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The Origins of Russian Music

Introduction to the Kondakarian Notation

Revised, Translated, and with a Chapter
on Relationships between Latin, Byzantine
and Slavonic Church Music
by Neil K. Moran



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Foreword

In 1955 I obtained the dr. phil. degree from the University of Vienna with a dissertation on Carlo Antonio Campioni dealing primarily with the Italian roots of Mozart's style. In September of 1957 I took up studies on Gregorian chant and Byzantine church music at Hamburg University with Prof. Heinrich Husmann, who at that time was considered the leading authority on medieval music. He not only acted as my mentor but also was most generous in assisting me and my work in word and deed.

For three and a half years I studied intensively Greek manuscripts of the 13th century containing the melodies in the so-called Middle Byzantine notation of the kontakia (one of the most important categories of Byzantine liturgical poetry). I compared the versions of the different manuscripts in all detail, transcribed the neumatic notation and analyzed the structure of the melodies. In the spring of 1961 I submitted a three-volume critical edition of these melodies to the faculty of philosophy at Hamburg University as my habilitation. Due to its length (over 1000 pages) and the high costs a setting of the text and musical examples would have entailed, the work unfortunately remained unpublished. At the same time I began to learn Church Slavonic because I wanted to include the five surviving Old Russian kondakaria in my research. The so-called kondakarian notation of these five manuscripts was then regarded as totally enigmatic and undecipherable. It soon became clear to me that these sources represented the most complicated system of notation of the European Middle Ages. These manuscripts fascinated me to such a degree that I was unsparing in my efforts to find a way to decipher them. In 1962 I was finally able to isolate the key for deciphering the notation on the basis of observations of the laimos. I wrote an extensive study in German which the journal *Musik des Ostens* published in two parts in 1965 and 1967.

In 1965, after the appearance of the first part of my study, Dr. Linos Polites, Prof. for New Greek philology at the University of Thessaloniki made a spectacular discovery, which surprisingly completely confirmed the results of my research. Prof. Polites found namely a Greek asmatikon in the cathedral of Kastoria in northern Greece written in a complicated notation, which resembled in many respects the general appearance of the neumes in the Old Russian kondakaria.

I must first thank Dr. Neil K. Moran, an outstanding researcher in the field of medieval music, for the very careful translation of my work into English and for helpful suggestions. I wish to also express my gratitude to Michael Rücker of Peter Lang International Academic Publishing Group in Hamburg for his sympathetic interest in the production of the book and for his attention to detail in the typography and layout.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Professor Dr. Heinrich Husmann (1908-1983), the outstanding musicologist and medievalist of the 20th century. He considered my study on the kondakarian notation and the following *Universale Neumenkunde* in three volumes to be “das Jahrhundertwerk der Musikwissenschaft” (the *magnum opus* of musicology in the 20th century). I would like to also evoke the memory of the prominent Russian musicologist Prof. Juri Keldysh, who expressed the opinion that no historian of Russian music would be able to proceed without taking into consideration my research into neumatic notation.