



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

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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.