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## INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION: SERBIAN MONOPHONY IN A POLYPHONIC CONTEXT

Abstract: The venerable arguments concerning the validity of harmonized music in the Orthodox Church continue. Serbia is unique in that the codifiers of the monophonic repertoire (in particular Stanković and Mokranjac) were also the initiators of the harmonic tradition. Comparison with Bulgaria and Romania prove that there are parallels elsewhere, but the systematic quality of the work of both Stanković and Mokranjac is unique. The character of Mokranjac's work in particular is determined by the working out of the harmonic and melodic implications of the monophonic tradition.

Keywords: Serbia, monophony, polyphony, Mokranjac, Stanković.

In parallel with the argument that monophonic chant is in some way purer than harmonized singing in the context of the worship of the Orthodox Church, it has frequently been argued that harmonization in some way destroys the integrity of a monophonic chant. Such arguments are hardly new, as the experience of the Russian Church shows, and more recently such discussion has been particularly vehement with regard to the use of harmony in the Greek churches of the United States of America; it is enough to consider the amount of space devoted to harmonized music in articles discussing the various traditions of Orthodox chant in prestigious publications such as *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* or *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* to become immediately aware that it is

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> V. for example, D. Conomos, "Early Christian and Byzantine Music: History and Performance", at http://www.monachos.net/liturgics/chant\_history.shtml – "The most appropriate Christian music is monophonic plainchant. It does not have to be Byzantine chant, or Old Believer, or Old Slavonic or Coptic chant; and ideally it should not be polyphonic". The "practical" objections Conomos adduces as justifications for this point of view are, in fact, as applicable to monophonic singing as they are to polyphony.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> A particularly thought-provoking discussion of this problem is A. Grindenko, "The Perspectives of Reviving Znamenny Singing in Russia", in: *The Traditions of Orthodox Music*, Joensuu 2007, 363–374 (Russian version, 351–362). For a penetrating discussion on the way harmonization was perceived in Russia and the way it was carried out in relation to the nationalist agenda, v. M. Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, New Haven and London 2007, 265–300.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> To enumerate the arguments comprehensively would be impossible, but one may see such discussions on many internet discussion groups and websites: v. for example, the homily by Fr. A. Cook, on the need to return to traditional church music at <a href="http://www.newbyz.org/franthonyarticle.pdf">http://www.newbyz.org/franthonyarticle.pdf</a>. Essentially, the arguments against harmony is that it destroys the integrity of the modal line, and that it is a Western innovation that has no part in Orthodox church tradition. These arguments are reinforced by the vast quantity of choral music of a very low technical standard in use in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in the USA which is, in addition, usually based on the melodies of Sakellarides.

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the monophonic tradition that is considered really important; the inference is always that polyphonic choirs have brought destruction upon the original pristine purity of monodic chant.

I have elsewhere discussed the problematic automatic dismissal of harmony that has come to be taken as "canonical" in many areas of the Orthodox world;4 there has, in fact, been no such dismissal or prohibition issued in any bindingly legal fashion relating to the Orthodox Church as a whole. Rulings on what is deemed acceptable liturgically have been occasional and local – that by Metropolitan Meletios (Pigas, later Patriarch of Alexandria) in 1590 being a case in point: "We do not censure either monophonic or polyphonic singing as long as it is proper and decent. [...] As for the noise or droning of animate (sic) organs, Justin the Philosopher-Martyr condemns it; and it was never accepted in the Eastern Church".5 Even the famous encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarch Anthimos of 1846 was sent spefically to the Greek community of Vienna and presumed that all Orthodox belonged to "the Greek Orthodox race".<sup>6</sup>

This being the case, then, one may surely and legitimately ask "exactly what does harmony do to a monophonic chant?" or "how does harmony relate to monophonic chant?" That question must surely have been asked by the originators of the harmonic tradition in Serbia, especially those who were actively engaged in the collecting, preserving and codifying of the oral tradition of monophony – and here, of course, one is immediately confronted by the names of Kornelije Stanković (1831–1865) and Stevan Mokranjac (1856–1914). The latter inevitably built on the work of the former, and, while none of his reforming ideas will be unfamiliar to scholars of the history of western Latin-rite chant, in the context of Orthodox worship and bearing in mind in particular the weight that the idea of tradition has had in that same context, Mokranjac's comments on his experiences at the St Sava Seminary in Belgrade are revealing: chant was "learnt by heart, which allowed the better singers greater artistic individuality and explains

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> I. Moody, "The Idea of Canonicity in Orthodox Liturgical Art", in: *Church, State and Nation in Orthodox Church Music*, Joensuu 2009, 337–342.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> I. Malyshevsky, *M. Pigas*, Kiev 1872, 89; English translation provided in Vladimir Morosan, *Choral Performance in Pre-Revolutionary Russia*, London 1986, 40. V. also: I. Moody, *op. cit.* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Anthimos speaks of Byzantine chant as the "best ornament of the Greek Orthodox race" ("Γραικῶν ὀρθοδόξου Γένους ἐκ τῶν αὐχημάτων τὸ κάλλιστον") ν. "Επίσημος Καταδίκη τῆς Τετραφωνίας", *Κιβωτός*, Ἰούλιος 1952, 302–303.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The concentration in the present case on Stanković and Mokranjac, on account of the liturgically systematic nature of their work, should not, however, cause one to lose sight of the earlier chant transcriptions made by Nikola Đurković (1812–1875) and Spiridon Trbojević (before 1820 – after 1870), or that of later musicians such as Tihomir Ostojić (1865–1921), Nenad Barački (1878–1939) or Branko Cvejić (1882–1951).

why there are so many variations to the same melody and why this chanting was often modified and then restored again". 8 He espoused, in fact, what is now considered the dangerous ideal of editorial purity, but the fact is that Mokranjac was uniquely able to undertake the work of transcription and arrangement, with his combination of profound musicality, western education and detailed knowledge of the Serbian tone system. It was this combination that would form the foundations of his work in Serbian chant.9

Related to the beginnings of a notated octoechos and its harmonization is the question of the relationship of Serbian church chant to both Byzantine and neo-Byzantine repertoires, a question that is still very much open, though research is in progress; recent work by Vesna Peno in particular has begun to shed light on a period during which has been until now, precisely on account of the lack of written evidence, a huge gap in the history of Serbian music. 10 Whatever revelations this research may bring, and whatever the origins of the relationship of this "third stage" of Serbian chant to earlier Serbian adaptations of late Byzantine repertoire. 11 it is this corpus of chant that Mokranjac knew ("I knew and sang the whole 'irmologij' by heart", he observed)<sup>12</sup> and notated, abolishing the simplified graphical system previously in use at St Sava's Seminary in Belgrade and introducing standard western notation; and it is this corpus of chant that he and others harmonized.

Paradoxical though it may in retrospect seem that it was the collectors, notators and codifiers, in particular Stanković and Mokranjac, who were also the harmonizers, it is important to see this in context. The fact of widespread musical illiteracy in Serbia during a large part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century gave impetus to the impulse for collecting and codifying; and western and Russian influences gave impetus to the establishment of polyphonic choirs and the construction of repertoires suitable for them. Thus it is that it is possible to refer to "the classical harmony of [the] Serbian chant

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> К. Манојловић, Споменица Стевану Ст. Мокрањиу, Београд 1923; reprint: Неготин 1988. Quotation translated by V. Ilić, "Foreword", in: Сабрана дела Стевана Стојановића Мокрањиа 6/III: Духовна музика 3, Београд – Књажевац 1996.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> V. inter alia Ivan Moody, "Tradition and Modernism in Serbian Church Music in the 20th Century". Orientalia et Occidentalia, 6 (2010), 195-199.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> V. for example V. M. Peno, "О мелодији божићног кондака трећег гласа Дјева днес", Зборник Матиие српске за сиенске уметности и музику 32–33 (2005), 25–36 and eadem, "Заједничке лествичне особености новије грчке и српске црквено-појачке традиције", Музикологија 8 (2008), 101–125.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. M. Velimirović, "Serbian church music", section 5 of "Russian and Slavonic church music", in: Grove Music Online (Accessed December 22th 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Foreword to: С. Стојановић Мокрањац, Осмогласник. I Српско народно ирквено појање, Београд 1908; quoted also in: V. Ilić, op. cit.

(Kornelije Stanković and Stevan St. Mokranjac)". <sup>13</sup> Mokranjac's work is seen both as traditional and innovative: "Mokranjac's way of harmonizing these Beatitudes, troparia, kontakia and prokimena is classical, but also highly individual. They have skilfully added secondary harmonies, which lend an archaic tone to the whole. <sup>14</sup>

A case in point is Mokranjac's setting for mixed choir of *Vozbrannoy voevode*,<sup>15</sup> a version of the melody much closer to the received Greek version than is the Karlovac chant published in 1923 by Barački<sup>16</sup> (though there is also a setting for male choir of an almost identical version of the melody Barački published).<sup>17</sup> The melody, with its initial movement from "F" to "G", is treated as being in a harmonic area oscillating between "D" minor – achieved by virtue of the melodic line "G-B flat-A-F", which enables movement from "A" major to "D" minor – and "F" major, again by means of a perfect cadence from "C" major. This occurs within the space of the first five bars.

**Example 1.** Mokranjac, *Vozbrannoy voevode*, opening.



<sup>17</sup> Cf. Сабрана дела, ор. cit., 5/II, 57 and 6/III, 304–305.

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<sup>13</sup> Д. Петровић, Хиландарски ктитори у православном појању, Београд 1999, 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> V. Ilić, "Foreword", in: *Сабрана дела Стевана Стојановића Мокрањца 5/II: Духовна музика*, Београд – Књажевац 1995, 54–56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Сабрана дела Стевана Стојановића Мокрањца 6/III: Духовна музика, ор. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Н. М. Барачки, *Нотни зборник српског народног црквеног појања по карловачком напеву*, Крагујевац – Београд – Нови Сад 1995, 294–295.

The harmonic regions through which the piece travels subsequently are not distant (four full cadences on "F" major, one on "G" minor), but the harmonic movement between these cadences is rapid, and after the "C" pedal that opens *no jako imuščaja deržavu* the composer moves the melody to the alto – with the indication "ben marcato" – and by the sequential introduction of "E" flat in the bass and "F" sharp in the soprano (a chromatic movement neatly anticipating the piece's final melodic phrase) manages to suggest "G" minor, before coming to rest again on "C" (minor); the following three bars take us through "D" minor and back to "F" major. The chromatic alteration in the melody at *da zovem ti* (between "B" natural and "B" flat) is emphasized by it being an unexpected unison, the more striking because its first note, "B" natural, occurs immedately after an F major cadence.

**Example 2.** Mokranjac, *Vozbrannoy voevode*, final section.



This kind of pull between the "untreated" purity of the chant melody and sophisticated harmonic techniques is precisely what gives rise to the kind of description of Mokranjac's work cited above. Stanković had employed a much more static harmonic vocabulary, generally emphasizing the modal stability of the chant, as one may see, for example, in his *Roždestvo* 

*tvoje*, the apolytikion for the Nativity of Christ, <sup>18</sup> which barely strays from an oscillation between the tonic F minor and its dominant, C major. The upper, melody-bearing, voice is largely doubled a third below, thus leaving the bass to outline the harmonic functions and the tenor to complete the harmony.

**Example 3.** Stanković, *Roždestvo tvoje*, opening.



On the subject of the notation of Serbian chant, Vesna Peno has written that "Over the years many Serbian chanters and musicians have noted down church melodies, especially those from the Octoechos, in F or in G, with the key defined as either major or minor. However, it ought to be said that Serbian chanters in the recent past, as well as those who take part in worship today, do not consciously connect the mode, melos or melody with scale progression, but rather with melodic patterns. In other words, neither in the 19th century nor today have Serbian chanters sung characteristic intonation formulae for their respective scale structures, when crossing from one mode to another. The reason for this practice has already been mentioned: they learn complete melodies by heart, without thinking about their scale system". This is a tendency naturally reinforced when the melodies are harmonized, since such re-intonation becomes redundant; all that is

 $^{18}$  К. Станковић, Православно црквено појање у србског народа, 2, Беч 1863, 14–15.

<sup>19</sup> В. Пено, "Заједничке лествичне особености...", *ор. сіт.*, 125.

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required is one note, or a chord. Likewise, any chromatic tunings that may have existed would be ironed out by harmonization: in this respect, the evidence of Mokranjac as presented by Peno in her discussion of the relationship of Greek and Serbian repertories is revealing: "these melodies never give the major third its full height. They sing it a little lower, not because the mode could not encompass a major third but because it goes against the character of these melodies that stand as they are written down here, and as they are sung by all our older experienced singers". <sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Mokranjac recorded that "there was hardly a note that was given its true value. Every crotchet and quaver that began and ended with ornaments", ornaments that he himself did not transfer to his own Octoechos. The composer's "smoothing out" of the rough edges of what he heard naturally facilitated his elegant harmonic style: what is surprising and impressive is precisely how much the identity of the chant melodies with which he worked not only stand out from within the choral textures, but how they in turn, with their – by traditional western standards – idiosyncratic linear structures and consequent harmonic implications, define the way they are treated.

It is, because of the singular nature of the repertory, easy to think of these developments in Serbia in isolation. However, some valuable parallels are offered by events in Bulgaria and Romania during the same period.

The proclamation of the Third Bulgarian state in 1878 and the subsequent attempt to establish a nationalist aesthetic inevitably had an impact on church music in Bulgaria. Polyphonic choirs had appeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thus a number of composers, most notably Atanas Badev (1860–1908) and Dobri Hristov (1875–1941) were able to take advantage of them and create a repertory of Russian inspiration but of indisputably Bulgarian character. Hristov, a pupil of Dvořak, Novak and Suk, amade a significant contribution to church music, notably with his liturgies of 1925 and 1934, proclaiming himself a national composer by making use of melodic material from the the repertoire of the Bulgarian Church. His 1925 *Liturgy*, for example, contains several sections built on "Old Bulgarian motives" (*Po Starob*ālgarski motiv), including the Beatitudes – abbreviated as is

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Foreword to: С. Стојановић Мокрањац, Осмогласник. І Српско народно црквено појање, Београд 1908.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Quoted in V. Peno, "The Tonal Foundations of Serbian Church Chant", *Acta Musicae Byzantinae* III/1 (2001), 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Yulian Kuyumdzhiev lists 16 polyphonic settings of the Divine Liturgy written between 1885 and 1936, by 13 different composers. V. Ю. Куюмджиев, *Многогласната литургия в былгарската музика*, София 2003, 107–126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Full biographical information may be found in К. Япова, Добри Христов и идеята за личността и общността, София 1999; v. also the catalogue Архивът на Добри Христов. Каталог, София 2002.

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customary in services in Bulgaria – and the Anaphora. There is no sense of stylistic dissonance, however, between these sections and others of purely personal inspiration, such as the Cherubic Hymn.

Hristov later harmonized a number of Byzantine chants, under the influence of Petār Dinev (1889–1980). Dinev took a path that was in some senses similar to that of Hristov, in its practical application, and at the same time – chiefly aesthetically – quite different. He studied at the Ecclesiastical Seminary in Constantinople, and then went to St. Petersburg, thus receiving, like the controversial Ioannis Sakellarides in Greece, a thorough grounding in both Byzantine and and European "art" traditions.

Dinev's importance as a composer of church music derives precisely from this circumstance: he was alone in endeavouring to reconcile his Constantinopolitan training in the Byzantine tradition with the techniques of Russian choral polyphony. An example of this mixed technique is the setting of *Dostoyno est* from the *Sbornik* that Dinev published in 1941, "in the 5<sup>th</sup> tone, on motives by John of Ohrid". Dinev's procedure is essentially to "amplify" the *ison*, or drone, by doubling it in octaves or fifths, and shifting it from outer to inner voices and back again; this in combination with a genuine feel for the expressive potential of Russian-influenced harmonic procedures, produces a remarkable kind of stylistic superimposition.<sup>26</sup>

As far as Romania is concerned, polyphony had appeared in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century through Russian influence, but only later was it more widely adopted, by means of the work of such composers as Gavriil Musicescu (1847–1903), Gheorghe Cucu (1882–1932), and Ioan Chirescu (1889–1980). Romania experienced, in fact, a flourishing of Byzantine-based choral polyphony at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Nicolae Lungu (1900–1993) in particular was an enormously significant figure in this regard, something of a parallel to Dinev in Bulgaria. He published chant books in both Byzantine and western notation (notably the *Liturghia Psaltică*) and wrote his own harmonized settings (*Liturghia psaltică pentru 4 voci mixte*, 1957). His choral style embraces both modal harmony and sometimes

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> V. "Introduction" to *Литургия на Св. Ив. Златоуста*, София 1925, reprinted: Gersau 1988

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> The present discussion is largely based on my article "Tradition and Creation in Bulgarian Orthodox Church Music: The Work of Petar Dinev", in: *Church, State and Nation in Orthodox Church Music*, Joensuu 2010, 232–241.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> A recent examination of Dinev's work has appeared in В. Гелева, *Петьр Динев и неговото църковно-хорово наследство*, Пловдив 2008; v. also I. Moody, "Some Aspects of the Polyphonic Treatment of Byzantine Chant in the Orthodox Church in Europe", *Историја и мистерија музике. У част Роксанде Пејовић*, Београд 2006, 516–517.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> For a detailed survey of this period v. C. Moisil, "The Making of Romanian National Church Music", in: *Church, State and Nation*, 225–231.

startling dramatic textural changes. Other composers shared his approach, notably Ioan Chirescu (1889–1980).<sup>28</sup>

While Dinev's marriage of styles and Hristov's work written under his influence, and the similar accomplishments of Lungu, Cucu and Chirescu are entirely remarkable, it is also true to say, without underestimating their achievements, that none of them attempted a synthesis of the thoroughness of Mokranjac in Serbia. Indeed, the stylistic contrasts in the published work of Dinev and Lungu are striking precisely because of their extremity; Mokranjac, in absorbing the idiom of Serbian chant so deeply, and discovering a means of reconciling a refined version of it with his own harmonic practice, was singularly consistent. That said, it is important to realize that the question of vocabulary in chant had not arisen in Bulgaria, or in Romania, in precisely the way it had in Serbia. Indeed, Dinev himself was instrumental in the propagation of neo-Byzantine chant in Slavonic adaptations by means of his publication of an extensive series of transcriptions into western notation.<sup>29</sup>

To return to the question of Serbian chant, it is clear that it is not the fact of harmonization that causes this very particular repertory to lose its identity; on the contrary, it confers upon polyphonic music a very specific character by its very presence. Here, of course, the question of technical competence of such harmonization is of the essence; and it is precisely the high degree of such competence – to use no more emotive a word – that not only characterized the work of the uniquely qualified Stanković and Mokranjac, but that so effectively laid the foundations of polyphonic Serbian church music, built on the indigenous monophonic repertoire, for the future.

As Danica Petrović pertinently wrote in discussion of this repertory as part of the wider tradition of Serbian church music, "[it] was created on the basis of the Byzantine tradition, and has been developed and preserved until present times through the uninterrupted liturgical life of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and through the work of numerous priests, monks and laymen who added to its originality and beauty". <sup>30</sup> By continuing to value

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> For further discussion of these composers, v. I. Moody, "Some Aspects...", op. cit., 515–516.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> These consist of Духовномузикални творби на Иван Кукузел, София 1938 and Църковно-певчески сборник – probably 6 volumes, as follows: I Кратьк осмогласник и Божествена литургия, София 1947, II Обширен Възкресник, София 1949, III Триод и Пентикостар, София 1951, IV Пространни пападически песнопения от литургията, София 1953, V Църковни треби и Слави от Триода и Пентикостара, София 1957; available evidence suggests that volume VI was never published. For further information, v. I. Moody, "Tradition and Creation in Bulgarian Orthodox Church Music...", op. cit., 232–241.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> D. Petrović, "Church Chant in the Serbian Orthodox Church through the Centuries", in: *The Traditions of Orthodox Music*, Joensuu 2009, 195.

that tradition, and at the same time viewing it within a broader context, that "originality and beauty" will surely be enabled not only to survive, but flourish, for many more centuries.

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## ИНТЕГРАЦИЈА И ДЕЗИНТЕГРАЦИЈА: СРПСКИ ЈЕДНОГЛАС У КОНТЕКСТУ ВИШЕГЛАСА (Резиме)

Аргументи о валидности употребе хармонизоване музике у литургији у православној цркви постоје дужи низ година, и то у контекстима различитих традиција (најбољи примери су случајеви Руске цркве и Грчке православне архиепископске дијецезе у САД). Србија је јединствена по томе што су установитељи једногласног репертоара у XIX веку (нарочито Корнелије Станковић и Стеван Мокрањац), уједно били и иницијатори хармонске — вишегласне хорске традиције. Поређења са композиторима из Бугарске и Румуније, нарочито Диневим и Лунгуом, показују да је и у другим земљама било слично, с тим што је у фокусу рада поменутих музичара био неовизантијски репертоар, док је систематичност рада и Станковића и Мокрањца на специфичном српском појању јединствен пример.

Карактер Мокрањчевог литургијског рада посебно је детерминисан разрадом хармонских и мелодијских импликација једногласне традиције, и он представља резултат комбинације његовог изузетног познавања српске једногласне традиције (односно онога што Велимировић назива "трећим нивоом" у развоју српског појања), и његовог западњачког образовања. Циљ овог рада јесте покретање питања генералног задржавања идентитета једногласног појања у вишегласном контексту, и посебно разматрање начина на који се карактер хармонизованог репертоара у Србији дефинисао, будући да је настао на основу једногласне музичке традиције.

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