

THE “AKATHISTOS”  
A STUDY IN BYZANTINE HYMNOGRAPHY

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THE Byzantine service is so rich in hymns that one of the greatest liturgiologists, Anton Baumstark, could speak of the “ivy of hymnography” which threatened to overgrow the service and make invisible the structure of the liturgy.

Yet, until a short time ago, very little was known about the hymns and their music, and even our present knowledge is very small indeed compared with what we know about Western chant. This fact can easily be explained: the rituals of the Eastern rite, the *Typika*, are less clear in their indications about the order of the service than the Western *Ordines* and – what is even more confusing – they often contain contradictory facts.

We shall have to deal with these difficulties in the course of this study which is devoted to one of the most famous hymns of the Eastern Church, the Akathistos hymn. We see from the Patmos Codex of the *Typikon* of Constantinople that the hymn was sung either during the Vigil of the Saturday in the middle of Lent or during that of the following Saturday.<sup>1</sup>

This was not its original place. The titles of the hymn in the *Kontakaria*<sup>2</sup> of the tenth to thirteenth century indicate that the Akathistos had been sung originally on the feast of the Annunciation, on 25 March. From the later assignment of the hymn to a movable feast, the present custom derived.<sup>3</sup>

It is now sung in four sections during Mattins of the first, second, third and fourth Saturday in Lent and, *in toto*, during the Vigil of the fifth Saturday in Lent. This day, therefore, is called “The Sabbath of the Akathistos Hymn” and has a special office.<sup>4</sup> Though the entire Hymn is sung, the division into four sections is maintained.<sup>5</sup>

The name “Akathistos” signifies that during the singing of the hymn all had to stand.<sup>6</sup> During the cantillation of the psalms and the singing of other chants one was allowed to sit. We can imagine what a strain it was

<sup>1</sup> “Καὶ οἶαν ἑβδομάδα τῶν νηστειῶν κελεύει ὁ πατριάρχης εἴτε τῇ μέσῃ, εἴτε τῇ μετὰ ταύτην ἑβδομάδι γίνεται ἢ παννυχὶς ἐν Βλαχέρναις οὕτως.” A. Dmitrievsky, *Opisanie liturgicheskikh rukopisei*, I (*Typika*) (Kiev, 1895) p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> The *Kontakarion* (κοντακάριον or κονδακάριον) is a liturgical book which contains a collection of *Kontakia* (κοντάκια) for the feasts of the year. The early MSS., those from the tenth to the thirteenth century, have the texts only, i.e. the Prooemium, which is called *κοντάκιον* and the first stanza (οἶκος).

<sup>3</sup> The *Typika*, the *Ordines* of the Eastern Church, and the *Synaxaria*, the *Acta Sanctorum*, give minute instructions for the celebration of each of the fixed feasts during Lent and Easter which might coincide with the movable “Sabbath of the Akathistos.”

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. de Meester’s Greek and Italian edition of the Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Ἀκαθίστου ὕμνου εἰς τὴν ὑπεραγίαν Θεοτόκον – *Officio dell’inno Acatisto in onore della Santissima Madre del Dio*. (Rome, 1903), and R. P. E. Mercenier, *La prière des églises de rite byzantin*, II, 2 (Paris, 1948) pp. 7–36.

<sup>5</sup> The division of the twenty-four stanzas into four groups of six stanzas is an organic one, as will be shown; it corresponds to the changes in subject matter in the hymn.

<sup>6</sup> Ἀκάθιστος = *a-privativum* and καθίζομαι (to sit) i.e. not sitting, standing.

upon the congregation to listen standing, since the singing of each of the four sections of the Akathistos must have taken nearly an hour, for the melody belongs to the richly melismatic style which has to be sung slowly and with much expression. Thus, its breaking up into four sections and the insertions of psalms, odes and doxologies, though lengthening the office, gave all in Church the rest necessary for relaxing from the strain.

For the purpose of our investigation into the history of the Akathistos, its poetical structure and its music, we must, however, separate the hymn from the surrounding elements and concentrate on the hymn itself, which is one of the most fascinating pieces of liturgical poetry known to us.

Much has been written on its authorship and about the occasion for which the Akathistos was composed.<sup>7</sup> All scholars agree that it is a hymn written in honour of the Blessed Virgin and many of them, misled by the content of the Prooemium, hold the view that it dates from the year 626, when the siege of Constantinople by the Persians miraculously collapsed and the city was saved. Others, however, connect the hymn with one of the later sieges, even to that laid by the Russians as late as 860.<sup>8</sup>

The reason for attributing the genesis of the Akathistos to one of the sieges of Constantinople is based on the rubrics of the Triodion – the Office-Book for the mobile feasts from Lent to Pentecost – which contains the legendary history of the siege and of the liberation of Constantinople. According to the Synaxar,<sup>9</sup> the superiority of the enemy was ten to one. But the Patriarch Sergius (who took command in the absence of the Emperor Heraclius) inspired the defenders, urged them to trust in God and the Blessed Virgin who would not abandon Her City, the city in which one believed the Virgin actually dwelled.<sup>10</sup> Thus, all assaults were repelled, and finally a tempest threw the fleet against the shores of the Blachernae quarter, and all ships went down.

This was the signal for the Persians to abandon the siege. During the whole night after the retreat of the enemy the people gathered in the church

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the bibliography in C. del Grande's edition of *L'Inno Acatisto* (Florence, 1948) pp. 30–31.

<sup>8</sup> The main supporter of the hypothesis that it was the siege by the Russians in 860 to which the Akathistos refers, and that the Patriarch Photios was its author, was A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus in his pamphlet: 'Ο Ἀκάθιστος ἕμνος, οἱ ἄρως καὶ ὁ πατριάρχης Φώτιος. ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ ΜΑΡΑΣΣΑΔΗ, 14 (Athens, 1903). M. Théarvic in "Photius et l'Acathiste," *Echos d'Orient*, VII (1904) pp. 293–300, however, argues convincingly that the Synaxar refers to the sieges in 626, 677 and 717, but that the siege in 860 is not mentioned.

<sup>9</sup> The Synaxar of the Akathistos is printed in Migne, *P.G.* 92, coll. 1348–53, and in N. Nilles, *Kalendarium Manuale* II (1897) pp. 157–166.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. N. H. Baynes, "The Supernatural Defenders of Constantinople," in *Mélanges Paul Peeters* I, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 67 (1949) p. 172. Reprinted in N. H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and other Essays* (London 1955) pp. 248–60.

at Blachernae and sang the Akathistos. In the course of the centuries, Constantinople was threatened by the Avars, Slavs, Arabs and Russians; but always the Virgin saved Her City, and the Akathistos became a song of victory in honour of the Theotokos.

We must ask, however: was the Akathistos composed as a "Song of Victory"? Can we believe in the common interpretation of the legend that it was composed in one day and sung by the crowd in the night after the lifting of the siege? These two questions make it necessary to investigate the structure and content of the poem and that of its music.

The Akathistos is a Kontakion. This is a poetical form of homiletic character, associated with the name of Anastasios, Kyriakos and, above all, of Romanos, who lived at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century. One could even call the Kontakion a poetical sermon.<sup>11</sup> We have no evidence to determine the exact date when the Kontakion developed and when, for the first time, the name of Kontakion was used to designate the new poetical genre. The poet-musicians just mentioned called such a poem either Hymn, or Psalm, or Song, or Laud, or Prayer.<sup>12</sup> In the Patmos Codex of the Typikon of Constantinople — a Ritual of the ninth to tenth century — the Akathistos is already referred to as a Kontakion.<sup>13</sup>

Structurally, the Kontakion consists of eighteen to thirty stanzas, or Troparia. All the Troparia are composed on the pattern of a model stanza, called Heirmos (είρμός), and great care is taken in setting the main accents at the identical place in corresponding lines, so that the melodic highlights correspond to the metrical ones.

A short Troparion, metrically independent, is set at the beginning of the Kontakion; this is the Prooemium, mentioned in the MSS. as Troparion or Koukoulion.

The stanzas of the Kontakion are linked together by an acrostic which, following Hebrew and Syriac patterns, was originally formed of the letters of the alphabet. In Romanos' mature works the alphabetical acrostic is replaced by a line, e.g.: "Song by the humble Romanos." The structure of the Akathistos differs, however, remarkably from the regular pattern. It has, in

<sup>11</sup> Cf. P. Maas, "Das Kontakion," *B.Z.* XIX (1910) pp. 285 sqq. G. La Piana, *Le rappresentazioni sacre nella letteratura bizantina* (Grottaferrata, 1912). E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford, 1949) pp. 152–67.

<sup>12</sup> ὕμνος, ψαλμός, ποίημα, ἕδῆ, αἶνος, προσευχή; other names are: ἔπος, δέησις, ἄσμα and, to characterize the alphabetic acrostic, ἀλφάβητον. Cf. K. Krumbacher, "Die Akrostichis in d. griech. Kirchenpoesie," *Sitzungsber. d. philosoph.-philol. Classe d. k. bayr. Akad. d. Wiss.* (1903) pp. 625–36, and E. Mioni, *Romano il Melode* (Turin, 1937) p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> A. Dmitrievsky, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

some manuscripts at least, two Prooemia of different content and metre: one, in which the subject-matter of the Kontakion is given in the form of an *argumentum*, namely, that the Angel went to Joseph's house and addressed the Virgin as "Bride unbrided," and another, in which the City, freed from danger, addresses the Virgin. In the thirteenth century Codex suppl. grec. 186 of the Vienna National Library<sup>14</sup> the first Prooemium (fol. 79<sup>v</sup>) is marked as τροπάριον (Troparion), the second as κοντάκιον (Kontakion); the two Prooemia are, however, separated by doxologies, chants and psalms, so that the connexion of the Troparion with the hymn is obscured, as can be seen from the text of Cod. suppl. grec. 186 which is here given:

ὦρ(α) δὲ Δ' τῆς νυκτὸς) σημν(ὸν) (!) τὸν ὄρθ(ρον) διὰ τ(ῆν) ἱκητήριον (!)  
ἀκολουθ(ίαν) τῆς ἀκαθίστου μετ(ὰ) τ(ὸν) ἐξάψαλμ(ον) θε(οτό)κου. τροπ(άριον)  
ἦχ(ος) πλ. δ'.

Τὸ προσταχθὲν μυστικῶς · λαβὼν ἐν γνώσει ·  
ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ · σπουδῇ ἐπέστη ·  
ὁ ἀσώματος · λέγων τῇ ἀπειρογάμῳ.

- 4 Ὁ κλίνας τῇ καταβάσει τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ·  
χωρεῖται ἀναλλοιώτως ὄλος ἐν σοί ·  
ὄν καὶ βλέπων ἐν μήτρᾳ σου ·  
λαβόντα δούλου μορφὴν ·  
8 ἐξίσταμαι κραυγάζειν σοι ·  
χαῖρε νύμφη ἀνύμφευτε ·

(The Angel, understanding the secret command, appeared suddenly in Joseph's dwelling, and said to her who knew not wedlock: He, who with his descent has bowed down the heavens, finds room in Thee, unaltered and whole. Seeing him taking a servant's form in Thy womb I marvel and cry out to Thee: Hail, Bride unbrided.)

Now follow the rubrics, indicating which hymns and chants the office requires until the "Great Doxology" is sung and the Apolytikion Τὸ προσταχθὲν repeated. After it has been sung three times, the second Prooemium, the Kontakion, follows in the fourth plagal mode (πλ.δ').

Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ · τὰ νικητήρια ·  
ὡς λυτρωθεῖσα τῶν δεινῶν · εὐχαριστήρια ·

<sup>14</sup> This Codex has recently been transferred from the Imperial Fidei-Komissbibliothek to the National Library. Dozent H. Hunger, Keeper of the Greek MSS., kindly showed me the Codex, a Triodion-Pentekostarion with musical notation, during my visit to Vienna in Oct. 1954, and sent me photographs of foll. 79<sup>v</sup>-81<sup>v</sup>, on which the text of the Office of the Akathistos is written.

ἀναγράφω σοι ἡ πόλις σου · θεοτόκε ·  
 ἀλλ' ὡς ἔχουσα τὸ κράτος ἀπροσμάχητον ·  
 ἐκ παντοίων με κινδύνων ἐλευθέρωσον ·  
 ἵνα κράζω σοι · χαίρε νύμφη ἀνύμφευτε.

(To the invincible Leader I, Thy City, freed from danger,  
 I dedicate the thanksgiving for victory, O Mother of God.  
 Since thou hast power unassailable,  
 Free me from all kinds of trials,  
 That I may cry out to Thee: Hail, Bride unbridged.)<sup>15</sup>

Already in 1907 A. Baumstark in a review of Strzygowski's book on the miniatures of the Serbian Psalter in Munich pointed out<sup>16</sup> that the second Prooemium was independent of the hymn and added to the Akathistos at a later date, between Sergios and Photios. This view was taken up and expounded by Krypiakiewicz in his study on the author of the Akathistos.<sup>17</sup> He argues rightly that the first Prooemium is a prelude to the story of the Incarnation and also stylistically akin to the diction of the hymn; the author of the Prooemium uses not only the same similes but the same words as one finds in the hymn. The strongest argument in favour of the coherence of the first Prooemium with the Akathistos is seen in the dogmatic significance of the line: *χωρεῖται* (sc. *Verbum Dei*) *ἀναλλοιώτως ὅλος ἐν σοί* (finds room in Thee, unaltered and whole), which expresses the confirmation of the Orthodox view against the Apollinarian heresy in the second half of the fourth century, and is paralleled in the first lines of the fifteenth stanza:

Ὅλος ἦν ἐν τοῖς κάτω  
 καὶ τῶν ἄνω οὐδ' ὅλως  
 ἀπῆν ὁ ἀπερίγραφος λόγος.

(The Infinite Word was wholly present on earth, yet in no wise absent from heaven.)

The *ὅλος ἦν ἐν τοῖς κάτω* is the repudiation of the teaching of Apollonius of Laodicea that Christ had a human body and a human soul (*ψυχή*), but not a human mind (*νοῦς*); and that the Word was his *νοῦς*, his *πνεῦμα*.

The interpretation of the two passages — in the Prooemium and in the fifteenth stanza — as a statement of the Orthodox view on the Christological

<sup>15</sup> The English translation is based on the poetical version which Mr. Mango made and kindly let me use when I read my paper on the Akathistos at the Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks.

<sup>16</sup> *B.Z.*, XVI (1907) p. 657.

<sup>17</sup> P. F. Krypiakiewicz, "De hymni Acathesti auctore," *B.Z.*, XVIII (1909) pp. 361–3.

dogma leads inevitably to the conclusion that the Akathistos embodies a poetical layer which goes back to the times when the Christological question was passionately discussed in poetical homilies, and Krypiakiewicz therefore argues that the Akathistos goes back to the days of Ephraem Syrus. This may quite well be so, though in a note appended to his study, K. Krumbacher, then editor of the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, says that S. Mercati did not consider the poem to which Krypiakiewicz refers as genuinely the work of Ephraem. P. Maas, however, carries the investigation much further. In a review of P. de Meester's *L'Inno Acatisto* he points out<sup>18</sup> that Romanos, describing in his Kontakion *De Pentecoste*, stanza 8,<sup>19</sup> the descent of the Paraclet from heaven, says of Him:

οὐ γὰρ γέγονε μετάβασις  
 ἢ συγκατάβασις·  
 οὐδ' ὑπέμεινε μείωσιν.  
 ἄνω γὰρ ἦν·  
 καὶ κάτω ἦν·  
 καὶ πανταχοῦ.

(His descent became not a change of place, nor suffered He diminution. For He was in heaven, and was on earth, and everywhere.)

The resemblance of the lines to those of the Akathistos is unmistakable and suggests Romanos as author of the hymn. Maas supports this view in his study on the date of the hymns of Romanos<sup>20</sup> by showing that of all the problems of Christian dogmatics it is Christology only in which Romanos is interested, and the defence of its orthodox view against Monophysites, Nestorians, Arians, Docetists and Manichaeans.<sup>21</sup>

Suggestive as it may be to ascribe the Akathistos to Romanos on the grounds of the striking similarity of his dogmatic reasoning, to be convincing it needs still more evidence; it needs above all an investigation into the structure of the hymn, the form of which must first be explained.

The Akathistos has the same number of stanzas as are usually found in the Kontakia of the sixth century. The main structural differences, however, between the Akathistos and all the other Kontakia are as follows: the twenty-four stanzas are not of equal length; stanzas one to twenty-four have each seven lines in which the poet gives a running account from the Annunciation to the Adoration of the Magi, and a comment upon the miracle of the Incarnation.

<sup>18</sup> *B.Z.*, XIV (1905) p. 644.

<sup>19</sup> Pitra, *Analecta Sacra*, I, p. 160, stanza ἡ.

<sup>20</sup> P. Maas, "Die Chronologie der Hymnen des Romanos," *B.Z.*, XV (1906) pp. 1 sqq.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-17.

Stanzas 1, 3, 5, etc. to 23 have appended to the seven lines twelve Chairetismoi in sixteen lines, and one line of refrain, i.e. "Hail, Bride unbridled."

Stanzas 2, 4, 6 etc. to 24 have, appended to the seven lines, one line of refrain, i.e. "Alleluia."

This gives twenty-four lines for the long stanzas, eight lines for the short stanzas.

The building up of the hymn from these two alternating sets of stanzas leads us to assume that the present form of the Akathistos is composed of two different kinds of liturgical poetry: of twenty-four Troparia of homiletic character and of twelve Chairetismoi, based upon a doxological layer. The form is quite exceptional. There are a few homilies with Chairetismoi, of which the eleventh homily of Cyril of Alexandria, the *Encomium in Sanctum Mariam Deiparam* has eighteen *Hail's* and contains, apart from some similes which are very similar to those which one finds in the Akathistos, the line: <sup>22</sup>

δούλη διὰ τὸν μορφὴν δούλου λαβόντα

(A bondwoman through Him who took the form of a bondman)  
which corresponds to line 7 of the first Prooemium λαβόντα δούλου μορφήν,  
and to line 5 of stanza IX: εἰ καὶ δούλου ἔλαβε μορφήν.

A Chairetismos has come down to us, also, in the fourth stanza of a hymn of doxological character on a seventh-century papyrus: <sup>23</sup>

Χαῖρε θεοτόκε ἀγνή (τοῦ Ἰσραήλ) ·  
Χαῖρε ἧς μήτρα πλατυτέρα οὐρανῶν ·  
Χαῖρε ἀγία, ἐπουράνιε θρόνε,  
ὃν οἱ παῖδες ὑμνοῦντες ἔλεγον:  
Εὐλογεῖτε τὰ ἔργα Κυρίου.

(Hail pure Mother of God, the Holy one in Israel.  
Hail Thou whose womb is greater than the heavens.  
Hail, O Sanctified one, O Throne of the Heavens,  
Which the Children praised, saying:  
Bless ye the works of the Lord.)

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Migne, *P.G.* 77, col. 1032 C.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. C. H. Roberts, *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, III (Manchester, 1938) pp. 28–35. I consider both hymns to be specimens of the doxological Troparion poetry, not as examples of early Kanon composition. Cf. also H. Schneider, "Die biblischen Oden seit dem sechsten Jahrhundert," *Biblica*, 30 (1949) p. 261: "Aus den Überschriften ist zu erschliessen, dass die Strophen zu bestimmten Abschnitten – später sind es die letzten Stichoï – der biblischen Oden zu singen waren."

We may mention in this context also the *Oratio in praesentationem SS. Deiparae* of Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople (Migne *P.G.*, 98, 304–8). Here are twelve stanzas of Chairetismoi, the same number as in the Akathistos. Eleven of them begin with *Χαίροις*, the twelfth with *Χαίρε*. In this last stanza one also observes a close kinship to the Akathistos, viz.:

*Χαίρε, κεχαριτωμένη Μαρία  
ἡ τῶν ἁγίων ἁγιωτέρα, καὶ οὐρανῶν ὑψηλοτέρα  
καὶ Χερουβὶμ ἐνδοξότερα, καὶ Σεραφὶμ τιμιωτέρα . . .*

(Hail Mary full of Grace, Thou art more saintly than the Saints,  
And higher than the heavens, and more glorious than the Cherubs,  
And more honourable than the Seraphs.)

It now remains to prove that the Kontakion and the Chairetismoi were not organically connected from the beginning, i.e. from the moment when its forerunner, a poetical homily, was brought into the exquisite metrical pattern which is an outstanding feature of the Akathistos. It was again P. Maas who pointed out that from the seventh stanza onwards in all the short stanzas it is Christ of whom the poet speaks, not Mary, and in stanza K(10), the poet addresses Him:

*Κήρυκες θεοφόροι γεγονότες οἱ μάγοι  
ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν Βαβυλῶνα,  
ἐκτελέσαντές σου τὸν χρησμόν·  
καὶ κηρύξαντές σε τὸν Χριστὸν ἅπασιν,  
ἀφέντες τὸν Ἡρώδη ὡς ληρώδη  
μὴ εἰδότα ψάλλειν· Ἀλληλουῖα.*

(The Magi, turned into God-inspired heralds, went back to Babylon,  
Having fulfilled Thy oracle; and proclaiming Thee to all as Christ  
They left Herod as a fool, not knowing how to sing: “Alleluia.”)

The same happens in stanzas M(12), Π(16) and Ϛ(20), but also in some stanzas with Chairetismoi, e.g. in A(i), Λ(11), and O(15), where the transition from an address to Christ to the praise of the Virgin gives the impression of an artistic *tour de force*. This is most obvious in Λ(12):

*Λάμπας ἐν τῇ Αἰγύπτῳ φωτισμὸν ἀληθείας  
ἐδίωξας τοῦ ψεύδους τὸ σκότος·  
τὰ γὰρ εἶδωλα ταύτης, σωτήρ,  
μὴ ἐνέγκαντά σου τὴν ἰσχύν, πέπτωκεν·  
οἱ τούτων δὲ ῥυσθέντες  
ἀνεβόων πρὸς τὴν θεοτόκον·  
Χαίρε, ἀνόρθωσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων κτλ.*

(Having kindled in Egypt the light of Truth,  
 Thou hast expelled the darkness of deceit.  
 And her idols fell, O Saviour, when they were unable to bear  
 Thy might. And they who were freed from idolatry cried to the  
 Mother of God: Hail, Thou who hast corrected mankind . . . .)

The examples here given show that Maas was right in assuming that the original poetical homily, or Kontakion, which is lost, was a hymn to Christ, going back to the times before the Council of Ephesus in 432, at which Mary was proclaimed 'Theotokos'; it originated presumably in the days of the Apollinarian heresy. The mariological parts, the praises of the Theotokos could not have been composed before the second half of the fifth century. At a later date both the christological and mariological parts were blended together and finally acquired the poetical structure which we possess in the present shape of the Akathistos.

The question now arises who the poet was who welded together these two elements with a maîtrise unparalleled in the whole field of liturgical poetry. The problem of the authorship was discussed at great length in the first decade of this century, partly in the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, partly in the *Echos d'Orient*, but also in various other journals. The particular difficulty of assigning the hymn to an author arose from the fact that the hymn is ascribed in some MSS. to the Patriarch Sergios,<sup>24</sup> in others to Georgios Pisides,<sup>25</sup> in the Latin version to Germanos,<sup>26</sup> even to Photios. In a single MS. only, Cod. Thessalonic. Blataion 41, fol. 193, the name of Romanos appears together with that of the Patriarch Sergios:

οὗτοι οἱ θεῖοι οἰκοί εἰσιν ὡς τινες λέγουσι Σεργίου τοῦ τηνικαῦτα τὸν . . .  
 Κωνσταντινουπόλεως· ἄλλοι δὲ τοῦ θείου Ῥωμανοῦ [διακόνου] τοῦ μελωδοῦ.<sup>27</sup>

It may be said at once that the arguments of Christ, Pitra and others in favour of one or other author are based upon the now discarded view that the Prooemium Τῆ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ and the hymn were written by the same *Melodos* who is said to have composed the hymn on the day of the liberation of Constantinople from the siege of the enemy, and that it was sung by the congregation during the same night.

There is no suggestion in the Synaxar, however, that the Akathistos was

<sup>24</sup> W. Christ-M. Paronikas, *Anthologia gr. carm. christ.* p. 140. Pitra, *Anal. Sacra*, I, p. 250.

<sup>25</sup> Migne, *P.G.* 92, col. 1353 sqq.

<sup>26</sup> M. Huglo, "L'ancienne version latine de l'hymne acathiste," *Muséon*, 64 (1951) pp. 44-61, ascribes the Prooemium to Germanos, but says that his investigation into the old Latin version produces no argument against the authorship of Romanos.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. C. Emereau, *Hymnographi Byzantini.-Acathisti auctor*, *Echos d'Orient*, XXI (1922) pp. 259-63.

composed as a "Hymn of Victory"; only that it was sung by the people during the whole night without a pause.

Ὅγε μὴν θεοφιλῆς τῆς Κωνσταντίνου λαὸς τῇ θεομήτορι τὴν χάριν ἀφοσιούμενοι, ὀλονύκτιον τὸν ὕμνον, καὶ ἀκάθιστον αὐτῇ ἐμελώδησαν, ὡς ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀγρυπνησάση, καὶ ὑπερφυεῖ δυνάμει διαπραξαμένη τὸ κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν τρόπαιον.

(And the people of Constantinople, who were so dear to God, sang the hymn standing and without any respite during the whole night, as a thanksgiving to the Mother of God, as She had kept watch over them and with Her great might had achieved the monument of victory over the enemies.)

It is possible that the Prooemium was composed on the day of the lifting of the siege, either by the Patriarch Sergios in 626, or, what now seems more probable, by S. Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople, after the retreat of the Arabs on 24 March 719; but it is quite unthinkable that the text and music of the twenty-four stanzas of the Akathistos were composed and sung on the same day. After the careful investigation into the Latin version of the Akathistos by Dom M. Huglo<sup>28</sup> one can reconstruct the genesis of the new Prooemium in the following way: the lifting of the siege took place on the eve of 25 March, the feast of the Annunciation, which was traditionally celebrated in the Church of the Annunciation at Blachernae — "the church in which the Virgin delighted"<sup>29</sup> — by the singing of the Akathistos. Again the Virgin had miraculously saved Her City, and, what made the miracle even more striking, on the Vigil of the feast of the Evangelismos. Thus the new Prooemium to "Our Lady of Victories" was sung on that occasion in place of the original one and remained for ever in its place. A legend was now created about the victory and from that time the Akathistos was seen as a Hymn of Victory; and this view still finds supporters.

However, by accepting the scholarly view that the composition of the Akathistos is not coëval with the composition of the Prooemium *Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ* we are freed from the fetters of semi-historical facts and can try to discover the author by criteria of quality and content.

Taking into account all the elements which constitute the greatness of the poem: power of expression, boldness of similes, perfect harmony of the lines and, above all, poetical vision, we know of no other poet than Romanos who could possibly be regarded as the author of the hymn; Romanos, the

<sup>28</sup> Cf. M. Huglo, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–50.

<sup>29</sup> F. Combes, *Historia Haeresis Monotelitarum* (Paris, 1648) col. 754–5.

greatest of all hymn-writers, who flourished during the reign of Justinian and who is known as the most prolific poet-musician of Kontakia.

A very suggestive argument in favour of Romanos has recently been brought forward by Carlo del Grande: In the seventeenth stanza the poet praises the divine wisdom of the Theotokos:

Χαίρε φιλοσόφους ἀσόφους δεικνύουσα ·  
 Χαίρε τεχνολόγους ἀλόγους ἐλέγχουσα ·  
 Χαίρε, ὅτι ἐμωράνθησαν οἱ δεινοὶ συζητηταί ·  
 Χαίρε, ὅτι ἐμαράνθησαν οἱ τῶν μύθων ποιηταί ·  
 Χαίρε, τῶν Ἀθηναίων τὰς πλοκάς διασπῶσα ·

(Hail Thou who showest the wise ignorant,  
 Hail Thou who provest the sophists speechless,  
 Hail, for the skilled disputers are become foolish,  
 Hail, for the poets of fables are withered.  
 Hail Thou, who dissolvest the word-webs of the *Athenians*.)

The word “Athenians” must refer to the philosophers of the School of Athens which was closed by Justinian in 529. The allusion, therefore, must have been written before that date, i.e. in the days of Romanos.

This passage breathes, I think, the same spirit which we find in the 18th stanza of Romanos’ hymn on Pentecost:

Τί φυσῶσι καὶ βαμβαίνουσιν οἱ Ἕλληνες;  
 τί φαντάζονται πρὸς Ἄρατον τὸν τρισκατάρατον;  
 τί πλανῶνται πρὸς Πλάτωνα; κτλ.

Why do the Greeks boast and puff themselves up?  
 Why do they dream of Aratos, the thrice accursed?  
 Why do they err after Plato?

Finally, another point, already mentioned by Pitra, *Anal. Sacra*, I, p. XXXI, supports the authorship of Romanos. Byzantine hymnographers either compose their poems in a new metre and to a new melody – these compositions are called *Idiomela* – or to the metre and melody of other hymnwriters or former hymns of their own; the latter are called *Prosomoia* and bear the rubric: εἰς τό, i.e. “to be sung to the melody. . .” Romanos’ Kontakion on “Josef in Egypt” now bears in Cod. Corsin. 366 the rubric:

πρὸς τό · ἄγγελος πρω(τοσπάτης)

(to be sung to the melody: An angel of the highest rank. . . .)

The words to which this rubric refers are the beginning of the Akathistos. We have no reason to doubt that the rubric is authentic. Romanos therefore

refers in one of his hymns to a former one, the Akathistos; and since all hymn-writers to which the Akathistos is ascribed in the Synaxaria lived after his time and none is known who lived before him, we may take it as certain that Romanos referred to a former hymn of his own, not to that of another Melodos.

We have not touched so far upon the question of Romanos' literary ancestry which may also throw some light upon the question of the authorship of the Akathistos. Two important studies, the one by T. Wehofer,<sup>30</sup> the other by C. Emereau,<sup>31</sup> discuss the influence of Ephraem on Romanos and P. Maas in his study on the Kontakion, that of Basil of Seleucia.<sup>32</sup> G. La Piana's investigation into the poetical homily in general<sup>33</sup> gives ample evidence of the sources from which the author of the Akathistos was able to draw his material.

Indeed, a glance at Ephraem's "Hymns to the Blessed Virgin," particularly the 16th, 17th and 20th, shows their relationship with the Akathistos. The 39th homily *In Sanctissimam Deiparae Annuntiationem* by Basil of Seleucia must also be regarded as a remarkable model for the Akathistos. Some lines in the 15th stanza, which contains the refutation of the Apollinarian heresy, are based nearly *verbatim* upon a passage from the homily:<sup>34</sup>

Basil of Seleucia	Akathistos
<u>Ὅλος τοῖς κάτω ἐπέστης</u> <u>καὶ οὐδ' ὅλως τῶν ἄνω ἀπέστης.</u>	<u>Ὅλος ἦν ἐν τοῖς κάτω</u> <u>καὶ τῶν ἄνω οὐδ' ὅλως</u> <u>ἀπῆν ὁ ἀπερίγραφτος λόγος.</u>
οὐ γὰρ <u>τοπικὴ γέγονεν ἡ κατάβασις</u> <u>ἀλλὰ θεϊκὴ πέπρακται συγκατάβασις.</u>	<u>συγκατάβασις γὰρ θεϊκὴ,</u> <u>οὐ μετάβασις δὲ τοπικὴ γέγονεν.</u>

The most striking prototype of the Akathistos, however, is the dialogue between Mary and Gabriel in the eleventh *Oratio de Laudibus Mariae*<sup>35</sup> by Proclus of Constantinople (d. 447). Here, when the linking words of the narrator, e.g. "And the Holy One said to the Angel" are taken out, a dialogue in distichs becomes apparent as does an alphabetical acrostic from A-M, carried out in such a way that the first words of the questions of the angel and the answers of the Virgin begin with the same letter.

<sup>30</sup> T. Wehofer, "Untersuchungen zum Lied d. Romanos auf die Wiederkunft des Herrn." *Sitz. ber. d. Akad. d. Wiss. Wien, Philos.-Histor. Kl. Bd. 154, 5. Abt.* (Vienna, 1907).

<sup>31</sup> C. Emereau, *Saint Ephrem le Syrien* (Paris, 1918).

<sup>32</sup> *B.Z.*, XIX, pp. 290-8.

<sup>33</sup> G. La Piana, *Le Rappresentazioni sacre nella letteratura bizantina* (Grottaferrata, 1912).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Migne, *P.G.*, 85, 448 B, and P. Maas, "Das Kontakion," *B.Z.*, XIX (1910) pp. 298-306.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Migne, *P.G.*, 65, and G. La Piana's metrical reconstruction, *op. cit.* pp. 250-2.

The close parallels in style, structure, and the use of the alphabetical acrostic in the Annunciation homilies and in other poetical orations, particularly those of Basil of Seleucia, made P. Maas, in his study on the Kontakion, doubt whether one can still consider Romanos as a poet of the first rank; he goes so far indeed as to declare that a wider knowledge of the homilies of the beginning of the sixth century would show that Romanos was only a minor poet ("als Autor zweiten Ranges").<sup>36</sup> One must regret this judgment which contradicts everything Maas had written before in favour of Romanos' genius, and one can only assume that these lines were written under the spur of Maas's discovery of the homilies of Basil of Seleucia. But even if we assume that this was the case, our opposition to Maas's view must go even further, for this kind of criticism shows a misunderstanding of the task of the hymnographer. His aim was not to write poetry as a classical author, but to present the hagiographical object of the feast in a new form. The Akathistos, like all the homilies which preceded it and the hymns which followed it, was part of the liturgy. The main part of the hymn which the Melodos composed — this word covers both the music and the words — was given by the feast, just as the text of the prayers of the Office of the day had to commemorate the occasion of the feast. The hymnographer, like the painter of icons, had to follow his forerunners as closely as possible; he had to follow a given pattern; this unwritten law applies as much to the words as to the music. To imitate one's model is, therefore, not a sign of lack of imagination, but the duty of the Byzantine Melodos. His greatness can be seen from the treatment of the material which he has taken over from his forerunners, and in that respect Romanos surpasses all Byzantine hymn-writers.

Summing up, we are, I think, entitled to come to the following conclusion: It was impossible to settle the question of the authorship of the Akathistos as long as the Prooemium *Τῆ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ* was considered an integral part of the hymn. However, once one knows that the "Victory"-Prooemium was added to the Akathistos at a later date, both internal and external evidence point to Romanos as the author of the hymn. One should not be confused by the fact that the name of Romanos occurs in one MS. only, and there only second: all the MSS. and also the Typika and Synaxaria were written at a time, when the original Prooemium was separated from the hymn, and the later one — one may now ascribe it to S. Germanos — was attached to the hymn.

Far more important, and I should say, decisive evidence is the rubric to Romanos' Joseph-hymn which mentions the *Ἄγγελος πρωτοστάτης* as

<sup>36</sup> P. Maas, "Das Kontakion," *B.Z.*, XIX (1910) p. 299.

model. Indeed, if one reads the Akathistos without bias, one cannot but think of Romanos as its author.

Let us now turn to the content of the hymn and consider its division into four sections in the "Office of the Akathistos."

The hymn is sung in the Orthros, the Mattins, which begin with the doxology; the Hexapsalm (Ps. 3, 37, 62, 87, 102, and 142); another group of doxologies and the thrice repeated chanting of the Dismissal chant (Apolytikion) *Τὸ προσταχθὲν μυστικῶς* from the Vespers Office (which was the original Prooemium), followed by a group of short chants; then follows the Akathistos.

The first group of twelve stanzas contains the story of the Incarnation, divided into two sections after the sixth stanza by the repetition of the Prooemium, *Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ*, the reading of the first part of the history of the Akathistos from the Synaxar, and the repetition of the Prooemium.

The content of the twelve stanzas of this group is as follows:

- 1) An Angel of the first rank sent from heaven announces to the Blessed Virgin that she will give birth to the Saviour.
- 2) The Virgin asks the Angel how this could happen to her who is a Virgin.
- 3) The Angel reveals to her the Divine Omnipotence.
- 4) The Power of the Highest overshadows the Virgin.
- 5) Mary goes to Elisabeth whose unborn child is the first to praise the Mother of God.
- 6) Joseph, ignorant of the Mystery, is perturbed; but when made aware of it, he sings Alleluia.
- 7) Shepherds hearing the chant of the Angels come to greet Jesus in Bethlehem.
- 8) A star appears and leads the Magi.
- 9) The Magi praise Jesus.
- 10) The Magi go back, preaching everywhere the appearance of the Saviour.
- 11) The Flight into Egypt and, following the Apocrypha, the Fall of the Idols.
- 12) Simeon recognizes God in the Child Jesus.

At the end of this group the *Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ* is sung again, the second part from the Synaxar is read and followed by the cantillation of Ps. 50. Hereafter begins the Kanon *Ἀνοίξω τὸ στόμα μου* (I shall open my

mouth) by Joseph Hymnologos, of which the first and third Odes with inserted Troparia are sung, and the Prooemium *Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ* is repeated.

The second part of the Akathistos, stanzas 13–24, contains the praise of the Mystery of the Incarnation. This part is again divided into two sections, each of them consisting of six stanzas.

- 13) By being born of an immaculate Virgin the Creator reveals a new creation.
- 14) Let us lift up our Hearts, so that we can understand the Mystery.
- 15) Praise of the Incarnation.
- 16) The Angels praise the miracle of God living among Men.
- 17) The verbose orators are mute like fish seeing the Blessed Virgin.
- 18) The faithful however understand God's mercy. The Good Shepherd must guide his flock.

Here again the sequence of Oikoi from the Akathistos is interrupted by the singing of the Prooemium, and a monostrophic chant with inserted doxology; followed by the singing of the 4th, 5th, and 6th Odes of the Kanon with inserted Troparia and the repetition of the Prooemium.

The fourth and last section of the Akathistos is of homiletic character:

- 19) All men must praise the Incarnation; above all, the virgins shall praise God and the Theotokos.
- 20) But earthly chant is incapable of giving praise to such a miracle.
- 21) Let us praise the Virgin as Bearer of the light which gave us life.
- 22) And He who has taken upon Him the sins of all the mortals brought us redemption.
- 23) Let us praise, therefore, His Mother, the tabernacle of God and of His work, and let us sing:
- 24) O Mother, worthy of all praise, who hast born the most Holy Word.  
Alleluia.

Now the first stanza *Ἄγγελος πρωτοστάτης* and the Prooemium are repeated and the 7th to the 9th Odes of the Kanon with inserted Troparia are sung and, after the 9th Ode the *Exaposteilarion*, the closing Troparion of the Kanon.

The Office of Lauds follows without interruption. It consists of Ps. 148, 149 and 150 and their Stichera, the Doxology, the Trisagion, and ends with the repeated Apolytikion *Τὸ προσταχθὲν μυστικῶς*.

This survey of the Office of the Akathistos gives only the framework without taking into consideration its coincidence with other feasts. But

even from this outline one may gather how impossible it is to separate the words from the music. Even more than in the West music is an essential part of the liturgy. It ranges from ekphonic reading, and cantillation of the psalms, syllabic Heirmoi and slightly embellished Stichera, to richly ornamented liturgical Chant. Thus, the Office of the Akathistos can be understood only in its highly elaborate structure, if one follows its dramatic building-up until the moment is reached when the Soloist intones the first stanza and fills the Church with the singing of the hymn which can be regarded as an expression of the essence of Christian piety.

What do we know about the music of the Akathistos?

Even the earliest manuscripts of the hymn with musical signs which have come down to us, are, so far as we can tell, of a relatively late date, namely the second half of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth century.

There is, however, a short fragment from the Akathistos in the twelfth-century Heirmologion Codex Coislin 220 of the Bibl. Nat. in Paris<sup>37</sup> to which, from fol. 238 onwards, a group of Stichera, Prosomoia for Lent, and Theotokia is attached. The place of the fragment is after the Sticheron Δεῦτε, ἅπαντες πιστοί for the Vespers of the Sabbath of Sexagesima, which begins on fol. 261<sup>v</sup>; the rest, six lines, is on fol. 262<sup>r</sup>. The larger part of the folio is left empty, but in the middle of it the first words of the Akathistos, i.e. Ἄγγελος πρωτοστάτης (An Angel of the first rank) are written with superimposed musical signs. The script differs from that of the Stichera, and one may imagine that a scribe used the empty space – which ought to have been filled in with another Prosomoion of Lent – to copy from a Kontakarion the first words of the Akathistos, as a reminder for the protopsaltes. There was no other place for him to insert the reference to the Akathistos since on the next page, fol. 262<sup>v</sup>, another set of Stichera begins, the *Stichera Dogmatika*.

Though the fragment is short, it reveals the important fact that the melody had already its melismatic character, but that here, unlike in later MSS., the ornamentation is not spread over all the syllables of the two words, but is confined to the accentuated third syllable of *πρωτοστάτης*. Moreover, the fragment reveals another fact, relating to the date of the melody. The notation contains a sign which occurs only in the first stages of Early Byzantine notation, i.e. the Katabasma, which occurs twice: on the last syllable of Ἄγγελος and on the seventh *a* of *πρωτοστατης*.

<sup>37</sup> I owe the reference to the fragment to Professor Oliver Strunk, who also kindly sent me a handwritten copy of it. Professor Carsten Høeg supplied me with his own photographs of the whole section of Codex Coislin 220 containing the Prosomoia for Lent.



dates from the second half of the thirteenth century and was written, as the subscription on fol. 44<sup>r</sup> shows, by the scribe Symeon at Grottaferrata.

The manuscript, the larger part of which is a Kontakarion, a collection of Kontakia for all the feasts of the ecclesiastical year, is incomplete, from the Akathistos, which is at the beginning, the first folios are missing. On fol. 1 is the second stanza B'. But fortunately the Prooemium Τῆ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῶ and the first stanza Ἀγγελος πρωτοστάτης can be found as "Kontakion" and "Oikos" of the feast of the Annunciation (foll. 108<sup>r</sup>–112<sup>v</sup>). Thus the Codex contains all the stanzas with their melodies, apart from the two refrains "Hail, Bride unbrided" and "Alleluia." The omission of the refrains shows that the book was intended for use by a Soloist; the refrains were sung by the Choir and were therefore not included in a Codex for the use of the "Singer of the Kontakia."

In his subscription, Symeon the scribe implores Our Saviour for *λύσιν ἀμπλακημάτων*, "forgiveness for his faults." His faults as a scribe were indeed many. Almost every stanza has mistakes, and it was not easy to decide exactly where the corrector's work had to begin, since there was no other manuscript available with which the text of the music could be collated.<sup>38</sup> It did not help either, to discover that the Oikoi are all based in general on the same melodic phrases, because even in the case of identical melodic phrases, slight divergencies occur which cannot be neglected; as can be seen from the following table (Example 2).

These are the Initial phrases of the first group of stanzas from A'-Z'. At first glance one cannot see any differences between them; only after close scrutiny of words and music does one discover the reason for the minute divergencies in rhythm and the occasional introduction of passing notes.

<sup>38</sup> After this study had gone to the printer I found, in the Library, during my visit to Grottaferrata in September 1955, the palimpsest MS. of an early thirteenth-century Kontakarion, Codex Cryptensis E. β. VII, which contains on foll. 135–212 another complete copy of the Akathistos with musical notation. The Codex, however, has suffered severely through the use of chemicals by scholars who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, wanted to decipher the underlying Latin text. Some pages look as if blue ink had been poured over them, and the parchment has become so brittle that the Codex had to be taken apart, and the single sheets put into folders. By holding the sheets up before the light I was able to decipher most of the musical signs which otherwise were illegible. I wish again to express here my thanks to Professor Oliver Strunk who drew my attention to this MS., and also to the Librarian, Dom Marco Petta, who helped me to study the MS. Dom M. Petta provided me also with a microfilm of the Akathistos of which I now possess an enlarged positive. The Akathistos in Cod. Crypt. E. β. VII shows a slightly less melismatic structure than that in Cod. Ashburnham, and some other important divergencies, which will be treated more fully in my forthcoming edition in the *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*. Here I should like to mention only that the examination of stanza A' of the Cod. Crypt. E. β. VII version helped me to correct some of the mistakes which the scribe of Cod. Ashburn. had made. Further help came from photographic copies of Codd. Γ.γ. III and E. β. III of Grottaferrata which contain the Prooemium and the first stanza.

1 Ἄ — γγε - λος . . . . . πρω - το - στά  
της . . . . .

2 Βλέ — που - σα . . . . . ἡ ά - γί  
α . . . . .

3 Γνώ — σιν ά — γνω - στον γνώ  
ναι . . . . .

4 Δύ — να - μισ . . . . . του ύ - ψί  
σου . . . . .

5 Ἐ — χου - σα . . . . . Θε - ο - δό  
χον . . . . .

6 Ζά — λην έν — δο - θεν . . . . .  
χων . . . . .

Example 2, Codex Ashburnham. Florence, Laur. L 64

It is, however, in the Chairetismoï that the musician shows his craftsmanship at its best. He transfers the melodic phrases from one place in a stanza to another; phrases which are long in one stanza in another are compressed; tension is created by the repetition of a phrase. He works with a subtlety unsurpassed even in modern music. But all that only touches the surface; it is merely the work of the musician who adapted the version handed down to us in Codex Ashburnham. However behind the richly ornamented flow of the melodies one finds a solidly constructed melodic scheme which is proof of the musical genius of the composer.

This statement needs some explanation. The melodies from the Heirmologium and Sticherarium are composed of a number of formulae characterizing each of the eight modes.<sup>39</sup> The formula technique of composition is, as I showed first in my study on the Serbian Octoëchos,<sup>40</sup> the fundamental principle of composition in the Near and Middle East, it can be traced from India to the countries of the Mediterranean basin. The task of the Byzantine composers consisted in setting the formulae of a mode to the words and in linking the formulae together by "bridge-passages."

The rich ornamentation of the Kontakia in Codex Ashburnham in general and the Akathistos in particular, covers the same structural principle, as can be seen from the table on the next page (Example 3) which shows the variations of three Χαίρε formulae.<sup>41</sup>

There are, further, the stereotyped half cadences (a-b-g-) and full cadences (g-b-g-)<sup>42</sup> which occur at the end of each line. These cadences may not belong to the original pattern of melodic construction, but must have been introduced at a very early date. They so much resemble those in the ninth century Franconian Sequence *Alleluia. Concelebramus*, modelled on the Alleluia *Levita Laurentius*,<sup>43</sup> that the theory of the influence of Byzantine hymnody, particularly the Kontakion, upon the origin and form of the Sequence gains another strong argument.

Before the transcription of the first stanza is given a few words must be said about its lay-out and the relation of words and music.

<sup>39</sup> I have given tables of formulae of Heirmoi and Stichera in my book *A History of Byz. Music and Hymnogr.*, pp. 320-9, and a table of the cadences and their embellished forms in my article "Das Prooemium des Akathistos," *Die Musikforschung*, VI (1953) p. 203.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. E. Wellesz, "Die Struktur d. serbischen Oktoechos," *Zeitschr. f. Musikwiss.*, II (1919-20) pp. 140-8.

<sup>41</sup> The Roman figures indicate the number of the stanza, the Arabic figures the line.

<sup>42</sup> The *b* is natural.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Handschin, "Über Estampie und Sequenz II," *Zeitschr. f. Musikwiss.*, XIII (1930) p. 123 and E. Wellesz, "Eastern Elements in Western Chant," *Mon. Mus. Byz.*, Amer. Ser. I (1947) pp. 169-74.

A

Stanzas  
I, III, V,  
VII, IX, XI

XIII XV

8 
  
Xaî ————— ρε Xaî ————— ρε Xaî ————— ρε

I, III, etc.

9 Xaî ————— (ρε)

B

I, III, V,  
VII, IX, XI

20 
  
Xaî ————— ρε . . . . .

21 Xaî ————— ρε . . . . .

C

XIX, XXI I, III, V, VII

10 
  
Xaî — ρε Xaî — ρε

I, III, V, etc.

12 Xaî ————— ρε

I, III, VII, IX

16 Xaî ————— ρε . . . . .

Example 3, Codex Ashburnham. Florence, Laur. L. 64

A Byzantine ecclesiastical hymn is composed, as already mentioned, in one of the eight modes, of which there are four authentic modes and four plagal modes.<sup>44</sup> The Akathistos is composed in the fourth plagal mode. The hymn is preceded by a long Intonation formula sung to *νεαγιε*. This word, the meaning of which is obscure, indicates the fourth plagal mode.<sup>45</sup> After almost every melodic phrase short Intonation-formulae occur, and often indications of modulations. These Intonation-formulae were sung by the singer of the Kontakion, probably in a subdued voice. They are printed in the transcription in a smaller type in order to distinguish them from the melodic phrases of the stanza.<sup>46</sup>

Byzantine musical notation indicates rhythmical and dynamic nuances with great accuracy; in that respect Byzantine neumatic notation is far superior to Plainsong notation. Glancing at the neumatic signs in the Kontakaria and, in particular, at the neums of the Akathistos, one is surprised at their abundance. There is hardly a note which is not marked by an agogic, dynamic or rhythmical sign, and in addition to these signs others are added which indicate the manner of singing a group of notes.

The transcription of Ἰαλλεγος πρωτοστάτης follows the rules which the editors of the *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae* agreed upon in 1931; in some cases, however, for the sake of clarity, simplified signs have had to be introduced; for example a small horizontal stroke on top of a note (-) for *sfz* (*sforzando*), and *c* for *cito* or *celeriter*. The text of the Akathistos in Codex Ashburnham differs in many respects from that published by W. Christ, Pitra, de Meester and del Grande. It represents, as far as can be seen, a version which was the traditional one in Grottaferrata and probably in South Italy in general. This can be seen from the text of the hymn in the eleventh-century Codex Vindob. suppl. gr. 96 of South Italian provenience, which is identical with that in Codex Ashburnham. But the South Italian version can be traced further back. There exists, as P. v. Winterfeld<sup>47</sup> discovered in 1903, a Latin version of the Synaxar, the Prooemium and the beginning of the first stanza in a St. Gall MS., Codex C. 78 of the Zurich Library, dating from the ninth century. The title refers to S. Germanos as author of the hymn. Recently Dom M. Huglo of Solesmes found a complete

<sup>44</sup> Cf. H. J. W. Tillyard, "Handbook of the Middle Byzantine Musical Notation," *Mon. Mus. Byz.*, *Subsidia* I, 2, pp. 30 sqq.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. O. Strunk, "Intonations and Signatures of the Byzantine Modes," *The Musical Quarterly*, 31 (1945) pp. 339-55.

<sup>46</sup> The small type of the Intonation-formulae are the only editorial markings in the text and music of the stanza A'. I must refer the reader, for further information about the correction of mistakes, to the forthcoming edition of the Akathistos in *Mon. Mus. Byz.* Series: *Transcripta*.

<sup>47</sup> P. v. Winterfeld, "Ein abendländisches Zeugnis über den Ymnos Akathistos d. griech. Kirche," *Zeitschr. f. deutsches Altertum u. deutsche Litteratur*, 47 (1904) pp. 81-88.

copy of the hymn, preceded by the Synaxar, in Codex Paris Bibl. Mazarine 693, dating from the beginning of the twelfth or the end of the eleventh century.<sup>48</sup>

The comparison of the ancient Latin version with that of Codex Ashburnham and the Vienna Cod. suppl. gr. 96 shows that the Latin monk must have translated from a text which had all the peculiarities of the South Italian version. The Latin version, therefore, provides conclusive evidence: (1) that the Prooemium Τῆ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ was added before the end of the eighth century, and that the Photios hypothesis is untenable; (2) that the text of Codex Ashburnham must also have acquired all its divergent readings before the end of the century. The comparison of the text deriving from Byzantine monasteries and that used in Southern Italy shows the superiority of the Byzantine versions; but we have no authority to correct the text of Codex Ashburnham, since all its peculiarities and divergencies from the original text can be found in a Latin MS. which was written six hundred years earlier.

We now give the text of the first stanza according to the South Italian version of Codex Ashburnham L 64 and its translation,<sup>49</sup> followed by the transcription of the music of the first stanza (folios 109<sup>r</sup>-112<sup>v</sup>) into modern staff notation, and by a few remarks on the setting of the words to the music. For the analysis of the structure of the melodic phrases, for the discussion of the variants and the free treatment of them by the composer or singer, when he repeated the same melodic phrase in the following stanzas, we must again refer the reader to the forthcoming publication of the Akathistos

<sup>48</sup> M. Huglo, "L'ancienne version latine de l'hymne acathiste," *Muséon*, 64 (1951) pp. 27-61. Dom Huglo in his masterly study gives all the divergencies of the Latin text from the version published by Pitra. Following up a line of investigation from the opposite direction I have succeeded in finding the identity of the ancient Latin with the South Italian version. Dom Huglo is certainly right in assuming that the text of the Akathistos in the Paris Codex must derive from an eighth-century original. The result of his critical examination of the text needs no support on palaeographical grounds. There are no indications in the *ductus* that the scribe of Codex 693 was influenced by an early ninth- or late eighth-century MS. which he copied. I showed a photograph of the Latin version of the Akathistos in the Paris Codex to Professor E. A. Lowe who said that the round ligature of *ti* does not indicate the copying of the *ductus* of an eighth-century MS., but that the curved form of *t* regularly occurred where the syllable *ti* was pronounced in Medieval Latin as *ci*, as in *auditio*, *resurrectio*, etc.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Wellesz, *A Hist. of Byz. Mus.*, p. 165. The text printed in Pitra, *Analecta Sacra* I, has line 10: ἀνάκλησις instead of ἀνάστασις, and line 23 βρεφουργείται instead of προσκυνείται ὁ πλάστης. — At the Symposium of 1954 Mr. Basil Papadakis sang the Prooemium Τῆ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ. I decided, however, to present the first stanza in the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, because its melodic structure serves as a model for all the stanzas of the hymn and, furthermore, contains the Chairetismoi. I have added in brackets < > the refrain from the Prooemium where, I suppose, it was sung first by the Soloist, and repeated by the Choir.

in volume IX of the Series *Transcripta* of the *Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae*.

- Ἄγγελος πρωτοστάτης  
 οὐρανόθεν ἐπέμφθη  
 εἰπεῖν τῇ θεοτόκῳ τὸ “Χαῖρε.”  
 καὶ σὺν τῇ ἀσωμάτῳ φωνῇ
- 5 σωματούμενόν σε θεωρῶν, Κύριε,  
 ἐξίστατο καὶ ἴστατο,  
 κραυγάζων πρὸς αὐτὴν τοιαῦτα ·  
 Χαῖρε, δι’ ἧς ἡ χαρὰ ἐκλάμψει ·  
 Χαῖρε, δι’ ἧς ἡ ἀρὰ ἐκλείψει ·
- 10 Χαῖρε, τοῦ πεσόντος Ἀδάμ ἡ ἀνάστασις ·  
 Χαῖρε, τῶν δακρύων τῆς Εὕας ἡ λύτρωσις  
 Χαῖρε, ὕψος δυσανάβατον  
 ἀνθρωπίνοις λογισμοῖς ·  
 Χαῖρε, βάθος δυσθεώρητον
- 15 καὶ ἀγγέλων ὀφθαλμοῖς ·  
 Χαῖρε, ὅτι ὑπάρχεις  
 βασιλέως καθέδρα ·  
 Χαῖρε, ὅτι βαστάζεις  
 τὸν βαστάζοντα πάντα ·
- 20 Χαῖρε, ἀστήρ ἐμφαίνων τὸν ἥλιον ·  
 Χαῖρε, γαστήρ ἐνθέου σαρκώσεως ·  
 Χαῖρε, δι’ ἧς νεουργεῖται ἡ κτίσις ·  
 Χαῖρε, δι’ ἧς προσκυνεῖται ὁ πλάστης ·  
 Χαῖρε, νύμφη ἀνύμφευτε.

(An angel of the first rank was sent from heaven to say to the Virgin ‘Hail’, and seeing Thee, Lord, become corporeal at the incorporeal voice, he was amazed and stood still and cried out to her: ‘Hail, thou through whom joy will shine forth. Hail, thou through whom the curse will be lifted. Hail, Resurrection of the fallen Adam. Hail, Redemption of the tears of Eve. Hail, Summit inaccessible to human minds. Hail, Depth invisible even to angels’ eyes. Hail, because thou art the seat of the King. Hail, because thou bearest the Bearer of all. Hail, Star who makest visible the Sun. Hail, Womb of the divine Incarnation. Hail, thou through whom the creation is regenerated. Hail, thou through whom the Creator is worshipped. Hail, unwedded bride.’)



να ————— γι — ε



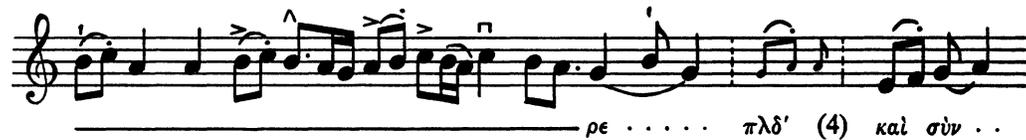
(1) "Α — γγε-λος . . . . . πρω-το-στά ————— της . . . . . β"



(2) ού-ρα — νό ————— θεν έ-πέ ————— μφθη . . . . . πλ.β"



(3) εί-πέιν . . . τῆ θε-ο-τό ————— κω τὸ . . . . . Χαί —————



————— ρε . . . . . πλδ' (4) και συν . .



τῆ . . . . . ά-σω - μά - τω φω ————— νῆ . . . . .



. . . . . (5) σω ————— μα —————



τού ————— με - νόν σε . . . . . θε - ω - ρών . . . . .



. . . . . Κύ ————— ρι - ε . . . . .

MUSIC OF AKATHISTOS  
Example 4, Codex Ashburnham. Florence, Laur. L 64

..... (6) πλ.δ' ἐξ-ί-στα — το καὶ ἴ — στα-το . . . . .

(6a) ἐξ-ί — στα-το καὶ ἴ-στα - το . . . , (6b) ἐξ-ί-στα — το . . . . .

καὶ ἴ — στα — το . . . . .

(7) δ'' κραυ-γά — ζων πρὸς αὐ-τήν . . . . . τοι - αὐ —

τα . . . . . νε — νε — ια — ες .

(8) Χαῖ — ρε δι' ἧς . . . . . ἡ χα-ρά . . . . .

ἐκ - λά —

μψει . . . . . υ — ε-ς

(9) Χαῖ —

Example 4, Codex Ashburnham. Florence, Laur. L 64

ρε δι' ἧς .....  
 ..... ἡ ἀ - ρά ... ἐκ-λεί  
 ψει . . . ν - α - ν  
 (10) Χαῖ — ρε τοῦ πε — σόν — τος . . . (β'') Α - δάμ . . .  
 ἡ ἀ — νά  
 στα - σις . . . (11) (ἦχος βαρύς) Χαῖ  
 ρε . . . τῶν . . . δα  
 κρύ  
 ων . . . τῆς Ἐ - υας ἡ . . .

Example 4, Codex Ashburnham. Florence, Laur. L. 64

λύ ————— τρω ————— σις . . . . .  
 ἄ - γι - α (12) Χαῖ —————  
 ρε . . . . . ὕ ————— ψος . . . . . δυσ - α ————— νά —————  
 ————— βα ————— τον . . . . .  
 (13) ἀν - θρω - πί ————— νοις . . . . . λο - γισ - μοῖ - σ . . . . .  
 . . . . . α - γί - α (14) Χαῖ —————  
 ————— ρε . . . . . βᾶ ————— θος . . . . .  
 δυσ - θε - ῶ —————  
 ρη ————— τον . . . . . δ' (15) καὶ ἀ - γγέ ————— λων . . . . .

Example 4, Codex Ashburnham. Florence, Laur. L 64

ó - φθαλ - μοίς .....  
 ..... ν-α-ν (16) Χαί —  
 ρε ..... ὅ — τι ὑπ - άρ — χεις  
 (17) βα - σι - λέ — ως κα - θεί —  
 ρε ..... ὅ — τι βα - στα — ζεις(19) τόν βα - στα —  
 ζον - τα ..... πάν —  
 τα ..... δ'' (20) Χαί — ρε ..... ά —

Example 4, Codex Ashburnham. Florence, Laur. L 64

στήρ . . . . . ἐμ-φαί — νων τὸν . . . . . ἡ —

λι — ον . . . δ''(21) Χαῖ —

ρε . . . . . γα — στήρ . . . ἐν-θέ — ου σαρ —

κώ — σε — ως . . . . . ι ι (22) Χαῖ - ρε . . . . .

. . . . . δι' ἧς . . . . . β' νε-ουρ-γεί — ται ἡ

. . . . . κτί — σις . . . . .

δ'' (23) Χαῖ — ρε . . δι' ἧς . . . . . προ-σκυ-νεί - ται ὁ

πλά — στης: (Chorus) (24) Χαῖ ρε . . . νύ —

μφη ἄ — νύ — μφευ — τε . . . . . :

Example 4, Codex Ashburnham. Florence, Laur. L 64

The treatment of the words in this stanza differs from that in all other stanzas. Nowhere else is a word or a phrase repeated. In this opening stanza the musician was so overcome by the greatness of his subject, the mystery of the Incarnation, that he repeated three times the words depicting the archangel's awe when he stood before the Blessed Virgin: ἐξίστατο καὶ ἴστατο; the third repetition embellishing the phrase with a long melisma on ἴστατο. The repetition of the phrase reflects the ecstatic character of the music. It finds expression also in the repetition of syllables and in the insertion of vowels and syllables which do not belong to the word. This is a practice which one finds frequently in the chanting of Alleluias and, at a later date, in melismatic chants in general.

A distinction must be made between the simple repetition of the vowels of a word and the insertion of vowels and syllables which do not belong to it. The insertion of vowels and syllables which have no meaning, but have the function of prolonging a word is a widespread custom in the Orient.<sup>50</sup> The repetition of vowels, however, which is a feature characteristic of the Byzantine melismatic style, gives an explanation of the manner of singing the melismas. If one takes, for example, the beginning of a stanza, and writes down the words as the scribe of the Codex Ashburnham put them to the music, one sees that never more than three notes are sung to a vowel or a syllable:



Taking together the insertion and the repetition of vowels one arrives at the conclusion that the melismas were regarded as musical phrases, consisting of a number of small groups of notes which had to be sung slowly and expressively, but not as “coloraturas” in one breath. It would be wrong to sing Byzantine liturgical chant in the *bel canto* manner. It would be equally wrong to sing Byzantine music in the New-Greek manner. As we know from Mesarites' treatise on the Church of the Apostles at Constantinople, the training in liturgical chant began in early childhood, so that one could find

<sup>50</sup> I first drew attention to this practice in an article “Probleme d. musikal. Orientforschung,” *Jahrb. d. Musikbibl. Peters* 1917 (Leipzig, 1918) pp. 15–18. Here, two examples of Manichaean hymns in Pehlvi, written in Estrangelo script are given, dating from the ninth century. They were found in Turfan, in Central Asia. The inserted vowels and syllables are: *â, î, ygâ*. Similar insertions have been noted in Hungarian and Roumanian folksongs by Béla Bartók. The second example of a Manichaean hymn is reproduced in my chapter on “Early Christian Music” in the *New Oxford Hist. of Music*, II, pp. 11–13.

“boys with young men just emerged from boyhood singing a well-shaped song.”<sup>51</sup> Singing in the Eastern churches in the hey-day of the Empire cannot have been very different from that in the West; otherwise Charlemagne would not have listened with so much delight to the singing of the Mattins by the chanters who came with a Byzantine delegation to Aix-la-Chapelle that he ordered his clerics to translate them without delay into Latin.<sup>52</sup>

But here we must end, because further pursuit of the question would open more vistas into the subject of “Eastern Elements in Western Chant” which I have started to discuss in my book of that name; above all into the question of the influence of strophic hymns like the Akathistos on the origin and development of the Sequence, that form of Western chant which, in its music, comes nearest to the Kontakion.

It took many years for those who became interested in Gregorian chant towards the end of the last century to realize its beauty. Today, Plainsong is recognized as a great art; it is music with which one lives. With Byzantine music we are now in the same position as our forerunners were in the field of Plainsong a century ago; and, of all Byzantine chant, the Akathistos must be regarded as the most elaborate and exquisite product.

Music of that kind cannot be fully appreciated unless we have become familiar with it. It may at first appear as something which merely awakens our interest. But we shall soon find that it exercises a spell over us. We are compelled to penetrate deeper into it, and finally the music reveals its full splendour and greatness. We begin to understand the monks who adorned the service with an unending chain of hymns. We begin to understand the essence of Byzantine piety, whose spirit is expressed in these hymns; in their words and in their music.

Oxoniae, Die 25. Martii 1955  
In Annuntiatione B. Mariae V.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. A. Heisenberg, *Grabeskirche und Apostelkirche* (1908) pp. 20–1, and Wellesz, *A Hist. of Byz. Mus.*, p. 54.

<sup>52</sup> *Monachi Sangallensis De gestis Karoli* § 7. *Mon. Germ. Hist., Scriptores*, II, p. 751.