

PSALTIC CHANT VERSUS CHORAL MUSIC IN THE CONTEXT OF NINETEENTH CENTURY ROMANIA (SECOND HALF)

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ABSTRACT

Byzantine music is today, in Romania, undergoing a profound process of rediscovery and revival, after approximately 130 years marked by political changes which, more often than not, exerted a negative influence upon the life of the Orthodox Church and its culture. This return to the psaltic chant of Byzantine tradition, in order to be fully embraced, requires a thorough understanding of the historical events and of the sinuous path which, on many occasions, endangered the very practice of this ecclesiastical music within the liturgical sphere.

The present article therefore aims to highlight several significant moments along this historical trajectory, beginning with the second half of the nineteenth century and extending into the early decades of the last century—a period in which numerous official changes were introduced within the Church, including in the musical domain. At the same time, strong reactions emerged from within the Church against such imposed cultural and musical reforms, reflecting the conflict between tradition and innovation that arose from the intrusion of political forces into ecclesiastical life at that time.

Keywords: Byzantine music, choral music, Liturgical music, Musical Westernization

INTRODUCTION

The context of the second half of the nineteenth century constituted a turning point not only for Romanian society, but also for the ecclesiastical culture, with repercussions that continue to be felt to this day. The infiltration of choral music into the Romanian Orthodox Church during this period elicited diverse reactions: while some clergy, teachers, and chanters expressed themselves vehemently against the use of harmonic singing in churches, others regarded it as progress, modernization, and a natural evolution leading towards the “great culture of Europe.” At the same time, another direction advocated the transcription of the principal psaltic repertoires into staff notation for liturgical use, and encouraged the coexistence of the two musical genres.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As a method of presentation, the present study brings once again to the reader’s attention old historical documents—many of them musical, historical, or liturgical publications—which bear witness to the events, particularly from the period of the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1859–1866).

PSALTIC CHANT AND THE “CURRENT OF PROGRESS”

The scholar Vasile Vasile observes that the new direction of choral-harmonic music, which began to develop in the United Principalities, did not in itself undermine the