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ARS NOVA. NEW ART AND RENEWED ART

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Whilst Edward Williams's idea of an *ars nova* within the context of the music of the Orthodox Church provided musicologists with a new and fruitful way of viewing the flourishing of kalophonic chant in the 14th century¹, we may still legitimately ask how the idea of a "new art" may intersect with the concept of tradition in the liturgical art of the Orthodox Church. Conventional narratives of the genesis and practice of liturgical art would lead one to suppose that such a contradiction is impossible, but, as has become increasingly apparent in recent reappraisal of the work of Uspensky and Florensky, amongst others, such narratives are historical constructions, themselves subject to revision and refashioning². When the parallel between "bad icons" and "bad church music" is brought into play, with the corresponding implication of a direct relationship between artistic style and prayerful efficacy, the idea of a "new art" may be viewed either as an unnecessary innovation or as an essential return to origins with the intention of renewing the capacity of art to transmit and facilitate prayer.

On the subject of the new, Fr Thomas Pott, in his *Byzantine Liturgical Reform*, has the following to say:

Newness is one of the essential themes of the Christian message. (...) Nevertheless, rather than speaking of 'newness', it is more appropriate to speak of 'renewal'. For the newness of the Gospel did not fall from heaven like a *Deus ex machina*, but descended to the depths of the earth in order to surge up like a water spring that renews everything and everyone it quenches. (...) It does not abolish the old, but rather transforms it by renewing it from its very depths, not in order to make it last a bit longer, but to make it well up to eternal life.³

I should like to address here in more detail this idea of renewal, and the ways in which it might give us a theological perspective on phenomena in the history – and actuality – of Orthodox liturgical arts such as what Williams described as an *ars nova*. The word "renew" in English is of late 14th-century origin, using the Middle English stem *newen*, meaning "resume, revive or renew", with the prefix "-re", obviously meaning "again", by analogy with the Latin *renovare*. The existence of three meanings for the stem *newen* is significant: apart from "renew" in the

Edward V. Williams, "A Byzantine Ars Nova: The Fourteenth-Century Reforms of John Koukouzeles in the Chanting of Great Vespers," in H. Birnbaum and S. Vryonis Jr, eds, *Aspects of the Balkans: Continuity and Change: Contributions to the International Balkan Conference held at UCLA, October 23–28, 1969* The Hague: Mouton, 1972, 211–29.

See in particular Nicoletta Misler, "Pavel Florensky as Art Historian" in Pavel Florensky, ed. Nicoletta Misler, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, London: Reaktion Books 2002, 29-93; Evan Freeman, *Redefining the Icon. The Problem of Innovation in the Writings of Florensky, Ouspensky and Kontoglou*, M. Div thesis, St Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, Crestwood, NY 2009 in general, and in particular, p. 59; and Evan Freedman, "Rethinking the Role of Style in Orthodox Iconography", in Ivan Moody and Maria Takala-Roszczenko, eds, *Church Music and Icons: Windows into Heaven. Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Orthodox Church Music, Joensuu, Finland*, 3-9 *June 2013*, Joensuu: ISOCM 2015, 350-369.

Thomas Pott, Byzantine Liturgical Reform, Crestwood, New York: SVS 2010, 13.

modern sense, we have "resume" and "revive". Both of these should give us pause for thought in the present context. If we replace the word "renew" with "resume", we have the idea of taking up a tradition that was interrupted. If we replace it with the word "revive", we have the idea of bringing back to life something that was dead. Is there a sense in which *renovatio* in Orthodox liturgical art could correspond to either of these meanings, and if so, what are the implications? Before I go on to discuss possible answers to this question, it is important to point out that the Latin itself, *renovo*, *renovare*, also has the possible meanings "restore", "repair", "reestablish", "repeat" and "reanimate".

Is it possible that St John Koukouzeles, the great musical reformer, the figure so deeply associated with Williams's ars nova, found the tradition of Byzantine chant of his time to be dead, to be in need of "reanimation", of "revival"? The answer to this question must take into account the context of his work, which was as a monk at the Great Lavra on Mount Athos; during the week, this cantor, composer and saint could be found outside its walls practicing hesychia. Alexander Lingas has comprehensively addressed this question in his article "Hesychasm and Psalmody", in which he discusses ways in which Sts Gregory Palamas and John Koukouzeles balanced solitude and community life: each would spend his weekdays in hesychia at a hermitage outside the monastery wall and join their brethren on weekends for liturgical worship. This weekly cycle is immediately identifiable as the old lavriote form of Palestinian monasticism that had recently been revived throughout the Orthodox world with the dissemination of a revised 'Typikon of St Sabas'.⁴

The clue is in the revival of an earlier form of monasticism, according to a revised Typikon, and in light of this, it may be considered that Koukouzeles, unlike Philippe de Vitry in the West, did not in fact create an *ars nova*, but an *ars renovata* (and it should also be remembered that the use of the term *ars nova* to describe an entire period of music dates only from the early 20th century)⁵.

According to Fr Irenäus Totzke,

In the West [...] there is a clear desire to take possession of matter and to 'fashion' it, that is, to reinvent it in shaping it. In sum, we can already see the Western artist as 'reformulator' and 'recreator'. Under the aegis of St Peter – the Apostle of such great importance for the West – the artist's creative force would not only give form to the melody but consciously change it, while the Byzantine artist – in view of the importance for the East of the Apostle John – would respectfully contemplate tradition, changing it only unconsciously. The primordial Christian 'theoría kaì práxis' is separated into an Eastern theoría, on the one hand, and a Western práxis on the other.⁶

Such a contrast may at first sight seem simplistic, but it is the result of a profound intuition concerning liturgical art in East and West. The drama of the controversy surrounding the way in which western composers tried to reinvent liturgical music in the Middle Ages is well-known, and a recent study by David Catalunya of newly-discovered concordances to a piece from the Las Huelgas manuscript, *Fa fa mi fa*, makes this abundantly clear. The text found in these concordances, says Catalunya, "extremely rich in musical terminology, metaphors, allegories, admonitions and references to specific individuals and places, rather sounds like a protest against the restrictions imposed by the ecclesiastical authorities at the beginning of the fourteenth century on the singing of polyphony." What he calls the "vindicatory nature of the

⁴ Lingas, "Hesychasm and Psalmody", in Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham, eds, *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, Aldershot: Variorum, Ashgate 1996: 159 of 155-168.

This usage originated with Johannes Wolf in 1904. See David Fallows, "Ars nova", in Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, eds., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition, London: Macmillan 2001. An easily accessible translation into French by André Gilles and Jean Maillard of the treatise attributed to Vitry which gave rise to this name may be found at http://centrebombe.org/livre/Ars.Nova.html.

[&]quot;Im Westen aber wird der Wille deutlich, sich der Materie zu bemächtigen und sie zu 'gestalten', d.h. sie in der Gestaltung gewissermaßen neu zu erfinden. Der abendländischen Interpret als 'Nach-' und 'Neuschöpfer' steht in nuce bereits vor uns: denn bald wird seine – im Sinne des für den Westen wichtigen Apostels Petrus – in der Zeit und in die Zeit ausschreitende Schöpferkraft die Melodie nicht nur gestalten, sondern bewusst verändern während der byzantinische Interpret – im Sinne des für den Osten wichtigen Apostels Johannes – ehrfürchtig das Überkommene kontempliert und in der Kontemplation unbewusst verändert. Der Auseinanderfall der frühchristlichen Einheit von 'theoría kai práxis' in östliche theoría und westliche práxis beginnt sich zu zeigen." Irenäus Totzke, *Musik der Ostkirche*, Sankt Ottilien: Eos 2014, 15.

⁷ David Catalunya, "Nuns, Polyphony, and a Liégeois Cantor: New Light on the Las Huelgas 'Solmization Song'", *Journal of the Alamire Foundation*, 9 (2017), 100.

poem" is clearly evident from the attempt, right at the beginning, to frame the use of polyphony in the liturgy within the context of the Fathers of the Church:

Fa fa mi fa... It is foolish to despise fa fa mi fa...

est fatuum spernere

quia musicalia because [they are] the elements of music,

teste philozophia by witness of philosophy,

quam sancti tradidere which the saints have handed down.8

This appeal to the consensus of the Church is notable, as is the placing of this in the category of philosophy. Inevitably, Koukouzelis's work also required some defence in some quarters; thus, Manuel Chrysaphes, in his treatise on chanting of 1458, says the following:

Ioannes Koukouzeles, the maistor, does not alter the stichera in his anagrammatismoi, but follows them step by step, although, like composers now, he was entirely able (indeed he was much more able) to create his own original chants which had nothing in common with their prototype stichera. But, had he acted thus, he would neither acted correctly nor would he have thought that he had interpreted the science of composition befittingly. Therefore, he follows the path of the old stichera precisely and does not alter them at all, obeying the rules of the science.⁹

These words squarely position Koukouzeles as a renewer rather than an innovator; earlier in the text, Chrysaphes notes that, "The second composer always follows his predecessor and his successor follows him and, to put it simply, everyone retains the technique of the art. [...]"¹⁰

To return to Totzke's words, they constitute another way of describing a "renewed art". A renewed art, bearing in mind the context under discussion, may in fact be considered to be at the very centre of the continuing power of liturgy to speak to us, and this applies to liturgical structure as well as the musical components of liturgy. That is to say, the gradual disappearance of the Cathedral rite, for example, was a response to spiritual circumstances. Its late remnants, zealously preserved by St Symeon of Thessaloniki, were a bulwark against change in precisely the same measure that an interest in this rite in the present day might be seen, inversely, as a seeking to renew liturgy against stagnation. For renewal is never without its critics, but it is through the dialogue between proponents and adversaries that changes in liturgy and liturgical music are refined so that they may, perhaps, become part of the tradition of the Church, just as doctrine was refined by disputation at the Ecumenical Councils. But it is of course, precisely because we have no easily understandable canons from the Ecumenical Councils concerning music that this particular discussion remains active and its arguments unresolved. Councils concerning

Such dialogue was already underway in the context of the spread of the psalmodic vigil as long ago as the later fourth century, as James McKinnon has established. He quotes St Ambrose's approval of psalmody:

⁸ Catalunya's translation, *ibid.*, 126.

^{9 &}quot;Ό γὰο χαριτώνυμος μαΐστωρ, ὁ Κουκουζέλης, ἐν τοῖς ἀναγραμματισμοῖς αὐτοῦ τῶν παλαιῶν οὐκ ἐξισταται στιχηρῶν, ἀλλὰ κατ' ἴχνος τούτοις ακολουθαῖ, δυνάμενος ἄν πάντως καὶ αὐτός, ὡς οἱ νῦν, καὶ πολὺ μᾶλλον εἴπερ οὖτοι, μέλη μόνα ποιεῖν ἴδια, μηδέν τι κοινωνοῦντα τοῖς πρωτοτύποις αὐτῶν στιχηροῖς. ἀλλ' εἰ οὕτως ἐποίει, οὔτε καλῶς ἄν ἐποίει, οὔτε ἐπιστήμης προσηκόντως ἐπαΐειν ἐδοκει. διὸ καὶ κατ' ἀκρίβειαν τοῦ τῶν παλαιῶν στιχηρῶν ἔχεται δρόμου καὶ αὐτῶν οὐ πάνυ τοι ἐξίσταται, τοῖς τῆς ἐπιστήμης νόμοις πειθόμενος." In Dimitri Conomos, ed., The Treatise of Manuel Chrysaphes, the Lampadarios: [Περὶ τῶν ἐνθεωρουμένων τῆ ψαλτικῆ τέχνη καὶ ὧν φρουνοῦσι κακῶς τινες περὶ αὐτῶν] On the Theory of the Art of Chanting and on Certain Erroneous Views that some hold about it (Mount Athos, Iviron Monastery MS 1120, July 1458), Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae – Corpus Scriptorum de Re Musica, 2, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1985, 40-45.

^{10 &}quot;καὶ τῷ πρωτέρῳ τε τῶν τοιητῶν ἀεὶ ὁ δεύτερος ἔπεται καὶ τοῦτο ὁ μετ' αὐτόν, καὶ πάντες ἁπλῶς ἔχονται τῆς τέχνης ὁδοῦ. [...]" Ibid.

Similarly, his painstaking detailing of the correct celebration of the Byzantine Liturgy in his *Liturgical Commentaries* would seem to have been born of a desire to ensure that they were not changed by contact with the Latin Church. See St Symeon of Thessalonika, *The Liturgical Commentaries*, ed. and trans. Steven Hawkes-Teeples, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies 2011, 23-24.

See discussion of the 75th Canon of the Council in Trullo (Quinisext) of 692 in Ivan Moody, "The Idea of Canonicity in Orthodox Liturgical Art", in *Composing and Chanting in the Orthodox Church: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Orthodox Church Music*, Joensuu: ISOCM/University of Joensuu, 2009, 337-342.

'Old men ignore the stiffness of age to sing a psalm... young men sing one without the bane of lust... young women sing psalms with no loss of wifely decency... and the child who refuses to learn other things takes pleasure in contemplating it... A psalm is sung by emperors and rejoiced in by the people... a psalm is sung at home and repeated outdoors; it is learned without effort and retained with delight,'¹³

and observes that, "The tone of such passages is altogether different from those describing the earlier fourth-century psalmody of desert monasticism. Musical pleasure had become an essential feature of psalmody, a development that is further documented by the emergence of a puritanical reaction to it," and he further notes that, "One could say that, with its continuous psalmody, monasticism made a quantitative contribution to the song of the fourth-century Church, and received in exchange the gift of musicality." This musicality was inevitably something that would not remain static, as the history of the development of Christian chant, in spite of the many gaps still extant in our knowledge of it, splendidly demonstrates.

The Koukouzelian reforms provide a particularly eloquent, and peculiarly radical, example of this: Lingas notes that,

the sheer length and complexity of the newly composed chants for the all-night vigil's ordinary herald not only a shift of emphasis away from the often verbose canons and stichera of the 'proper', but also imply an increased confidence in the expressive potential of purely musical techniques, and new attitudes toward their application within Orthodox worship. This latter conclusion is underlined by the production of multiple and often highly individual settings of a single text, profoundly altering the correspondence between words and melody in Byzantine chant.¹⁶

This shift of emphasis was nevertheless the result of an organic process that occurred as part of the exploration of the "gift of musicality" within the context of the development of monastic spirituality, and which in turn is part of a theological context. In discussing the basis of hesychasm in the writings of St Makarios, Fr Nikolaos Loudovikos says the following:

This introjection of the Church with its structures and sacraments is the ecclesialization of the inner human being as a free ascetical reception of the Spirit of the ecclesial fact, in such a way that this becomes the content of such a person's thinking and acting, of his or her body and soul. It has to do, then, not with a psychological interiorization, but with an ontological refashioning of humanity's personal being. This is so because it voluntarily and ascetically positions the Church as an image of the kingdom of God within, a fact that signifies precisely an interiorization without any more or less narcissistic individualism, a non-psychological turning-within – for the first time we are speaking of an inner space in a clearly ontological sense."¹⁷

This inner space, then, has to do with the actual nature of the human being; and if hesychasm is a "refashioning" of that being, a music that arises within the context of the practice of hesychasm must necessarily be conceived in that spirit and with that aim in mind. This is entirely in accordance with the comments by St Gregory Palamas himself on the benefits of liturgical psalmody, and his injunction to his flock in Thessaloniki not to neglect sung worship, ¹⁸ and, as I said above, in accordance with the historical context of monastic spirituality more generally.

It is clear that the idea of innovation, in the modern acceptance of the word, has no place in all this. The idea of renewal, however, is quite another matter. Williams, in his discussion of Koukouzeles, would seem to be very clear in this respect: "Within the formulaic limitations of a conventional musical vocabulary", he says, "Koukouzeles composed lines with a vocal coloration not to be found in the more restricted ranges and contours of the 'quasi-traditional' settings," and after detailed analysis of the Koukouzelian style, he compares it to that of his contemporary, Xenos Koronis, which

relies upon chains of stock melodic figures to attenuate his lines. (...) Koronis seems to propel his melodies more through determination than melodic momentum. In the hands of later 14th and 15th-century composers

¹³ St Ambrose, *Explanatio psalmi* I (*MECL*, No. 276), quoted in James McKinnon, "Desert Monasticism and the Late Fourth-Century Psalmodic Movement", *Music and Letters* 75, 517 of 505-521.

¹⁴ McKinnon, ibid., 519.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 519.

¹⁶ Lingas, op. cit., 167.

¹⁷ Nikolaos Loudovikos, Church in the Making, Yonkers, NY: SVS 2016, 34.

¹⁸ Lingas, op. cit., 157.

¹⁹ Williams, op. cit., 228.

lines often degenerate into unrelieved roulades of melodic clichés. John Lampadarios, even more than Koronis, depends upon successions of formulaic patterns to construct his lines.²⁰

However, Williams's conclusion after his detailed analytical observations is that Koukouzeles was "the first composer to turn his back upon an archaic, anonymous musical practice and the first to offer a 'new art' for the evening office." Such a conclusion is hardly warranted either within the context of Orthodox theology or Orthodox musical praxis; while Koukouzeles did indeed effect what might be considered a revolution, it must be seen within the context of the hesychastic renewal of the vigil, the *agrypnia*, of the time, and while this kind of composition certainly enabled a new artistic freedom and confidence, it is by no means evident that this therefore implies a turning of the back upon "an archaic, anonymous musical practice". It is precisely because of that practice that such a renewal was possible; just as the practice of hesychasm did not appear *ex nihilo*, but was founded on the spirituality of earlier saints, so the musical expression of prayer of Koukouzeles and his contemporaries arose from a profound awareness of, and connection with, earlier tradition: indeed, this new-found freedom would have been impossible without the settling of liturgical praxis of the preceding years. To quote Grigorios Stathis,

The three lengthening and distinguishing elements of kalophony [that is, the kalophonic melos proper, the *anagrammatismoi* of the poetic text and the echemata or kratemata] converge into one composition and are at the same time the surest indicators of the new style after it has already passed a long period of development, emerging out of the first half of the fourteenth century into the ocean of the new, more expansive musical ephos. Kalophony, then, in this sense can be considered the *ars nova* of the Byzantine melopoeia.²²

If the hesychastic tradition's aim of refashioning the human person, as manifest in the tradition from St Makarios to St Gregory Palamas, as well as St Symeon the New Theologian's call for each person to experience the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit²³, turns on this refashioning, it is clear that the Church's sung worship, of which Palamas was such a fervent advocate, would hardly contradict it. The Lebanese theologian Fr Jean Corbon expressed this perfectly when he said that,

The freshness of the first creation, which nostalgically inspires artistic creativity, is no longer in a mythical past but in a world that is coming and culture, delivered from its bonds, already opens us to this new world. Silence, 'the mystery of the world that is coming' [St Isaac of Nineveh], transfigures our gaze; we are able to see the glory of God with open eyes.²⁴

The transfigured gaze enables the artist not only to reflect "nostalgically", but to go beyond that and, "with open eyes", emerge in to what Stathis calls the "ocean of the new" by refashioning – renewing – creation for the world that is to come. If we return to the multifarious meanings of the Latin *renovo*, *renovare*, which include "restore", "repair", "re-establish", "repeat" and "reanimate", we can easily discern both the awareness of tradition and the eschatological dimension inherent in them. For any renewal can have only one eschatological aim, pointed towards the Kingdom and, like the water spring of which Pott speaks, "welling up towards eternal life".

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²⁰ Ibid., 229.

²¹ Ibid., 230.

Gregorios Stathes, trans. Konstantinos Terzopoulos, *Introduction to Kalophony, the Byzantine* Ars Nova, Oxford: Peter Lang 2014, 62.

²³ St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), Hymn 27. See Johannes Koder, ed., and Joseph Paramelle, trans., Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, *Hymnes*, "Sources chrétiennes" 156, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1969, t. I.

²⁴ Jean Corbon [trans. Matthew J. O'Connell], The Wellspring of Worship, San Francisco: Ignatius 1988, 231.

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