

Summary:

A case of survival of 13th - 14th century melodic traits in an Easter chant from the island of Zakynthos

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The church music of the Eptanesa or Ionian islands differs considerably from the so-called Neo-Byzantine Chant which is presently in use in most Greek churches. It is of Cretan origin and was brought over to the Eptanesa in 1669. That was the year when a large number of Cretans fled to the Eptanesa to escape from the Turks who had just taken over the island from the hands of the Venetians. In Crete this music soon fell into disuse, whereas in the Eptanesa it was adopted and developed in most of the "Seven Islands" and maintained its popularity up to today. On account of its origin the Eptanesians refer to this music as "Cretan" or "Cretoeptanesian".

Just like all forms of Byzantine Chant the Cretoeptanesian idiom is divided into eight groups or modes (echoi) and the melodies belonging to each mode are composed according to the formulaic techniques described by Wellesz and other specialists. On the other hand the idiom has incorporated some Western elements in certain melodic features and in the fact that it is performed in four parts. The first tenor sings the line of the melody, as handed down by tradition, while the three other singers (a second tenor and two bass voices) improvise a simple harmonic accompaniment including several parallel fifths and octaves.

The Cretoeptanesian chant was enjoyed and cultivated especially in the island of Zakynthos, where it acquired an independence of its own. Up to today most Greek writers on music considered the

various forms of Cretoeptanesian chant and especially that of Zakynthos as being a hotchpotch of unassimilated influences from the East and the West. But recent studies have shown that they were totally mistaken.

One of the most expressive melodies of the Zakynthian repertory is the Hirmos of the First Ode of the Easter Canon which starts with the words *Αναστάσεως Ημέρα*. When I first recorded this melody in Zakynthos in 1985 I was struck by its similarity to its much older medieval - and for many centuries obsolete - Byzantine counterpart. On the other hand I was quite impressed by the fact that it had almost no relationship to its more or less contemporary Neo-Byzantine counterpart (see Exx. 1 and 3-7).

Between 1985 and 1992 I recorded in Zakynthos three more variants of the same melody (see Ex. 2). The comparison of these additional versions to their Byzantine counterpart reveals a series of even more striking similarities (see Exx. 8-10).

It would be a mistake to jump to the conclusion that because of these similarities the Zakynthian Chant has a stronger Byzantine flavour than the Neobyzantine Chant. Both stem directly from the Middle Ages, but each of them has retained in some cases more or less the same Byzantine elements and in others somewhat different ones for reasons which have yet to be explored.

