

ANCIENT GREEK MUSICAL THEORY AND BYZANTINE CHANT – POINTS OF INTERSECTION

A NEW RESEARCH PROJECT SUPPORTED BY THE PSALITIKE STUDY GROUP UNDER THE AUSPICES OF FONDAZIONE LEVI (VENICE)

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A CASE TOPIC

What is a musical note? What are the foundations of tonality?
An example of ‘osmosis’ of musical definitions between Ancient Greek and Byzantine traditions

Elements of the Papadike (§2)

Ἀρχὴ μέση τέλος καὶ σύστημα πάντων τῶν σημαδίων τῆς μουσικῆς τέχνης **τὸ ἴσον** ἐστὶ . χωρὶς γὰρ τούτου οὐ κατορθοῦται **φωνή**.

The ison is the beginning, the middle, the ending, and the coordination (systema) of all notational signs. For without this sign, a correct tonal degree (phone) cannot be established.

Hagiopolites (§45)

Καὶ ἐνηγήματα μὲν εἰσιν αἱ τῶν ἤχων ἐπιβολαί. ἐπεχήματα δὲ ἡ προσθήκη τοῦ ἐνεχήματος, καὶ κατιοῦσα <ἢ ἀνιοῦσαι> καὶ συναρμοζομένη **τῷ φθόγγῳ** τοῦ μέλλοντος προενεχθῆναι εἰς τὴν ψαλμωδίαν.

Enechemata are the intoning of the modes, Epechemata are the addition to the Enechema, descending <or ascending> and being adapted to the note (phthongos) which is going to be sung in the Psalmody.

Hieronymos Tragodistes (89-97):

Ἴσοφωνία τοίνυν κατὰ τοὺς νεωτέρους τῶν μουσικῶν ἐστὶν **ἀρχή, μέση τε καὶ τέλος**, καὶ τῶν σημαδίων ἀπάντων **σύστημα**.

According to the younger theoreticians, the establishment of a note level (isophonia) is the beginning, the middle, the ending and coordination of all notational signs.

Kleoneides (2nd-4th c. CE) (1.8)

φθόγγος μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ **φωνῆς** πτώσις ἐμμελῆς ἐπὶ μίαν τάσιν. διάστημα δὲ τὸ περιεχόμενον ὑπὸ δύο φθόγγων ἀνομοίων ... **σύστημα** δὲ ἐστὶ τὸ ἐκ πλειόνων ἢ ἑνὸς διαστημάτων συγκεείμενον.

A note is then the realization (ptosis) of a musical sound (phone) on a recognizable pitch (mian tasin). An interval is embraced by two different notes . . . and a coordinated musical structure (systema) is built from one or more intervals.

Manuel Bryennios (c. 1300), Book I.4:

φθόγγος ἐστὶ **φωνῆς** πτώσις ἐμμελῆς ἐπὶ μίαν τάσιν ... ἐπειδὴ πῆρ τὸ ὅλον μέλος πτώσις ἐστὶν ἐπὶ πολλὰς τάσεις καὶ τοσαύτας ὅσας ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιέχει κατὰ τὸ **σύστημα**.

A note is then the realization of a musical sound on a recognizable pitch. And since the whole melody embraces many different pitches, namely those it has in itself according to its musical structure (systema).

Manuel Bryennios, Book II.3

Καὶ γὰρ ὁ μὲν πρῶτος καὶ βαρύτατος τῶν προκατειλεγμένων ὀκτώ τόνων νήτην μὲν ἔχει τὴν μέσην, ... προσλαμβανομένην δὲ τὴν ἐν τῷ τελείῳ τοῦ ἡρμοσμένου **συστήματι** καλούμενην προσλαμβανομένην, ... καὶ γὰρ ἕκαστος τῶν τόνων ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσην καὶ τέλος ἔχει...

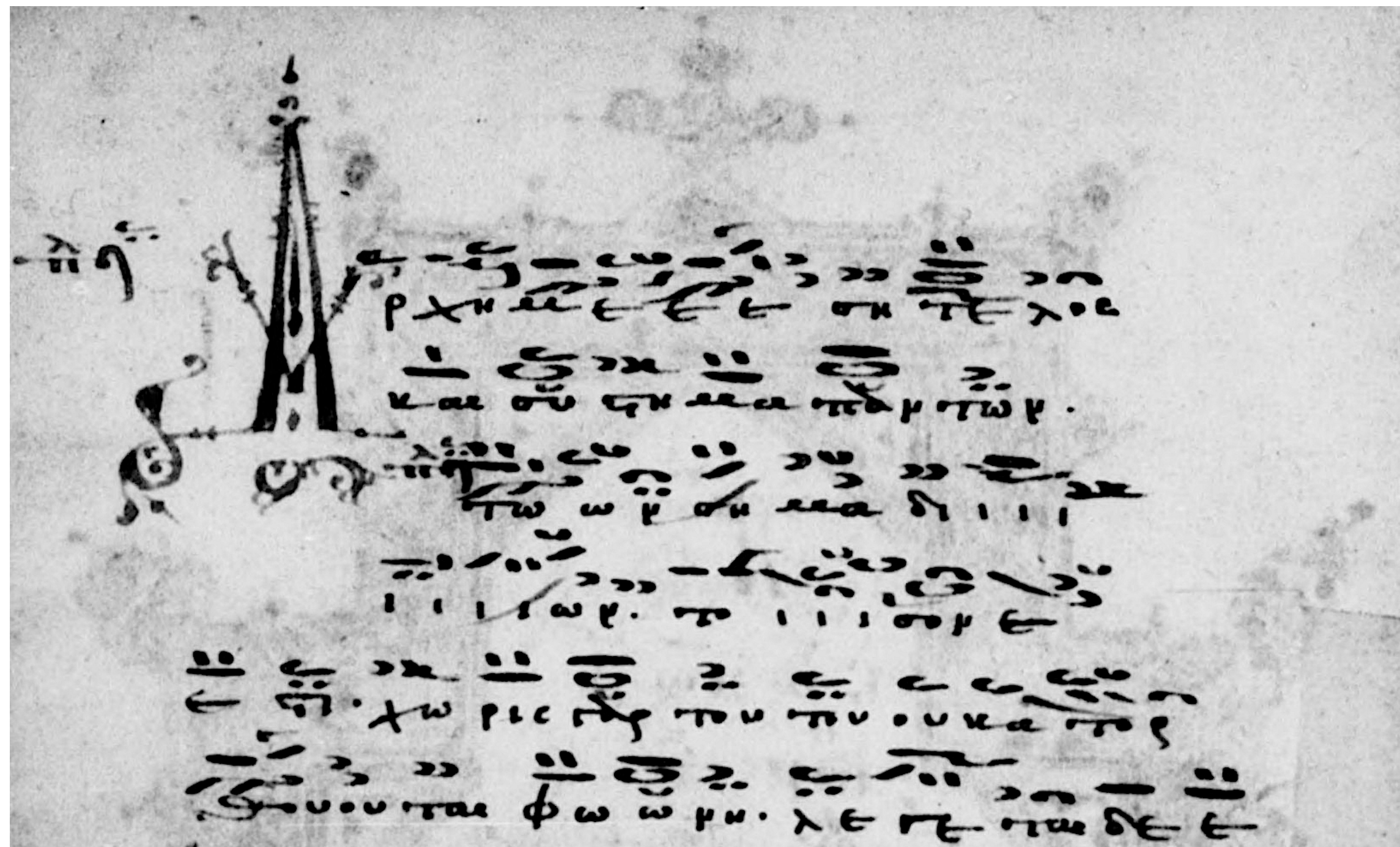
For the first and lowest of the abovementioned eight tones has the ‘Nete’ as its middle string . . . and the so-called ‘Proslambanomenē’ in the perfect coordinated harmonic system... for each of the tones has its beginning, middle and ending.

Description:

Verbalizing music involves definitions. It seems that a dialogue or exchange of terminology with Ancient Greek theory was an ongoing phenomenon when educational texts for Byzantine chant were created during the Middle Ages.

Ultimately, the old definition of a ‘note’ (phthongos) as a musical sound with recognizable relation to other musical sounds and as the foundation of tonality goes back to Aristoxenos, but was reflected in almost all later musical treatises, including the influential works by Kleoneides and Ptolemy. In Byzantine chant theory, the primary term for a tonally fixed point of departure is rather the ‘ison’. Nevertheless, phrasings around these matters appear ever converging.

An invitation: If you are interested in the particular topics related to the general theme of the intersections between Ancient Greek and Byzantine music, it might be possible to contribute to the project. Please contact Silvia Tessari.



The incipit of the Elements of the Papadike as tonalized by Theodoros Rodakinos, Sinai gr. 1552, fol. 1v, @Library of Congress Collection of Manuscripts in St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai

Lines of research:

--- Influences from Ancient Greek Music Theory in the **Papadike**, in the teaching about modes and about rhythm.
--- Elements of Ancient Greek Music, Grammar, Metrics and Rhetorics in the **nomenclature of Byzantine neumes**.

--- The possible relationships between the system of the **Masoretic signs** and the notational systems of Byzantine music.

--- The **poetic presentation of the modes**. Words and ethos in the verses of the Heirmologion.

--- A renewed look at the composition and reception of the **Hagiopolites** treatise.

--- “Ancient music” and “Byzantine chant” **during the quest for “Greek”** in the mid-17th century - or in the “Long Renaissance”: **Marcus Meibom and Leo Allatius**. Materials and letters are available in Biblioteca Angelica, Rome.

--- Investigation from the **CSRM** (esp. Gabriel Hieromonachos and ‘Die Erotapokriseis des Pseudo-Johannes Damaskenos’). Lexikon: εἶδος - ἰδέα, γένος, δύναμις - ἐνέργεια, ἦθος, τόνος, φθόγγος, αἴσθησις, μεταβολή etc., from different authors, as Claudius Ptolemaios, Porphyrios, Aristoxenos, Platon, Aristides Quintilianus and others.

--- **Georgios Pachymeres and Manuel Bryennios**.

--- The **“three genera”** in terminology and practice: ancient Greek music and the Nea Methodos theory.

--- **High-brow liturgical poetry** mentioning or alluding to the musical modes and their characteristics (e.g. new critical edition of the eight pentekostaria by patriarch Germanos II, inc. Τὸν πρῶτον σῶτερ ἐν βροτοῖς τῶν γηγενῶν τὴν ρίζαν, first ed. by A. Papadopoulos Kerameus from ms. Sankt-Petersburg, National Library of Russia Gr. 139.

--- Systematic analysis of **scholia or marginal annotations** in which there is an explicit link between ancient and Byzantine music tradition. Cf. e.g. ms. Patm. 52, f. 49v (9th-10th century):

Ὁ α΄ ἦχος λέγεται μελωδός Ὁ πλάγιος αὐτοῦ χορευτής

Ὁ β΄ ἦχος εὐήχος Ὁ πλάγιος αὐτοῦ Λύδιος

Ὁ γ΄ ἦχος νεαστής, ἡ Δώριος Ὁ πλάγιος αὐτοῦ Βαρύς

Ὁ δ΄ ἦχος ἀγλαίστης Ὁ πλάγιος αὐτοῦ ᾠσματικός

--- **Ptolemy's Harmonika** read in connection with Byzantine liturgical chants. E.g. Ms. Vat. Gr. 191 (13th-14th centuries).

Here Ptolemy's Harmonika (ff. 320-359) bear marginal scholia concerning Byzantine semiography. E.g. on f. 340r, there is one correlation of the names Dōrios Phrygios etc. with the ordinals (and additionally, here, to the martyriai). Ms. Vat. Gr. 191, immediately after Ptolemy, on f. 359v: ‘Protopseudodamaskēnos’ treatise.

Ptolemy, the Great Perfect System,
Bodleian Library MS. Barocci 124, f. 35r @ Bodleian Libraries, Oxford

