



VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE, AUDIBLE AND INAUDIBLE CHANT PERFORMANCE IN BYZANTINE MONASTIC FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS¹

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INTRODUCTION

It has become almost a cliché to state that the Orthodox liturgy speaks to all senses: there are sounds, scents, images – things to touch, taste and see.² This is the impression that one hears often, especially from the mouths of the non-Orthodox. Public discussion on the impact of Orthodox liturgy seems, indeed, to focus in the twenty-first century on the experience of the individual, instead of the twentieth-century emphasis on communal eucharistic ecclesiology.³ This shift in scholarly attempts to understand the

1 This paper, originally performed (!) at the biennial conference of the International Society for Orthodox Church Music in Joensuu, Finland, in June 2019, is a part of a more extensive project that has already resulted in some papers on this topic. Some of them I have originally delivered as talks in workshops, in which they have been only one of many approaches to performance in Byzantine liturgy: one of them was titled “Liturgy and Performance in Byzantium”, organized by Andrew Walker White and Niki Tsironi at the Byzantine Congress in Belgrade in 2016 – the proceedings of which unfortunately remain unpublished – and another workshop on Byzantine poetry and performance, convened by Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksen at the University of Uppsala in 2017. My communication in the latter workshop has been recently published: see Fr Damaskinos (Olkinuora) of Xenophontos, “Performance Theory and the Study of Byzantine Hymnography: Andrew of Crete’s Canon on Lazarus,” *Ortodoksia* 59 (September 2019): 7-31, http://ortodoksia.fi/ojs_3.1/index.php/ortodoksia/article/view/146/104. Additionally, I convened a workshop in August 2019 at the International Patristic Conference in Oxford, entitled “Theologizing Performance in the Byzantine Tradition”, the proceedings of which are awaiting publication in the *Studia Patristica* series. Apart from these conference activities, Niki Tsironi hosts a project on performative approaches to Byzantine studies at the National Hellenic Research Institute in Athens, culminating in an international conference in January 2021.

2 Different multisensory (or intermedial) approaches have been employed recently in scholarship: see, for example, Jaakko Henrik Olkinuora, *Byzantine Hymnography for the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos: An Intermedial Approach*, *Studia Patristica Fennica* 4 (Helsinki: Societas Patristica Fennica, 2015); Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2017); and Bissera V. Pentcheva (ed.), *Aural Architecture in Byzantium: Music, Acoustics, and Ritual* (London, New York: Routledge, 2017).

3 A strongly communal eucharistic approach was promoted especially by the Russian émigré school of theology, particularly Fr Alexander Schmemmann (*Introduction to Liturgical Theology* [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003]), but also in the fundamental work by Metropolitan John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997). On the other hand, the notion of experience has gained more ground in scholarship during the last two decades; see, for example, Clair Nesbitt & Mark Jackson (eds.), *Experiencing Byzantium: Papers from the 44th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Newcastle and Durham, April 2011* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016).

liturgy as not happening in isolation from other fields within the humanities. After the so-called performative turn in the humanities half a century ago, the experience of the individual has become more and more prominent in scholarship – the experience of a performance, either aesthetic or everyday action, through the senses.⁴ This tendency has forced art historians and theologians alike to reconsider some fundamental notions of human experience, such as the senses or emotions,⁵ or the Foucaultian notion of the “self” in a liturgical context.⁶

However, it must be admitted that performance theory still remains a tool primarily used by art historians and scholars of religious studies, and employed very little by Orthodox theologians.⁷ In the Orthodox world, the notion of “performance” has been mostly understood as a rather concrete term, and sometimes – depending on the language of scholarship – it carries negative connotations from a spiritual point of view. Clergymen in particular are utterly negative towards the use of the term for divine worship, since believers should not be considered an “audience” and the clergy and choir the “performers”. Sometimes an example is even brought forth from pre-revolutionary Russia, where (predominantly Italian) opera composers adapted their arias for liturgical use in domestic chapels to boost their patrons’ social status, and choir conductors saw their task of church singing more as a job than any kind of liturgical activity.⁸ A majority of Orthodox clergy would probably rightly state that we do not want such performances in a liturgical space, but such a case also represents a caricature of the notion of performance, rather than a deep understanding of performance theory. Another point of tension is the classic analogy between church and theatre, proposed by several Western scholars, which has been criticized not least because of the hostile attitude of the Byzantine Church, and especially of its preachers, towards theatre.⁹

But performance can mean many things and the connotations it carries depend on the linguistic background of the speaker. Even though I have already stated this in my other contributions on performance studies, I must reiterate also here how deeply the language of scholarship affects the understanding of performance. Performance studies emerged in the English-speaking world, and this is probably both the reason why English-speaking scholars understand performance in the way they do, and why scholars working in other languages are reserved in using the language of performance in their studies. In English, the term has two meanings: performance can be a show, or it can be the accomplishment of a certain task. In Finnish, the word “performanssi” (this is the word used always in the compound word “performanssiteoria”,

4 For important bibliography on the “beginnings” of performance studies, see Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2015), and especially the groundbreaking work by John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), originally published in the 1950s.

5 See, apart from the above-mentioned bibliography, two forthcoming works related to this question: Andrew Mellas, *Liturgy and the Emotions in Byzantium: Compunction and Hymnody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), and Andra Jugănaru & Marijana Vuković (eds.), “Taste and See that the Lord is Good”: *Senses and Sense Perception in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Budapest: Trivent Publishing House, 2020).

6 This was examined by Derek Krueger in his highly influential *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

7 Notable exceptions to this are the monograph by Andrew W. White, *Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), and my own publications: the above-mentioned paper “Performance Theory,” where I further develop the topic of my doctoral dissertation, and Fr Damaskinos (Olkinuora) of Xenophontos, “Interaction Between the Preacher and His Audience in Middle Byzantine Preaching: Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus,” *Homilies in Context*, *Studia Patristica Fennia* 9, eds. Anni Maria Laato, Serafim Seppälä & Harri Huovinen (Helsinki: Suomen patristinen seura ry, 2020), 78–114.

8 See Vladimir Morosan, *Choral Performance in Pre-Revolutionary Russia* (Madison, Conn.: Musica Russica, 1994), 66–9.

9 See White, *Performing*, where this matter is the main tenet.

performance theory) has a highly specific meaning that is even narrower than that of an aesthetic performance.¹⁰ Calling liturgy a performance in such a linguistic context sounds almost blasphemous. In Greek, many scholars tend to use the English word “performance” when speaking of performance studies,¹¹ even though the Greek word *ektelesis* carries the same etymology. Another plausible translation would be *epitelesis*, which is also used in liturgical language to refer to the action of celebrating a saint’s memory, for instance. So, the Greek translation of “performativity”, *epitelestikotes*, already acquires other connotations than the English term.

Be that as it may, I would claim that we must admit, whatever our theoretical approach to liturgy, that Orthodox liturgy includes many aspects of performances: it can be an aesthetic show, in which performers (priests and choir) are performing to an audience (the laity) – even if this is seen as an undesirable result of understanding the liturgy by many clergymen – or it can be seen as the performance of a certain task, most importantly the consecration of the Holy Gifts. But if one sees the liturgy only through these two performative aspects, one inevitably has a rather limited understanding of what a performance is. Therefore, the aim of my paper is to deepen this idea from the point of view of monastic foundation documents.

My focus in the present study is not to offer a philosophical reflection on liturgy as a whole, or a dogmatic exploration of sacramental theology – these aspects have already been covered by scholars much more eloquent in these fields than I ever could be¹² – and neither is my aim to summarize the rhetorical authorities of Byzantium regarding the ontological connection of enunciated words to human thoughts and divine words or, indeed, the Word.¹³ Instead, my paper is a reflection, based on the above-mentioned Byzantine monastic foundation documents, on *what is actually performed and to whom*. In other words, I shall argue, based on the source material, that this performance goes beyond visibility and audibility. The monastic foundation documents do not remain content that describes the externally observable aspects of liturgical performances, but, instead, they see this external performance as a perceptible expression of a simultaneous, invisible performance, that sometimes transcends spatio-temporal conceptions. I shall also shed light to the ideas these monastic authors have on the common participation in psalmody.

The abundance of monastic sources forces the author of such a short paper to make restrictions. One could turn one’s attention to monastic discourses, directed by a spiritual leader to a community, and indeed these texts include valuable information on the way monastic chant performance was perceived.¹⁴ Hints on the understanding

10 The bibliography on performance theory in Finnish is rather limited, but see a survey of Finnish adaptations of performance theory in folklore studies: Mikko Heikkilä, *Performanssiteorian tulkinta suomalaisessa folkloristiikassa* (Master’s thesis, University of Helsinki, 2013).

11 See, for example, the study between ecclesiastical rhetoric and theatre in the post-Byzantine period: Ιωσήφ Βιβιλάκης, *Τὸ κήρυγμα ὡς performance: Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ρητορικὴ καὶ θεατρικὴ τέχνη μετὰ τὸ Βυζάντιο* (Athens: Ἐκδόσεις Ἀρμός, 2013).

12 The most serious studies on philosophical readings of Byzantine (Orthodox) liturgy are Terence Cuneo, *Ritualized Faith: Essays on the Philosophy of Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), and Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Welcoming Finitude: Toward a Phenomenology of Orthodox Liturgy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

13 For a more detailed discussion of this matter, see the highly enlightening forthcoming paper by Vessela Valiavicharska, “*Logos prophorikos* in Middle Byzantine Thought” in *Studia Patristica*, but also an examination of the philosophical history of the notions of the enunciated word (*logos prophorikos*) and the “word of the mind” (*logos endiathetos*) and how these concept of rhetorical theory were included in the Christological debates of the early church; Max Mühl, “Der λόγος ἐνδιάθετος und προφορικός von der älteren Stoa bis zur Synode von Sirmium 351,” *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 7 (1962): 7–56.

14 For an examination of Theodore Studite’s theology of monastic singing, see Daniel Galadza, “‘Open Your Mouth and Attract the Spirit’: St Theodore the Stoudite and Participation in the Icon of Worship,” *Church Music*

of performance can also be found in the performed texts themselves, and the general understanding of performance as mimetic action can be found in some liturgical commentaries, such as the texts of Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite. Since I have discussed elsewhere sermons (some of them performed in a monastic context) and hymns as performed texts, as well as the way liturgical commentaries understand performance,¹⁵ in the present paper I will turn my attention to the practical instructions on how to organize liturgical worship generally: the foundation documents of Byzantine monasteries (*ktitorika typika*). This contribution is a continuation to my earlier examination of the descriptions of chanting practices and vocal performance in the typikon of Mar Saba:¹⁶ therefore, I have excluded liturgical typika from my examination. On account of the restricted space I have at my disposal, this paper will only sporadically refer to other monastic sources than the foundation documents. Instead, I am interested in the way a practical 'stage-setting' of a monastic performance influences the way the theological significance of this performance is perceived.

THE NOTION OF LITURGICAL PERFORMANCE

Returning briefly to the question of the notion of performance, we must bear in mind, as I implied in the introductory paragraph of the present paper, that the term lacks a definition that would be generally accepted in liturgical scholarship, even though we may gradually be approaching one. Perhaps the most important opening for this discussion was the monograph published half a decade ago by Andrew Walker White entitled *Performing Orthodox Ritual in Byzantium*. White's main tenet is that Orthodox liturgy is not "dramatic" or "theatrical," but primarily "rhetorical" – by this he means that liturgy is not about acting, not about "doing something" (even though there are, of course, movements and gestures), but about "saying something", not through a show or spectacle (even though, again, there are certainly some elements of this kind in the liturgy), but by an invisible but still audible outreach towards the divine. Performance in such a rhetorical act is a more complex one than in an aesthetic performance, such as a theatre play. But White seems to see performance, in the liturgical context, exclusively through the lens of rhetoric, calling the art of rhetoric "the ancient equivalent of performance studies."¹⁷

Recently, because of White's reluctance to see movements and other mimetic elements as a fundamental element for understanding liturgical performance, he has received scholarly responses (including my own), regarding the understanding of the ancient notion of *mimesis*.¹⁸ White's definition of "rhetorical" as merely "saying" poses several questions, such as the emphasis several rhetorical authors of Antiquity gave to the use of physical gestures in an oral performance. Moreover, White's understanding of liturgy not being about "doing something" (he even puts forward the extremely problematic idea that "what we fail to notice is that its [the divine

and Icons: Windows to Heaven. Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Orthodox Church Music, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland, 3–9 June 2013, eds. Ivan Moody & Maria Takala-Roszczenko (Joensuu: International Society for Orthodox Church Music, 2015), 441–455.

15 See the bibliography in previous footnotes or in the end of this paper.

16 Hieromonk Damaskinos (Olkinuora) of Xenophontos, "Descriptions of Vocal Techniques and Melody Types in the Typikon of Mar Saba," *Liturgy and Music: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Orthodox Church Music, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland, 6–11 June 2017*, eds. Ivan Moody & Maria Takala-Roszczenko (Joensuu: The International Society for Orthodox Church Music, 2019): 18–28.

17 See White, *Performing*, 51–4, and 5 for the quotation on performance studies.

18 For more discussion on this matter, including discussion on criticism directed against White, see my forthcoming paper "Byzantine Liturgical Commentaries and the Notion of Performance" in *Studia Patristica*; see also Christina M. Gschwandtner, "Mimesis or Metamorphosis? Eastern Orthodox Liturgical Practice and Its Philosophical Background," *Religions* 8(5):92 (May 2017): 1–22.

liturgy's] character is non-mimetic"¹⁹) contradicts Byzantine liturgy commentaries, in which the movements and gestures of a priest are given complex allegorical interpretations and not seen by any means as an inferior element of liturgy.

It seems, then, that there are different understandings of the notion of liturgical performance, from a mere reduction of performance to a "merely rhetorical," audible setting, to a more allegorical understanding of each gesture, movement, word and scent experienced in liturgy. But why is there a need to use performative language to describe liturgy at all? Should we excise the term from liturgical scholarship, since there is so much confusion? Even if we thought of liturgical "performances" as something other than "aesthetic performances,"²⁰ I would argue it is useful to employ performative language in order to verbalize this process to a scholarly audience: in this way, non-theologians (in particular) obtain a better image of how things happen in a liturgical setting, but it also forces theologians to reflect on the functions of liturgical texts and their performance. I claimed above that we should deepen the understanding of performance in the liturgical context. Therefore, it is not by any means justifiable to say simplistically that the priest and choir are the performers and the laity the audience. In liturgy, on the contrary, the four roles of an aesthetic performance – the authors, performers, *personae* and audience – overlap, change and transform constantly and reach out to a world that transcends the church space, and even involves other eras, places, and persons in the performance.²¹ There are audiences in the narrative, audiences outside the narrative; audiences that never hear the performance, audiences that hear the performance even if we do not perform to them. We are the performers, God is the performer, sometimes the characters of the narrative are the performers. And, most importantly, performance is transformative: it is not something imposed by someone on someone, but a communal act, realized through words, sounds, gestures, images and prayer that transcends the senses. Therefore, I would not restrict the description of a Byzantine performance to a merely rhetorical performance as opposed to a dramatic performance.

For example, when one sings a hymn, one could say that there are two, three or four authors: the author of the text, the author of the melody, the singer (who contributes with his own interpretation to a unique performance), and, of course,

19 White, *Performing*, 5.

20 Aesthetic performances form a group of their own among performances, according to performance studies – an "everyday" performance, something that happens in normal human activity, communicates messages in a way that has its own symbolic language. Instead, aesthetic communication, that takes place in the context of aesthetic performance, is (according to the description of Ronald Pelias), "a culturally specified act in which a speaker structures language in a unified and expressive manner, triggering audience response. Aesthetic communication calls upon speakers and listeners to become engaged in the power of art, to accept their respective roles, and to possess the necessary competencies for the exchange to take place. When the participants meet these conditions, an aesthetic transaction occurs" (see Ronald Pelias & Tracy Stephenson Shaffer, *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts* [Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 2007], 19). It is clear that Orthodox liturgy has culturally specified elements, but it might also have elements foreign to the cultures in which it is performed. Instead of merely reproducing culturally specified performances, liturgy also introduces "foreign performances" into the culture in which it is performed.

21 It is interesting to note that during the pandemic of Covid-19, many local churches mainly served divine liturgies behind closed doors and broadcast them. Metropolitan John of Pergamon, one of the most important ecclesiologists of our time, stated that "I don't agree with the Divine Liturgy being transmitted by television. I'm confined to my home and will not be able to attend Liturgy. However, I will not turn the television on in order to watch the Liturgy. I consider that an expression of impiety. It is impious for someone to sit and watch the Liturgy" (see "A Conversation with Metropolitan John Zizioulas Regarding the Suspension of Church Services due to Covid 19", Orthodoxia News Agency, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.orthodoxianewsagency.gr/foreignnews/a-conversation-with-metropolitan-john-zizioulas-regarding-the-suspension-of-church-services-due-to-covid-19/>). In other words, despite the fact that participation in liturgy can happen through distance (such as in the act of commemoration of the living and dead during the *proskomide*), Zizioulas considers participation through technological means essentially a sign of impiety, even in these extreme conditions.

God Himself, who inspires all these persons. The performers are the singers, but in the case of public participation, also the audience; the *personae*, the characters of the narrative, overlap with the believers and the singers: *we* are Lazarus who cries out to Christ "Save me," *we* are the sinful woman who carry our repentance and good deeds as our spiritual myrrh to Christ. We are the audience of the chanter; the chanter is also the audience of his own singing; God is our audience, when we praise Him.²² Now it is time to move away from the world of these texts, and see what the monastic authorities say about singing them.

MONASTIC HYMN-SINGING AS A DIVINE PERFORMANCE

After this somewhat lengthy methodological reflection, let us now turn to the actual source texts the paper's title obliges us to examine. I shall now go to the deeper level of performance described in the monastic founders' *typika* dating from the ninth to the fifteenth century. The initial questions I posed to myself were: What do these handbooks of organizing the divine, mystical drama tell us about the essence of this performance? Do we have any hints on the Byzantine understanding of performance in these documents? In other words: are they theological texts or merely technical guides, used for practical purposes? The investigation of these questions for this talk has not been exhaustive, but rather exemplary. The source materials here are the foundation documents published by Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection,²³ and a helpful starting point for the study is Rosemary Dubowchik's survey of the references to singing in these same foundation documents.²⁴ Dubowchik's study is a technical one, relating to the practical descriptions of chanting in the documents. My task here is to dig deeper into these descriptions through the lenses of the performance methodology I described above.

UNITY IN CHRIST'S BODY AND ITS TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

First of all, we should begin from the natural unity of the different roles in performance and the image of the body. The *typikon* of the Monastery of Steadfast Hope (*Bebaia Elpis*), dating from the fourteenth century,²⁵ opens the description of liturgical celebration with this setting of attaining unity through the commonness of human nature united in Christ:

The entire congregation of your sisterhood, together with your superior in Christ, resembles a complete body, composed and constituted of a head and different parts, which have different faculties and energies. Therefore in view of this interconnection and harmony of yours, in accordance with the analogy of the parts of this body a worthy and appropriate position should be assigned to each of you.²⁶

22 For a more extensive examination of the "role-casting" of hymn singing, see Fr Damaskinos of Xenophontos, "Performance Theory", 14–26; for further examinations of the use of first person in penitential hymnography, see Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 164–96.

23 John Thomas & Angela Constantinides Hero (eds.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, 5 vols, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 35 (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000).

24 Rosemary Dubowchik, "Singing with the Angels: Foundation Documents as Evidence for Musical Life in Monasteries of the Byzantine Empire," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002): 277–96.

25 The *typikon* is dated to 1327–35, and the document is the only source that mentions the foundation of the monastery, located (according to the topographical evidence provided by the document) in the Heptaskalon quarter at the capital, Constantinople, with no surviving remains; see Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 4, 1512–3.

26 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 4, 1537.

This is fundamental in order to understand the natural unity of performance: the key to the overlapping roles, as I described them above, is hidden here – in the body of Christ, in Him being the performer together with us, performing to Him and to us at the same time. And our response as an audience is at the same time the response of Christ, through His human nature that He shares with the whole monastic community and the Church, to the divine nature and the Trinity. This same unity is seen in the utmost importance given to order and the whole concept of getting-together and simultaneously leaving the outside world (the etymological meaning of *ekklesia*) to enter a monastery: the brothers or sisters are allowed to gather together only in front of God, as one group of hymn-chanters, and not on other occasions or in smaller groups.²⁷ The Studite typikon²⁸ orders that

two overseers should be appointed who, each evening after the wooden *semantron*²⁹ sounds, are by turns to urge the slothful to run to compline services and again, after the service is dismissed, are to visit the hidden places of the monastery and with fitting severity break up those who are meeting at an improper time.³⁰

Their appearance before God must be well ordered, and therefore “there should also be two choir monitors, one in each choir, who are to remind the brothers to stand in an orderly manner at choir.”³¹ A monastic performance, as Derek Krueger has pointed out, is a transformative performance, where the performer also performs to himself in order to go through an ascetical transformation:³² in other words, the words and sounds of a hymn are directed also to the singer himself. He is not only transmitting a message to others, but to himself, and he is invited to act according to this transmitted message in a similar way to the others. The brotherhood’s attention is, therefore, not in the way they appear to external observers, but how they appear to each other and to themselves. Their own behaviour is an image of their inner state.³³ The theological importance monastic authors give to hierarchy and order stems primarily from the works of Pseudo-Dionysios, who notes that human hierarchy is seen “pluralized in a great variety of perceptible symbols lifting us upward hierarchically until we are brought as far as we can be into the unity of divinization.”³⁴ The inner unity of human nature, attained through liturgical

27 This is an order included in several typika, in addition to the following example from the Studite typikon (*The Rule of the Monastery of St. John Stoudios*); see, for example, the fourteenth-century typikon of Mar Saba, in manuscript HAAB Q 740, f. 14v, that states: Χρηὶ γινώσκειν ὅτι τὰ ἀπόδειπνα ἡμέραν ἔτι οὔσης ἀπολύομεν καθ’ ὅλον τὸν ἐνιαυτόν. Μετὰ δὲ τὴν τούτων ἀπόλυσιν οὐ δεῖ τοὺς μοναχοὺς συντύχας ποιεῖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους, κελλίοις ἀπέρχεσθαι καὶ σχολάζειν εἰς τὸ μικρὸν τρισάγιον, ὃ παρέλαβομεν, καὶ εἰς ἀνάγνωσιν καὶ ἀναπαύεσθαι, ὅπως μετὰ προσοχῆς ἀναστῶσιν ἐν τε τῷ μεσονυκτικῷ καὶ τῇ λοιπῇ ἀκολουθίᾳ καὶ συνάξει τῆς ἐκκλησίας (“It should be known that we finish compline throughout the year while it is still daylight. After the compline’s final blessing it is not allowed for the monks to have meetings with each other, but they should go to their cells, and dwell in reading the small trisagion and reading and then rest, so that they may diligently rise for the midnight service and the rest of the service in the synaxis of the church”).

28 This is the ninth-century text posterior to the life of St Theodore, preserved in two different versions (*Rule of the Monastery of St John Stoudios*) dated by its translator to a date posterior to 842; see Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 1, 84.

29 *Semantron* is the wooden instrument used to convene brothers to church, even in the contemporary Athonite tradition and elsewhere. Somewhat confusingly, in the modern terminology, *semantron* sometimes refers to an iron bar instead of the wooden instrument, which is called *talanton*.

30 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 1, 107.

31 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 1, 107.

32 Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 11–2.

33 See also Galadza, “Open Your Mouth”, 451–453.

34 *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 1*: see Pseudo-Dionysius: *The Complete Works*, transl. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 196.

worship and signified through external unity, leads to union with the divine, enabled by divine activity.

This transformative aspect of performance is also underlined by the practice of antiphonal singing, often referred to in the monastic foundation documents. Pakourianos³⁵ orders that antiphonal singing must happen in a good order. None of the choirs should “snatch up [psalm] verses hastily from each other [...] so the singing should take place in a pious and reverent manner.”³⁶ In this antiphonal way of chanting, in which the semantic whole can only be understood through the combination of the two choirs (unlike in the case of, say, simple stichera), the two choirs are bound to each other through this alternation of smaller parts. In other words, the performer was forced through this chanting practice to be a member of the audience: performing was not a one-way road but constant interaction with the other choir.

IMITATING THE ANGELIC CHOIRS

The orderly manner of singing also reminds us of the angels. Here we come to the question of the iconic quality of the liturgy. Dubowchik noted that the foundation documents often bring up this image of the choirs of monks joining the angels,³⁷ which is hardly surprising, since the monks are described as living an angelic life and angels, on the other hand, are biblically described as unceasing chanters. Moreover, the imitation of angelic praise is brought up by liturgical commentators, such as Pseudo-Dionysios.³⁸ Bringing this common theological understanding to the foundation documents, St Christodoulos of Patmos³⁹ quotes Gregory the Theologian in saying that men are an antiphon to angels. Through Christ’s incarnation we have become able to reconcile with the angels and join them in their praise of God.⁴⁰

One of the elements that connects men to angels is their rational faculty. We have a *logos*, a reason, and we should express it with a *logos*, word, that comes out from our mouths.⁴¹ St Christodoulos notes that

before all else, it is [...] fitting to speak of our true employment [...] the doxology of praise to God. For it is in view of this one thing that [...] we have been brought into being and adorned with reason, in order to honor the Creator with uninterrupted hymn-singing. Besides everything else, the fact that the character and pursuit of the monastic life is called angelic leads to this conclusion.⁴²

Based on this passage, it becomes clear that the doxology of praise to God has its source not in repeating magical words, but using our own rational faculties. The act of performing hymns in itself is honouring God, even if the words are not directed explicitly to Him: even when we narrate the lives of saints or do not sing

35 Gregory Pakourianos, a monk of Caucasian (Armenian or Georgian) origin, wrote this typikon in December 1083 for a monastery called *Petritzonitissa*, located in modern Bachkovo in Bulgaria. The foundation still survives: see Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 2, 507.

36 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 2, 536.

37 Dubowchik, “Singing with the Angels,” 281.

38 See *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, especially chapter one: see *Pseudo-Dionysios*, 195–200.

39 St Christodoulos’s monastic rule has been dated to 1091 and his testament and codicil to 1093. Christodoulos became a monk on Mount Olympus in Bithynia but later on founded a monastery dedicated to St John the Theologian on Patmos, for which these documents were written; see Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 2, 564.

40 See Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 2, 586–7; see also Dubowchik, “Singing with the Angels,” 281.

41 See footnote 13 above.

42 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 2, 586.

a hymn that is formatted as what we would call a prayer, we honour God with the mere usage of our ability to sing.

The notion of the natural unity of performers and their elevation through the process of divinization towards the Divine can also be found in the description of the *ekklesiarkhissa*, the leading chanter and director of the church services in the typikon of the Steadfast Hope. Her task is to encourage the other sisters to perform better, not to perform *to* them, even though she is one of the soloists; her task is to elevate them towards the angelic choirs.⁴³ In the testament of Lazaros of Mt Galesios,⁴⁴ dating from the eleventh century, there is a passage where he describes the action of the cellarer: “those he saw eager and persevering in church, standing and singing, he would often praise in the presence of the brothers and favour them, besides which he would on occasion do the opposite for the slackers and the sluggish.” This could sound as though it were favouring some of the brothers, but there was a deeply spiritual aim:

He did not do this purposelessly, as you might think, but in order to increase the zeal of the former – for he knew that praise often increases the zeal of those who are striving for virtue, and also the contrary – and to rouse the others from their laziness and slackness.⁴⁵

PERFORMING TO GOD

A similar task of keeping the choirs in order is assigned to the choir sisters in the typikon of the Steadfast Hope, but it is also said that their task is to perform *to* God, standing in front of the heavenly King without distraction, and without caring about their physical pains.⁴⁶ In this case, God is clearly the audience and the efficacy of the performance is related to the inner purity of the performer, not the rhetorical excellence of the performance. The typikon of the Eleousa Monastery⁴⁷ orders the brethren “alone to speak to God alone through your prayers, for in this manner ‘your conversation will be pleasing to him’.”⁴⁸ The author of the typikon of the Steadfast Hope rhetorically asks the choir sisters:

How will God hear you and fulfil your petitions, when you are thus made captive and distracted, and say one thing with your tongues, but another in your hearts, and therefore you do not perceive the One before whom you are standing and to whom you are speaking, nor what you are saying and singing?⁴⁹

It is clear based on this passage that the audience is twofold: both God and the sisters. The choir sisters are supposed to comfort the other sisters, who await it. They are also intercessors on behalf of the other sisters and supplicate for the remission of their sins. In return for this, the other sisters serve the choir sisters materially by performing the more practical tasks, a custom that was not rare in

43 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 4, 1537–8.

44 This rule has been dated to October 31, 1053. Lazaros was a stylite living on Mount Galesios, but he eventually founded three monasteries directly under his administration. Additionally, there were other monastic settlements that had a spiritual relation with him; see Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 1, 148–50.

45 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 1, 159.

46 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 4, 1539–40.

47 The rule has been dated to somewhere between 1085 and 1106. The monastery was founded by the bishop of Stroumitza (ancient Tiberioupolis), named Manuel, and the monastery was dedicated to the Mother of God of Mercy (Eleousa); see Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 1, 167.

48 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 1, 178.

49 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 4, 1539.

Byzantine cenobitic monasteries.⁵⁰ The choir sisters do have a privileged position in the community, but in return they possess an almost sacramental role. The sisters whose primary task is ministry and not performing the divine offices are, however, not only audience members. Their roles with the performers overlap: the author of the *typikon* exhorts the nuns to “strive as if you saw God himself before your eyes [...] if you should be able to read, sing with both heart and mouth, honoring your Master and Creator and Bridegroom with psalms and hymns and spiritual odes.”⁵¹ The nun presents herself before God. The performance *to* God could also be seen as an actual sign of the substantial gap between Him and the humanity. Even though He inspires the performance through His activities, He is not the ultimate performer of worship, but its audience.

The latter idea is even more strongly attested to by the testament of Lazaros that offers a slightly modified view of this performer–audience relation. The illiterate monks who do not sing and perform hymns in the church are actually not the audience – it is clear here that God is the only audience:

Those who know the Scriptures and stand in the choir to sing are like the reapers in the field, while the ignorant, who cannot read and do not know how to sing, and for that reason stand behind the singers, listening to the chant, are like those who follow behind the reapers and pick up the ears that fall or are overlooked [...] the illiterate, if they stand soberly and attend to what those in the choir are singing [...] even if they do not recognize everything [they hear], yet all they do manage to grasp they hold safe in their mind.⁵²

So, one would perhaps characterize the illiterate monks rather as overhearers than audience, with which the performers would like to have an efficient act of communication.

The notion of overhearing in the context of prayer or worship is an intriguing one, and it has been discussed at length by Carol Harrison in her recent monograph on the sense of hearing and the action of listening.⁵³ She suggests that sometimes in worship we are actually overhearing conversations directed to someone else: words written by the poet, uttered by the chanter, directed to God. But overhearing does not necessarily mean sharing a common memory, or what Harrison calls a “symbol-system” with those whose discussion we are overhearing.⁵⁴ We do not always understand the discussion a hymnographer has either with God or with His concrete audience – this is also taken into consideration by the founders’ *typika* that admit that the illiterate monastics are not able to absorb all the meanings of the text. But this does not prevent them from being saved through their singing – they hold things safe in their minds, as the testament of Lazaros describes.

CONCLUSION

In the examination above, we have seen the multiform dimensions of a monastic liturgical performance. The chanting monastics perform not only visibly and audibly to their fellow monks or nuns (which is the didactic dimension of liturgical performance), but also to themselves: their performance aims at a personal transformation. However, the ultimate audience is invisible – it is God. This

50 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 4, 1539–40.

51 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 4, 1541.

52 Thomas & Hero, *Byzantine Monastic*, vol. 1, 159.

53 Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially 201–4.

54 Harrison, *The Art of Listening*, 135.

performance takes place audibly, in the form of hymns, but also inaudibly, through the silence of the soul's purity. In this uplifted double performance – visible and invisible, audible and inaudible – the visible choirs of monks join the invisible angelic choirs through the *mimesis* of not only the way the bodiless powers praise God, but also of angelic, immaterial lifestyle. The monastic congregation, as a whole, is a concrete image of a community of Christians – i.e., the Church – that becomes one thanks to their one human nature, unified with the Divine and deified through the person of Christ, whose Body the Church is. This unity is visibly shown through the good order of singing emphasized by founders of Byzantine monasteries.

I would argue that reflecting on performance practices and their deeper functions in Byzantine monasteries is not only a matter of the past, nor of merely scholarly interest. It is, I think, a fundamental aspect to be borne in mind when we discuss matters such as liturgical theology, public participation in liturgy, or liturgical translations – in other words, it has significant effects on how we both understand Byzantine liturgy in its historical context and apply this understanding to our own pastoral work in today's church. Byzantine worship is not, as we have seen, built on a structured constructive understanding that would form Christians in the way primary education forms citizens (though liturgical texts and their performance of course have didactic functions, too, as we have seen: this task is left to more educated monastics, according to the source material). But monastic foundation documents are not introductory course books for spiritual life, either. Even the descriptions of performers, audience members and performances in these texts underline the significance of context and one's personal spiritual state for the way in which a hymn functions.

Something that might strike the modern ear, in an age when “egalitarian” approaches to liturgy are promoted (in the form of using more and more vernacular, and promoting active participation of the laity in the liturgy, for instance) is that it was not of primary importance for the organizers and founders of Byzantine monasteries to make liturgical performance equally understandable to all members of the monastic congregation. They were aware of the differences in the psychological and spiritual capacities of monastics in the way they could process what their senses perceived. A modern commentator might perhaps claim that this is an abuse of power or a symptom of a highly hierarchical society. But this did not prevent what we would perhaps today describe as “full” participation in the monastic office. The most important idea was that the monk or nun was constantly chanting in front of God, performing the service enabled by our rational faculty, being adorned by virtues and good will. Such a pleasing performance, as well as enjoying any liturgical performance in the role of a “passive” listener, is born out of an ascetical and holy life. This is also why St John of Sinai, the author of the *Ladder*, noted:

Let us be guided by the same rule in singing melodies and songs. For lovers of God are moved to gladness, to divine love and to tears both by worldly and by spiritual songs; but lovers of pleasure to the opposite.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Saint John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, transl. Lazarus Moore (Brookline: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1979), 113.

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