



# City Research Online

## City St George's, University of London

**Citation:** Lingas, A. (2017). (Review of) Greek Orthodox Music in Ottoman Istanbul: Nation and Community in the Era of Reform. *Music and Letters*, 98(2), pp. 298-300. doi: 10.1093/ml/gcx036

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

**Permanent repository link:** <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/17189/>

**Link to published version:** <https://doi.org/10.1093/ml/gcx036>

**Copyright and Reuse:** Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to [City Research Online policy](#).

*Greek Orthodox Music in Ottoman Istanbul: Nation and Community in the Era of Reform.* By Merih Erol. Pp. xix + 265. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indiana, 2015. \$35. ISBN 978-0-253-01833-5.)

In recent years musicologists writing in western European languages have analysed nineteenth-century efforts to renew or reform Catholic, Protestant and Jewish liturgical music, including the 'restoration' of Gregorian chant by the monks of Solesmes, the introduction of harmonised choral music to the synagogue, and revivals of the sacred polyphony of Palestrina and J.S. Bach. Yet parallel movements in the churches of the Christian East remain, with the partial exception of the 'New Direction' in Russian Orthodox choral music, virtually unknown outside of their native regions. Only recently has Jim Samson made a significant step toward filling this gap in his magisterial *Music in the Balkans* (2013) with a wide-ranging treatment of developments in Orthodox Christian liturgical singing that accompanied the emergence of European nation-states in areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman and Habsburg empires.

Now in *Greek Orthodox Music in Ottoman Istanbul: Nation and Community in the Era of Reform*, a monograph based on her 2009 doctoral thesis, Merol Erol focusses on developments during the second half of the nineteenth century in the study, teaching, and practice of church singing in an important Christian community that fell outside the geographic borders of Samson's book, namely that of the Greek Orthodox of late Ottoman Istanbul. Constantinople, as it was then generally known, was a multi-ethnic city in which Muslims did not become a majority until the 1880s. Its 'Rum' or 'Romeic' Orthodox were inheritors of the ecclesiastical traditions of the East Roman (so-called Byzantine) Empire that fell to Mehmed the Conqueror in 1453, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the foremost episcopal see of Orthodox Christianity. From his base in the Phanar (Fener) district, the Ecumenical Patriarch not only carried out his ecclesiastical duties as Archbishop of Constantinople, but also served the Sultan as an 'ethnarch' responsible for the Ottoman Empire's *Rum millet* (Orthodox Christian religious community). During the politically turbulent early decades of the nineteenth century, when rebellion and foreign intervention led to the emergence of a small nation-state of Greece with Athens as its capital, the Ecumenical Patriarchate had fostered and then formally adopted a revised system of chant notation and theory created by Chrysanthos of Madytos, Gregorios the First Cantor (*Protopsaltes*), and Chourmouzios the Archivist. This 'New Method' was the most important reform to Byzantine ecclesiastical chant since the introduction of fully diastematic neumes in the twelfth century. The consequences of the Chrysanthine reform continue to resonate until the present day in debates over the correctness of its tunings, the historical verisimilitude of its transcriptions from the pre-reform system of neumes (generally known today as 'Middle Byzantine Notation'), and matters of performance practice.

By beginning her narrative with the Ottoman Reform Edict of 1856, Merol avoids directly confronting issues surround the introduction of the Chrysanthine 'New Method'. Instead she offers what is to a large extent a chronicle of an intermediate stage in its reception during a period of relative peace for the Greek Orthodox community of Constantinople. As the Ottoman Empire was transformed by the *Tanzimat* reforms of civil administration and the *millet* system was replaced with modern conceptions of equality before the law, old religious collective identities gave way to new ones determined by modern nationalisms. At the same time, substantial portions of urban society – a combination of established elites and members of the rapidly growing middle class – came to adopt and share Western European cultural norms.

Merol produces a fascinating socio-economic history of increasingly self-confident Romeic Orthodox musical institutions and discourse in this period of reform from primary

sources including books, encyclicals, periodicals, pamphlets, and materials chronicling the founding and operation of Istanbul's Greek musical associations. These show that the *Rum* community was preoccupied with attempts to understand the past and determine the future of the traditions of sacred chant that they had received through oral tradition, pre-modern manuscripts, and the transcriptions and theoretical treatises of the Chrysanthine New Method, the dissemination of which had been facilitated by the recent adoption of mechanical printing. Merol does a fine job of showing how discussions of church music in late Ottoman Constantinople were shaped by transnational discourses of identity that have been examined most thoroughly by scholars working on the history, language and literature of the modern nation-state of Greece. These embrace efforts to establish or disprove continuity with the Greek-speaking civilisations of Classical Antiquity and Byzantium, as well as debates over the proper position of Hellenism relative to the contemporary Christian West and Muslim East. Were, for example, areas of musical overlap between Greek Orthodox chant and Ottoman secular music on the one hand, and dissimilarities with modern European sacred music on the other, to be interpreted as evidence for common roots in Classical Antiquity or as signs of later Oriental corruption? If the traditions, which had been known for centuries as 'ecclesiastical music' or simply 'psalmody' but, in line the later nineteenth-century rehabilitation of Byzantium as 'medieval Hellenism', had been renamed 'Byzantine Music', been corrupted, how might they be purified? Furthermore, was the production of polyphonic settings of chants such as those created during the 1840s for the Greek Orthodox parishes in Vienna a natural and even necessary form of modernisation, or did it constitute, as condemnatory encyclicals from the Ecumenical Patriarchate maintained, a betrayal of patristic traditions of psalmody?

Most prior historical scholarship that addresses in detail attempts during the later nineteenth and early twentieth to answer these questions, such as that of Katy Romanou and Yannis Filopoulos, has been written in modern Greek and focuses mainly on the Hellenic nation-state. Merol skilfully draws on this literature, as well as the analyses of parallel developments in non-musical fields noted above and recent ethnomusicological investigations of Greek Orthodox chanting by Alexander Khalil, Jeffers Engelhardt and Tore Lind, as she conveys the development of discourse about music within the Romeic community of late Ottoman Constantinople. Unlike the three ethnomusicologists just mentioned, however, Merol refrains from sustained efforts to explain how matters of ideology and identity relate to particular features of musical compositions, performance practices, or theoretical systems. *Greek Orthodox Music in Ottoman Istanbul* is thus in some ways comparable to Katherine Bergeron's *Decadent Enchantments: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes* (Berkeley, 1998) in its eschewal of musical detail

When she does attempt to address particular musical and liturgical issues, Merol sometimes evinces a lack of familiarity with the received texts and music of Greek Orthodox liturgy, as well as of current scholarship regarding their historical development. Thus she follows late nineteenth-century writers in placing the canonised saint, composer and theorist John Koukouzeles in the twelfth century, whereas more recent scholarship finds him to have been active in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. A more serious case of confusion is Merol's effort to explain how controversies over the liturgical propriety of *kratemata*, which are wordless musical settings of chains of vocables such as 'a-na-nes' or 'te-ri-rem', related to wider debates over the 'purification' of received chant traditions without citing the comprehensive historical study of Gregorios Anastasiou *Τὰ κρατήματα σὴν ψαλτικῆ τέχνη* (Athens, 2005). *Kratemata* may occur either as passages (*teretismata* or *echemata*) within texted works or as independent compositions, but Merol describes them misleadingly as 'the tenuto parts of ecclesiastical chants' (p. 150) while illustrating her point on the companion website with a freestanding *kratema* (an oblique relationship that is

unfortunately typical of the internet sound examples). Although she is correct in observing that some kratemata employ modes and melodic patterns extraneous to the central repertoires of texted Greek chants for the Byzantine rite, the genre had also become controversial for its eschewal of comprehensible text since at least the time of St Nikodemos the Hagiorite (1749–1809). Nineteenth-century partisans of reforming Byzantine chanting along Western or Russian lines expanded this critique of semantic incomprehensibility to encompass texted melismatic repertoires, most of which they dismissed as fatally disfigured by oriental influence. During the same period, however, it became common for some cantors to compose new settings of liturgical texts using modes borrowed from the Ottoman *makamlar*. Illustrating this spectrum of practice and opinion with musical examples would have provided the reader with a suitably nuanced understanding of what Greek Orthodox authors writing from a variety of perspectives meant when they spoke of the 'purification' of ecclesiastical chanting.

Other missed opportunities to ground observations about musical discourse in actual music occur when Merol logically broadens her focus to encompass music education in the Greek schools of Constantinople and the presentation of folk song by Georgios Pachtikos. Given the debates about the modernisation of chant, for example, it is undoubtedly significant that Pachtikos presents the very first item in his 1905 song collection as a harmonised arrangement for four-part male chorus. Less clear is the relevance of Merol's penultimate chapter 'Singing and Political Allegiance', which nevertheless offers some interesting accounts of surveillance and regulation of musical events by the Ottoman state. The cataclysmic consequences of these political rumblings fall outside the chronological bounds of *Greek Orthodox Music in Ottoman Istanbul*, for it concludes on the brink of the Ottoman Empire's dissolution and the destruction or displacement of most Christian communities in Asia Minor. As Merol recapitulates her main themes, however, she does briefly indicate their lasting influence on musical thought and practice in Turkey and Greece.