

## **The Role of the Nationalism in Modeling the Romanian Chant before the First World War. The Case of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostome**

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Romanians' Church music suffered deep transformations during the 19th century. Towards the 1860, the repertoire then in use in Constantinople was adapted in Romanian, printed and spread through the school system. In the '60s, immediately after the foundation of the nation-state, a decree forbade the use of church languages other than Romanian on the territory of the country. At the same time the government supported—though rather unsuccessfully—the replacement of chant by harmonic choirs.<sup>1</sup>

As Romania became an independent kingdom and the former Churches of Wallachia and Moldavia were united in one autocephalous structure acknowledged by the Patriarch of Constantinople, intellectuals began to be interested in developing a Church music appropriate for the Romanian nation.<sup>2</sup> Similar to Greece, Byzantine chant was then predominant, although in villages and small towns the music was probably not so close to the Constantinopolitan tradition and it was perhaps influenced by lay music. In few important churches in the cities harmonic music was also used for the Divine Liturgy, Weddings or Funerals; the pieces were either those used in St. Petersburg or Vienna (but with the text translated in Romanian), either compositions of Romanian musicians, in Russian or German style.

I point in this paper to the measures taken by the Church and the State concerning the church music in the three decades before the First World War, and the connection of these measures to the nationalist ideas of the time. At first, I trace the opinions of contemporary *psaltes*, hierarchs and historians of the relation between nation and Church music. Afterwards, I present bishop Melkisedek's main propositions accepted by the Holy Synod in 1881 and the way the government acted

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1 For a general history of Romanian Church music in the 19th century see Vasile 1997: 90–132, 155–203, Cosma 1974: 75–98; 1975: 137–153; 1976: 179–194, 356–366; 1983: 286–291; 1986: 239–309, Moisil forthcoming.

2 Romania's independence was acknowledged in 1878 and Carol I, its prince, was proclaimed king three years later. Constantinople recognized the Romanian Church as autocephalous in 1885.

to put them into practice the following years. Finally, I show the changes underwent by the Byzantine chant for the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostome.

### **Nation and Church music**

I have examined the most important works related to the topic written in the pre-war Romania: Petrescu 1872, Melchisedek 1882, Luca 1898, Ionnescu-Gion 1899, Nifon 1902, Popescu 1908, and Cireșeanu 1911.<sup>3</sup> Their approach is definitely a new one: chanters did not talk in these terms and on these subjects before the mid-19th century, even if they compared the Romanian cantors with the Greek ones and used the word *nation*.

Chant was now considered as part of the national patrimony (Popescu 1908: 1). It was viewed as *national*, because it was *popular* and has identified itself with the Romanian's taste and religious sense; therefore, it had to be preserved, cultivated, and developed, just as every product of the Romanian genius (Melchisedek 1882: 42, Luca 1898: 68–69, Nifon 1902: 47, 79).

I.D. Petrescu affirmed that there was a close relationship between the developing of the national music and the glory of that people. Consequently—and because Romanians considered themselves Europeans—by cultivating a Church music similar to the Western one, Romanians could create “the most solid elements of our national culture” (Petrescu 1872: 67–68).

Alexandru Luca thought that chant not only reflected the Romanian society, but also contributed to the construction of the Romanian identity. It “elevated the feelings and nourished the nationalism of the people both in time of happiness and unhappiness” (Luca 1898: 69).

Bishop Melchisedek (Ștefănescu) affirmed that Romanian church music should be uniform, as the nation requires cultural unity. It was desired to have the same tunes in all Romanian churches, not only in Romania but also in those belonging to the Romanians subjects of the Austrian-Hungarian and Russian Empires (Melchisedek 1882: 42–44).

Everybody admitted that Romanians should have a national Church music, according to their features. Because of their Latin “race” and their Oriental geographic position, it was thought that the proper Church music for Romanians

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the image of the Romanian Church music and its relationship with the nation before the First World War see Moisil 2007.

should have “a Western-Oriental atmosphere”, based both on the Eastern chant and Occidental choirs, although it was not so clear in which way and proportion the two elements had to be blended (Petrescu 1872: 68, Melchisedek 1882: 42–47).

The preeminence of the cultural factor above the biologic and the geographic ones is to be found in the view of Bishop Melchisedek and his followers. Romanian Church music had to fit to the musical spirit of the Romanians, to their national taste and to the old national chant. The value of a musical piece or that of a composer were judged depending on the concordance with the Romanian taste. Bishop Nifon (Niculescu) praised some chanters for “cleaning all the foreign elements from the Church chants” they had adapted in Romanian (Melchisedek 1882: 33–35, 42, 45–47, Nifon 1902: 58, 76).

Little by little, the phrase *Romanian chant* came to indicate not the chant in Romanian language, as previously, but a particular variant of Orthodox Church music (Melchisedek 1882: 34–35, Luca 1898: 78, 85, Nifon 1902: 46–48, 76). The Romanian style was defined as simple, sweet, smooth, clear, pious. Most of the time it was compared and opposed to the Greek one, which was considered full of Turkish elements or other non-ecclesiastical figures and lacking an appropriate rhythm (Petrescu 1872: 41, Melchisedek 1882: 24–34, Ionnescu-Gion 1899: 539, 541, Nifon 1902: 51–53, 58, Cireșeanu 1911: 528–531).<sup>4</sup>

The view proposed by our writers was a new one, according to the national ideology that dominated Europe at that time. They pleaded for the construction of a national Romanian Church music conceived as distinct from the musics of the other Orthodox peoples. The ideas they expressed help us to better understand the way the people acted in order to develop this national music.

### **Constructing a national Church music**

In 1881 bishop Melchisedek read to the Holy Synod of Romania an extensive report concerning the Church music, from which I have quoted above. The first part of the report consisted of a historical account and the second part was a project for improving the situation of the Church music. Melchisedek proposed to make up a repertory adequate to the Romanian spirit, to diffuse this repertory all over the

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<sup>4</sup> There were lesser writers who did not oppose the Romanian chant to the Greek one (Păltinescul 1875), and considered that preserving the original melody in the Romanian adaptations was to be praised (Popescu 1908: 43–44).

country, and to found school choirs that had to sing at the Divine Liturgy in rural churches.

The repertory was supposed to be a standard one and to bear the validation of the Holy Synod. More precisely, Melchisedek referred to three related repertories: a Byzantine one,<sup>5</sup> made by selecting and correcting the best and most appropriate to the national music chants; a choral repertory, made by harmonizing the melodies used in the Romanian Church; and a repertory for normal schools and rural schools, written on staff notation, which had to include the most used and important pieces: chants for the Divine Liturgy, for the Lent, the *heirmoi* of the 9th ode for feasts (*anti-Axion estin*), and *automela* (Melchisedek 1882: 45–46). This standard repertory was the solution for the desired uniform Church music as an expression of the united nation.

Bishop Melchisedek considered that state should offer a material and symbolic support for solving the crisis of the Church music. He suggested that the ruler could sustain the chant and encourage the cultivation of the national Church music by printing the repertory in a sufficient number of copies, by delivering the copies to churches and schools, and by conferring distinctions to the chanters and editors who published pieces belonging to the repertoire (*ibid.*: 46–47).

Melchisedek's propositions were put into practice in the early-20th century. The Ministry of Education decided that pupils in the villages had to learn the chants of the Liturgy and perform them during services (Popescu-Pasărea 1911: 811–812).

The repertoire desired by Melchisedek took shape at the same time. Its diffusion was not based on coercion or control—there was no unique book of chants, as it would be the case under communism, 50 years later—but on spreading the melodies in plenty of copies and teaching the children to sing them. There were published Liturgies for rural school choirs approved by the Holy Synod and the Ministry of Worship and Education. The first of them was written in 1889 and included simple melodies, sometimes in 2-part harmony (Podoleanu 1889).

More influent were the collections of bishop Nifon and Ion Popescu-Pasărea which shared an important amount of the melodies. The former was published in 10,000 copies and distributed for free to chanters and priests. The book contained chants and 3-part pieces.<sup>6</sup> As the volume included an historical part—from which some statements were mentioned above—it is likely that a lot of chanters took over

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<sup>5</sup> Melchisedek did not use the term *Byzantine*.

<sup>6</sup> The volume also included two 4-part pieces.

not only the melodies but also Nifon's opinions on the topic.

Popescu-Pasărea, the most prominent Church musician of that time, published between 1908 and 1914 several volumes for the Liturgy and Great Saturday Orthros, for 1, 2 or 3 voices, on Byzantine notation, staff notation or both. We have information that the government printed and distributed at least one of Popescu-Pasărea's titles, a 3-part Liturgy for rural choirs. One has to add that the author had been appointed, probably in 1908, as organizer of rural Church choirs (Popescu-Pasărea 1911: 811–812).

In the eve of the First World War there were already made the first steps in order to establish a uniform and distinct repertory for all the churches in Romania. Melodies were spread in thousand of copies—"even in the smallest hamlet of the country" as Poslušnicu put it (Poslušnicu 1928: 54)—and children were taught to perform them, the process being warmly saluted and supported by the Church and the State.

### **Changes in chanting at the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom**

I refer below only to the changes suffered by the chant at the Divine Liturgy, neglecting the harmonic choral music and the case of other services.

One major transformation was the presence of children at the lectern. They replaced or chanted along *psaltes* in the villages and sometimes also in the cities (Popescu-Pasărea 1911: 811–812, Popovici 1911: 290). Children always used to chant at services, but as a part of their training and as helpers for the cantor. Now for the first time the leading role was assumed by pupils and chanting passed from professional singers to ordinary people.<sup>7</sup>

Another change was the appearance and spread of 2-part chant in which voices often moved in unison or parallel thirds. Although there were certain fragments in which a tonal harmonization was present, I think that we may consider this 2-part chant distinct from Western harmonic music. The arranger showed no interest for harmonic relation but he wished only to accompany sporadically the main voice with a second one. Sometimes one can find even fragments of polymodalism, if we assume that the composer intended the work to be performed using the non-tempered

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<sup>7</sup> A choir of teenagers (40 boys and 10 girls) sang for a few months at the Divine Liturgy in the village of Rotopânești in 1861. However, they were students of the village Conservatory who attended Church choir classes, and not pupils of elementary school (Poslušnicu 1928: 185).

Byzantine intonation (Fig. 1).

As a consequence of the replacing of professional chanters with children the former wide repertory narrowed. Even if they would have intended the choirs to perform various pieces, this would be very difficult using untrained choristers. The number of variants for a chant was sensible small in the aforementioned collections; moreover, there were books that offered only one variant for every chant, as it was the case for Popescu-Pasărea 1914.

Changes occurred not only in the number but also in the nature of the chants. A lot of them were replaced by simpler versions, in order to be performed by children and for esthetical reasons. Some of them were written in the first half of the 19th century, but became widespread only in the early-20th century; others were new compositions. The former showed similarities to some *makam* or to the tonal music. A few of them were Russian tunes or Russian-influenced compositions.

The modern style pieces had frequent modulations and were influenced by tonality. A lot of them were composed in 1st plagal or 4th plagal modes, the equivalent of the tonal minor and major. The ratio of non-traditional pieces was quite high, as it is featured in Table 1, which presents the chants from Popescu-Pasărea 1914.

The foundations of a Romanian national Church music were already laid 30 years after bishop Melchisedek's report to the Holy Synod. The role of nationalism—both as an ideology and as a political movement—was fundamental in shaping the Romanian repertory and putting it into practice. The process of replacing the monodic chant sung by a professional *psaltis* and based on “classical” 18th century Constantinopolitan authors with a new, narrower and uniform Romanian repertory performed by regular people, sometimes in parts, had to be still continued during the entire 20th century.

<b>Chant</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Observations</b>
Eirinika	8 (plagal 4th)	
Antiphons I and II: Ps 102: 1 and <i>Unule născut</i> (O Monogenis)	5 (plagal 1st)	The melody shows tonal influences (minor scale). The original piece dates from mid-19th century.

<i>Veniți să ne închinăm</i> (Deute proskynisomen)	2nd	Traditional Byzantine melody.
<i>Doamne mântuește</i> (Kyrie soson)	8 (plagal 4th)	Traditional Byzantine melody.
Trisagion	5 (plagal 1st)	The Russian style melody was composed in the first half of the 19th century. This Trisagion concluded the Great Doxology sung every December 7 (the feast of St. Filotheia) at Curtea de Argeș monastery, where the relics of the saint were kept.
<i>Doamne miluește</i> (Kyrie eleison) at the Ektenis deisis	8 (plagal 4th)	The melody has Russian origin. It was sung by Anton Pann in 1810 when he was member of the harmonic choir in Chișinău. It may be currently heard in Greek churches at the deisis following the anafora.
Cherouvikon	8 (plagal 4th)	A simple variant of a Byzantine melody. Most of the syllables last two beats.
Leitourgika	8 (plagal 4th)	Melody composed in the first half of the 19th century.
Megalynarion ( <i>Axion estin</i> )	5 (plagal 1st)	New style Byzantine chant with frequent chromatic modulations.
<i>Unul sfânt</i> (Eis agios)	8 (plagal 4th)	Tonal influences.
<i>Văzut-am lumina</i> (Eidomen to fos)	2nd	Traditional Byzantine melody.
<i>Fie numele Domnului</i> (Eii to onoma Kyriou)	8 (plagal 4th)	Although the melody is Byzantine, it was not customary to sing this piece in plagal fourth mode.

Table 1: Modern and traditional pieces in Popescu-Pasărea 1914

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