

Hymn as fundamental expression of musical practice of apostolic tradition

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In the usual terminology connected to religious singing, **Hymn** defines as generalization all musical hypostasis of the liturgical poetry; and not by chance even today at Theology faculties the courses of liturgical singing are taught within the subject called **Hymnology** . And so, theologians and laics as well will freely use this general term by letting the nuances of particular aspects to those of strict speciality. We often talk about **Great Hymns** of the Liturgy by thinking at Heruvic, Trisagyon, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei without being conscientious of their genuine characteristics or the role they take in the relevance of the ritual discursivity.

On the other hand, based on the oriental tradition churches, it is frequently used, in hymnological context, the term **Tropar** with the following annotations of ritual-genuine origin: as *The Tropar of Birth*, *The Tropar of Resurrection*, *The Tropar of Saint Basil* and others.

For starting, here are the definitions taken by our terminology Dictionary:

The Tropar,

-it is the smallest hymnological form unitary built through the development of an invocation. The tropar is the basic of the great hymns constructions such as: **Condac** * (odes) or **Canon** * (poem). Connected with the term of tropar we must also take into consideration the **irmos** * or the **icos** *.

“ **T.** , the oldest, the smallest and the simplest form of hymnological poetry, under the form of a poetic verse, unitary built through the development of an invocation, acclamations or exclamations, that is sung (or read) at the end of vecernia, at the beginning and the end of Utrenia, at the small vohod of the Liturgy and at the hours mass. Placed between Psalms, the tropar is destined to characterise the celebration of the day and to interrupt, by a more rhythmical singing, the psalmody [...]” (**B-Bucur** p.501)

“Tropar (gr. *to troparion* , from gr. *tropos* – way, face, because it worships the way a saint lives, or from gr. *to tropaion* – trophy, victory, because it worships the victory of saints over the devils or passions) or **stihira** – the oldest and fundamental form of poetry of liturgical hymnography. In Greek, the tropar respects, in form, the laws of poetical composition (rhythm, rime, number of syllables); through the translation in Romanian, it is written in prose, by respecting the content, rather than the form [...]” (**DECR** p. 522-23)

With this occasion we would like to emphasize that the **Hymn** is a generic term for the entire musical religious creation of Eastern tradition, wishing to present as follows some other inherent aspects defined through genuine annotations (we will quote from the same Dictionary):

Trinitarian Hymn,

- (*For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen*) one of the most common religious hymns, called the small Doxology. Currently it is used since the 4 th century to compose multiple hymns (see Trisagyon*) or for the ending of ectenias (see

ecfonis*). (In Latin Church is marked through the same content: *Gloria Patri et Filii et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum Amen*, having as well an essential role in ending the Hymns and Psalms).

Heruvic,

“heruvims hymn, in Byzantine Liturgy a melismatic song in papadic style. Dates from the 6 th century [...] With the introduction within the orthodox church of the choral polyphony *a cappella* **h.** has become an important hymn, with slightly perceptible connections with the originary melismatic style.” (**DTM**, p. 228) "(herouvicon, herouvicos imnos), name derived or figured from the name of angels army of heruvims, that begin the hymn *Us, who secretly imagine the heruvims* , sung at the liturgy while the priest brings from proscomidy to prestol, by avoiding the vohod through naos, the Honoured Gifts (bread, wine, blessed at proscomidy) for the liturgical sacrifice. In orthodox cult there are four familiar texts of heruvic: *May all body be silent* , from St. Basil Liturgy from last Saturday, that seems to be the oldest, because we can find it as well in the Jacob Liturgy of apostolic origin; *The Last Supper* from the same liturgy from last Thursday; *Now the holy powers* from St. George the Great Liturgy (Dialogue), that is performed on Wednesdays and Fridays in certain holy weeks and *Us, who secretly imagine the heruvims* , from John Hrisostom Liturgy, performed in most days over the years, and which, under Justin II reign (565-578) has probably replaces the one from Apostle Jacob Liturgy, *May all body be silent* .” (**B-Bucur** p 491)

Sanctus (Saint),

- the forth section from Catholic Ordinarium Missa* where it connects to the acclamation *Benedictus* , in one common corpus. It has this name after the exclamations from the beginning of this hymn: *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis* (Saint, Saint, Saint is Lord Sabaoth. Full is the sky and the earth of His Praise. Osana into the above.)

Te Deum,

- “hymn by Niceta de Remesiana (335-404), that began with the words: *Te Deum laudamus...* ” (**DTM** p.474). “ **TEDEUM** or **DOXOLOGY** is a religious service of gratitude and praise to the Lord in various festive occasions from the personal or social life of Christians. It is a hierurgy, a sacred mass, of younger origin than other hierurgies performed by the Church. It is called *Te Deum* from an ancient Latin Hymn, that makes part of this mass: *Te Deum laudamus* (“We praise You, Lord, we praise You”) [...] (**DECR** p. 499) The Latin Hymn *Te Deum laudamus* is more familiar under the name of *Hymnus Ambrosianus* *.

Trisagyon,

- **three times sacred** hymn [from the Greek: *Aghios O Theos, Aghios Ischyros, Agihos athanatos, eleison imas* =Tri-aghios] [...] By intersection with **Trinitarian Hymn** * **T** realises a three-verse special typology.

Thus the trisagyon becomes a structural model, through the local and intonational tradition, for the intonation of the hymns “Your Cross” (on cross day) or “How Many in Christ Were Baptised” (on great celebrations), cases in which the trinitary hymn remains unchanged!

We have easily come to understand a con-substantial aspect of Christian hymnology of apostolic tradition, and that is **the definition of the hymn as structural model**. In Byzantine hymnological practice, the tropar will be the model of configuration for some various hymnological typologies, and some of them, grace to the typical customs, become effective structural models and intonational archetypes .

In Gregorian hymnological practice, there were two distinctive structural models: *Psalm* and *Hymn* . What we know today under the name of Gregorian music is based upon the ancient music of the Roman Rite and it symbolically refers to the Pope Great George . Though the presence of songs connected to the biblical texts, the Western church frames the essential differences with the Eastern Church that will be dominated by the so-called confessional songs. As a consequence, the segmentation of the musical articulation in Gregorian is modelled by the biblical text that will determine the up-rising of some structural typologies, the most common being the one from the psalm* (Not by chance we use today this kind of music as generical term « Gregorian psalmody »); with this we find also the hymn* (*Hymnus* * from which there were configured within the liturgical singing some typologies of juxtaposition as *Litania* * and of *Sequence* *). The biblical texts had to be translated, usually in prose. In many cases, there were attempts of some adaptations – prose of rhythmical scandation. This is how the famous *Te Deum* * (Hymnus Ambrosianus*) was born, *Gloria in excelsis Deo* * (Hymnus angelicus* – known as well under the name of Great Doxology*) or *Sanctus* * (Hymnusseraphicus*). Even so, the majority of the biblical texts will follow the structural model of psalm, even though it is not a direct reference to them. Liviu Pandrea mentions: “[...] in original Hebrew, the psalms were not only a poetical text, but also a melodic aria, because they were especially composed to be performed with instrumental accompaniment. This is why the psalms have never been appreciated at their real value and beauty, and never been listen to, in their entire savour, but only in the sacred environment and with choral and instrumental accompaniment of the Jerusalem temple.” The Psalmody is the singing of psalms, but, beside the 150 biblical Psalms in this category we also have those 14 biblical songs from the Old Testament [Cantemus Domino (Canticum Moysi-Exodul 15), Domine audivi (Canticum Habacuc) Ego dixi (Canticum Ezechiae) and others] together with the 3 gospel songs (from the New Testament [Magnificat (B.M. Virginis); Nunc dimittis (Canticum Simeonis) and Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel (Canticum Zahariae)]. By its characteristic form, the Psalm has forced onto the liturgical song a well-firmed structural model. With more lines, the psalm can be longer or shorter depending on the biblical text it appeals to. [The shortest is Psalm 116 (Hebr. 117) “Praise the Lord all people” (“laudate dominum omnes gentes”) that only contains 2 lines; the longest being the Psalm 118 (Hebr. 119) “Happy those with no sins” (“Beati immaculati in via”) that has 176 lines.] As we know, with the exception of the first eight psalms (1-8) and the last three psalms (148-150) the

numbers from the masoreic text are not the same as those from the main version (LXX Greek and Vulgata Latin). [...] Here is a synoptical view of the two numberings:

(after LXX and Vulgata) Numbering in Hebrew text

.....

Ps.1 - Ps.8 Ps. 1 - Ps.8

Ps. 9 Ps..9 - Ps. 10

Ps. 10 - Ps. 112 Ps. 11 - Ps. 113

Ps. 113 Ps. 114 - Ps. 115

Ps. 114 - Ps. 115 Ps. 116

Ps. 116 - Ps. 145 Ps. 117 - Ps. 146

Ps. 146 - Ps. 147 Ps. 147

Ps.148-149-150 Ps.148-149-150

We quote from the same Dictionary the article that refers to the hymn:

HYMN

1. is the second structural model of the Gregorian song that has been taken by St. Ambrosie from Eastern practice. In a first phase, it has kept its ditirambic free form. (**Gloria in excelsis** or **Te Deum** are formed from lines in prose quasi-psalmodic.) At the base of the Gregorian hymn there is the **liturgical poetry** , composed by various artistic, in which the alternance between accent and non-accent, together with the fixed number of syllables gives the impression of metric scandation. [Beside St. Ambrosie of Milan, with a great number of hymns (in iambic scandation), we also know creations from St. Hillarie of Poitiers (who composed in Latin strophic hymns upon all rules of the Greek classical verse) or St. Prudentius of Spain, who also writes long strophic compositions upon various Latin meters. The order element of hymnical scandation has been the metric taken from the verses of classical antiques. **The structural model of the hymn was determined by the rigors of the model verse**, on which base the others verses were sung. All hymns ended with the same melodic formula, which was fit on the end of that particular mode. In principle, the structure of the hymn follows a catena with N verse, ended with clausula Amen (an addition of a more recent date).

A famous hymn, addressed to St. John , **Ut queant laxis** , has melodic incisions that begin each with a higher note, thus accumulating the ascendant scale of the seven notes in an octave. The first syllable in the line will later call the note it starts on. This is where the syllable name of the musical scale came from:

Ut queant laxis **Re** sonare fibris **Mi** ra gestorum

Fa muli tuorum **Sol** ve polluti **La** bii reatum

S ancte **J** oannes:

The basic element of the structural model of hymn is the verse with all versification laws. As said before, the hymns used in Gregorian singing were composed in Latin by different authors based on the poetry laws of Greek-Latin tradition.

Hymn is sung poetry or «versed song» . The term cantus itself in Latin had a double meaning, both as song and as poetry in verses. (In the same way, “carmen” has both the meaning of song, as well as poetry-poem-versed composition.) Ever since the 5 th century, St. Augustine defined the Hymn as song in verses to praise the Lord; if not in verses, than it cannot be called as such.

In order to debate the on going of these structural models in the context of liturgical practice, a recordation of our reasoning to the ritual customs born from the sacred dimension to perpetuate the apostolic tradition for Christ followers is necessary. But this aspect is way over the limits of this paper, so we will stop here. In the end, we would only like to remind you a beautiful definition of the hymn, definition that, by the concision of the Latin expression, adds all up without the need for further comments.

" Hymnus est laus Dei cum cantico ". (**Tinctoris** p. 31)

" Hymnus cantus est cum laude Dei. Si laudas Deum, et non cantas, non dicis hymnum; si laudas aliiud quod non pertinet ad laudem Dei; et si canta do laudas, non dicis hymnum. Hymnus ergo tria ista habet, et cantum, et laudem, et Dei. Laus ergo Dei in cantico, himnus dicitur."

ABBREVIATIONS of the bibliographical references in text:

B-Bucur Sebastian Barbu Bucur, *Psaltichie Rumâneasca* , Ed. Episcopiei Buzaului, 1992

DECR Ene and Elena Braniste *Dictionar Enciclopedic de cunostinte religioase* Editura Diecezana Caransebes, 2001

DTM *** *Dictionar de termeni muzicali*, Editura stiintifica si enciclopedica, Bucuresti, 1984

Langa Tertulian Langa *Credo, Dictionar teologic crestin din perspectiva ecumenismului catolic* , Ed. Dacia , Cluj 1997

Pandrea *** *Cartea psalmilor* (Sefer Tehillim), translation from Hebrew by Pr. Dr. Liviu Pandrea, Ed. Viata Crestina Cluj 1993.

Tinctoris Johannis Tinctoris *Terminorum musicae Diffinitorium* (1475), Richard Mass Ed., Paris , 1951

1. Valentin Timaru *Notional and Terminological Dictionary*, Publishing House of the University of Oradea , 2002.

2. We said that by thinking of the intonational rigors determined by the configuration of *voices* . For example the mention: *The tropar of the Saint of vocie!*

3. The Saint Great George, pope between 590-604, has opened the process of sistematization of the liturgical singing in the context of some liturgical context because: “George wanted an united Europe in faith and law, in freedom and respect toward the human being.” [Claudio Rendina *Popes. History and Secrets* Ed. ALL 2002 page 161].

4. Pandrea , preface p. VII

5. Pandrea, preface p. IX

6. RIEMANN *Musik-Lexicon* , Mainz , 1967, pag. 500 ; The quote is attributed to St. Augustin, taken exactly – as seen – by the Tinctoris in his Dictionary.