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Stability and flexibility in the transmission of melodic archetypes in Greek Liturgical Chant

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Abstract: *Research to date reveals that, for over half of Christian history, Christians primarily sang from memory. By comparing notated melodic patterns from the 13th to the 18th centuries, specific trends and developments emerge in the melodic structures that served as foundational models for much of church hymnography. In this paper, we aim to examine, using the same comparative method, the transmission of these model melodies within the Greek language tradition from the 19th to the 21st centuries, while other contributions will explore their evolution in different linguistic traditions.*

Key-words: *hymnography, melodic variation, psaltic music, byzantine music.*

1. Introduction

In Byzantine chant, there existed a widely used compositional and interpretative technique that has been preserved to this day. This technique is based on memorizing the melodic and rhythmic patterns of certain church hymns, according to which the hymnographer adapts new liturgical hymns both prosodically and melodically. The church singer then performs them with only the text in front, without any musical notation.

The technique imposed certain restrictions on composers in the creation of imitation hymns (*prosomoia*), the main restriction being the alignment of the prosodic accents of the text with the melodic accents of the model (*automelon*). On the other hand, it relieved singers from memorizing new melodies, which helps to explain the abundance of hymnographic compositions within this tradition. Nonetheless, in the compositions of some renowned Byzantine hymnographers, differing accentuations (*paratonismoi*) were identified between the melodic model and the contrafacta, with these differences being adjusted during performance. (Troelsgard 2011, 5; 20)

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Identifying the earliest sources containing the *automela* repertoire with notation is still an emerging field, with the first research results on this topic appearing in the 1990s. There wasn't a widespread and stable repertoire solely comprising these melodic models (*automelon*) like the *Sticherarion* (a collection of notated model-melody hymns called *stichera*, sung during various feasts or different times of the year) or the *Irmologion* (a collection of model-melody hymns, notated and used only for the main part of the service dedicated to a saint or feast, known as the canon). After the automela principle was introduced into Byzantine church practice, the melodies were classified by the the system of the eight modes (*octoechos* system) and began to be notated in the 9th century (Shkolnik 1995, 522-523). The repertoire of automela hymns became stable then, with the number of hymns chosen as models by composers decreasing significantly from the 13th century onward (Troelsgard 2011, 4-5).

Analysis of hymnographic sources from the 5th to the 12th century identified approximately 120 such models, while in the 13th to 18th centuries, only 47 were found, 27 of which appeared across multiple sources, forming a standard repertoire. Frequently used church hymns, were not notated as they were memorized. The first cycle of model melodies with notation was preserved in a 13th-century manuscript from St. Petersburg, containing the largest number of *automela* compared to other manuscripts (Shkolnik 1995, 522-524).

The model hymns from this repertoire have been compared by researchers with variants of the same hymns found in the repertoires of manuscripts from different eras or with hymns from other repertoires within the same manuscript. (Troelsgard 2000, 8-21; Shkolnik 1995, 523-536). Parallel transcription and diachronic comparison of the same model hymns, as they appear in manuscripts spanning a period of approximately 500 years (approx. 13th–18th centuries), have led to the observation of melodic stability across the compared versions. Specific "crystallized elements", such as the beginning and final cadence, and even internal cadences in some cases, were identified as mnemotechnically associated with the text (Troelsgard 2000, 14). At the same time, certain modal differences can be observed, such as in the case of first mode, where in later manuscripts there is a shift in the tonal center from the third to the fourth pitch. Additionally, in some cases, there are significant differences, where melodic identity is barely recognizable, and even the mode has changed. (Troelsgard 2000, 17).

Comparison with the style of other hymns repertoires has led to the identification of two distinct styles: "the *automelon* style and the classic *sticherarion* style" (Troelsgard 2000, 11). Although different from many feast hymns, the *automelon* style was similar to that of Sunday hymns, which were

passed down orally until around 1300, when they were added to the *Sticherarion* (Troelsgard 2000, 14-15).

Even the automela repertoires themselves lack this stylistic consistency, containing both simple, monotone melodies and more complex chants. (Troelsgard, 2000, 15). The differences likely stem from some melodies being older and simpler, while others align with the more sophisticated classical style of the late 7th to 9th centuries (Shkolnik 1995, 529). Comparing the cadences revealed both classical and archaic types, showing that some manuscripts reflect attempts to revise archaic cadences to match classical Byzantine modes, efforts that predate the 8th century and thus precede the traditional *Stihirar* (Shkolnik 1995, 532).

The stylistic diversity within the automelon repertoire cannot be explained by the variational or improvisational aspects typical of oral music transmission (Shkolnik, 1995, 530). It is proposed that a "simple, unwritten style coexisted for a considerable time with the notated style of the classical *Sticherarion*," suggesting different local traditions or chronological developments (Troelsgard, 2000, 19): "There was a gradual alteration of the melodies from their creation until the point of final crystallization." (Papathanassiou 2002, 11).

The subsequent development of *automela* melodies indicates a reduction in this discrepancy (Shkolnik 1995, 530). But decoding pre-Hrysantine notation was and is challenging because musical signs are interpreted contextually. The same notation can vary in performance based on factors like voice, scale, genre, style, festivity level, location, and whether it's choral or solo (Sîrbu 2018, 16). Fully understanding this tradition requires blending written notation with active oral practices in liturgy (Κωνσταντίνου 2022, 26).

The 1814 Chrysanthine reform aimed to standardize Byzantine notation for accuracy and accessibility but, over time, restricted melodic diversity. It risked overshadowing oral tradition by allowing deviations from traditional structures (Sîrbu 2018, 21; Κωνσταντίνου 2022, 141). Misunderstanding the singing tradition, it placed embellishments over the core melody. A chant should be simplified into a synoptic form to guide the oral tradition without interpretative elements that may distort its purpose (Κωνσταντίνου 2022, 209).

Only in this way are the archetypal melodic formulas (*theseis*) identified, preserved, and reused; these are the foundational melodic units that form the structure of a melody. Psaltic music has always been a living tradition, characterized by the "recycling" of phrases and motifs (Κωνσταντίνου 2022, 31). In this way the archetype formula or melody serves as the foundational unit, generating new creative processes that enrich and extend the tradition (Κωνσταντίνου 2022, 21).

2. Comparative analysis

We aim to examine how Byzantine melodic archetypes were transmitted in their syllabic form after being printed in Chrysanthine notation, focusing on variations during transmission. This brief study focuses on the model hymn Κατεπλαγη Ιωσήφ as presented in Greek sources from the 19th to 21st centuries (Table 1). Key editions include the 1820 *New Anastasimatarion* by Petros Manouil Efesios (whose name will be abbreviated: E), and 1825 *Syllabic Irmologion* by Petros Byzantios (B), both significant for introducing printed hymns. By the late 19th century, multiple editions of the *Anastasimatarion* emerged, but the editions containing minor variations in this model hymns, and which we will include in our analysis, are the 1832 editions by Hourmouzios Hartofilakos and Theodoros Phokaeus (Hu), and the 1858 edition by Ioannes Protopsaltes (I). The latter became the standard for subsequent editions.

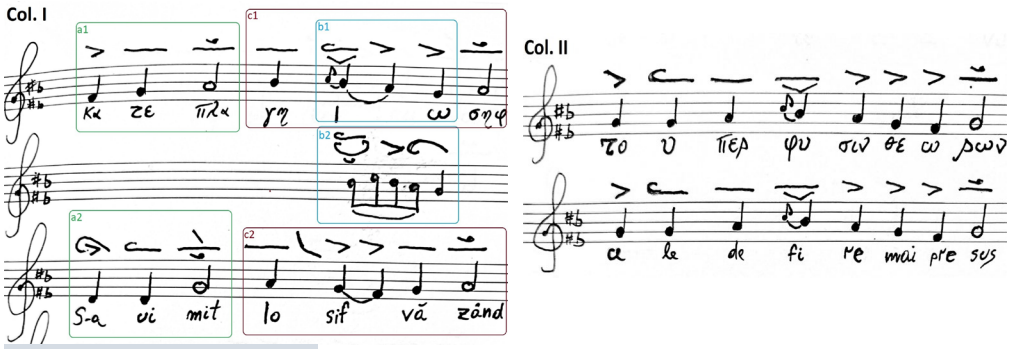
Syllabic model hymns largely remained within the realm of oral tradition, even after the advent of printed psaltic collections, as few early editions included them. In 2007, a manuscript by Dimitrios G. Sourlantzis (S) with model hymns published in Sydney, intended for students but lacking an introductory study. Research initiated in the late 20th century led to several publications in the early 21st century including works by Ioannes Kastrinakes (2009), Giorgos Epam. Hatzihronoglou (2010), and G. N. Konstantinou (2023), each highlighting the value, application, and structure of these hymns for Byzantine music studies. We also examined these last four publications to perform the comparative analysis and track the development of the transmission of the referenced melodic model. Each phrase or musical colon, as printed in 1820, was compared to its counterparts from other authors.

We have also selected a Romanian version of this model hymn which will be presented in full, with the Romanian text, as the final version each time. We made this not to explore the complex issue of adapting ancient melodies to Romanian prosody, but because the Romanian melodist (the arranger who adapts liturgical melodies to fit specific hymn texts) and translator aimed to align with a melodic model rooted in the Mount Athos oral tradition (Canoane 2022, 96).

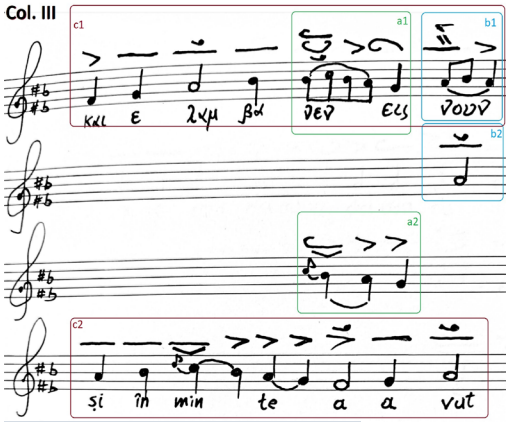
The table 1 displays the initial variant (E) in Chrysanthine notation, transcribed by us into staff notation, alongside differing figures from other works, with attribution to each author. Each varied figure is circled and labeled for classification. The comparative analysis of the eight Greek editions reveals that, across the 12 musical phrases or “musical cola” forming the piece studied, there are 19 points of variation. Aside from 2 phrases that are identical across all authors and one that presents only one variation, the remaining phrases each contain 2

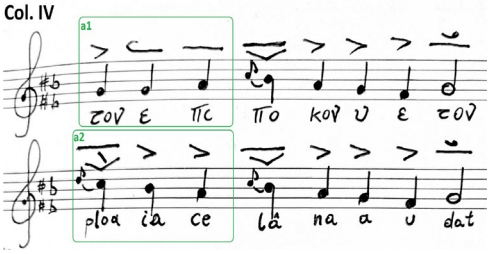
points of variation, represented by formulas, micro-formulas, or transitional segments leading to a formula. As a result of the variational process, 25 new varied figures emerge, each undergoing one or more variation techniques, which I have classified according to four principles, as shown in Table 2. In the case of the eight Greek editions, the findings (organized in the upper section of Table 2) indicate five cases where melodic variants shift to different modes or modal centers within the musical discourse (*Mode* section in Table 2); 11 cases where figures are ornamentally varied or reduced to their basic melodic outline (*Ornament*); 13 instances with slight differences in melodic contour or direction (*Path*); and six cases where figures are extended or shortened by inserting or omitting notes, or by rhythmic augmentation or diminution (*Duration*). This results in a total of 35 variation processes, as the same variant may undergo multiple variation processes simultaneously. Aside from two identical phrases and two cadences across all authors, the remaining cadential formulas preserve the same basic structure and pitch, with one exception: phrase eight, which features tonal modifications and a different cadential pitch.

In the lower section of Table 2, the variational processes undergone by the adaptation of the same melodic archetype—this time adjusted to the Romanian language and representing the oral variant from a monastery on Mount Athos—are classified.

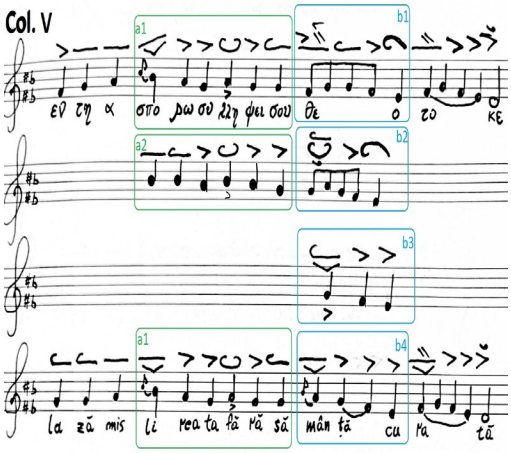


1.E, Ko, Ha, S; / 2. Hu, I, B, Ka

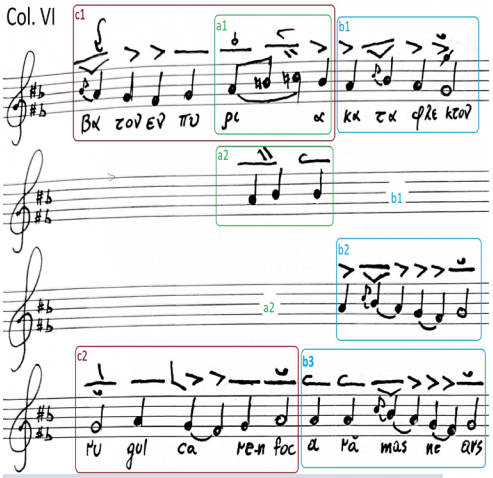




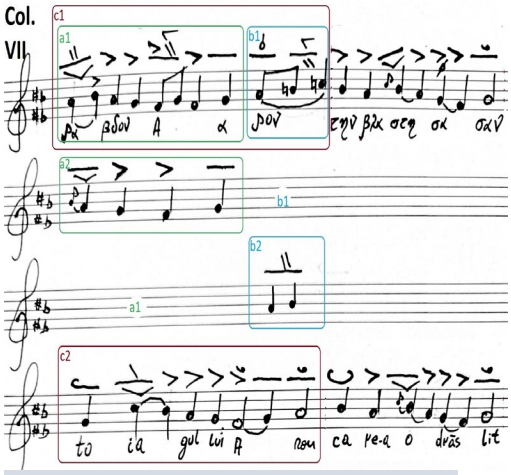
1.E; / 2. Hu, B, Ka; / 3. I, Ko, Ha, S



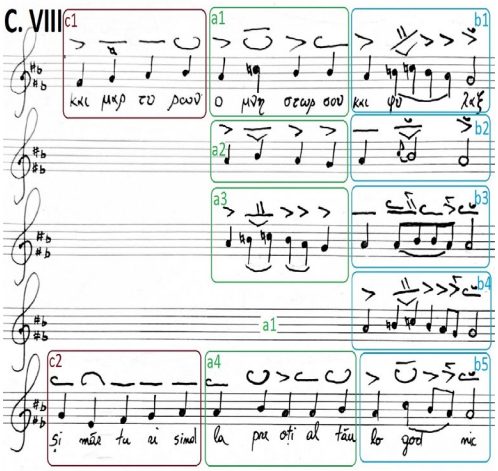
1.E; 2. Hu; 3. I, Ko, Ha, S; 4. B, Ka (a1, b3).



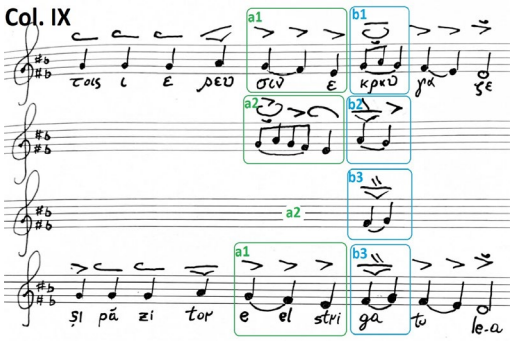
1.E; 2. Hu, I, B, S; 3. Ko, Ka; 4. Ha (a1, b2)



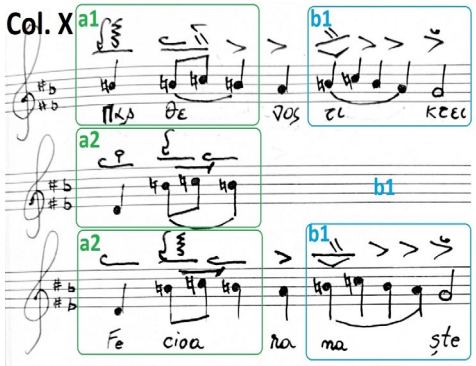
1.E, Hu; 2. I, Ha, Ko, S; 3. Ka. 4. B (a2b2d2)



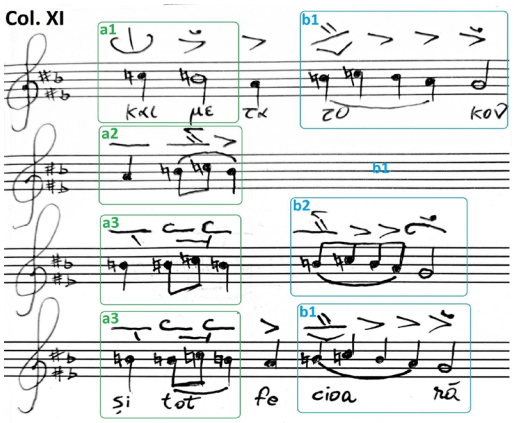
1.E, Hu, I; 2. B; 3. Ko, S; 4. Ha; 5. Ka (a2b3)



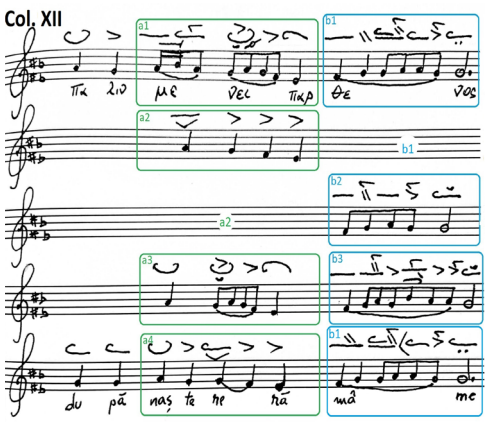
1.E, B; 2. Hu; 3. I; 4. Ka, Ko, S (a1b3); 5. Ha (a2b3).



1.E; 2. Hu, I, B, Ka, Ha, Ko, S; 3. B.



1.E; 2. Hu, I, S, Ko, Ha, Ka; 3 B.



1.E, Hu, I; 2. Ka, Ko, S; 3. B; 4. Ha.

Table 1. *Comparative analysis of the variants*

	Cola	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	Process
G	Mode						a2	b2	a2/a3/b2					5
R	Ornament	b2		a2/b2		b3/b2			b3/b4	a2			a2/a3/b3	11
E	Path					a2	a2/b2	a2/b2	a2/a3/b2	b2/b3	a2	a2/a3		13
E	Duration						b2	a2	a3/b2			b2	b2	6
K														
R	Mode	a2/c2		c2			c2	c2	c2/b5					7
O	Ornament					b4							a4	2
M.	Path	a2/c2		c2	a2	b4	c2/b2	c2	a4/c2/b5				a4	12
	Duration			c2		b4	c2/b2	c2	a4/c2				a4	8

Table 2. *Classification of variational processes*

The comparison of the Romanian variant was made not only with Efesios's full variant but also with each variant from the variational process. The goal was to check whether any figure from the Romanian variant appeared in at least one of the eight Greek editions, considering that Efesios's variant does not always reflect the simple, unembellished profile. Seven new points of variation were identified in the Romanian variant (which had not varied in the Greek editions, with only one case potentially influenced by the mismatched prosodic structure of the Romanian translation), representing formulas, phrase segments, or even an entire phrase, where 29 variational processes occurred. Given that this analysis involves the comparison of a single variant, rather than eight, we consider the variational process in this case to be much broader. Notably, this variant retains nine cadential

formulas identical to those in one of the printed versions, five phrases identical to at least one Greek version, or a combination of identical melodic figures from those Greek sources. However, in other five phrases (1, 3, 4, 6 and 7), although the prosodic structure could allow for the unaltered melodic line from the Greek version, a different melodic line is applied while maintaining the same cadence pitch. This line shifts toward other modal centers and avoids the internal symmetry of the first four phrases preserved by all other authors.

3. Conclusions

In the case of the eight Greek editions analyzed, no discrepancy or stylistic differences are observable as in those from the 13th to 14th centuries, with the scope of modifications being minimal. The variations of the prototype melody are expressive, differing in appearance but identical in structure. While printed editions aim for stability, they cannot be fully descriptive. This can be observed from the fact that, just as a thousand years ago in Byzantium, an oral variant from the same Greek tradition circulates alongside the written versions, and this is still the case today (it is true that the modifications are not as significant as they were back then). This reflects the tradition's dynamism rather than a departure from it. It is not about a musical improvisation, but rather about citing a formula or a melodic path specific to the genre from which it belongs. The formulas (thesis) of this music are alive in those who perform it, and sometimes, in certain contexts, even the imitation of an archetype can become an opportunity for renewal.

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