



A NEWLY-DISCOVERED MANUSCRIPT BY BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ ON THE BYZANTINE OCTOECHOS

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There are some discoveries in life that seem to fall from the sky. One of those is a hitherto virtually unknown manuscript on the Byzantine Octoechos and Greek music by one of the most famous and prominent Czech composers of the twentieth century, Bohuslav Martinů. My “story” with this manuscript started on my birthday, 14 April 2016, when I received a brief e-mail from a gentleman who was at that time unknown to me. After addressing me as “Vážený otče” (i.e. “Honourable Father” in Czech), he asked me for a brief meeting to help him with “liturgical matters in music” (“liturgické věci v hudbě”). Without giving it a great deal of thought, I replied, and we arranged a meeting – and of course, I explained that I was not a priest. At that meeting I discovered that this gentleman was Mr Jaroslav Mihule, a renowned Czech musicologist and one of the finest experts on the work of Bohuslav Martinů. After introducing himself, he showed me an **original** manuscript by Martinů on the Byzantine Octoechos, asked me a few questions about the “Alleluia” hymn noted in the manuscript and then, surprisingly, he offered to lend me the manuscript so I could study it carefully at home. It is difficult to describe my surprise upon coming across this coexistence of two musical worlds, ordinarily so remote from each other: the music of my childhood in Cyprus (since the manuscript essentially comprises liturgical chants of the Greek Orthodox Church), very thoroughly notated by a very famous and very “Western” composer.

This manuscript actually forms part of the composer’s studies on Greek sacred music for his last opera *The Greek Passion*, which is based on Nikos Kazantzakis’s famous novel *Christ Recrucified* (Ο Χριστός ξανασταυρώνεται).

Another coincidence is that in, 2017, there were two anniversaries related to this opera:

- a) The 60th anniversary of the death of Nikos Kazantzakis;
- b) The 60th anniversary of the “birth” of the first version of this opera.¹

In other words, the first version of the opera was finished in the year of Kazantzakis’s death.

¹ Concerning the two versions of the opera in English, see the introduction to the vocal score of the first (London) version of the opera by Aleš Březina in Bohuslav Martinů, *The Greek Passion*, Universal Edition. For the original text in Czech, see Aleš Březina, „...abych se mohl na změny předem duševně připravit. Řecké pašije – dvě opery Bohuslava Martinů“, *Hudební věda*, XXXVII/1/2, (2001), 137-153.

The Greek Passion is Bohuslav Martinů's last opera, written shortly before his death. Although by that time, the composer had written fourteen operas, this was his "first musical drama in the full sense of the term."² Many Martinů scholars claim that the composer's initial intention was to write an opera based on the popular Kazantzakis novel, *Zorba the Greek* (*Βίος και Πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά*).³ This is disputed, however by Aleš Březina,⁴ In October of 1954, regardless, Martinů and Kazantzakis met for the first time in the French town of Antibes, and Kazantzakis recommended his novel *Christ Recrucified* to the Czech composer⁵. The two men remained very close friends from the date on.

The opera's libretto was also written by the composer, based on Jonathan Griffin's English translation of the novel. The whole process of the creation of the libretto is beautifully illustrated in the correspondence between Martinů and Kazantzakis, in which various aspects of the work are discussed.⁶

The work was finished on the 8 January 1957, and was intended for The Royal Opera House at Covent Garden in London, but for a number of reasons which are still not quite clear, the performance was cancelled.⁷ After this, Martinů began to work on a second version of the opera, which is actually a new opera, known as "the Zurich version."⁸ The first version, called "the London version", was completely unknown until the year 1999 when, after its reconstruction by the renown Czech musicologist Aleš Březina, it was performed for the first time at the Bregenz festival.⁹

The present study will be restricted mainly to localizing and dating the manuscript, though a brief description of the manuscript's content is, nevertheless, unavoidable.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Despite the fact that the largest and most important part of the manuscript deals with Greek liturgical music, known today by the term Byzantine music or Byzantine chant, there are other, minor, parts of the manuscript which concern other subjects. We can divide the manuscript into three parts, according to these subjects:

PART A: PAGES 1 TO 5 AND 9 TO 10 - NOTES ON INSTRUMENTATION

The first five pages contain basic information about the range, registers and notation of voices and all the rudimentary instruments of the symphonic orchestra lacking the strings, while pages 9 and 10 are a kind of manual on the harmonics of the string instruments (see examples 1 and 2). Generally, it can be said that this section in its entirety is a "basic manual" on instrumentation.

2 Miloš Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů: His Life and Works*, transl. Roberta Finlayson-Samanuscriptourová, London: Allan Wingate 1962, 286.

3 Ibid., 286.

4 Aleš Březina, "Řecké pašije – dvě opery Bohuslava Martinů", in (the programme brochure): Bohuslav Martinů – Řecké pašije (Prague: National Theatre, 2006) 26.

5 Ibid., 26

6 Aleš Březina – Růžena Dostálová: *Řecké pašije. Osud jedné opery. Korespondence Nikose Kazantzakise s Bohuslavem Martinů*. (Prague: Set out 2003)

7 Ibid., 34-7.

8 Ibid., 37-8.

9 Ibid., 31.

Example 1 – extract from page 1.

Handwritten musical score for Example 1, featuring vocal parts (Soprano, Mezzo, Alto, Tenor) and instrumental parts (Bassoon, Bass). The score includes dynamic markings such as 'weak', 'strong', 'brilliant', and 'Solo'. The Soprano part is marked 'weak reg.', 'middle', 'brilliant', and 'Solo'. The Mezzo part is marked 'Strong' and 'brilliant'. The Alto part is marked 'Weak', 'Strong dramatic', and 'Solo'. The Tenor part is marked 'Weak', 'loud', 'Solo', and 'Solo'. The Bassoon part is marked 'Weak', 'brilliant', and 'Solo'. The Bass part is marked 'Bass', 'Strong, clear', 'weak', and 'Solo'. There is a small logo in the bottom left corner that says 'JISOCM' and 'No. 12'.

Example 2 – extract from page 9.

Handwritten musical score for Example 2, featuring 'Sound' and 'Notation' for 'Harmonics Nat.' and 'Violon.'. The score includes various musical notations and chord symbols. The 'Sound' part is written in treble clef and includes notes with accidentals. The 'Notation' part is written in bass clef and includes notes with accidentals and chord symbols (G, A, E, D, A, E). The 'Violon.' part is written in treble clef and includes notes with accidentals and dynamic markings. The 'Nat.' part is written in bass clef and includes notes with accidentals and dynamic markings. The 'S.i.g.' part is written in bass clef and includes notes with accidentals and chord symbols (G, D, A, E, G, D, A, E). There are some markings like '8' and '17' above the notes in the 'Violon.' and 'Nat.' parts.

PART B: PAGES 6 AND 7 - ANCIENT GREEK MODES

Pages 6 and 7 concern ancient Greek modes (see example 3).

Example 3 – extract from page 7.

Mixolydian Lydian Phrygian Dorian Hypolydian Hypophrygian Hypodorian

PART C: MAIN SECTION - GREEK ORTHODOX OCTOECHOS

The remaining 13 pages are numbered by the composer, beginning from the number 1, and deal with the Octoechos of the Greek Orthodox Church.

This section includes several well-known compositions of the Greek Byzantine tradition in all eight modes of Byzantine music and it is the most important and interesting part of the manuscript. As mentioned above, this was, without any doubt, part of Martinů's studies on Greek music while preparing and collecting material for his last opera, *The Greek Passion*.

In his "study", which is actually a collection of Byzantine chants, Martinů does not follow the liturgical order of the eight modes, i.e.:

1. = 1st (authentic)
2. = 2nd (authentic)
3. = 3rd (authentic)
4. = 4th (authentic)
5. = 1st plagal
6. = 2nd plagal
7. = 3rd plagal
8. = 4th plagal,

but a different order which corresponds rather to the musical logic of these modes:

1. = 1st (authentic)
2. = 1st plagal
3. = 2nd (authentic)
4. = 2nd plagal
5. = 3rd (authentic)
6. = 3rd plagal
7. = 4th (authentic)
8. = 4th plagal

Martinů noted down from between two to seven compositions from each mode. Another fact that shows that he was trying to understand the musical logic of the modality of Greek Orthodox chant is that he notated the psalm 140 ("Lord I have cried" – see Example 4) in all eight modes.

With the exception of "Lord I have cried" (*Κύριε εκέκραξα*), all the other noted hymns relate to the story of the opera (Easter hymns, wedding hymns, funeral hymns etc. – see Example 5).

Example 4 – extract from page 1 (of the third part of the manuscript)

Mod. *Seigneur.* David 1403

allegro

(dim)

Example 5 – Wedding Chant *Ησαΐα χόρευε* – extract from page 2 (of the third part of the manuscript)

Une danse religieuse, vue la fin de la cérémonie de mariage

Allegro ①

paese Isaia!

As it is known, in the contemporary practice of Byzantine music there are various types of each mode, i.e. a single mode can have different tonics (Βάσεις), different melodic formulae, different final tones etc. After a thorough examination of the manuscript it becomes obvious that Martinů tried to explore as many versions of each mode as possible. Another piece of evidence that proves the composer's strong desire for a deep understanding of this music is, that in some cases, such as, for example, the second mode, a brief theoretical explication of the mode precedes the music (Example 6):

Example 6



As may be observed in Examples 4 and 5, Martinů also carried out a very thorough and rigorous examination of the craft of performance of this music, i.e. he noted micro-intervals (Example 4) and, even more interesting, he notes in detail the way in which the signs of expression in Chrysanthine notation are executed. This is very important aspect of this manuscript, because it gives us extremely useful information about the performance of Byzantine music in the 1950s.

Beside the parts of the manuscript briefly discussed above, at the end of the manuscript there are a few pages which record early polyphony.

LOCALIZATION AND DATING OF THE MANUSCRIPT

There are several pieces of evidence which lead to the conclusion that the manuscript was written in New York between 16 January and 17 February 1956. These pieces of evidence are to be found in two main sources:

- Correspondence between Bohuslav Martinů and Nikos Kazantzakis¹⁰
- Correspondence between Bohuslav Martinů and Miloš Šafránek¹¹

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ AND NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS

As mentioned above, in the correspondence between Martinů and Kazantzakis we can follow the whole process of the opera's genesis, which also includes Martinů's research on Greek Music. After examining the correspondence from this perspective, we can observe three facts that lead this investigation to the aforementioned conclusion:

- The composer received a collection of 32 Greek folk songs and the troparion "Lord save your people" (Σώσον Κύριε τον λαόν σου) before the end of the year 1955.¹² It is very likely that he did not acquire any other Greek music by that time, because if he had, it would almost certainly have been mentioned in this correspondence, which discusses each step forward concerning his research into Greek music. This implies that the manuscript was probably written after the year 1955.

10 Ibid.

11 Miloš Šafránek, Divadlo Bohuslava Martinů, Prague: Editio Supraphon 1979, 283-92.

12 Aleš Březina – Růžena Dostálová: Řecké pašije. Osud jedné opery. Korespondence Nikose Kazantzakise s Bohuslavem Martinů, Prague: Set out 2003, 69-70.

In addition to this, there are two more pieces of evidence that reinforce this conclusion:

- b) On 17 February 1956, Martinů writes to Kazatzakis from New York the following: "...At last I am sure that the opera is heading in a good direction, I have found some exceedingly beautiful chants, and it becomes clear to me that the opera must be based on ancient modes, which give to the music power, the kind of power that has vanished from contemporary music. I hope that I will succeed; this is a very difficult task. I have met your friends, who helped me a great deal with my research [into Greek music]...¹³. Very probably these "exceedingly beautiful chants" are those noted in the manuscript here discussed and it appears from this letter that it was written before 17 February 1956.
- c) Martinů's previous letter, written on 15 January, 1956, like his earlier letters, does not mention anything about Greek musical sources.¹⁴ Again, it is highly likely that Martinů would have mentioned it if he had discovered something new of interest; thus it seems that he found the Byzantine hymns noted in this manuscript only some time after January 15 1956.

Obviously, the evidence above leads to the conclusion that the manuscript was written in New York between 16 January and 17 February 1956.

This conclusion is also reinforced by two letters from the composer to his friend Miloš Šafránek:

- a) On 13 March 1956, Martinů writes to his friend and first biographer from New York the following: ".....Concerning the opera, it will be based on old Byzantine scales, of course, as long as they do not restrain my imagination."¹⁵
- b) And on 26 July, 1957, he writes again from Rome: "... Of course, I have used Byzantine chant [in the opera *The Greek Passion*], but there is a problem with that, because the English translation of the text does not fit the music. It took me a hell of a lot of research [in New York, M. Š.], since there is not much material about this kind of music and I have spent a lot of time collecting it....."¹⁶

From these two letters, we may conclude that the manuscript was written before he wrote to Šafránek, since it appears that by that time Martinů had already found the Byzantine chants and theoretical material that he had been seeking.

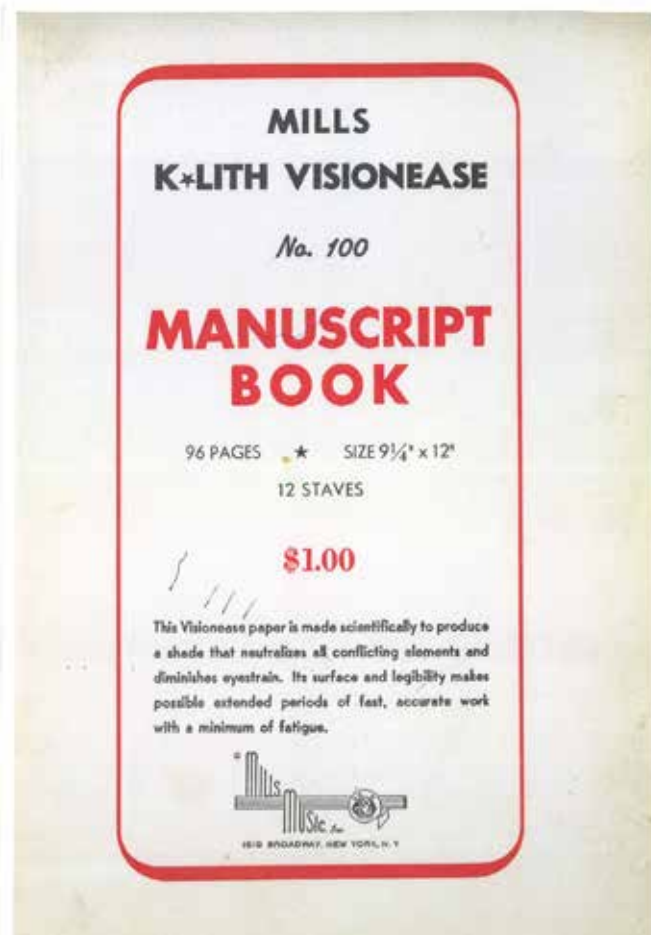
In addition to the evidence already discussed above, there is another indication that supports this assertion. This indication is an integral part of the manuscript, i.e. the manuscript's front page (see example 7).

13 Ibid., 75, (quotation translated by the present author).

14 Ibid., 74.

15 Miloš Šafránek, *Divadlo Bohuslava Martinů*, Prague: Editio Supraphon, 1979, 284 (quotation translated by the present author).

16 Ibid.



Example 7 – Manuscript front page

CONCLUSION

After a thorough examination of the manuscript and its relationship with both versions of the opera, it becomes obvious that this document played a very important role in the structure of the entire opera. There is no doubt that Martinů used some of these hymns in his opera in varied and interesting ways at all structural levels of the work, and the present author intends soon to analyse his manner of using Byzantine music in the opera *The Greek Passion* in further articles. The apprehension, nonetheless, of the degree of influence of Byzantine music on the opera makes the complete absence of research on this aspect of the work astonishing indeed.

In addition to the opera itself, this manuscript is also a very helpful tool for a deeper understanding of the process of the opera's genesis, i.e. for understanding the composer's initial intentions, his *modus operandi*, strategies for solving problems, and more. Therefore, the identification of Byzantine chants in this manuscript enables a much deeper understanding of a work that is extremely important for Czech music and Czech musicology.

As mentioned above, another very significant aspect of this manuscript is that it can be used as a piece of reliable evidence concerning the performance of Byzantine chant, since it bears witness to the way in which the various signs of Chrysanthine notation were executed in the middle of the last century. In other words, this manuscript has a twofold significance: it is important for research concerning the work of Bohuslav Martinů as well as for the field of Byzantine musicology (Βυζαντινή Μουσικολογία).

The task of the present paper, however, as mentioned above, is restricted to the manuscript's localization and dating. Further analysis of Byzantine music in the opera *The Greek Passion* will, therefore, follow in future studies.