



JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
FOR ORTHODOX CHURCH MUSIC

Vol. 5 (1), Section III: Reviews, pp. 59-61

ISSN 2342-1258

<https://journal.fi/jisocm>

DER TRAKTAT DES AKAKIOS CHALKEOPULOS ZUM BYZANTINISCHEN KIRCHENGESANG

Gerda Wolfram (ed.)

Union Académique Internationale

Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae

Corpus Scriptorum de Re Musica Vol. VI

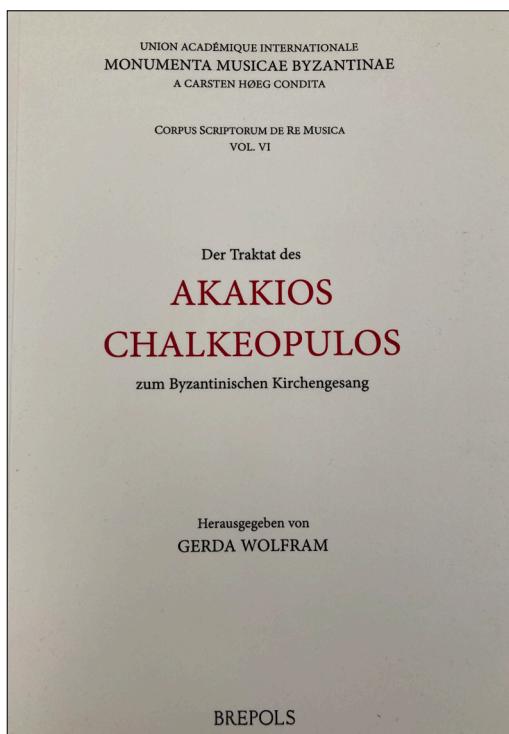
Brepols 2020

ISBN 978-2-503-58970-1

eISBN 978-2-503-58971-8 97pp. 52 figures

<https://www.brepolsonline.net/doi/pdf/10.1484/M.CSRM-EB.5.122673>

A critical edition of the treatise by the composer, *psaltes*, teacher and scribe Akakios Chalkeopoulos (fl. ca. 1490–1530), monk at the monastery of St Catherine in Chandax (today's Heraklion, Crete), has been a long-standing *desideratum* in the field of Byzantine musicology. Envisaged already in 1981, this project was at last brought to fruition by Gerda Wolfram in 2020.



The music treatise by Akakios Chalkeopoulos, written under Venetian influence at the beginning of the 16th century, is taken from codex GR-An 917, housed at the Greek National Library in Athens. Based on his treatise, together with the following Anastasimatarion (i.e., the book containing the resurrectional hymns of vespers and Sunday matins) and Anthology, Chalkeopoulos attempted to explain his interpretation of Byzantine chant. Furthermore, he wanted to show that the whole system of the Octoechos rests on the geometry of the 133 houses of the so-called Paschalion which is used for the calculation of the Easter calendar with the help of a diagram consisting of the seven letters of geometry (from

alpha to zeta). It seems to have been Chalkeopoulos himself who tried to connect the Paschalion with music: thus, he takes the seven letters of geometry for the seven, in fact eight, intervals of Byzantine chant which build the basis for the eight modes.

Akakios uses the popular question-and-answer form of his times to explain his theory to a Papas Ioannikos, teacher, musician and *psaltes* at the church of St Catherine. Together with the help of another method (called *organike methodos*), Akakios tries to provide the other teachers, chanters and composers with a practical tool for their work: he takes music examples which have compositional errors and corrects them in order to teach them compositional methods, metrophony and the correct use of the phthorai (i.e., the modulation signs).

Gerda Wolfram gives a detailed explanation of Chalkeopoulos's work in her introduction to the treatise as well as in her extensive commentary to the text itself at the end of the book. This is of great help for understanding the often quite dense and theoretical language of Chalkeopoulos. In a separate section after the commentary Wolfram also provides insights into Akakios's language and style, showing that he was greatly influenced by the vernacular literature of sixteenth-century Crete. In particular, the (incomplete) prooimion in the then-popular "political verse" (also known as decapentasyllabic verse) depicts Akakios as a child of his times.

As Wolfram explains, the prose of the main text of the treatise belongs to the established form of such theoretical texts and constitutes a mixture of the traditional forms of Byzantine *koine* and the developing Modern Greek vernacular language whose orthography is very volatile. Wolfram then greatly helps the readers by demonstrating her editorial work, how the orthography was slightly amended, providing examples of Akakios's most striking linguistical peculiarities.

Wolfram's translation cannot be praised enough: given in parallel with the Greek original text on the left page it is lucid and straightforward. Although many foreign words are interspersed amongst the German text, the reader can have recourse to the indices at the end of the book. Especially helpful and interesting are the musical examples taken over from the manuscript: they are depicted as both excerpts from the codex and transcribed into modern staff notation with the help of cue notes by Wolfram, making them available also to readers not acquainted with Byzantine neumes.

Furthermore, Wolfram presents concise analyses of the musical examples in her commentary, thus providing insights into the use and purpose of the examples chosen by Akakios for his pupils. This is very painstaking work indeed, for which today's readers of the book will be especially thankful.

As an edition of the Anastasimatarion following Akakios's treatise would have been beyond the scope of the volume, Wolfram provides an overview of the content of this part in a separate appendix. Given the limited available literature on the Anastasimatarion, this list will be especially

helpful for comparing Akakios's construction of this chant book with the work of other composers, be they older or younger.

The edition thus fills a great void regarding Byzantine chant treatises, complementing the five hitherto published treatises in the series of the *Corpus Scriptorum de Re Musica* in a reader-friendly and thorough way, and representing the height of today's state of the art in Byzantine musicology. The book will definitely develop into a standard reference work and help further the research into its discipline. Regarding the great non-German-speaking readership, it is to be hoped that an English translation of the edition will also be forthcoming during the next years.

Nina-Maria Wanek