

Editorial: *Armenian ecclesiastical music*

Perhaps more so than the other sacred arts, the liturgical chant of the Armenian Apostolic Church appears to be the product of the fruitful merger between European and Asian spirituality, two opposite entities that have, throughout the ages, fused and metamorphosed inside a melting pot – to which were later added numerous musical exchanges with Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia, but also with the legacy of the Greeks and Byzantium, both before and after 1453. Alongside the Armenian homeland, other peripheral centres successfully promoted and cultivated the sacred monodic chant of this venerable Church, such as the centres in Jerusalem, Caffa Crimea (today, Theodosia) or New Julfa in Iran. One should also mention the Mekhitarist monastery in the Venetian lagoon (Armenian Catholic Monastery of San Lazzaro, founded 1717), a monastic order, which printed – in Vienna, rather than Venice, in 1823 – the first books to present the Romanian language Byzantine liturgical repertoire, as translated by the reformer of Romanian psaltic education, Macarie the Hieromonk (1750-1836).

Armenian ecclesiastical music, like other sacred Christian music traditions, has remained dependent on the oral tradition, but has also permanently been anchored in what the written tradition has preserved and transmitted throughout the ages. Each element of the rite was constructed, step by step, with multiple layers being added to it, and thus contributed to the creation of a diverse repertoire and a specific style of music. This repertoire is preserved today in hundreds of musical codices, scattered throughout the world. In parallel with the development and refinement of the Armenian neumatic *khaz* notation and with the classification of melody-types in eight modes (similar to the Byzantine *Oktoechos*), Armenian musician-philosophers, much like in Western Europe and Byzantium, interpreted and refined the mystical dimension of these sacred repertoires, contributing to their dogmatic and theological understanding.

Today, more than 1700 years since St. Grigor Lusavorich (Gregory the Illuminator) converted the bloody king Trdat III (Tiridates) to Christianity, an event through which Armenia officially became the first Christian state (in 301), numerous musicologists and musicians are attempting to bring back to life the distinct, fascinating and original history of the liturgical music of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

This issue of *Musica Sacra* presents three studies and one review written by renowned native scholars, both theoreticians and performers, which endeavour to open up new research directions in a field, which is as fascinating, as it is little known, outside Armenia.

The first of two studies written by Dr. Artur Shahnazaryan (*A Brief Historical Overview of Armenian Sacred Music and Neumes*) presents in a diachronic manner the development of the Armenian liturgical music, the formal elements and hymnographic corpus specific to this millennia old tradition, both the poets and the theoreticians that decisively contributed to the evolution of the Armenian ecclesiastical chant.

Anna Arevshatyan's article, *Komitas and Grigor Gapasakalian. Neumological Connections*, investigates the theoretical work of the Archimandrite Komitas (Soghomon Soghomonian, 1869-1935) – the founder of the Armenian national school of music – and the musicological sources he employed in elaborating his theory on the Armenian neumatic system, mainly the musicological research of Acolyte Grigor Gapasakalian (1740-1808).

Dr. Shahnazaryan's second study (*The Key to the Armenian Neumes*) proposes a theory that gives us access to the Armenian neumatic system, a true “gateway”, a “key” to the

world of medieval Armenian Church music. This theory is based on the research of Archimandrite Komitas.

Dr. Arevshatyan's monograph, *The Theory of Musical Modes in Medieval Armenia* (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2013), written in the same spirit of inter- and multidisciplinary research, is reviewed by Dr. Mher Navoyan in this issue of *Musica Sacra*.

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