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The Greek community of Odessa and its role in the 'Westernisation' or 'progress' of Greek music

*The Greeks have the most monstrous taste in their pictures,
which for more refinery are always drawn upon a gold ground.
You may imagine what a good air this has,
but they have no notion either of shade or proportion.*

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
Constantinople, 29 May 1717

Introduction

This chapter is on taste. It highlights the ambiguity of the meaning of 'progress' (or 'Westernisation') in the development of Greek music; ambiguity deriving from the ill-timed encounter (or, rather, collision) of the Western trend for restoring past music, and the (Greek) goal to arise from a distant past. It focuses on the contribution of the inhabitants of the prosperous city of Odessa to the progress of Greek musical life and education and follows their fluctuating adaptation to the prevailing trends and tastes.

During the greatest part of the nineteenth century the Greek diaspora was much more pivotal in the development of the Greek state than its local inhabitants. It would be unwise to attribute some general characteristics to the Greeks inhabiting the areas with such diverse cultures as Western Europe and Northern Turkey, more so because the knowledge of the latter is disproportionately small. Due to the troubled history of the eastern areas inhabited by the Greeks, the language reforms in Turkey, the negative feelings between the two peoples over the long periods of time, as well as the slow development of Turkish scientific historiography,¹

¹ The voluminous history of the Ottoman Empire by Ahmed Cevdet Pashas, known as *Tarih-i Cevdet*, was written between 1854 and 1884; it is considered representative of the Tanzimat historiography and a turning point towards the westernisation of Turkish historiography (Çakır 2009).

historical research has been much more effective on the Greeks living in Europe.

On the other hand, towards the end of the twentieth century, Western historiography developed a fallacy that was propagated as objectivity: namely, the historians described the cultures of past epochs according to criteria developed during the latest phases of those cultures. Hence, in many texts from that period, the Greeks who had lived in Constantinople and Asia Minor in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were called the Ottomans. However, the ethnicities were very clearly distinguished among the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire. William Eton, an English diplomat who had lived in Russia and Turkey for many years, remarked at the end of the eighteenth century: 'A Turk is never called a Greek, although his family should have been settled for generations in that country; nor is a Greek called a Turk, though his ancestors had lived centuries in a Turkish province' (Eton 1799: 358–359). It is noteworthy that he is speaking about a Greek country before the Greek Revolution and the foundation of the modern Greek state.

I was prompted to introduce my topic with the above comments as a monition to the readers. The enthusiasm, optimism, energy and ingenuity exhibited by the Greeks living outside Greece who aimed to bring the country closer to Europe by introducing Western thought and ideology, makes for a remarkable story. The focus of the zealous efforts toward the resurgence and progress of Greece was the heredity of the Ancient Greek culture and the secularisation of education. The Greeks, including those living in the East, had for long before the Revolution been aware of the heritage of the Ancient Greece. It was expressed in tales and songs, fused with their Christian past and their Ottoman present, in a way that is characteristic of Eastern traditional literature and poetry.² Describing the Greeks in Constantinople, William Eton says: 'Their ancient empire is fresh in their memory; it is the subject of their popular songs, and they speak of it in common conversation as a recent event' (1799: 350–351). That the 'ancient empire' is not Byzantium, but Ancient Greece is clear from other points of the text where contemporary Greeks are compared to the Ancient Greeks; and it is thus that a French translator of the book

² Examples of the fusion of cultures, religions and periods in Eastern poetry are the numerous epics about Alexander the Great. Alexander is an enemy, a conqueror, a local hero, a Christian, etc. (see Stoneman et al. 2012).

understood: 'Ils n'ont pas oublié leur ancienne gloire. Toutes leurs chansons populaires la rapellent, et ils en parlent comme d'un événement tout nouveau' [They have not forgotten their ancient glory. All their popular songs remember it, and they speak of it as if it were a new event] (Eton 1801: 74). Speaking of the Phanariots, whom he dislikes, Eton claims that 'they are all people of very good education' and that 'they are the only part of their nation who have totally relinquished the ancient Grecian spirit' (1799: 352–353).

There was an important difference between the education of the Greeks in the East and the West. The Ancient Greek culture was prominent in Western education, hence the Greeks who lived in Western cities developed a pronounced interest for its history and culture. The interrelationship between the ideas of ancient Greek heredity, secularism, Western philhellenism, the Greek Revolution and the European orientation of the new state was tightly woven. Realising the immense gap that the new state had to bridge in order to survive in the European environment, many saw the heredity of ancient Greek culture as an asset and believed that its exploitation was the only means to bridge the gap. Starting from the final decades of the eighteenth century, a web of Greek publications that secularised knowledge and introduced both the Western achievements and Ancient Greek writers to the Greeks themselves spread over Europe. Between 1780 and 1820, one may count 205 names of authors appearing for the first time. A majority of them were young and wrote on secular subjects (Ēliou 2003: 9–26:14). Between 1801 and 1821, 1373 new books were published, mostly in Venice, Vienna, Constantinople (Istanbul), Corfu and Paris, but also in Leipzig, Moscow, Iași and other cities (Ibid). Although religious subjects still dominated the catalogues of publishers in the cities such as Venice and Constantinople, many publications on science, history, archaeology, geography and linguistics appeared for the first time in modern Greek language. Judging from the lists of subscribers who financed and bought the books (a method applied to many of those publications), the cities where they had the best circulation were Vienna, Iași, Bucharest, Odessa, Trieste, Constantinople, and the monasteries of Mount Athos; this list gives us the picture of the distribution of educated Greeks in Europe (Ibid.: 16).

Communication between the Greeks participating in the resurgence, from the cities listed above, was effective thanks to the commercial

activities developed by the most energetic Greeks of the diaspora. It was three young Greek merchants in Odessa, Nikolaos Skoufas, Manōlēs Xanthos, and Athanasios Tsakalōv who, influenced by Freemasonry, founded the secret Filike Etaireia ('Friendly Society') in 1814 – a society that contributed much to the preparation of the Revolution. Secularisation changed the apportionment of education in society. It was the merchants – and not the clergy – who were at the forefront of Greek scholarship.

Since the late eighteenth century, a majority of secular publications in Greek were published in Vienna, after the Emperor Joseph II's reform (1781) which introduced the freedom of press and religion. Two widely disseminated periodicals were printed in Vienna: the *Hellēnikē Ephēmeris* (Greek Daily, 1790–1797) and the periodical with the perfectly eloquent title *Hermēs ho Logios* (Hermes the Scholar, 1811–1821).

Introducing Western music to the Greeks was a natural repercussion of this movement. There are two extended texts on music in *Hermēs ho Logios*, unveiling the reason why the Westernisation of music was not introduced so smoothly as other subjects. The first, entitled 'Mousikē' [Music] was a translation of a text by Johann Georg Sulzer (1816/1–6), most likely extracted from his book *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste in einzeln, nach alphabetischer Ordnung der Kunstwörter auf einander folgenden, Artikeln abgehandelt* (Sulzer 1771–1774). Although the name of the translator was not stated, it must have been Kōnstantinos Kokkinakēs, one of the two editors of the periodical in 1816 to 1819, who had studied in Constantinople, Bucharest and Vienna and translated a number of texts on various subjects from German and French. In a short introduction Kokkinakēs writes on the important role of music in the societies of Ancient Greece and Western Europe; he believes that this is now beginning to be understood in 'contemporary Greece, the country that requests that her lights are regenerated, in order to be detached from the precipice of unmusicality' (Ibid). The translator, who admits that he does not know either Western or Byzantine music, has tried to use in his translation the corresponding terms applied in Byzantine and Ancient Greek music, but his ignorance of all three systems and of their differences is obvious. He expresses his optimism for the future of Greek music, noting that the patriarch in Constantinople has consented to establish a music school for

the instruction of the New Method of Byzantine notation.³ The second – and the last – lengthy text on music published in the periodical is the (pedantic) questionnaire given to students at the final exams of this music school, sent from Iași by a graduate (Chrysantos 1817). After that, nothing else was published on music, except some news about music taught in some Greek schools, especially of the diaspora.

In the nineteenth century, the Greeks in European cities, had no doubt whatsoever that harmony and stave notation should be taught in Greece and that monophonic chant represented an underdeveloped art, at a low cultural level, from which it should rapidly rise. Their assurance started to crumble towards the end of the nineteenth century and especially in the early twentieth century, when the ideas that supported the restoration of the monophonic Gregorian chant were propagated, thus transforming the meaning of progress in the arts.

The Greek community of Odessa

Odessa is a port in the Black Sea, founded in 1792 by the Empress Catherine the Great, that quickly rose to prosperity. In the nineteenth century it was the largest city in Ukraine and one of the four largest Russian cities. Nearly a half of its population was foreign. The Greeks formed the fourth largest foreign community in Odessa, after the Jews, the Polish and the Germans. Gregorios Maraslēs (1831–1907), who was born in Odessa, was elected the Major of the city in 1878 and served in that post for more than 15 years.⁴ With his wealth he contributed both to his native city and to the Greeks in Athens, Constantinople and elsewhere.

A majority of his benefactions had to do with education. *The Maraslēs Library* was a series of over 120 high quality editions of translations (mostly of Shakespeare and Russian writers) and original works selected for their perceived efficacy with respect to the desired progress of the Greeks. The books were printed in Athens and sold at low prices or donated for free. The project was initiated in 1897 and ended in 1909, two years after Maraslēs' death. However, only a few books related to music were

³ On the influence of Western 'enlightened' writers onto the inventors of the New Method, and on the short period that the Patriarchate in Constantinople encouraged such directions, see my introduction to the English translation of Chrysanthos of Madytos' *Great theory of music* (Romanou 2010: 10–25).

⁴ On the Greek community of Odessa see Karavia 1998.

published in the series. All of them are in stave notation and it is known that at least one book in Byzantine notation that was proposed to be included in the series, was not published. It was P. G. Kēltzanidēs' *Kleis tēs Archaías Methodou* (Key to the Ancient Method), an explanation of music notation, written about 1870. Kēltzanidēs died in 1896, and the book was proposed by the Music Society of Constantinople. It should be noted that the society's greediness played a role in the cancelation of the project (see Rōmanou 1996: 143).

Anastasios Maltos (1851–1927), who had settled in Odessa in 1894 and lived there until 1915, was in charge of the series after 1905. Maltos was a philologist who held a doctorate from the University of Zurich and who had also studied music at the Universities of Munich and Leipzig. Maltos wrote a number of works aiming at the Westernisation of music education in Greece. He published translations of two historical works, a *History of Ancient Greek music* by Weitzmann (*Geschichte der griechischen Musik*; Berlin, 1855) that was printed in Athens in 1893, and the *History of music in outline* by H. A. Köstlin (*Geschichte der Musik im Umriss*; Berlin, 1889). Maltos also began writing a book *Historia tēs mousikēs en Helladī apo tēs ethnikēs paliggenesias* [History of music in Greece since the national rebirth], however it is likely that it was left incomplete. The extracts from the introduction to this book were published in the periodical *Mousikē* (April 1912) in Constantinople. Maltos says that in Greece 'the Muses were silent during many centuries, having moved to other countries together with Liberty, their protecting Goddess.' He asked: 'When our beloved country [...] rose again in the small corner of our great and glorified Greece, did the Muses return [...] where they were born and adored for thousand years?' In his opinion, although in the sciences important achievements have been made,

one could not say the same thing about Apollo's magic art [...] The musical sun of modern Greece, the patriarch of our new musicians, Nikolaos Manzaros, around whom new planets rotate, is certainly well known to us, having connected firmly his name with the poet of the *Hymn to Liberty*,⁵ but in the West he is practically unknown. Nevertheless, lets not get disappointed! Their efforts will bring results soon. In the Ionian islands but also in the rest of Greece music is already cultivated. Conservatories

⁵ The 'complete work' of Dionysios Solomos, to whom Maltos refers, was published in Maraslēs Library in 1901, edited by the poet Kostas Palamas.

and philharmonics are today in rivalry to bring music to all the social classes of Greeks.

Maltos was well informed on Western music and wanted Greece to participate in its achievements. In the following issue of *Mousikē* he published a chapter of his *History of music in Greece*, namely the biography of Nikolaos Augerinos born in Taganrog (1803–1889), a violinist who owned a precious ‘Amati’ instrument, and whose harmonisations of Greek church music were performed in Taganrog and Odessa.

Aside from these historical works, Maltos also published several collections of children’s songs. One of them, *Terpsichorē*, came out in 1884. It was written for beginners and contained preliminary instructions on solfège reading, as well as songs in one or two parts. There was absolutely no intention to give a national flavour to the collection. There were many German, Russian, Irish, French, Italian, English, Hungarian and Greek melodies, including melodies written by Maltos himself, then, by Alexandros Katakouzēnos, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Weber, and many lesser known composers. In the second edition, published in 1894, four Greek folk songs in 7/8 meter (and a Serbian melody) were added. It is interesting that the verses of the four Greek songs, as well as the Serbian song, are by Katakouzēnos. The same sources, roughly, have provided Maltos with the songs gathered in his more advanced collections, such as *Melpomenē* (Odessa 1887) and his *Sylogē Diphōnōn, Triphōnōn kai Tetrphōnōn Asmatōn eis chreisin Hellēnikōn Scholeiōn kai Gymnasiōn* [Collection of songs in two, three and four voices to be used in Greek schools and gymnasia], published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1881.

Of special interest (though deviating from our central subject) are songs by Dēmētrios Lalas (1848–1911) in both these collections. This composer’s entire opus was lost in 1917, in the wreck of a ship carrying his manuscripts to Italy to be published. Dēmētrios Lalas, whom Maltos called a friend and ‘a man proficient in music’, had studied in Austria and Germany. He was acquainted with the Wagners and helped with the preparation of the premiere of the *Ring* in 1876. Cosima Wagner wrote about him in her diaries in a very friendly and tender tone. Her last entry on Lalas was on Friday 6 April 1877: ‘Today’s stranger is our good Lalas, coming here from Salzburg to say goodbye – he is returning to Monastir. Memories of the Nibelungen days!’ (Gregor-Dellin and Mack 1978: 956).

The Repatriates

Alexandros Katakouzēnos (1824–1892) lived in Odessa from 1861 to 1879. A perfect representative of the diaspora, he was born in Trieste, his parents having fled from Smyrna during the Greek Revolution. It seems that he received his first music lessons in Athens (from Dēmētrios Digenēs, a teacher from Corfu); then, he studied in Paris, and finally in Vienna. In Vienna he directed the polyphonic choir of the Greek Orthodox Church, for which he composed (or harmonised) the music. His fame spread fast, and in 1861, he was invited to Odessa, where he directed the polyphonic choir of the city's Greek Church of Holy Trinity. In 1870 Olga, the Russian Queen of Greece (who reigned from 1867 to 1913), invited him to Athens where he established and conducted the choir of the royal chapel. In 1880 he offered his service and experience to the newly founded Conservatory of Athens, which would become the leading music conservatory since 1891.

Katakouzēnos wrote hundreds of children's songs, which were taught in Greek schools for many years. Many of those were his own melodies with verses written by himself or by others, however, even more songs were his own poems adapted to familiar Western melodies (by Schubert, Mozart, Mendelssohn et al.).

Katakouzēnos died in 1892, one year after the Reform of the Athens Conservatory (Motsenigos 1953: 326) that effaced his contribution as old-fashioned and ineffective, and introduced the methods, programmes and repertoires mainly 'borrowed' from the French Conservatoire. Katakouzēnos shared the fate of a considerable number of musicians who had gathered in Athens from the Ionian islands and Western cities and were involved in popularising Western music through choirs and bands in the church, at schools, and in the open air. The culture of the 'great composer', of the integrity of the work of art and of the stable repertory was now modernising Athens. Most Greeks were not qualified to teach in the reformed conservatory, the staff of which included several foreign musicians, such as Paul Miersch, Franck Choisy, Désiré Pâque, Armand Marsick – to name but a few.

Among the waves of Greeks repatriated around 1900, Iōannēs Prōios was another musician who came to Athens from Odessa. A graduate of

the Imperial Music School of Odessa, Prōios translated a music dictionary by A. Garras from a Russian translation by Vladimir Feodorovich Odoyevski (1803–1869), one of the founders of Russian classical musicology, and the first respectable music critic, who was in favour of a historical treatment of Russian chant. Prōios' translation was published in Leipzig in 1910. In the Introduction, he wrote of the difficulties he had faced, and of his choice to leave certain terms (such as *sonata*) in the original language, rather than attempt to hellenise them. He listed a number of Russian and Western European writers that he had consulted (including N. D. Kashkin, A. F. Kazbiriuk, P. I. Tchaikovsky, N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov and A. S. Arensky, as well as E. Hanslick), and he ended the Introduction by expressing his wish that his work would 'induce others to write more perfect and systematic works, specialised in our national music' (Prōios 1910).

Prōios' collection of choral songs for one to four voices 'for schools and families' also appeared in 1910 with the same publishers. Reflecting the latest trends of that time, it is titled *Phēmios kai Damascēnos ētoi Syllogē Dēmotikōn kai Ekklēsiastikōn Asmatōn* [Phēmios and Damascēnos,⁶ or A collection of Greek folk and church chants]. No more Schubert melodies and Katakouzēnos' verses. It was the double roots of Greek tradition that would make modern Greek music flourish; or, maybe, they *were* modern Greek music in full bloom. Progress and westernisation acquired another face.

In the Introduction to his collection, Prōios seems to criticise Maltos. He says that the benefits of music are well known to everybody. 'But what has not yet been understood' he comments,

is that in the education of our youth, the music that should especially be used is our national music. The Greeks have failed to understand this, because of the irrational prejudice against the music of our fatherland. Unfortunately there are many who either totally deny the existence of Greek music, and pretend that since we get dressed in European clothes, we should also sing the European way, or believe that even if some Greek music has been preserved, it must have been corrupted and therefore useless. But both are awfully deceived, because Greek music exists and its particular beauty has been preserved unspoiled (Prōios 1910).

⁶ Phēmios is a singer mentioned in *Odyssey* and Damascēnos is Saint John of Damascus.

Then Prōios gives the ‘proof’ of his assertion: ‘This has been recognised by famous musicians of the West for a long time’ and explains in the following reverse route the absence of Greek art music: ‘Yes, Greek music does exist but, unfortunately, it was forced to retreat into the church and the village’ (Ibid). Then he gives his opinion on church and folk music, which is an opinion often expressed at that time by the Greeks who had no contact with either church or village culture. Church music, he says, is badly performed by chanters who are uneducated and have poor taste. But church music, preserved in manuscripts, is not endangered. On the contrary, folk music is seriously in danger of extinction. Hence he called for a systematic recording of Greek folk music in order to protect it from Western influence.

It is noteworthy that it was in the environment of the reformed Conservatory of Athens that monophonic church chanting was incorporated in official music education. A well-presented collection of folk songs from Peloponnese and Crete was also prepared by the Conservatory in 1910 and 1911; however, the collection only appeared in 1931, due to disagreements between the persons involved (Rōmanou 1996: 255–263). Geōrgios Nazos, who, after studying in Munich, replaced Katakouzēnos in the directorship of the Conservatory, and introduced the methods, the aesthetics, and the repertoires taught in German music schools and at the Paris Conservatoire, went to Constantinople to find the person who would teach ‘pure’ monophonic church music in Athens. The right person turned out to be Constantinos Psachos who, after arriving to Athens from Constantinople in 1904, contributed to a *progressive* treatment of church music, helped expand the established repertory, and secured its systematic and uniform teaching and performance.

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