

**VESNA (SARA) PENO, “IZ HILANDARSKE POJAČKE  
RIZNICE – VIKENTIJE HILANDARAC”**

[From the Hilandar’s Chanters’ Treasury  
– Vikentije Monk from Hilandar Monastery],  
(Novi Sad, Art print, 2003), 236 pp. musical examples

It is not easy to write a brief review of an important new publication by a very talented young scholar writing on a complex topic that should be explained to readers who are not necessarily familiar with the subject matter. To try to present it in as simple terms as possible, this is a monograph about a Serbian monk who was both a copyist of musical manuscripts and a composer of music in the latter part of the 19th century, residing in the Serbian monastery Hilandar on Mount Athos in Greece. While stating this much, a reader of Slavic origin may recognize the substance of the topic and orient himself in time and space. However, a Western European or even a Central European reader would require additional information to grasp the complexity of the topic; so let us try to set the stage and proceed with the presentation of the essence of the content of this volume.

The general area under consideration is the domain in which centuries earlier the ecclesiastical organization and practices were part of the Byzantine cultural and religious tradition. From the second half of the 14th century onward the territories of the Balkan Peninsula were under Turkish domination which also included a strong presence of elements of Oriental culture. Nevertheless, religious practices of Christian communities continued to serve the needs of non-Turkish populations, even being enlarged and enriched by new aspects especially in the area of Chants, quite a few of which were composed and circulated in musical manuscripts copied usually in monasteries.

One aspect of the musical practice that still deserves to be studied with scholarly scrutiny deals with the evolution – if any ? – of the music itself. In other words, assuming that the medieval tuning and temperament used by Byzantine Greeks may be determined to have consisted of specific types of “scales” and/or “modes” (this term being used as a counterpart of the Greek technical term “echos”), the question that has to be raised is whether the “echoi” remained unchanged or whether they evolved in the course of centuries into somewhat different structures. Let me immediately state that to this writer’s knowledge, no definite answers have been given to these questions.

What transpired in the Byzantine cultural domain differs considerably from the events in the Western European musical practice where in due time a “well-tempered” system became dominant and was accepted in just about all the manifestations of the Art of Music to the present. In the Greek – cultural sphere that includes the Near East and territories conquered by the Turks, elements of the Near Eastern musical traditions were cultivated and a few concepts became mingled with existing traditions in Byzantium. Furthermore, apparently a number of theoretical treatises dealing with music were compiled but, regrettably, most of them remained unknown to Western European scholars and only a few are slowly gaining access to modern – contemporary study by the analytical approach of Western musicologists.

Greeks are territorially and culturally rather close to European attitudes toward the arts. And in the early 19th century a movement toward a theoretical study of the ecclesiastical music of the Greek Orthodox Church did take place. We refer to this theory and its accompanying notational system as the Chrysanthine theory, honoring thus the Archbishop Chrysanthos of Madytos, the author of the basic theoretical treatise that to this day Greek chanters accept as the source of musical theory and practice. To get an idea about the type of tuning and/or temperament “codified” by Chrysanthos and used to the present in Greek traditions, let me mention as one example – if I understand the argument – that what in the Western European theory of music is viewed as the interval of Major Second that within its ambitus contains two Minor Seconds, in the Chrysanthine theory the distance of the Minor Second is described as consisting of 6 (six) ‘moreia’ and yet it may contain also 4 or even 8 ‘moreia’ depending on the ‘type’ of scale. The Major Second would contain 12 ‘moreia’. The first reaction of a Western musician to this theoretical construct is that we are dealing with a NON-TEMPERED system that a Western trained singer would have difficulty to follow and interpret, not to mention that for a “traditional Western musician” brought up on well-tempered scales and nursery rhymes, such chanting of Greek and other Eastern Mediterranean musical repertoires may be viewed as “dissonant” and “out of tune”. And on the other hand, any attempts of Western scholars to study and transcribe Byzantine chant into Western musical notation will be deprecated by Greeks as “lacking understanding” of the subtleties of Greek musical notations and traditions.

Within the last half a century appeared a growing number of studies attempting to examine the relationship of the two neighboring cultural areas – The Byzantine Greek and Eastern Slavic [consisting of Russians (encompassing Ukrainians), Bulgarians, Serbs, including Romanians]. Unfortunately, most of the scholars involved in this endeavor were handicapped by insufficient command of the Greek language that presented a significant linguistic barrier. It is in this respect that the author of the volume under review, Mrs. Vesna Peno deserves our warmest congratulations for mastering the Greek language as well as the Chrysanthine theory and practice enabling her to discuss all aspects of ecclesiastical chants “on level” with Greek scholars and to communicate their views to non-Greeks. Interested in finding out the musical practices in the Serbian monastery Hilandar on Mt. Athos, Ms. Peno was fortunate to view the manuscripts from an area to which females do not have access, since the “monastic republic of Mt. Athos” does not permit females to visit what is viewed as “The Garden of the Virgin” who is celebrated as the “protector” of Mt. Athos. Fortunately the Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies in Thessaloniki is presently a repository of microfilms of most of the manuscripts from the monastic libraries on Mt. Athos. As for the monastery Hilandar, it was founded in the last decade of the 12th century by the retiring Serbian ruler Stefan Nemanja and his son Sava who shortly thereafter won for the Serbian church the independent status from the Greeks. Both Nemanja and Sava are venerated by the Serbs as saints and within the last few decades the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts assembled in Belgrade a collection of microfilms from the Hilandar library. These microfilms were the basic sources for Ms. Peno’s investigations that were further supported by ‘on the spot’ double checking of pertinent segments of MSS by her husband who prepared additional photographs of needed materials.

The fact that some Serbs became prominent in the composition and transmission of some individual chants had already been known and documented for the

late Middle Ages. But for the last several centuries of Turkish domination over the Balkan area, little was known about the life in some of the monasteries that were losing monks; in the case of Hilandar, in the 18–19th centuries it was practically “overrun” by Bulgarian monks. The discovery by Ms. Peno of a monk who did not hesitate to indicate his Serbian origin led to additional research establishing the facts that Vikentije, who lived between 1856 and 1927 was a significant copyist of manuscripts and a composer of some chants. He was fully trained and raised in the Chrysanthine tradition and notated his works in the neumatic notation of that tradition. As a special treat with this volume one finds a compact disc recording of some nine compositions of Vikentije, performed under Ms. Peno’s conducting a small student choir named Saint Cassiana, which Ms. Peno has trained to sing from the neumatic notation rather than the transcriptions into Western staff-notation. A hearing of this recording will provide new insights into changing taste and tradition on the Balkans.

While it is possible that Ms. Peno may be “accused” for “selling out to the Greek approach to the Chant” rather than adhering to the traditional chanting, usually related to the Russian models for singing of Church music, I find her research and attainments as opening a new era of studies that just may bridge the distance between the different interpretations of a rich repertory of ecclesiastical music in several Eastern European Languages. It is a pioneering effort that deserves full support for the continuation of researches that are enriching our knowledge of the multiplicity of Balkan traditions.

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## MUSIK UND WORT

### Bericht über die Konferenzen in Berlin und Bratislava

Die Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen Musik und Poesie, zwischen Wort und Ton, die für jede Epoche aktuell war, stand im Mittelpunkt zweier internationaler musikwissenschaftlicher Kongresse in diesem Jahr: dem der 4. internationaler Konferenz der WMA (“Wort-Musik Assoziation”, 18–21. Juni 2003, Berlin) und dem des 7. internationalen Symposiums im Rahmen des Musikfestivals Melos-Ethos (12–14. November 2003, Bratislava). Die erste Veranstaltung, die facettenreich und interdisziplinär konzipiert war, ist aus der langjährigen Zusammenarbeit von Experten aus verschiedenen Bereichen der Musik, Literatur und des Theaters erwachsen, die so über eigene methodologische Basis verfügen. Geistiger Vater dieser ‘Grenzgebietforschung’ ist Steven Paul Scher (Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH), der zahlreiche Arbeiten<sup>1</sup> im Bereich der musikalischen und literarischen Komparatistik veröffentlichte.

<sup>1</sup> Unter anderem, *Literatur und Musik. Ein Handbuch zur Theorie und Praxis eines komparatistischen Grenzgebietes*. Hrsg. Steven Scher, Erich Schmidt Verlag, Berlin