
**Gordana Blagojević,
Φωτοσκιάσεις στη Βυζαντινή Μουσική. Μικρή
εισαγωγή στον κόσμο της ψαλτικής τέχνης
[Byzantine Music Shades. A Brief Introduction
to “The Art of Chanting” World].**

Εκκλησιαστικό Ίδρυμα Βυζαντινής και Παραδοσιακής Μουσικής Ιεράς
Αρχιεπισκοπής Αθηνών, Αθήνα 2020, 160 σσ. [Ecclesiastical Foundation
of Byzantine and Traditional Music of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens,
Athens 2020, 160 pp.]

This book is an exciting journey into the world of Byzantine music. It explicitly explores and presents the essence of Byzantine chanting and its twofold character, namely that of strict rules and spirituality but also of creativity and cosmopolitanism. Based on field research and personal experiences (namely years of the author’s travels to parishes and monasteries in Serbia, Greece and elsewhere), the reader comes across useful information which is both grounded and emotional. Its pages shed light on the monophonic chanting of the Eastern Orthodox Church by looking both at its past history and meditating onto its future, with an ultimate goal to capture the inner rhythm that penetrates the oral and written tradition of Byzantine music.

The book is an enriching addition to those acquainted with Byzantine lore and an invitation to anyone who would like to dive into its musical universe. The word “shades” in the title is critically telling: Our daily lives are full of what Greek Orthodoxy calls “harmolipi” (χαρμολύπη), namely “joyful sorrow”, the expected, balanced outcome of the persistent, simultaneous presence of darkness and light.

His Beatitude Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Ieronymos II introduces the treatise followed by a prologue by Reverend Archimandrite Irenaios Nakos, Director of the Ecclesiastical Foundation for Byzantine and

Traditional Music of the Archdiocese of Athens. Thank you notes close up this introductory part of the book along with the author's introduction on "the seduction of Byzantine music".

The first chapter serves as a forward to what in music is called "Byzantine". It meditates on why Byzantine music has acquired an eternal essence, also how it has been used as an art form to exceed the limits of humanity. The history of this genre is briefly explored while its presence on today's "confused world" is also being investigated. Words are accompanied by traveling, verbal imagery to several chanting communities and the art of chanting inside but also outside walls, as this turns to be the first book to introduce Byzantine music examples through generated scannable use of QR codes.

The coming of Christianity is at the focus of the second book chapter. The beginning of the art of chanting, the birth of the new chanting and chanting art as ritual are the main topics dealt here followed by a third chapter on the Christian Empire. Essays in this chapter are on the viewing of a kingdom on earth, the "anti-state" nature of the monasteries, the character of singers who enter the house of God, the melodists and hymn writers (showcasing Roman the Melodist), writing as a way to unravel Byzantine music, the "Eight Modes" (Octoechos) of Byzantine music, the late Byzantine period (showcasing the "Master of Music" Ioannis Koukouzelis) and the monastic community of "Mount Athos" (the so-called "Virgin Mary's Orchard").

Chapter four continues into the post-Byzantine period, talking about the Fall of the City, the chanting forms, the musical reform of 1814, the three teachers, the old and the new method, Byzantine chanting as a music art form of the future and its symbolisms. Following chapter five goes over the three main personalities of the 20th century Byzantine music, namely Konstantinos Psahos, Simon Karas and Spyros Peristeris. It also illustrates the status of Byzantine music and the contributions of other personalities onto contemporary musicological research.

Lastly, chapter six, is more anthropological, as it presents to the readers the so-called "pair" in Byzantine music which results to the "mating of voices" where one could distinguish several couples, such as the male-female, the transnational-local, the professional-practical, the teaching-apprenticeship, the aristocratic-popular, the singer-priest, and that of the two singers (where the one is performing the melody and the other the so called "ison", namely a drone note). This sixth chapter concludes with two essays, one on the notions of concerts and Divine Liturgies and the other on Byzantine music in the digital age.

Lykourgos Angelopoulos (1941–2014), a professor at the School of Byzantine Chant at the Conservatory of Athens, the founder and director of the Greek Byzantine Choir and an Archon Protopsaltes (lead chanter) of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, is at the center of an epimeter, which also serves as a memorial, sentimental note. The book concludes with the “Music Treasure”, namely a list of 110 audiovisual materials as generated scannable QR codes (details such as composer, psalm, choir, etc. also provided here), the bibliography, a table of images and a summary in English.

Dr. Blagojević’s work is useful to scholars of Byzantine and other music art forms but also general readers-new listeners. Not only it wishes to make Byzantine music famous, but also seeks to connect one with the future of this music, by using one’s mobile devices. Though the QR code is an icon of our time, it is an interesting coincidence that Byzantine music also uses notation in the form of images. It is a much worthy addition, an affordable and practical way to not only read but also feel the music one is reading about. The writer expects to stimulate its readers-listeners to begin their own quests and expose themselves to this tradition deeper.

As a native Greek speaker, I would like to wholeheartedly congratulate the “Greek by soul” author on the excellent use of the Greek language (the book’s original language). I wonder: Is it the genuine love of, careful listening to and intense, active participation in Byzantine music events which has resulted to the cultivation of such a diligent perception, melodic and rhythmic use of Greek vocabulary? I also acknowledge the fact that the author purposefully chooses to use the word Byzantine “music” versus “chanting”, wishing to emphasize how equally sound and word as “chorus” (χορός) are inextricably woven in this unique art genre.

In a dissonant era, this is a melodic and harmonious handbook, extremely legible and useful. On the book’s cover, Dr. Blagojević’s artful painting of the miraculous herb chicory with its seeds dispersing as abstract Byzantine notes, flying to spread and cultivate melodies is philosophically telling. This way, in the writer’s words, “Byzantine music becomes the spring flower of the Orthodox tradition, a lily on the side of the road, a wild flower on the rock and a silver dandelion; when its yellow flowers fall, it will form a transparent head of seeds”. Indeed, it is the wind of chanting that softly adheres them onto our palm, transplanting them through our ears into our souls!

Maria Chnarakí