets ...<sup>10</sup>

Among other examples of this cultural interchange is the discovery of bi-lingual hymns in both Greek and Latin, in a Beneventan gradual; while Ferretti notes in his *Estetica Gregoriana* that

*L'Hirmos* (eirnos) dei Bizantini, e il *ris-qolo* dei Siri ha una grande rassomiglianza colla *Melodia-tipo* e col canto *strofico* dei nostri inni liturgici.<sup>11</sup>

This rich cross-fertilisation of ideas is also noted by Geanakoplos:

... Byzantium was certainly more than a mere passive repository of ancient civilization. On the contrary, as her culture developed, it reflected a remarkable amalgamation not only of the philosophy and literature of Greece but of the religious ideals of Christianity, [as well as] a certain transcendent, mystical quality that may, at least partly, be attributed to the diverse influences of Syria, Egypt, the Jews, and even Persia.<sup>12</sup>

### The origins of the homily

The evolution of the kontakion is intimately linked with the development of the sermon, which in turn, evolved from the epideictic aspects of classical rhetoric. It is now well established that the metrical sermon was the precursor of the kontakion.

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10. *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

11. D. Paolo Ferretti, *Estetica Gregoriana*, Vol. 1, Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra, Rome, 1934, p. 92.

12. Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the 'Sibling' Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance, 330-1600*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976, p. 55.

Wellesz places the homily in context, noting that 'an uninterrupted liturgical tradition existed from the days of the Synagogue to the Byzantine melodies of the mid-seventh century, according to which the reading of the Scriptures was followed by the recitation or chanting of a poetical homily.'<sup>13</sup>

The Byzantine sermon ... which must rank as one of the most characteristic forms in Byzantine literature, could draw on a tradition completely established by the fourth century. It too ranged over a literary spectrum which went from the anecdotal to the poetic, from the apocryphal narrative to the most formal and rhetorical. It represents the possibility ... of a fusion between devotional needs and high culture. It was a natural development from New Testament preaching, filtered entirely predictably through the educational system of the Roman empire ... now for the first time the Church has acquired power and position in society ... the voice of authority [bishops] in the fourth century speaks in the tones of classical rhetoric.<sup>14</sup>

It appears then that the sermon was one of main carriers of the classical oratorical tradition:

Christian oratory ... as practised by the great exponents of the fourth century – the two Gregorys, Basil and John Chrysostom – represented the high point in a continuum of which the lower end was occupied by the dramatic homilies of the fourth to the sixth centuries, heirs with the medieval mystery plays to the tradition of the apocryphal narratives.<sup>15</sup>

Monastic influence on the sermon is noted by Croll: 'The forms of prose in which the results of such monastic training are apparent are those in which the church addressed itself to its popular audience in the tone of warning, exhortation, and appeal. The sermon is certainly the most important of these ...'<sup>16</sup>

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13. Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd ed., OUP, 1961, p. 11.

14. Averil Cameron, *New and Old in Christian Literature*, 17th International Byzantine Congress – Major Papers, Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University, Washington DC, 1986, p. 50.

15. *Loc. cit.*

16. Morris W. Croll, *Style, Rhetoric and Rhythm*, Essays by Morris W. Croll, J. M. Patrick and R. O. Evans with J. M. Wallace and R. J. Schoeck (eds), Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1966, p. 256.

While Mango sees in the sermon an outlet for rhetoric:

... it was Christianity that gave rhetoric the application it lacked, namely the sermon. All the tricks of composition and persuasion learnt in the schools could now be used for a worthy purpose.<sup>17</sup>

The rhetorical features of the homily are further explored by Kennedy:

... the most characteristic and persistent form of preaching in the Church has always been the homily. Homily in Greek means 'conversation'; it implies informality of structure and in Christian contexts a reliance on authority and inspiration ... The close tie to the scriptural text contributes to many features of the homily.... It tends to echo biblical language out of which it develops a stock of commonplaces, and it borrows the imagery and rhythmical devices of Hebrew poetry. Some of these, such as antithesis, assonance, anaphora, and isocolon, are identical with figures of speech in classical rhetoric, and a variety of other classical figures was gradually adapted by educated speakers addressing congregations accustomed to sophistic discourse.<sup>18</sup>

Kustas comments on the lack of rules for composing a homily:

We shall ... look in vain for a discussion of what constitutes a good homily or sermon, that literary creation which we in a later age recognize as one of the most original and successful productions of the Christian genius.<sup>19</sup>

He sees the reason for this in the complexity of its origins and the variety of elements of which it is composed.

Citing Cicero in *De Officiis*, Kustas notes his complaint that "There are rules for oratory ... there are none for conversation (*sermo*); ... [nor teachers] ... who make conversation

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17. Cyril A. Mango, p. 134.

18. George Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1983, pp. 182-3.

19. George L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, Thessalonika, 1973, p. 43.

a subject of study ... And yet the same rules that we have for words and sentences in rhetoric will apply also to conversation.<sup>20</sup>

Kustas observes also that the Latin word *sermo* suggests ordinary speech and originally had no philosophical or theological significance, while the Greek word 'omilia' carried wider associations

ὁμιλία is the word Xenophon uses to describe the Socratic circle ... Thus ὁμιλία includes the element of fraternity as well as ... *conversatio* ... A homily is thus a kind of dialogue between a speaker and his audience.<sup>21</sup>

This contrasts with the school of thought which sees the homily related not to dialogue but to the oration.

The influence of the Syrian poetic tradition on the homily is noted by Carpenter:

... Ephrem's predecessors Harmonius and Bardesanes were responsible for a new literary genre that then grew into Ephrem's sougitha and in turn inspired homily and hymn of the sixth century ... Perhaps the most startling evidence for the influence of Syrian homily is the publication of a homily of Melito, Bishop of Sardis. Since this is a second-century sermon and since it shows rhythmic structure similar to Byzantine song and sermon, the Syrian influence must have begun quite early.<sup>22</sup>

Epistolography – the *Ars Dictaminis* of the West – also exerted a powerful influence on the homily, as Kustas notes:

Just as the homily assimilated to itself many formerly distinct types of literature, so the Greek letter comes to bear the burden of a much greater number of literary needs ... The proliferation of epistolography in later Greek literature reflects in part the effect of Christianization, for the criteria under which letters were composed were in line with the inherent dualism of the literary standard of late antiquity. Like the homily, the letter aims at both

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20. *Loc. cit.*

21. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

22. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xx.

simplicity and dignity, the combination of which, resting on Biblical support, enjoyed the added sanction of rhetorical theory.<sup>23</sup>

Kustas also points out that 'the common ground between letter and homily is seen also in their shared association with the dialogue, itself regarded in rhetorical theory as the expression *par excellence* of τὸ ἠθικόν.'<sup>24</sup>

... a tract on epistolography ... calls the letter 'a kind of ὁμιλία in writing of one absent person with another, fulfilling some utilitarian function' ... St. Paul ... speaks of himself as absent in body but present in spirit... St Paul's *Epistles* were not merely written messages, but were meant to be read aloud to the congregation.<sup>25</sup>

McCredie also points out the connection between letter-writing and rhetoric, citing a treatise of Alberic of Monte Cassino *Dictaminum Radii*, which he refers to as 'a work in which rhetoric and letter writing were linked as a formal art.'<sup>26</sup>

#### (a) Rhetorico-literary aspects of the kontakion

This study of the rhetorico-literary features of the kontakion covers three aspects: (1) classical sources, (2) Christian poetry, and (3) an agglomerate of influences including the Jewish, Hellenistic, Egyptian and Syrian traditions. We now turn to an examination of the various sources which helped to shape the kontakion. Much of the speculation concerning the vexed question of whether or not Romanos drew directly upon the classical rhetorical treatises, or absorbed them vicariously through the Christian rhetors, has been outlined

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23. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

26. A. D. McCredie, 'The problem of the *dispositio* — the question of time in the inter-disciplinary perspectives of music and rhetoric — a contribution to the historiography of the metarhetoric of music,' *Musica Antiqua VII*, Acta Scientifica, Bydgoszcz, 1985, p. 12.

in Part I, Chapter 1. This section will concentrate more on the influence of the early homilists, who mediated between the classical tradition and Christian literature.

### (1) The classical rhetorical tradition

Pointing out that Christian literature was 'hardly less sophisticated than classical discourse, and far less divorced from it than most people have thought,' Cameron notes:

Given the extraordinary tenacity of traditional education in the empire, and the almost exclusive place which rhetoric enjoyed within it, it was inevitable that Christian writing would use classical conventions and classical forms ...<sup>27</sup>

The Cappadocians were known to be skilled exponents of classical rhetoric, which they subordinated to the service of Christianity. As Geanakoplos points out: 'Gregory of Nazianzus ... combined Greek philosophical ideas with the rhetorical style of the contemporary "Second Sophistic" movement, making effective use of its literary devices of symmetry, imagery, antithesis, comparison, and repetition of key words.'<sup>28</sup>

The Cappadocian fathers put a limited seal of approval on antique literature, which they conveyed, not through their theoretical pronouncements ... but through the power of their own literary output. Within a century of their own lifetimes, the Cappadocian fathers became Christian classics in their own right. ... All this meant that the absorption of the classics by such men as Gregory of Nazianzus or Basil mattered a great deal in shaping the educated Byzantine's attitude toward these very classics throughout the life of Byzantium. Without the intellectual climate and reflexes produced by such an attitude, neither the scholarly antiquarianism nor the sheer power of the eternal Greek spirit could have ensured the survival of antique Greek literature.<sup>29</sup>

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27. Averil Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

28. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

29. Ihor Ševčenko, *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, 1982, p. II 64.

Following this line of thought, it could be said, then, that Romanos could have been using vicariously the techniques of classical rhetoric through his use of the classical content and descriptions of such writers, though not the formal structure of their homilies.

Allowing for the influence of the Syrian tradition on Romanos, there would be no need to seek for other structures, since he already had at hand the Syriac literary forms of the Memrâ, Mâdrâshâ and Sôgithâ, which provided an ideal dramatic mould into which he could pour content derived from the classical tradition as modified by the Cappadocians.

The extent to which Romanos drew directly upon classical rhetorical authors has been discussed in some detail in Part I, Chapter 1. There is ample evidence, however, that he drew heavily upon earlier Christian homilists, who had managed to effect a brilliant compromise by using pagan rhetorical techniques for their sermons but substituting Christian themes for their content.

There exist some remarkable examples of the effect of this morganatic marriage in the *kontakia* of Romanos, which underline the essentially dramatic nature of this genre.

Maguire cites one such episode:

In the sixth century, the poet Romanos translated the conventional description [of the Massacre of the Innocents] from prose into verse, incorporating it into a hymn composed for the Feast of the Innocents. Like Basil of Seleucia, Romanos seems almost to delight in brutal detail: '[Herod] gave chase to the mothers and when he overtook them, he snatched their nestlings from their very arms like little sparrows ... Some [of the children] were horrendously transfixed ... while others were dismembered. Others were decapitated as they sucked at their mothers' breasts.'<sup>30</sup>

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30. Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1981, p. 26.

In support of her contention that Romanos drew upon the writings of the Early Fathers, Carpenter cites another instance of an encomium to Mary by Proclus which contains two long dialogues, 'probably ... an adaptation of a sougitha attributed to Narses or Ephrem. There are traces of a homily by St John Chrysostom ... In the latter case there is a dialogue between the angel and Mary in which he tries to answer her questions, and there is also a dialogue between Mary and Joseph, who is finally reassured by the angel.'<sup>31</sup> Carpenter finds the organisation of the dialogue and the human reactions given by the poet to Mary and Joseph typical of Romanos.

It is in psychological explorations such as these by Romanos, and in the rhetorical means he has used to convey them to the audience, that we find not only remnants of the classical tradition, but the foundation for all future religious drama in both East and West, and, one ventures to say, a vital force in the survival of the dramatic art in secular society as well.

Maas and Trypanis concede that though Romanos borrowed, he developed the content freely, dramatizing it 'by introducing lively dialogues, monologues and vivid descriptions ...',<sup>32</sup> while other characteristics of his style are

Arresting imagery, sharp metaphors and similes, bold comparisons, antithesis, coining of successful maxims and vivid dramatization of his material ...<sup>33</sup>

In Part II, Chapter 2, mention has been made of Romanos' use of antithesis. Maguire also draws attention to his use of this rhetorical device in his *kontakia*:

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31. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

32. Maas and Trypanis, *op. cit.*, p. xxii.

33. *Ibid.*, p. xix.



In ecclesiastical literature a common motif was the juxtaposition of Christ the human child with Christ the divine creator of the world ... Poets also praised the Virgin through the opposition of her child with the creator; in the early Byzantine *Akathistos* hymn, for example, the Wise Men 'saw in the hands of the Virgin him who formed men with his hand' ... The opposition of Mary with the throne of heaven was a favorite theme in liturgical poetry.<sup>34</sup>

The rhetorical device of antithesis, 'which Quintilian translates as *contrapositio*,<sup>35</sup> was a major feature of Byzantine literature and thought processes: 'In the Byzantine church antithesis was more than a figure of speech; it was a habit of thought.'<sup>36</sup>

This powerful rhetorical figure extended its influence from liturgical literature to religious art. 'The constant repetition of antitheses in the homilies and liturgies of the Byzantine church came to be mirrored in its paintings and mosaics. The opposition of images in literature had a decisive influence on Byzantine art.'<sup>37</sup>

The influence of antithetical concepts also had some bearing on composition and design. The antithesis of Christ's infancy on earth with the Virgin's assumption into heaven was an important principle of composition in Byzantine art, which affected not only the arrangement of mosaics and frescoes in churches, but also the design and iconography of the images themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Kennedy adds that paradox was also 'a dominant feature of Christian rhetoric: it is seen in the preaching of Jesus, is fully exploited in the text by Saint Paul, and ... dominates John's [Chrysostom] homily.'<sup>39</sup>

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34. Maguire, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-5.

35. Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1957, p. 92.

36. Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

39. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

Another rhetorical feature used for contrast was a change of metre. Carpenter points out that one of the features of the kontakion was the placing of a preface or *prooimion* at the beginning of the work, the metre of which always differed from that of the following stanza.

A short stanza (sometimes more than one) called a *koukoulion*, precedes the series of strophes. The *koukoulion* is metrically independent of the other strophes, is not included in the acrostic, but has the same refrain. Its function is to announce the theme or the feast day.<sup>40</sup>

Changes in style and idiom as well as metre also helped to provide contrast.

Perhaps the most noteworthy common feature of these iambic prefaces is that they were written in what their authors at least believed to be the style, metre, and idioms of Attic comedy ... the object was presumably ... to obtain the maximum contrast between the introductory remarks contained in the preface and the poem itself.<sup>41</sup>

The subtle christianisation of rhetoric, as we have seen, was linked with changes in the Greek language as an attempt was made to produce a fusion of pagan and Christian thought, with the Church consciously cultivating the 'popular' element, according to Pitra:

While it may be true that classical poetry offered to ears that were accustomed to it a twofold melody, the one resulting from a succession of longs and shorts, the other from the rhythm of the tonic accent, it may be believed that the first type of melody was little appreciated by ordinary people and had its effect only on refined and cultivated minds. The tonic accent, on the other hand, made its primary appeal to the masses, and stimulated applause or derision on the part of those who sat in the amphitheatres. The Church has faithfully retained this popular heritage ...<sup>42</sup>

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40. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

41. Alan Cameron, *Literature and Society in the Early Byzantine World*, Variorum Reprints, London, p. II 122.

42. Seversen Salaville, *An Introduction to the Study of Eastern Liturgies*, Sands & Co., London, 1938, p. 92.

## (2) Early Christian poetry

Early Christian poetry comprised another formative influence in the development of the kontakion. The techniques described by Wilder foreshadow Romanos' use of such devices.

In the Christian Church we find a ... distinction between poetry of biblical Jewish roots and poetry shaped by syncretist and even gnostic patterns. Among both Essenes and Christians when the Old Testament tradition is followed the poetry is marked as in the Psalter, by recitation of God's acts and promises, especially by synonymous and cumulative parallelism; while the new mystery tradition discloses itself especially in sharply antithetical parallelism, based on a world divided between light and darkness.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Hellenistic developments can also be discerned in Romanos' use of antithesis.

This Hellenistic type of utterance 'can be seen in epistle of I John verse 5 ch 1.'

'God is light/and in him there is no darkness at all.' This is adversative parallelism ... [It represents] a kind of formal rhetoric of a rhythmic character which was used in the Christian meetings and had its background in Hellenistic and Hellenistic-Jewish liturgy.<sup>44</sup>

The kontakion reflected the main elements of Christian literature in which 'The prominence of story, parable and vision in the New Testament testifies to the mimetic and dramatic character of the early Christian witness ...'<sup>45</sup>

Though the Christian drama differed from its classical Greek counterpart which depicted the gods as human being writ large with all their failings, there are instances, particularly in the kontakia of Romanos, in which it shared the cynical questioning of the motives of

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43. Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p. 102.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.

the gods, and examined the same moral dilemmas: Witness the passage in the *Akathistos Hymn* when Joseph expresses his doubts concerning Mary's pregnancy.

Wilder notes that 'Jesus uses figures of speech in an immense number of ways,'<sup>46</sup> and observes 'how natural it was that genres like dialogue and story should have an essential place in early Christian rhetoric.'<sup>47</sup> These are the very elements which ensured the success of the *kontakion*.

Noting that Jesus was not the first to use the parable, but that it took on a special character when he did, Wilder formulates the need for a 'plastic and rhythmic language'<sup>48</sup> as the medium for this Christian message. In other words, the language that Romanos was to exploit so successfully in his *kontakia*.

The Gospel's story-forms, however artistic, have a formidable personal focus which distinguishes them. Its poem-forms, similarly, focus upon the heart and its ultimate response to God. But this response takes place in the midst of the great world-change announced in the Gospel, and plastic and rhythmic language must be called forth to convey this level of experience.<sup>49</sup>

It now remains to study the eastern elements that can be observed in Romanos' *kontakia*, namely, the Judaeo-Hellenistic, Egyptian and Syrian traditions, following an overview of the great rhetorico-literary centres in the Eastern patriarchates.

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46. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

49. *Loc. cit.*

### (3) Rhetorico-literary influences

An overview of the Eastern world in general indicates that 'AD 312 is a date that brings together Christianity and paganism face to face, edge to edge. Thence emerges a new era and the Triumph of the Church.'<sup>50</sup>

[Post 312] was an age peopled ... by great Fathers of the Church, Greek or Latin: Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome. It was a great age of Councils. (2) ... Except for those cults (not to be called 'religions') that derived from the east — cults such as Mithraism — there had never been much strength in non-Christian beliefs.<sup>51</sup>

Here one must acknowledge the seminal role of Egypt in the spread of Christianity, and that of Syria in the development of the Byzantine liturgy. As Pelikan points out: 'Much of Christian liturgy and most of Christian dogma had arisen in the East, as Greek theologians frequently reminded their Western opponents.'<sup>52</sup>

Vasiliev notes that 'the Christian Orient of the fourth and fifth centuries had several well-known literary centers. Cappadocia, in Asia Minor, had in the fourth century the three famous "Cappadocians," Basil the Great, his friend Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa, younger brother of Basil.'<sup>53</sup> Caesarea, and towards the end of the fourth century, the southern Palestinian city of Gaza, boasted a school of famous rhetoricians and poets, while from Caesarea also came the 'father of ecclesiastical history,' Eusebius.<sup>54</sup>

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50. Ramsay MacMullen, *The Meaning of AD 312: The Difficulty of Converting the Empire*, 17th International Byzantine Congress — Major Papers, Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University, Washington DC, A. D. Caratzas, New Rochelle, 1986, p. 1.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

52. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (2): The spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974, p. 3.

53. A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire 324-1453*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1952, p. 117.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

But above all, it was Alexandria which exerted a powerful influence, chiefly through the Cappadocians who 'received an admirable education in the best rhetorical schools of Athens and Alexandria.'<sup>55</sup> They were well acquainted with classical literature and represented the so-called 'new Alexandrian' movement.

Antioch, the Syrian center of culture, produced in opposition to the Alexandrian school its own movement, 'headed by such unusual men of action as the pupil of Libanius and favorite of Antioch, John Chrysostom.'<sup>56</sup>

Following this cursory outline of some of the major rhetorical centres flourishing in the early centuries of the Christian era, we now turn to a brief overview of the sources contributing to the poetic and structural content of the kontakion which embrace Judaic, Hellenistic, Egyptian and Syrian influences.

### The Judaic tradition

Features of the kontakion which can be traced to Hebrew sources are outlined by Wilder:

The poetry of the New Testament is based on two different traditions, that of Hellenistic paganism and that of Israel. Hellenistic poetry had a variety of forms. But those which most influenced the New Testament writers were on the one hand a kind of recitational poetic prose, and on the other an antithetical oracular style. Both of these patterns have influenced the literature of Hellenistic Judaism as well as early Christian literature.<sup>57</sup>

Noting that poetry plays a large part in Jewish Scripture and writings, Wilder says: 'the oracles of the prophets were in most cases poems, phrased in a long tradition of

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55. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

57. Wilder, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

declamatory or elegiac rhythm. Equally significant is the fact that the poetic elements are often basic to the whole structure of Israel's religion and literature.<sup>58</sup>

The 'leading features' of traditional Hebrew poetry were to find brilliant expression in the kontakion:

We have first parallelism of lines and thought, a form which lends itself to many varieties. In addition we have accentual rhythm ... [and] texts in the New Testament that we can best speak of as 'hymns,' or as 'odes.' These are poetic forms of a liturgical character going back to a syncretist tradition ...<sup>59</sup>

### Hellenistic influence on the kontakion

Alexandria was the medium through which the Greek philosophical tradition reached Syria. Lemerle outlines the transmission of Hellenism to the Arabs as follows:

... from pagan Athens to Christianised Alexandria from Alexandria to Antioch under Omar II, from Antioch to Harran (Carrhae in Osrhoene) which was already predisposed to favour Greek through the influence of the pagan Sabaeans and Christian Nestorians, and finally from Harran to Baghdad.<sup>60</sup>

The dominance of Hellenism is reflected in Talbot Rice's remark that 'it is not possible to speak of the influence of the East upon the West because from the seventh to the twelfth centuries there was neither east nor west,'<sup>61</sup> which can be taken to mean that Hellenism had so captured the collective mind of the Early Empire, that it provided a common cultural base.

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58. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

60. Paul Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism: Notes and Remarks on Education and Culture in Byzantium from its Origins to the Tenth Century* (trs H. Lindsay and A. Moffatt), Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, Canberra, 1986, p. 21.

61. John Mavrogordato, *Digenes Akrites*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956, p. lxxvi.

The culture of Islam was not, as is often supposed, an Asiatic civilization, irreconcilably opposed to that of Europe. It was, on the contrary, a product of the same elements as those which formed the background of early Christian thought, the union, namely, of Hellenistic culture which pervaded the near east.<sup>62</sup>

These comments eloquently illustrate the surprising homogeneity of thought pervading the cultures of the medieval era, and emphasise the common debt that they owe to antiquity and to the Hellenising impulse.

In spite of opposition, the survival and persistence of this Hellenistic spirit is nowhere better demonstrated than in fourth century Christian letters, seen by historians as the triumph of Hellenism.

Commenting on one of the great exponents, St John Chrysostom, Ševčenko says that his 'mastery of the devices of the Second Sophistic is beyond doubt; and the purity of his Atticism has been admired or acknowledged by critics ... though ... Chrysostom was not an extreme purist, but wrote a standard classicistic Greek.'<sup>63</sup>

Concerning the fate of secular Hellenism in Byzantium during the first three centuries of the Empire, Lemerle notes:

... in the Greek East, in Byzantium ... Greek continued to be spoken there and the works of ancient Greece were still the basis of the education offered by grammarians and rhetors. However, there is a problem: whether there was real continuity with secular Hellenism, or simply a case of survival, diminishing in impact as it became swamped by militant and finally triumphant Christianity.<sup>64</sup>

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62. *Ibid.*, pp. lxxvi-lxxvii.

63. Ševčenko, *op. cit.*, p. II 71.

64. Lemerle, *op. cit.*, p. 43.



In this intellectual climate, the demise of Hellenistic culture was inevitable. The law of Julian preventing Christians from participating in Hellenistic culture meant that:

... the 'century of Justinian' was time wasted, given over to enterprises where vanity vied with naivety, in spite of the Code and Sancta Sophia, the last fruits of the marriage of Hellenism with Rome and the East.<sup>65</sup>

Acknowledging the more positive aspects of Hellenism, Sokrates, writing in the middle of the fifth century in his *Ecclesiastical History*, observes that Hellenistic culture (παιδεύσις) was 'neither approved nor condemned by Christ and his disciples.'<sup>66</sup>

... On the one hand, many Greek philosophers were not far from having a knowledge of God. Thanks to their knowledge of logic (μετὰ λογικῆς ἐπιστήμης), they successfully fought the Epicureans and others who denied the existence of a providence and thus, though not attaining to true knowledge which was still hidden, they became useful to pious men.<sup>67</sup>

Pelikan also notes the positive contribution of Hellenistic culture.

... Byzantine theology included a force virtually unknown in the West until the Renaissance or even later: the theological speculations of an educated laity ... This Christian Hellenism represents chiefly the intellectual substratum of the doctrinal developments and, as such, can never be ignored ...<sup>68</sup>

### The Egyptian poetic tradition

Cameron notes that 'In the later Roman Empire Egypt ... became the home of Greek poetry.'<sup>69</sup> In fact, 'Greek literature flourished in Egypt until the year 451.'<sup>70</sup> Its influence on Romanos can be observed not least in his use of acrostics and rhyme.

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65. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

67. *Loc. cit.*

68. Pelikan, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

69. Alan Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. I 470.

70. Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

... This period saw the development of the literature of religious hymns. The hymnwriters gradually abandoned their original practice of imitating classical meters and developed forms of their own. These forms were quite original and for some time considered merely as prose. It is only in comparatively recent times that these meters have been even partially explained. They are marked by various types of acrostics and rhymes ... While Gregory the Theologian followed the antique meters in most of his poetical hymns, Romanus the Melode ('Hymn-writer'), whose works appeared in the early sixth century under Anastasius I, used the new forms and made use of acrostics and rhyme.<sup>71</sup>

### The kontakion's debt to the Syrian poetic tradition

One of the most significant influences on Romanos was that of the Syrian poetic tradition, epitomised by the works of Ephraem.

Carpenter questions Wellesz' assertion that 'the kontakion made its appearance suddenly, without antecedents,' though she notes that later he states that 'antecedents of the kontakion existed in Syriac ecclesiastical poetry.'<sup>72</sup>

Maas and Trypanis note that 'It has been suggested with much probability that the impulse towards this new Byzantine literary genre came from a foreign literature, in all probability Syriac.'<sup>73</sup>

For in the main types of Syrian poetry of the early Christian centuries, the *Memrā*, *Madrāšā*, and *Sugīā*, most of the elements that came to form the kontakion can be traced. There is nothing similar to these Syriac forms in the Greek literature of the same period. The only surviving Greek writings which may be considered as 'forerunners' of the kontakion are either translations from Syriac, like the Greek metrical translations of Ephraem, or are directly

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71. *Loc. cit.*

72. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

73. Maas and Trypanis, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

influenced by Syriac literature, like the *Parthenion* of Methodius (312) and the *Dialogue between Mary, Gabriel, and Joseph*, attributed to Proclus (Fl. 440).<sup>74</sup>

The Syrian poetic tradition not only augmented classical sources in providing the content of the kontakion, but also provided the models for its structural features.

The Syrian poets ... provided the model into which the Greeks of the sixth century infused new life. By combining the metrically primitive lines of the *Memrā* and the endless 'strophomythia' of the *Sugīṭā* with the variety and refrain of the *Madrāsā*, the Byzantine writers fashioned the long and disciplined strophes of their kontakia, in which argument and form were clearly and closely integrated in a manner which is essentially Greek. Moreover, they added the prelude, the *koukoulion*, which appears to be a purely Byzantine creation.<sup>75</sup>

Ševčenko is in agreement with this assessment of Romanos' sources, by conceding that Syro-Palestinian as well as classical rhetorical influences can be discerned in the *Akathistos Hymn*.

Finally, even if we have to concede that the structure of the Acatlist Hymn to the Virgin is ultimately inspired by Syriac models, we might contend that Greek homilies in rhythmical prose were the other source of the hymn's literary inspiration, and state that these homilies also followed the devices of Greek pagan oratory.<sup>76</sup>

Though evidence of this sort implies that the classical rhetorical elements in Romanos' texts were derived from later Christian churchmen who were skilled in rhetoric, I have found that an examination of the musical settings of some of these texts would seem to point to Romanos having at least some first hand knowlege of classical rhetorical theory.

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74. *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii.

75. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

76. Ševčenko, *op. cit.*, p. II 62.

Certain features of Syriac hymnody are worth summarising since they constitute a virtual blueprint for the kontakion:

The Syriac Hymnody is constructed on the Hebrew principle of parallelism, in which thought answers thought in clauses of repetitive or antithetical balance: but unlike the Hebrew, its clauses are further regulated by strict equivalence of syllabic measures ... Syriac verse is not measured by feet – whether determined by syllabic quantity ... or by accent ... Thus the metre of Syriac poetry is substantially the ‘thought-metre’ (as it has been well called) of Hebrew, reduced to regularity of form by the rule that each of the lines into which the balanced clauses fall, shall consist of a fixed number of syllables. There is no systematic rhyme; but the nature of the language which by reason of its uniformity of etymological structure abounds in words of like terminations, often causes correspondences of sound amounting to rhyme, or at least to assonance. The lines are very short; not exceeding 12 syllables sometimes confined to four. Ephrem, though not the actual inventor, was the first master of this metrical system, the first to develop it into system and variety ... In other poems, especially in Hymns intended for popular or ecclesiastical use, where simplicity of structure is suitable the lines which compose each strophe, whatever their number, are of uniform length. So easily do the Syriac tongue, and the genius of Syriac literature lend themselves to this scheme for short syllabically equal clauses, that ... many even of the Homilies are metrical; arranged not indeed in strophes, but in continuous succession of brief *stichoi*, all of one and the same length – usually of seven syllables; a sort of blank verse, but a blank verse with no animating accents, no varying pause.<sup>77</sup>

### The influence of Ephrem on Romanos

There is little doubt that Romanos was heavily influenced by Ephrem, whose extant writings comprise ‘exegetical, ascetical and polemical works in prose, metrical homilies (*memre*) and doctrinal hymns (*madrashé*) ... It was as a spiritual poet and hymn-writer that Ephrem made his most lasting and significant contribution to the ecclesiastical life of his time.’<sup>78</sup>

77. Judith M. Lieu (trs), ‘Ephrem the Syrian,’ in Samuel N. C. Lieu (ed.) *Translated Texts for Historians, Greek Series*, Liverpool University Press, 1986, p. 102.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

... To combat the heretical Bardaisan of Edessa, he mastered the poetical metre used by Bardaisan and his son and 'composed similar poems in accordance with the doctrine of the church and praises for ascetics ... His other hymns ... cover various mysteries of Christ's life such as his nativity and his resurrection.'<sup>79</sup>

The regular format and rhythmic prose of Ephrem's poetry confirms the didactic and mnemonic function of rhythm and music posited in the Prolegomenon.

It is noted that 'As a theologian-poet Ephrem had few rivals in his day and his hymns exercised a profound influence on the development of Greek as well as Syriac hymnography.'<sup>80</sup> Apart from the didactic bent of his hymns in inculcating the true faith, he used them polemically as well to attack his enemies, 'be they pagans, Jews or heretics.'<sup>81</sup>

#### **(b) Musical realisation of Rhetorico-Literary aspects of the Kontakion**

The following examples of Romanos' musico-rhetorical approach to composition have been drawn from three of his greatest kontakia: (1) The *Akathistos Hymn*, (2) The *Nativity Hymn*, and (3) *On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, considered to be among the finest achievements of Byzantine poetry.

Geanakoplos reinforces this view, singling out the greatest hymn of Orthodoxy, Romanos' *Akathistos Hymn*, for his praise:

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79. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

81. *Loc. cit.*

This exalted quality of Byzantine hymns unfortunately cannot be adequately reproduced in translation. One can nevertheless, note the technical devices, literary and musical, used by the Byzantine hymnographer (probably Romanos the Melodos) to produce this effect. The internal rhythm of the lines, the repetition of the key phrases such as *Haire nymfe anymfefte* ('Hail bride unmarried,' literally 'unbrided'), the acrostic starting of each line with a new consecutive letter of the Greek alphabet, the intonation of the words chosen for their onomatopoeic effect, and finally, the remarkably pure sound of the chanting, devoid of any harmony whatever, much like Gregorian chant – all of these devices produce for the listener a lofty, ethereal quality perhaps unmatched in the entire range of liturgical literature.<sup>82</sup>

Wellesz supports this opinion when he says:

None of the contemporary melodists were equal to Romanos in power of expression, poetical vision, boldness of similes, and perfect harmony of line; and in no other hymn does his greatness shine more brightly than in the Akathistos.<sup>83</sup>

Though doubts concerning Romanos' authorship of the Akathistos Hymn have been expressed in the past, there is a general consensus among scholars today that he is the author.

Supporting this view, Carpenter says:

Added to the theological and stylistic evidence that connects the Akathistos with Romanos are identifying elements in the music and in the art of the period ... In the visual arts, the cycle of mosaic representation of the infancy of Christ coincides with the formation of the same cycle in poetry. Both go back to Syrian art and poetry of the fourth century ...<sup>84</sup>

The *Akathistos* is the only kontakion to have been discovered with all twenty-four strophes intact, and 'is chanted in all the Orthodox Churches throughout the world,

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82. Geanakoplos, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

83. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

during the first five Fridays in Lent, and constitutes a very concrete spiritual preparation for the Holy Week and Easter Services.<sup>85</sup>

It combines the kontakion form, a poetic sermon, with a series of salutations addressed to Mary, with the kontakion sung by a soloist, and the refrains sung by a chorus.

According to Carpenter, 'The salutations have their origin in the Hellenic synagogue ...'<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the influences already mentioned in Part I of this thesis, literary research has specifically linked certain passages of the Hymn to early homily, for example, the idea that Christ was present in Heaven and on earth without change, as well as to a speech by Basil of Seleucia, while the dialogue between Mary and Gabriel can be traced back to a homily by Proclus.<sup>87</sup>

Romanos' psychological insight and human touch is reflected in *Oikos VI*, when he makes a reference to St Joseph's dilemma:

Since he was inwardly distressed by the ambiguous situation,/The prudent Joseph was upset./As he saw thee unwed, blameless lady,/He suspected illicit love;/but when he learned of thy conception by the Holy Spirit he said;/ 'Hallelujah!'<sup>88</sup>

Romanos' political acumen has been noted in some detail in Part I, and Carpenter comments on the care he took to espouse 'what was considered the Orthodox point of

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85. Fr George Papadeas (trs), *The Akathist Hymn*, Patmos press, Athens, 1972, p. a.

86. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

87. *Loc. cit.*

88. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

view,<sup>89</sup> singling out the Councils of Chalcedon (451) which 'defined the two natures of Christ in an attempt to refute the Monophysites,' and that of Constantinople (553) under Justinian which 'condemned the errors of Origen and confirmed Chalcedon,' as those which influenced Romanos most significantly.<sup>90</sup>

The second part of the *Akathistos* concerns itself with the dogma of the Incarnation, and Romanos' 'preoccupation with the divine-human natures of Christ'<sup>91</sup> emerges strongly, when in Oikos XV, he writes: 'Wholly present on earth, yet never absent from Heaven was He, the Infinite Logos.'<sup>92</sup>

In this paean to the Virgin, the Hails comprise antithetical statements of her great attributes, with thought answering thought, reminiscent of the Hebrew poetic tradition, thereby establishing her as a powerful and unique being.

It seems then that Romanos was adopting an established and proven format in using antithetical Hails to illuminate the Virgin's attributes. There is ample Marian literature from Syriac and other sources to testify to the importance of the Virgin in the imagery projected by the church. In fact, it became obvious in the early centuries of theological dispute that the Christological problems were not going to be solved adequately until Marian problems were also addressed. Rhetoric again came to the rescue, as liturgical poetry drew upon its resources to create the approved theological images in the minds of the congregation.

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89. *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

90. *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

91. *Loc. cit.*

92. Papadeas, *op. cit.*, p. 36.



In this connection, Maguire points out the importance of the trope of metaphor in Christian literature, 'e.g. Christ's glory imaged by the sun, or the Virgin addressed as a meadow or a flower ...'<sup>93</sup>

The topic of spring was enthusiastically associated with the Annunciation, as Maguire notes: 'A very popular subject of description among Byzantine authors was the season of spring.'<sup>94</sup> For Byzantine writers:

there was a divine logic lying behind the coincidence of the Annunciation with the renewal of nature ... The feast's association with spring encouraged Byzantine authors to embroider their praises of the Annunciation with the imagery of the season.<sup>95</sup>

He elaborates on this image:

The accumulation of images was a technique that found its most effective expression in poetry devoted to the Virgin. A famous example is the reiteration of metaphors in the early Byzantine *Akathistos* hymn ... In the course of this hymn the poet repeatedly calls on the Virgin with long sequences of images [related to spring]:

Hail, vine of the imperishable shoot;  
hail field of the pure crop ...  
hail to you who plant the planter of our life ...  
hail, for you make a meadow of delight to flourish ...  
Hail, flower of immortality ...  
hail, tree of splendid fruit, from which the faithful are fed;  
hail, tree well covered with shading leaves, under whom many are sheltered.<sup>96</sup>

Such an extended treatment of a theme could come under the classification of an *ecphrasis*, if we adopt the classical interpretation of this rhetorical device which was

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93. Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

96. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

intended to make the listener 'see' the signs of spring, or whatever scene was being set before him.

As Maguire suggests

The textbooks on rhetoric emphasized that the purpose of formal description was to make the writing as vivid as possible, so that the reader would seem to see what was described, before his own eyes.<sup>97</sup>

Later he cites an example of *ecphrasis* becoming virtually an extended metaphor:

A few Byzantine homilists chose to express the ideas of fertility and renewal associated with the Annunciation through the formal ekphrasis of spring; in this case the entire description became an elaborate metaphor for the feast that the homilist wished to glorify.<sup>98</sup>

In both the *Nativity* and *Akathistos* Hymns the dramatic effect is heightened by the insertion of antithetical refrains, litany-like in their repetitions – 'A child newborn, the God before time' in the *Nativity Hymn*, and 'Bride unwedded' in the *Akathistos Hymn*.

Concerning the rhetorical device of antithesis, Kennedy notes:

The habit of antithesis was deeply ingrained in the Greek character, as is evident from the *μὲν ... δὲ* construction, from the fondness of the Greeks for contrasting figures ... and from the structure of most Greek art and literature.<sup>99</sup>

Maguire sees antithetical thought as habitual in both Hebrew and Greek culture:

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97. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

99. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963, p. 34.

This stylistic device [antithesis], common both to antique rhetoric and to the literature of the Bible, provided Christian writers with a ready-made mould in which to cast the paradoxes of their faith.<sup>100</sup>

Maguire notes that the Fathers of the church made liberal use of antithesis 'in order to express the paradoxical nature of Christ's incarnation, for it enabled them to clothe the unfamiliar mysteries in a linguistic convention that pagan education had made familiar to their audiences.'<sup>101</sup>

Just as no two kontakia are exactly alike, though they draw upon the same melodic formulae, demonstrating the great skill of the hymnographer in the art of minute variation to prevent duplication, so no two Hails in the Akathistos Hymn are alike, each Hail being of different length (duration), while each has a distinctive melodic progression, in some cases, centring on an important word or phrase, while in other instances the difference may be simply a longer beat or an accented note.

The musical outlines of each of the twelve Hails in the first set of Oikos I, each followed by some attribute of the Virgin Mary, provides an excellent example of the melodic inventiveness of the Melode, with almost every Hail being accorded individual treatment, either melodically, rhythmically or in the matter of duration. The two exceptions are Examples 5 and 6, which are identical, while elements of Example 7 appear in Example 8.

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100. Maguire, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

101. *Loc. cit.*



Ex. 6

Xai ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - pe - e

Ex. 7

Xai ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - pe - e

Ex. 8

Xai ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - pe - e - e

Ex. 9

Xai ai - ai - ai - ai - pe - e

Ex. 10

Xai ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - ai - pe - e

## Ex. 11



## Ex. 12



In the opening pair of Hails to the Virgin (Examples 1 and 2):

Hail! To You through Whom joy shall shine forth.  
Hail! To You through Whom the curse will vanish

the first Hail receives only brief treatment, while the second antithetical Hail is the subject of extended melismatic treatment.

What reason can there be for the excessive melismatic treatment of the second Hail? Is it to emphasise the succeeding attribute envisioning Mary as the new Eve – the one who removes the curse of Eden.

Against the background of heretical problems, it is reasonable to assume that this hymn could be an attempt to link Mary and Jesus in the soteriological scheme by the deliberate juxtaposition of their names with those of the fallen Adam and Eve.

The next pair of Hails (Examples 3 and 4):

Hail! The recalling of the fallen Adam.  
Hail! The redemption of Eve's tears

offer dogmatic reinforcement of the Church's teachings regarding Mary's place in the soteriological scheme, as the new Eve.

Examples 4, 5 and 6 commence with an arpeggio-like figure (Ex. 13), moving from  $g^1$  to  $e^{11}$ .

Ex. 13



However, a continuation of the text following this figure in Example 5:

Hail! O Height beyond human logic.  
 Χαίρει, ὕψος δυσανάβατον ἀνθρωπίνοις λογισμοῖς.

throws the emphasis on 'human' (ἀνθρωπίνοις) with the leaping figure (Ex. 14) extended to the range of a seventh ( $g^1$  to  $f^{11}$ ). This leaping configuration could represent a rhetorical attempt by the Melode to make a theological point. In Byzantine theoretical terminology, leaps were called *pneumata*, (spirits) and could perhaps be used symbolically to suggest spiritual implications, by contrast with the stepwise intervals, the *somata* (bodies) indicating their confinement to the material plane.

Ex. 14







drawing upon this same tradition to literally force the congregation to see with the eyes of the Angel the miracle which is occurring. Through the Angel's reaction they are able to experience vicariously his feelings when he suddenly envisages the miracle of God becoming corporeal in Mary's womb, and stands wonder-struck at the vision.

There is a parallel here perhaps with classical Greek drama in which the most dramatic scenes are implied rather than shown. In these instances, the Messenger reports the vivid details to the chorus, allowing the listener to build his own dramatic edifice internally as he absorbs the import of the words. Romanos is achieving a similar effect by implication in these passages by allowing the music to act as the 'Messenger,' as it were, subtly underscoring the action taking place. In this instance, of course, it is an ineffable spiritual event taking place, but no less dramatic for the audience, and presented in understandable human dramatic terms.

In all the examples from *Oikos I*, it can be seen that the general rule has been observed of taking care to make the words completely intelligible, with melismatic treatment confined to the latter syllables. This is in keeping with the intent of the kontakion in its function of homily, while the highly melismatic treatment of the text, almost obscuring the meaning of the words, is a later development. It is possible to see in this later lack of concern for the text the perception of the Church Fathers that there was then no more need for didacticism, as, with the heresies expunged, the doctrinal crisis had passed.

To highlight this dramatic instant, Romanos uses both literary and musical techniques. The 'rhyming' words (*homoioteleuton*) ἐξίστατο καὶ ἴστατο are repeated three times, each time assuming a different melodic morphology.



The three statements, viewed in sequence, reveal a classical symmetry, with the second statement featuring some dramatic leaps representing the rhetorical climax.

Again we are reminded of the classification of the neumes as 'bodies' (*somata*) for steps, and 'spirits' (*pneumata*) for leaps. Without pressing this imagery too far, it is possible to see in the above example the leaping figures representing the height of the spiritual realisation of the congregation as they experience this miraculous event through the eyes of the angel, with the subsequent stepwise progressions bringing the whole sequence back onto the material plane.

Another instance of this extended melismatic treatment occurs in Oikos III, when Mary asks the angel: 'How may a son be born from a virginal womb? Tell me.' Here, Romanos has inserted part of the ecstatic music of the Hails section in order to mirror rhetorically Mary's ecstasy.

Ex. 19 – Formulae from 'Hails' in Akathistos Hymn

The musical notation consists of six staves. The first staff begins with the Greek text: γέ - ο - υνυ - ά - γι - ον (6) η - μ - ε - ς. The second staff continues with: ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς. The third staff continues with: ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς. The fourth staff continues with: ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς. The fifth staff continues with: ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς. The sixth staff continues with: ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς - ο - υ - τ - ο - ς.

KEY:

a – formulae taken from the Χαίρειμοί which appear also in other *oikoi*.  
 b – the interpolated passage taken from the Χαίρειμοί and which appears in this *oikos* only.

The cause of the elongation of line 5, *oikos* III, is due to the interpolation of passage 'b' from the *Χαίρεισμοί*.

Wellesz obviously recognised this passage as formulae occurring in the *Χαίρεισμοί*, as he has inserted editorially in square brackets two quavers to relate it exactly to the latter.

There is no other instance of this particular formula occurring elsewhere in other *oikoi* in this Hymn; it appears exclusively in line 5, *oikos* III.

In the latter two examples, Romanos has applied musical rhetorical devices to highlight seminal parts of the text, while the rest of the kontakion follows the predictable rhythmic pattern of the *heirmos*, no doubt fulfilling the mnemonic role discussed in the Prolegomenon, with the familiar litany-like repetitions instructing the congregation virtually by rote.

In Romanos' *Nativity Hymn*, there is another instance of musical extension in association with a beautiful metaphor in which, to drive home an important theological point, Christ is likened to an undug well ( $\phi\rho\epsilon\alpha\rho$ ) from which all men can draw nourishment and life.

This image of Christ as one who 'quenches thirst and is called the "spring of salvation," or even compared to rain,' is noted also by Carpenter.<sup>102</sup>

The passage, in full, reads:

Bethlehem opened Eden, come let us behold;  
 We have found joy in this hidden place, come let us seize  
 The pleasures of Paradise within the cave;  
 There appeared an unwatered root which sprouted forgiveness;  
 There was found an undug well  
 From which David once yearned to drink;  
 And there the Virgin brought forth an infant  
 Who once quenched their thirst, that of Adam and of David.  
 Come, then, let us hasten to this place where there has been born  
 A newborn babe, the God before time.

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102. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. xxxv.

To draw attention to the central metaphor 'There was found an undug well,' Romanos states it twice, with word order assuming great significance each time. In both of these statements we have perfect examples of expert use of the *dispositio*, discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Exploiting the fact that Greek is an inflected language, which allows great flexibility in word order, he has manipulated the text to create the utmost suspense. In true narrative style, the first statement comprises an isosyllabic treatment of 'There' (ἐκεῖ), followed by a long melisma on 'was found' (εὕρεθη), which builds the suspense while the listeners ponder upon what was found, with the answer supplied simply in a few notes: 'a well.'

Ex. 20



In the second statement, a further piece of information, also of theological significance, is supplied with the addition of the word 'undug' (ἀνόρυκτον). Again, flexible word order allows the hymnographer to place the new idea at the end of the statement, thereby holding the audience in more suspense.

Ex. 21



The pattern this time is: 'There' (ἐκεῖ), drawn out, followed by 'was found,' with a fermata preceding the word 'well' to draw attention to what is to follow, followed by a long melisma on 'undug.'

A breakdown of the number of notes apportioned to each word in these examples reveals the rhetorical scheme:

Ex. 20 – Phrase 1: There (isosyll.) – was found (22) – a well (6);

Ex. 21 – Phrase 2: There (15) – was found (18) – a well (9) – undug (31)

Romanos' kontakion *On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, a work that is truly representative of his style, embodies the principles of the Aristotelian, Roman and Byzantine schools of rhetoric.

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis, the Greek text is given, together with Carpenter's rather free English translation.

In order to demonstrate the composer's use of main signatures and medial signatures for syntactical purposes, as punctuation, as well as for rhetorical effect, I have interpolated these in the Greek text.

*Prooimion*

δ/Ἰωακείμ καὶ ἄννα/ὄνειδισμοῦ/ἀτεκνίας  
 ι/καὶ ἀδάμ καὶ εὔα/ἐκ τῆς φθορᾶς/τοῦ θανάτου  
 ἠλευθερώθησαν  
 /᾿/ἄχραντε/ἐν τῇ ἀγία γεννήσει σου  
 /᾿/αὐτήν/  
 /᾿/ἐορτάζει καὶ ὁ λαός σου  
 /᾿/ἐνοχῆς τῶν πταισμάτων λυτρωθεὶς ἐν τῷ κράζειν σοι  
 /υι/ἡ στεῖρα τίκει τὴν θεοτόκου/καὶ τροφὸν./  
 τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν: /

*Strophe 1*

Ἡ προσευχή/ἦγ /ἡ προσευχή/ὁμοῦ καὶ στεναγμός/  
 ρι/τῆς στερώσεως/καὶ ἀτεκνώσεως/  
 αἰαα/Ἰωακὲμ τε καὶ ἄννης εὐπρόσδεκτοι/  
 /Ἄ/καὶ εἰς ὧτα κυρίου./ἐλήλυθεν καὶ εὐλάστησεν καρπὸν/  
 /Ἄ /ζωηφόρον/τῷ κοσμῷ/  
 /Ἦ/ὁ μὲν γὰρ προσευχὴ ἐν τῷ ὀρείτελει/  
 /γ- /ἦδε/  
 /γ/ἐν παράδεισῳ ὄνειδος φέρει/  
 /ρι /ἀλλὰ μὲ τὰ χαράς.

*Prooimion*

O Undefined, in your birth Joachim and Anna  
 Were freed from the reproach of childlessness,  
 And Adam and Eve from the corruption of death.  
 Indeed your people celebrate  
 Being redeemed from the penalty of sins, and they cry to you:  
 'The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God,  
 And the nurse of our life.'

*Strophe 1*

The prayer, along with the lamentation  
 of the barren and the childless  
 Joachim and Anna, was acceptable  
 As it came to the ears of the Lord and bore fruit  
 that was life-bearing for the world  
 For Joachim completed his prayer on the mountain,  
 While Anna bears her reproach. After a miracle, but with joy,  
 The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God,  
 And the nurse of our life.

In order to carry out the dissection required to illustrate this feature of the five-part division of rhetoric – the *dispositio* – one is obliged to forgo this 'artistic' translation for a completely 'literal' one, using the word order of the poet, which provides a vivid example of the way in which the inflected nature of the Greek language has allowed the poet free reign with the *dispositio*, as he arranged the word order to enhance his dramatic scheme.

Similarly, classical Greek writing exploited the freedom allowed by the inflectional system, which also enjoyed the advantage of variation in pitch and duration. As Clark observes:

Many of the patterns depend for their effect on the rich inflectional system of Latin and Greek and cannot be illustrated save in the ancient languages ... we should be aware constantly that the ancient speakers and theorists of prose style were dealing with the spoken word or the written word addressed to the mind's ear. Seneca betrays the ear-mindedness of the ancients when he says 'Even when we write we are in the habit of punctuating (*Epistolae II*). For to him, as to the others, punctuation was a pause in speaking. Consequently it is only natural that the ancients conceived the sentence first as a rhythmical pattern and only second as a logical pattern.'<sup>103</sup>

This freedom from the constraints of prescribed word order enables the poet to exercise more control over the 'timetabling' of his announcements, placing them in whatever order he feels is rhetorically the most advantageous, thereby allowing the rhetorical element of *dispositio* to come into play.

McCredie points out that little attention has been directed to the problem of *dispositio*, 'the rhetorical apportioning of experiential time.'<sup>104</sup> He finds this remarkable, 'since music, in common with rhetoric and poetry, is an art of time, one in which the sequence of sounding events, and the legitimacy of these, only unfold to the listener as an experience of time.'<sup>105</sup>

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103. Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-4.

104. Andrew D. McCredie, 'The problem of the *dispositio* — the question of time in the inter-disciplinary perspectives of music and rhetoric — a contribution to the historiography of the metarhetoric of music,' *Musica Antiqua VII*, Acta Scientifica, Bydgoszcz, 1985, p. 7.

105. *Loc. cit.*



If, as McCredie states: 'The *dispositio*, as the prearranged structure of a speech, is the time tabling of a series of events, to be presented before an audience or tribunal,'<sup>106</sup> may we not extend this application to duration arts such as poetry, in which the disposition of the words, imagery, and so on, must be given similar consideration as to the 'weighting' of their importance, and consequent timing of their entrance?

If, indeed, we can apply the rhetorical concept of *dispositio* in this manner to poetry and music, then the present work under examination supplies vivid examples of such application. As I have noted in Part I, this aspect of Romanos' compositional technique places him in the vanguard of later developments in western music, when composers similarly applied rhetorical techniques to enhance the dramatic impact of their compositions. McCredie notes this development:

Seventeenth and eighteenth century music theoreticians stressed three temporal aspects in their discussions of musico rhetorical form — (i) that of the *dispositio*, as preordains musical structure, (ii) periodicity and punctuation, (iii) the temporal element in specific rhetorical gestures (*gradatio, paronomasia*). The second of these was articulated in Daniel Speer's '*Vierfaches musikalisches Kleeblatt*' (1697), in which special attention was focussed towards the musical equivalent of punctuation signs (comma, colon), the roles of the fermata and cadence.<sup>107</sup>

In the *Nativity* kontakion, the *dispositio* is crucial from the outset. The opening statement of the poet comprises simply the words 'Joachim and Anna,' dramatically calling the listener's attention to the two main protagonists in the drama. Punctuation is effected by the use of a fermata on the last syllable of 'Anna.'

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106. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

107. McCredie, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

The effect of such moments of silence has not passed unnoticed in classical literature. As

Kustas observes:

... for 'Longinus' silence itself can be an expression of sublimity. Withal, it becomes also the expression of the divine, resident both in God and in the spirituality of man. Pythagoras with his appreciation of the religious function of silence and the host of Byzantine theologians inspired by a similar vision would have endorsed the sentiment.<sup>108</sup>

Ex. 22



Following this dramatic pause, Romanos immediately and starkly establishes the theme of the kontakion with the following two words – ‘reproach’ (ονειδισμού) and ‘childlessness’ (ἀτεκνίας), both receiving melismatic treatment, with ‘childlessness’ the subject of extended ornamentation.

Ex. 23



Ex. 24



108. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

On the question of style as expressed by ornament, if we are to search for norms in the ornamentation of the kontakia of Romanos, it would seem that this was a matter entirely dictated by the demands of the text. Textual punctuation also was faithfully echoed in the structure of the music. As I have noted elsewhere, the duty of the hymnographer was to enhance the text, but not at the expense of the meaning. In the case of the kontakion in particular, which served both a homiletic and a didactic purpose, the necessity for unambiguous communication of the meaning of the text was even greater.

Though Wellesz is inclined to think that the best kontakia of Romanos serve less a homiletic function than a dramatic one, in his outstanding examples of the genre, such as the one under examination, one can see that Romanos brilliantly fulfils both requirements:

... the Kontakion in the most perfect hymns of Romanos loses the homiletic character and, by assimilating elements from Mâdrâshâ and Sôgithâ, develops into a poetical description of the object of the feast on which it is sung.<sup>109</sup>

In the present work, Romanos has used ornamentation with the required discretion, treating the unaccented syllables isosyllabically in most cases, and taking care to apply ornamentation only to accented syllables, while ensuring that the word remains intelligible, e.g. ἄ-τεκ-νί(melisma)-ας; θα-νά(melisma)-του.

The syntax is reflected musically also by means of medial signatures, cadences and, in some cases, by a dramatic change of mode.

The dogmatic implications of the text have been rhetorically highlighted by the use of various musical techniques, such as: (1) changing modes to 'cordon off' particularly

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109. Wellesz, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-5.

significant words, e.g. ἀὐτῆν referring to the miracle of Mary's birth; (2) the placing of extended melismata on the accented syllable of words of great doctrinal significance; (3) the repetition of words to sustain suspense, e.g. Ἡ προσευχή, the prayer of the childless couple, with iteration suggesting the desperate appeal to God to accept their prayer; and (4) the use of antithesis, the device so beloved of Jewish, Syrian and Byzantine poets and theologians, especially in the contrasting images of Joachim and Anna, the instruments through whom the Mother of God was to be born in order to play her awesome role in the soteriological scheme, contrasted with the fallen Adam and Eve who were viewed as having brought such woe upon the human race.

With the musical 'icons' of Joachim and Anna, and their childlessness, followed immediately by the antithetical image of Adam and Eve, Romanos conjures up the whole Biblical tableau in the minds of the rhetorically-oriented congregation. This juxtaposition of good and evil was employed frequently in the contrasting images of Jesus and Mary represented as the saving 'new Adam' and 'new Eve.' The imagery is particularly apt here, however, in that Joachim and Anna represent Mary in this equation. The entire passage and its treatment calls to mind the thought parallelism of Hebrew and Syrian poetry whose influence on the evolution of the kontakion was discussed earlier in this chapter.

The antithetical images are further reinforced by identical musical treatment, with, again the use of a fermata on the fallen 'Eve,' contrasting here with the holy 'Anna.'

## Ex. 25



Similar antithetical treatment is given to the words 'childlessness' and 'death,' which have identical musical treatment, but for a slight variation on the cadence, perhaps to make allowance for the different final vowel sound, as the images 'freed from childlessness' and 'freed from the corruption of death' reinforce each other, and supply a further instance of the Hebrew poetical pattern of parallel thought metres.

## Ex. 26



The first syllables of the verb ἠλευθερώθησαν are treated isosyllabically, then ornamented in a manner which is relatively restrained compared with that applied to the foregoing nouns, perhaps reflecting the classical rhetorical contention that nouns should be used in preference to verbs, and presumably given more prominence.

## Ex. 27



In this context, the Byzantine exegete of classical rhetoric, Hermogenes, whose theories are applied to Romanos' kontakia in Part II, Chapter 4, makes the point that participles, pronouns, and nouns abstracted from verbs – 'onomatic' words – should be preferred, while verbs should be used least of all. Kustas adds:

These 'onomatic' terms have as their main function the definition of the divine, which is the main business, or Sentence, of Dignity [one of Hermogenes' rhetorical Forms]. One should note that a premium is put on the dynamic aspect. The theory asks not simply for nominal essences existing in their own right as the objects of knowledge and the explanation of the world, but as abstracted from the  $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$  of verbs.<sup>110</sup>

A change of mode, from the kontakion's original starting mode of *Tetartos*, to *Plagios Tetartos* signals the appearance of the dogmatically significant word ἀχαρῶτε (undefiled), which is treated to extensive ornamentation, to conclude with another fermata, perhaps intended to allow the audience time to reflect upon the profound dogmatic implications of the concept of Mary's immaculate conception.

The crystallisation of Mariological doctrine by the Early Fathers came comparatively late, as the early heresies were directed mainly at the nature of Christ. However, it became obvious to theologians that the solution of the Christological problems was intimately bound up with defining Mary's role in the whole redemptive scheme, and the establish-

110. Kustas, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

ment of her worthiness to bear Christ, by emphasising her sanctity, virginity, and immaculate conception.

As Burghardt notes:

... one is left with the impression that the Council of Ephesus [431] definitively consecrated in the Oriental Churches the belief not merely in Mary's divine maternity but in her perpetual virginity as well.<sup>111</sup>

Concerning the word ἄχραντε it should also be pointed out that the letter 'alpha' can be used as a prefix to convey negative meaning (in this case – undefiled or immaculate), which is characteristic of Greek theology. As Nicol notes:

Orthodox theology is often called 'apophatic' a theology of 'unknowing.' The Greek privative *alpha* (English 'un-') qualifies much of its terminology. God is said to be unknowable, ineffable, incomprehensible, indefinable, uncircumscribable.<sup>112</sup>

In the following example, the long drawn out melisma on the 'alpha' would have the effect of heavily emphasising this feature:

Ex. 28



The dogmatic importance of the word ἄχραντε is further emphasised by the melodic treatment of the rest of the passage, which antithetically answers the setting of

111. Walter J. Burghardt SJ, 'Mary in eastern Patristic thought,' in J. B. Carol (ed.), *Mariology*, Vol. 2, Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, 1957, p. 116.

112. Nicol, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

'childlessness' and 'death' with an identical melodic passage set a fourth higher on the word 'birth' (γεννήσει).

Ex. 29



A striking use of change of mode is now employed to highlight the word  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\eta\nu$  (this), referring to the miraculous fact of Mary's birth, and, in true narrative style, holding the listener in suspense before proceeding to elaborate upon what is to follow. The word is preceded by the *Plagios Protos* mode and is immediately followed by the *Plagios Tetartos* mode, separating it musically from the rest of the passage.

If the ears of the congregation were still attuned to changes of mode, this device would have provided a vividly dramatic instant. And if the singer chanted the intonations accompanying these modes aloud, the word would have been accorded even more weight by its setting in this musical framework.

Although Wellesz believed that the feeling for modality was gradually disappearing, certainly from the thirteenth century onwards, there is evidence that even today, in the practice of Byzantine chant in the contemporary Greek Orthodox Church, certain characteristics are still attributed to individual modes, as I have noted in more detail in the final chapter of this section.





Carpenter points out that the word for 'penalty' (ἐνοχῆς) is rare: 'it really means responsibility or a penalty to which one is liable.'<sup>113</sup>

This usage provides an instance of the richness of Romanos' language and the sources from which he drew, ranging from Attic, the *Koine* and the demotic. I have noted in Part I in more detail the state of the Greek language from the collapse of the Greek Empire to the establishment of Constantinople. Suffice to say here that it was for a time in a parlous condition, with virtually no standard language established.

Trypanis has issued a warning regarding the language of Romanos pointing out the 'Atticizing' process to which his writings were subjected by later copyists, resulting in (a) direct metrical errors where Attic 'correct' usages replaced Hellenistic, New Testament and Early Byzantine linguistic elements, and (b) indirect metrical errors, *i.e.* errors of copyists who tried to force the atticised passages into their original metrical patterns.<sup>114</sup>

Regarding the mixture of language, it may be relevant to observe here Hermogenes' admiration for the use of a 'mixed' style, much favoured by Demosthenes, his rhetorical ideal, as a way of increasing the beauty of discourse.

Ex. 32



113. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

114. C. A. Trypanis, 'The metres of Romanos,' *Byzantion*, XXXVI, Fascicule I, Brussels (Memorial Henri Gregoire), 1966, p. 563.

The 'barren woman' (ἡ στῆρα – the sterile one), is given isosyllabic treatment now, with the full force of interest concentrated on the one to whom she has given birth – the *Theotokos* – the 'Mother of God.' It should be noted here that the use of the word θεοτόκος was significant in itself, since, according to Burghardt, it took some time for this concept to be accepted, so that there was no indisputable evidence for the title of Mother of God before the fourth century.<sup>115</sup>

## Ex. 33



The following words, 'nurse of our life' (τροφὸν τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν) are accorded the identical melodic pattern of Example 8 on the word 'birth,' which, in turn, is a transposition a fourth higher of Examples 3 and 5 on the words 'childlessness' and 'death.' The thought connections are obvious.

## Ex. 34



We move now to Strophe 1.

115. Burghardt, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

The use of repetition allied to change of mode to increase dramatic intensity, as noted earlier, is also in evidence here, as the word 'prayer' (προσευχή) is repeated – the second time accompanied by a change of mode. The strophe continues the mode of the *Prooimion*, i.e. *Tetartos*, which is indicated by the *ison* at the commencement, while the signature inserted before the repetition of 'prayer' is *Plagios Protos*.

## Ex. 35



A long melisma on στεναγμός (lamentation), with a fermata in the middle greatly heightens the emotional impact of the word.

## Ex. 36



While the significance of the word 'childless' (ἀτεκνώσεως) echoes the 'ateknias' of the *Prooimion* which constitutes the main theme of the kontakion, that is, a miraculous birth, and is reflected in the elaborate melismatic treatment.

## Ex. 37



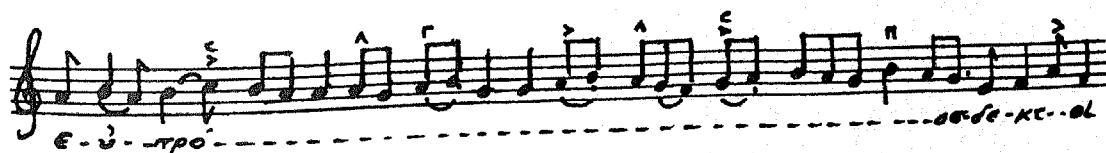
'Joachim and Anna' appear again, this time in different melodic garb. In the following example it can be noted that unimportant words like  $\tau\epsilon$  are treated isosyllabically, since they were usually either unaccented in Early Byzantine religious poetry, or sometimes inserted to aid the metrical working out.

## Ex. 38



Following the suspense invoking repetition of the word 'prayer,' we are told that this prayer of Joachim and Anna 'was acceptable' [to the Lord] ( $\epsilon\upsilon\pi\rho\sigma\delta\epsilon\kappa\tau\omicron\iota$ ), and accordingly is granted a long melisma.

## Ex. 39



In the phrase '[the prayer] bore fruit that was life-bearing for the world,' the word 'world' ( $\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\hat{\omega}$ ) is also accorded extended melismatic treatment.

## Ex. 40



The word 'prayer' occurs again in connection with Joachim praying on the mountain. There is no attempt to match it with the two previous occasions, however, like them, it is given completely individual melodic treatment.

## Ex. 41



An example of *ellipsis* can be found in the last two lines, when the action of Joachim (prayer) and the reaction of Anna (bearing her reproach) are referred to, without, however, the names of either being stated, but merely inferred from the context.

A further instance of the singling out of a word for dramatic effect by changing the mode both before and after, can be found on the word  $\eta\delta\epsilon$  (behold!). A similar technique has been used in the *Prooimion* on the word  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\eta\nu$ , however, there the resemblance ends, as there is no attempt to imitate the melodic pattern of the first example.

Ex. 42



The kontakion ends on a triumphant note, with the word 'joy' (χαράς) being the subject of extended melismatic treatment.

Ex. 43



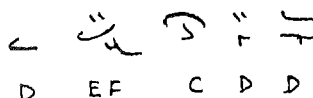
### Rhetoric enhances text through use of modes

There are obvious rhetorical implications in the use of varied modes to differentiate between individual protagonists and the question and answer technique, as I have been able to demonstrate in the foregoing dissection of the kontakion *On the Nativity of the Virgin*. In this work, changes of mode have been used rhetorically to underline the psychological impact of the text.

Although he has not designated it as such, the following description by Stathis of the composer's intention is a vivid example of the use of rhetorical means to enhance the text. In referring to a Sticherion of 'Aposticha' composed by Chourmouzos, he writes:

The composer matches the soothing character – the 'ethos' – of the First Plagal mode with the calmness of Spring – the season in the church year when the sticheron is used and sung – and begins to unfold the melody in a *Largo*

tempo within the tetrachord Πα-Δι (D-G) with the characteristic initial phrase:



The appearance of the enharmonic tetrachord at the word θεασάμενος ... prepares us for the elevation of the melody and for the development of the musical dialogue. The introduction of a 'thematismos' stresses the dramatic nature of the theme and heightens the interest of the listeners. The passing chromaticism on ζω-b, indicated with the pthora ϑ prepares for the succession of the enharmonic tetrachord with an increased feeling of intensification of the drama caused by the stress given to the argument – namely the words of the Theotokos – in order to persuade a man, i.e. Pilate, to issue his permission for the burial of God. The melody becomes calm, returning to the diatonic tetrachord and undulating upwards to Κε-a and downward to Πα-D, rejoicing at the successful petition, it makes a circular movement with the appearance of two signs of the paraklitikè on words παρέχοντα πᾶσι ... and concluding with the epegerma on Δι-G, a frequent ending in the First Plagal mode.<sup>116</sup>

The rhetorical use of modes is reflected also in an example cited by Raasted in which 'the structure of the text is brought out musically by a number of modal changes':<sup>117</sup>

The first section of the Stikheron ... is narrative; it is in the Deuterios mode. The angels' question ... is in the Tetartos, as is also their second question ... but for the answers ... the Deuterios is used. The concluding allocution to Christ is in the main mode of the Stikheron, the Deuterios.<sup>118</sup>

116. Stathis, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

117. Raasted, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

118. *Loc. cit.*



### *Chapter 3*

## **PERFORMANCE PRACTICE OF THE KONTAKION**

This chapter investigates the performance practice of Byzantine chant, with special reference to the kontakion, and related topics, including the oral tradition and the possible connection with the rhetorical concept of Obscurity. To add another dimension to the controversial topic of performance practice, where applicable, Byzantine chant is compared with another living tradition of chant, that of Christian Arabs in Israel.

Performance practice is an area of musicology which not only presents great challenges both to musicologist and to performer, but also the temptation to indulge in speculation in an area where indisputable evidence is not always easily available. While we do not know how Byzantine chant was performed, the insistence of contemporary Greek Orthodox authorities that it has remained unchanged over the entire span of its existence has to be taken into consideration, particularly if one allows for the extraordinary conservatism of the Byzantine tradition, and the persistence of an oral tradition.

### **The spirituality of chant**

Chant is at the heart of the liturgy, and in common with all Byzantine arts, springs from a spiritual base; therefore, its performance involves more than technical considerations. For the Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church, such as St. Symeon the New

Theologian, 'every prayer and psalmody is a conversation (*synomilia*) with God.'<sup>1</sup> It follows, then, that chant must be of the highest order of spirituality.

Byzantine sacred music ... is characterized, as far as its inner essence is concerned, by simplicity or freedom from undue complexity, by purity or freedom from everything sensual, ostentatious, insincere, and by unsurpassed power and spirituality.<sup>2</sup>

Sharing the Platonic view of the function of music, the chant of the Eastern Orthodox Church is not intended for pleasure but for the elevation of the soul.

The aim of this music is not to display the fine voices of the chanters, or to entertain the congregation, or to evoke aesthetic experience... The aim ... is spiritual. This music is, in the first place, a means of worship and veneration; and in the second place, a means of self-perfection, of eliciting and cultivating man's higher thoughts and feelings and of opposing and eliminating his lower, undesirable ones.<sup>3</sup>

In common with the other arts, the purpose of chant is to instil in the congregation a sense of the spiritual world beyond the senses:

In its inner essence, Byzantine hymnody is identical with Byzantine music, architecture, and iconography. It differs from them only in employing a different medium: language. Like them it seeks to introduce us to a realm of being that lies beyond the world which is apprehended by the senses, to lift us to a higher level of experience, to the level of spiritual beauty, of holiness, of the Divine.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Constantine Cavarnos, *Byzantine Thought and Art*, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts, 1968, p. 99.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

3. *Loc. cit.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

### The role of the hymnographer

In keeping with this lofty view of the purpose of chant, and as we have observed earlier, it can be seen that it is not an outlet for the personal ego of the hymnographer. In discussing the themes that are the subject of chant, Cavarnos states that 'These themes are treated *objectively*, without the poet injecting into them either his idiosyncrasy or matters pertaining to his own individual life,' adding that 'Unlike our English hymn which is intensely subjective – in many cases unhealthily so – the Greek hymn is in most cases objective.'<sup>5</sup>

The role of the hymnographer is to depict these themes 'in plain unmistakable language. So we have in the hymns of the Greek Church a pictorial representation of the history of Redemption which, by engaging the mind, appeals ultimately to the heart and its emotions.'<sup>6</sup>

[The hymnographers seek] not only to praise God and His holy followers in a worthy manner, but also to arouse the worshippers spiritually, to incite them to apply themselves with greater energy to the urgent task of transforming their inner being.<sup>7</sup>

The exalted role of the hymnographer is expressed by Cardinal Pitra:

... the Church has opened to him her temples, has given him a place of honour in her sanctuaries, and has borrowed from him his melodies to occupy, by night and by day, the long hours of Eastern prayer. Nowhere has poetry received from the Church a greater meed of praise than in the country of Homer.<sup>8</sup>

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5. *Loc. cit.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

8. Seversen Salaville, *An Introduction to the Study of Eastern Liturgies*, Sands & Co., London, 1938, p. 86.

### Character and status of chanter

Not only the hymnographer but also the chanter has a clearly defined spiritual role. In other words, the chanter, or *psaltes*, must be of good character and approach his art with the reverence it deserves.

In this context, Cavarnos stipulates that in addition to possessing musical attributes ‘the chanter must be a true Christian, possessing real piety, humility, inner wakefulness, and understanding – an understanding not only of what he is chanting, but also of the important purpose which he has been appointed to serve.’<sup>9</sup>

This attitude is reminiscent of Aristotle’s contention in his *Rhetoric* that the orator should have a good character, and goes beyond the requirements of the ordinary layman.

In the Apostolic Canons, in the canons of the Synod of Laodicea and of the Synod in Trullo, chanters are classified among the clergy (*klēros*), and a stricter mode of life is required of them than of laymen.<sup>10</sup>

### How chant should be performed

These spiritual requisites are reflected in the performance practice of chant. ‘It must, in the first place, be chanted in a state of *attention* or *inner wakefulness*, with *fear of God*, *devoutness*, *contrition*, *humility*.’<sup>11</sup>

*Languidness* in chanting is condemned by the Fathers ... But *forced* and *unduly loud* chanting is also condemned.... Jeremiah of Sinai ... stresses the need of *preserving the right tempo*, psalmodizing neither faster nor slower than is proper. He also stresses the need of *rendering every verse ‘integrally and perfectly.’* Since the melody and rhythm of a psalm or ode emphasize and enhance the meaning of the words, and the words give the rhythm and melody

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9. Cavarnos, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

10. *Loc. cit.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

specific, definite content, it is important that *both* be rendered properly. Every verse, every phrase, every word must be sung in such a way that the meaning of the text is not obscured or altered. Breathing at the wrong time, dividing the verses at the wrong places, wrong emphasis – these must all be avoided.<sup>12</sup>

The Eastern Orthodox authorities have maintained vehemently that the oral tradition of chant has remained intact since its inception. Therefore, the music remains **monophonic**, with the only vestiges of harmony supplied by the *ison* singing.

In order to enrich and augment the melody, Byzantine sacred music employs instead of polyphony and the accompaniment of the organ or some other instrument, a finer, more spiritual means: the *isocratēma* or *holding-note*. That is, in addition to the chanters (*psaltai*) who sing the melody, there are the *isocrats* (literally, ‘holders of the *ison*’ or fundamental tone) or, as they are named in ancient Byzantine manuscripts, *bastaktai* (literally, ‘holders’). The work of the isocrats consists in holding a drone on the basic tone of the mode in which the melody is being sung ... The isocratema not only enhances the melody, but also emphasizes the mode in which the psalm, hymn or ode is being sung, and adds solemnness and power to the psalmody.<sup>13</sup>

### Performance practice of the kontakion

The kontakion was a sophisticated development from the sermon certainly, but it is still uncertain how it was performed, that is, whether it departed very much from a kind of recitative, or followed a more melodic curve. According to Carpenter:

No one knows exactly how the kontakion was sung ... the closest present-day scholars can come to the manner of its delivery is to suggest that it may have resembled the recitative of an oratorio ... It may be that an individual singer, probably a priest, presented the hymn after reading the Gospels, and then double choirs chanted the refrains, or, when dialogue was involved, the alternate strophes.<sup>14</sup>

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12. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

14. Marjorie Carpenter, *The Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist I: On the Person of Christ*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1937, p. xv.

Trypanis supports the idea of a recitative-like performance, stating that the dramatic character of the content of the hymns of Romanos suggests that they were 'rendered in a kind of recitative resembling oratorios, the congregation joining in the refrain.'<sup>15</sup>

Further insights into the performance practice of Byzantine chant may be gained from a study of Syrian chant, based on the suggested techniques of Ephrem, the Syrian religious poet: 'The hymns are usually provided with refrains which would have been sung by the audience in response to Ephrem as he sang the stanzas accompanied by his harp.' It seems we may be dealing with a style of singing that is not far removed from recitative.

I venture to suggest that in the performance of kontakia, such as the *Akathistos* and *Nativity Hymns*, the singer, if not the celebrant of the liturgy, would be a highly trained virtuoso, capable of singing in a wide range of pitches. However, it is just as possible that, outside Constantinople, the pitch would have been modified to accommodate local conditions, such as less-skilled singers and a less-standardised liturgy, with, no doubt, many other 'convenient' changes being incorporated. This is a common pattern in the transmission of music from a principal performing centre to a distant or less musically sophisticated region.

### Technical aspects of performance

Having touched upon the spiritual attitudes required of the chanter, we now turn to some of the technical aspects of performance.

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15. C. A. Trypanis, *Medieval and Modern Greek Poetry: An Anthology*, Clarendon press, Oxford, 1951, p.

Since it is not possible to treat in depth every facet of these technical problems within the parameters of this chapter, only certain aspects will be covered.

### Theory and practice

The problems associated with using the *Papadike* – the theoretical documents of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries purporting to explain the theory behind Byzantine chant – lies in their being so removed from the original tradition. Cohen also has something to say on this dichotomy between theory and practice:

... theoreticians ... in order to guard the purity of the theory and protect it from the 'damaging effects' of meeting oral tradition an 'almost deliberate' gap was created between theory and practice, with theorizing an occupation enjoying high esteem, while practice was considered of lesser value and 'of no importance for the speculations of theoreticians.'<sup>16</sup>

Cohen points out also that in reality, however, there are instances of theoreticians basing descriptions of scales on concepts derived from actual playing of stringed instruments.

Discussing contemporary performance practice in the Greek Orthodox Church, Savas describes the manner in which certain signs are interpreted.

A case in point is the '*petaste*,' which, Savas notes 'is performed with a slight quivering of the voice ...'<sup>17</sup> In view of the explicit performance characteristics and the 'marvellous expressive quality' of the six characters of expression which indicate 'the manner of the recitation of the notes,' it is relevant here to give Savas' interpretation of their meaning:

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16. Dalia Cohen, 'Theory and practice of liturgical music of Christian Arabs in Israel,' *Studies in Eastern Chant*, OUP, 1966, p. 12.

17. Savas I. Savas, *Byzantine Music in Theory and Practice*, Hercules Press, Roslindale, Massachusetts, 1965, p. 10.

*Bareia* has a 'liveliness of accent,' the *Homalon* produces 'a slight quivering of the voice between first and second beat,' the *Antikenoma* 'produces a shaking (liveliness) of the voice, the *Psofiston* produces 'quickness (liveliness),' the *Heteron* 'must be brought forth with sweetness, slight wavering of the voice' and undivided, and the *Endophon* 'is performed with a closed mouth, usually.'<sup>18</sup>

With the Byzantine *protopsaltes*, or principal chanter, in mind, it is instructive to read Cohen's exposition of the problems facing Arab virtuosic singers, when she notes:

... ambitus and tessitura (i.e. range of the ambitus relative to the central notes) is dependent on *lahans* and the class of the singer. The problem of absolute pitch remains, but the central notes are the most stable and important determining factor in defining a *lahan* or mode, and are invariable. The intervals between the central notes are almost invariable (e.g. the interval between central notes is a 4th in 1st *lahan*, and a 3rd in 2nd *lahan*) however, the size of the interval, i.e. exact intonation, varies considerably ... In Arabic song, great importance is placed on notes stable and unstable in pitch ... [In]...every vocal performance, especially in the performance of oriental music transmitted orally, there exists a scatter or spread in the pitch of the different tones making up the melody and in the size of the intervals.<sup>19</sup>

During the long services, particularly preceding Easter, the problem of resting the chanter and maintaining the attention of the congregation was solved by using antiphony, according to Cavarnos.

In order to provide the chanters with needed periods of rest, and to keep the congregation in a state of inner wakefulness ... antiphony is employed in Byzantine chant. That is, not one but two choirs are employed, which psalmodize alternately.<sup>20</sup>

From this outline, perhaps we may be able to gain some insight into the original performance practice associated with this great vocal art. Allowing for the continuity of

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18. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

19. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

20. Cavarnos, *op. cit.*, p. 105.



the tradition, they may throw some light on the performance of liturgical genres like the kontakion. In spite of the lack of evidence, there has been, however, some speculation concerning the actual performance practice of this homiletic hymn.

### **Problems of pitch**

Looking at the musical manuscripts one is struck by the apparent problems of finding the starting note and maintaining pitch which must have faced the chanter. In a notation which was not 'heighted' as Western notation, and in which each note had to be gauged from the previous one, was the singer required to have absolute pitch to stay in tune, or on course? Or were the intonation formulae which preceded each hymn drilled into the chanter in oral practice to the point where they could be reproduced in his mind at the correct pitch at will? It is here that we must recognise the existence of a continuous and consistent oral tradition which relegated the notation to the function of a memory aid to the singer who knew the true run of the melody by heart.

### **Pitch presents problems to first transcribers**

The first transcribers of Byzantine chant, with, according to Stathis, insufficient knowledge of the oral tradition, were not so fortunate in having this total musical picture to work from, and were faced with the problem of having first to decipher the neumes and then to interpret the function of the medial signatures, martyriae, and intonation formulae in determining the pitch and the starting note. The singer also operated within the framework of tetrachords in order to position his voice and provide a point of reference for the pitch of the note and the size of the interval.

The situation is summed up by Raasted:

It is obvious that a notation which indicates  $\phi\omega\nu\alpha\iota$  without distinguishing between tones and half-tones cannot be satisfactorily interpreted unless one knows where to begin – not necessarily the absolute pitch of the initial note but its relative pitch, i.e. the distance between the initial note and the half-tones of the mode in question.<sup>21</sup>

Following Tillyard's observation that there existed 'a connection of some sort between the intonation-formulas and the signatures of the Byzantine modes,' Strunk also found a 'connection between the formulas and the signatures of the modes on the one hand and the opening patterns of the melodies themselves on the other.'<sup>22</sup>

### The function of the Intonations and Signatures

Raasted was of the opinion that the Medial Signatures (MeSi) were a 'means of control,'<sup>23</sup> i.e. of pitch, and notes Wellesz' contention that: 'These Intonation formulae are intended to be a guide for the singer to intone the following melodic line at the right pitch.'<sup>24</sup>

Høeg believed that in cases where both signature and intonation are given, it indicated an alternative choice for the singer, implying an aesthetic function. While Høeg and Wellesz agree that the medial signatures were possibly sung, either aloud or in the mind of the singer, Wellesz viewed them as enabling the singer to catch the right note of the following phrase.

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21. Jørgen Raasted, 'Intonation Formulas and Modal Signatures in Byzantine Musical Manuscripts,' *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae* VII, Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1966, p. 1.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

24. *Loc. cit.*

My own transcriptions support Raasted's contention that 'sung MeInt [Medial Intonations] had a structuralizing and aesthetical (ornamental) function,'<sup>25</sup> that is, a rhetorical function.

From their position in the text, it seems likely that one of the functions of the MeSi and MeInt also was to serve the rhetorical purpose of punctuation. When dealing with the highly melismatic style, one realises that, with the textual meaning so diffused through the long, ornate passages, some form of aural editing, to mirror the syntactical structure of the text, would have been imperative. Evidence that the singer's memory was taxed by these highly melismatic chants can be perceived in the necessity for the scribe to repeat, under each group of melisma, the syllable which was being sung.

The use of the MeSi and MeInt in this syntactical manner could be interpreted also as another aspect of the brilliant centonisation techniques of the Melode, who had also to allow for the constraints imposed by the use of syllabic verse:

After the manner of sung poetry, and this applies more especially to that employed in the sanctuary, syllabic verse tends to be subject to certain definite limitations. So disjunctive particles are for preference placed at the extreme limits of the verse; pronouns, designed to individualize thought, fall regularly in the last syllable; the pauses for breathing during singing or recitation permit also of some repose for the mind.<sup>26</sup>

In the 'Neo-Byzantine' music, however, which claims to have preserved the oral tradition, the MeSi are never sung, being used to define pitch only.

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25. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

26. Seversen Salaville, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

As Raasted points out, 'This system ... has no absolute pitch in a purely vocal music,' while Strunk notes: 'the actual pitch taken in performance is dictated, not by what is written, but by the singers' convenience.'<sup>27</sup>

Raasted appears to find in Strunk's opinion on actual performance practice a practical approach to transcription:

Consequently, the pitches which we choose in transcription are to be chosen from practical considerations only. In Western staff notation, a transcription of the central octave as D — d seems to be most convenient, since it yields a result virtually free from accidentals, lying for the most part well within the range of the average voice.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning the use of a 'convenient' pitch, one has to raise the objection that if this was what took place in performance practice, what was the function of the various modes? If, as Plato suggests they can induce certain feelings and moods (and this is one part of classical musical theory that could have still held credence in Byzantium), then surely, changing the pitch of the mode would have the result of changing the emotional effect.

#### Modes as vehicle of emotional expression

Although Wellesz suggests that there are signs that the feeling for mode had begun to subside by the thirteenth century, there are indications in contemporary textbooks on Byzantine chant, that certain emotional effects are still associated with certain modes.

In view of this contention that the feeling for mode was not strong as Byzantine music progressed, it is instructive to read in Savas' modern textbook on contemporary Greek

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27. Jørgen Raasted, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Orthodox chant a description of the character or attributes accorded to each mode [or tone]: 'Each tone has certain peculiarities which aid it in being heard with greater enjoyment by the audience. This oddity in the musical language is called *idiom*.'<sup>29</sup>

On the subject of interpretation and musical expression, Savas notes that, in addition to 'the characters of expression,' the tones [or modes] are also endowed with certain attributes. Though the list is long, it is worth detailing the individual character of each mode to scotch this concept concerning the loss of modal awareness, and to indicate the richness and diversity of the emotions portrayed:

*The First Tone (Dorios)* originated from Dorians: axiomatic, magnificent, happy and earthly.

*The First Plagal Tone (Hyperdorios)* derived from the First (Dorian): merciful, stimulating, and dancing-like.

*The Fourth Tone (Mixolydian)* attributed to Sappho: festive, dance-like and joyous.

*The Fourth Plagal Tone (Hypomixolydian)* as taken from the Fourth Tone (Mixolydian): humble, appeasing, suffering.

*The Second Tone (Lydian)* from Lydia: moving, languid, and graceful.

*The Second Plagal Tone (Hypolydian)* as derived from the Second Tone: funeral-like, and in general, sorrowful.

*The Third Tone (Phrygian)* from Phrygia: expresses arrogance, bravery, and has a mature air.

*Barys (Hypophrygian)*, related to Third Tone (Phrygian): has a manly character and strength of melody.

### **The oral tradition**

Oral transmission was a characteristic feature of Byzantine culture, applying not only to chant, but also to doctrine, as Sherrard notes '... the whole Christian Way ... is intimately

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29. Savas, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-2.

linked with the acquisition of knowledge, with a “gnosis” ... while much of the doctrine is written ... other aspects of the doctrine ... are the subject of oral, and symbolic transmission ... This sacred tradition of teachings orally transmitted is frequently referred to by the Fathers of the Church.<sup>30</sup>

In transcribing Byzantine neumes, it is important to be aware that they gradually evolved in response to a need to preserve an already established oral tradition, aptly described by Raasted as ‘one of the more elusive topics of musicology.’<sup>31</sup>

Bearing this in mind, the transcriptions which have been carried out by western scholars are now the subject of criticism by Greek musicologist Gregorios Stathis, who maintains that the manuscripts do not represent the oral tradition in its entirety, and that there are certain signs, representing a sort of musical shorthand, which could be interpreted only by those acquainted with the oral tradition. From the point of view of interpretation, he adds that ‘all the signs used in Byzantine music have an individuality and ... their manner of expression cannot be conveyed on a five-line staff.’<sup>32</sup>

Cohen, who also has broached this problem of transcribing oriental music into western notation in her absorbing study of the liturgical music of Christian Arabs in Israel, cites Couturier: ‘This music in European notation cannot, understandably, convey all the fine nuances of Eastern song ...’<sup>33</sup>

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30. Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West*, OUP, 1959, pp. 27-8.

31. Jørgen Raasted, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

32. Gregorios Th. Stathis, ‘An analysis of the Sticheron Τὸν ἡλιον κρύψαντα by Germanos, Bishop of New Patras [The Old “Synoptic” and the New “Analytical” Method of Byzantine Notation],’ *Studies in Eastern Chant*, p. 205.

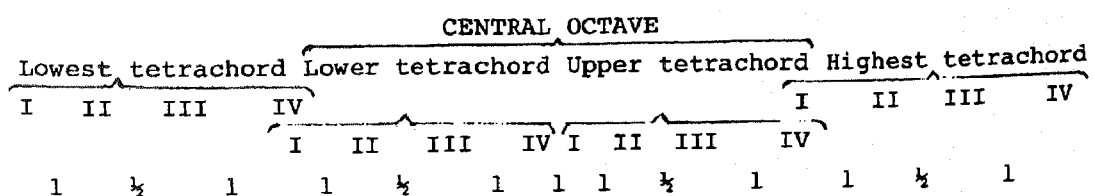
33. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

In the process of transcribing a number of kontakia from the *Codex Ashburnham 64*, I found myself agreeing with Stathis' contention that 'all the signs used in Byzantine music have an individuality and that their manner of expression cannot be conveyed on a five-line staff.' Be that as it may, and accepting the fact that many other scholars have now questioned the validity of transcribing this notation into the Western staff system at all, it has proved a useful exercise in establishing the framework of the melodies, the use of formulae, and the centonisation techniques of the Melode. Where it is under serious challenge is in its interpretation of the size of the intervals as they were sung.

### The question of diatonicism

This also brings into dispute whether the music was performed diatonically as has been claimed. The step of a second could be a tone, a semitone, or an even smaller interval.

Raasted notes that "Transcriptions of Byzantine melodies into Western notation are based on the assumption that medieval Byzantine chant consists of tones and half-tones only."<sup>34</sup> In other words, that it was diatonic in structure. Reproducing Strunk's analysis of the tonal system realised in Byzantine music, Raasted summarises his results in the following diagram; which shows the relative position of the modes within this tonal system.



34. Raasted, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Again, we come back to the problem of performance practice, and I feel that **though the music may have been based theoretically on such a system, in actual practice, it may not have been sung diatonically.**

The fact that the music was not always performed diatonically, is explained by Wellesz as a result of the principle of attraction (ἔλξις):

In my opinion, however, the introduction of such half tones was in the beginning a mannerism of the singers, which did not affect the basically diatonic character of the melodies. Since the richly ornamented **Kontakia** melodies are based on the same formulae, characterising the mode ... **one may conclude that they, too, are basically diatonic. The modal scheme, however, seems at that time already to have undergone some changes which are due to the process of growing 'orientalisation.'**<sup>35</sup>

Tillyard agrees with Wellesz concerning the so-called 'orientalisation' of Byzantine chant, noting that Chrysanthus, who reformed the notation in the eighteenth century, 'did not attempt to restore the mediaeval melodies or to purge Byzantine music of **Oriental elements.**'<sup>36</sup>

### **Improvisation**

Some insights into the performance practice of Christian Arabs in Israel by Dalia Cohen tend to throw some light on this problem, as this research is concerned also with a living oral tradition – perhaps a more flexible one, in that, under the Arab system 'the singer is a co-creator, having the scope for improvisation during performance,' which one doubts would have been permitted under the strict Byzantine regime.

35. Egon Wellesz, 'The Akathistos Hymn,' *Scripta, Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*, Vol. IX, Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1957, pp. LXIV-LXV.

36. H. J. W. Tillyard, *Handbook of the Middle Byzantine Musical Notation*, Munksgaard, Copenhagen, 1935, p. 16.



We do not know whether the Byzantine *psaltes* also followed this practice. Since the *kontakia* are contained in books for solo singers and we can assume that they were performed by the virtuosi of the day, we may speculate upon whether, like all creative artists, the singer would be tempted to place his own interpretation on the music – certainly the ornamentation.

Militating against this theory, however, would be the ultra-conservatism of the Byzantine tradition, which saw the melodic formulae as divine prototypes, miraculously handed down to the Melode from angels and saints – ‘echoes of heavenly music’ – in the same way that the redaction of the manuscripts was not so much as form of writing as of drawing in which a faithful replica of the original was produced.

We may assume though that in outlying areas of the Empire where the singers were perhaps not so well versed in the oral tradition at Constantinople, and perhaps less gifted than those of the City, that many modifications and adjustments would take place, just as the shape and form of the liturgy would suffer the same ‘corruptions.’

A further deterrent to creative interpretation by the performer was the Byzantine concept of the composer, icon painter or performer as merely a medium through which the Divine Logos was expressed, and this view leaves no room for the Western idea of the creative artist expressing his own ego through his works. So that there was little scope for the insertion of individual personal modifications.

The Melode, however, found ingenious ways and means to imprint his personality on this formulaic material by subtle and artistic fitting of the music to the stress accents of the

text, and by the use of smooth centonisation techniques, and minute variations to the musical formulae.

### **The implications of chant preceding its notation**

On this question of the accuracy of the notation in reflecting the oral tradition, another notion that has occurred to me is that the gradual evolution of the notation into more and more complex and specific forms, may not necessarily have mirrored the gradual evolution in the chant, which, by all accounts, was already highly developed as early as the fifth or sixth centuries, but reflected increasingly sophisticated attempts to provide a worthy facsimile of this highly evolved vocal art.

This surmise appears to be in line with Raasted's thinking on the subject, when he states:

... the innovation of the Round MSS is not a change in principles of performance, but simply explicitness in a field where the necessity of being explicit was not felt before.<sup>37</sup>

In this connection Raasted has noted, perhaps wryly, the benefits of working backwards in studying problems associated with Byzantine chant, when he says

... the nature of the subject itself makes backward movements more fruitful. This is due, I think, to the essential feature of the development of the Byzantine system of notation ... the tendency towards more and more precision and explicitness. This growing explicitness enables us to understand older phenomena in the light of more recent and more explicit sources.<sup>38</sup>

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37. Raasted, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

### Discovering the true 'melos'

Stathis' main contention is that any differences between Western and Greek scholars concerning Byzantine music hinges on an understanding of the meaning of the term 'melos,' which he defines as 'the real melody of Byzantine music regardless of the notation in which it is written down, particularly when it is written in the Round Notation (or the Middle Byzantine neumatic notation) ...'<sup>39</sup>

According to Stathis, the melos has always been viewed as something more than the metrophonia [framework]. 'It is evident ... that the metrophonia – i.e. the signs for intervals only with syllables of the text – was *not the melos*.'<sup>40</sup>

Tillyard's astute observation concerning the Late Byzantine notation that 'where it uses the Chromatic modulation-sign, [it] may have recorded an older, though unwritten, practice of some singers, who had come under Oriental influence'<sup>41</sup> are of great interest in the light of Stathis' theories. Were these 'chromatic modulation-signs' the phthorai? If so, he would appear to be in agreement with Stathis in his supposition that they represented an 'unwritten practice.'

This would also give some credence to the insistence of the Greek Orthodox authorities that, although the notation underwent reform, the melodies remained the same. Stathis agrees that 'at no time was there any change of the melodies themselves when obviously one deals with old compositions (from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries) written out

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39. Stathis, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

41. Tillyard, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

analytically in the New Method.<sup>42</sup> One of the inferences to be drawn from this is that the notation was possibly always a less than perfect copy of the chant.

The existence of such a 'hidden' tradition, known only to initiates, could be interpreted as a further example of the rhetorical concept of obscurity applied to music. Previously I have suggested that excessive ornamentation also could have produced this effect.

### The New Method

Stathis believes that the New Method has preserved the tradition of Byzantine chant.

Those of us who have been trained in the New Method ... believe that we know Byzantine music in its entirety and that we can trace back through the centuries a musical phrase by observing parallels; we can recognize the implications of the Old Notation while reading it analytically, namely resolving it in full.<sup>43</sup>

An exhaustive survey of every aspect of Byzantine chant is covered by the New Method, including the oral tradition, according to Stathis, who claims that the New Method also embraces

the 'analysis' or 'exegesis' of all musical 'theseis' and of the musical content of all the Great Hypostases of cheironomy in the Old Notation and the writing-out in full of this melodic content with regard to the basic elements and regulations of the New Method.

He adds:

Thus all the other ... great hypostases ... were now written out analytically with their whole melos including rhythm and expression and in this way became obsolete for the purposes of the New Method.<sup>44</sup>

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42. Stathis, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Stathis enlarges on the entire process:

the great hypostases and the 'theseis' concealed the 'melos' or the real melody of Byzantine music in the Old Method which was not clear to everyone. In other words, the Old Method was a synoptic one ... Therefore, it was necessary to 'resolve' such signs and groups of signs ... and so the terms 'analysis' and 'exegesis' designate the writing down in full of the 'melos' – the real melody – by using more signs of quantity.<sup>45</sup>

The complex unwritten tradition implies that the singer had to undergo rigorous training, as Stathis points out:

... the masters of the preceding centuries occupied themselves with a systematic study of a skillful broad exegesis of the melodies, which they taught at the same time. In so doing they followed not only the indications of the *red* cheironomic signs but also the various 'theseis' of the signs of quantity (black neumes). Naturally, in going through the theoretical treatises they occupied themselves with the rhythm, the signatures and the phthorai, the transpositions and the intervals in the different genders. This thorough learning of the 'melos' took place orally over a long period of training under a teacher and according to a stable tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Though the theories of Stathis are not acceptable in some quarters, I feel that the value of his work lies in its direct reference to the theoretical treatises and its foundation in practical experience of the oral tradition, so that, although they deal, for the most part, with Byzantine chant of the eighteenth century onwards, if one accepts the premise of an unbroken continuity of the tradition, then the conclusions drawn from the works of this period should have relevance also to the earliest chant.

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45. *Loc. cit.*

46. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

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