

Congregational Singing in the Rus' Liturgical Traditions: An Evaluation of Its History

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Abstract

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By means of original research into various liturgical and musical manuscripts, especially those pertaining to the East-Slavic Churches as found in the Hilandar Research Library and Resource Centre for Medieval Slavic Studies, the author demonstrates that the eclipse which congregational singing suffered among the East-Slavic Churches during the latter part of the second millennium was an inorganic development of an earlier tradition in which the lay people, aided by various “musical ministers” and led by the clergy, retained pride of place in singing the responses and participating actively in the eucharistic liturgies as well as the other services such as matins, vespers, and compline. This eclipse of lay congregational participation was brought about in part by the rise of

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choral ensembles, polyphonic arrangements, and increasingly vastly – and in some cases needlessly – complicated settings of liturgical chant, all of which required trained “specialists” whose role came, in most Churches, to supplant entirely the role of the laity, who were thus rendered passive, mute spectators, deprived of the spiritual benefits which attend fuller participation in the liturgy.



Sigla and Abbreviations Used in this Article

BNL. = Slavic Manuscript Collection, Bulgarian National Library “Cyril and Methodius,” Sofia
 FEKULA. = Private Collection of Paul M. Fekula
 GLZ. = “Z,” non-Byzantine Collection, Great Lavra Monastery, Mount Athos
 HM. SMS. = Slavic Manuscript Collection, Hilandar Monastery, Mount Athos
 IVERON. = Slavic Manuscript Collection, Iveron Monastery, Mount Athos
 P.G. = Migne, *Patrologiae Graeca* Cursus Completus
 VATICAN SLAV. = Vatican Slavic Manuscript Collection, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City

Introduction

Many aspects of the study of liturgy have been extensively explored over the centuries. One thing taken for granted by many liturgical scholars, particularly of the liturgical traditions of the Christian East, is liturgical singing. Yet the study of congregational singing is unfortunately one of the more neglected aspects of Eastern Christian liturgics.

Individual studies of particular issues concerning liturgical singing as a whole have been done, but none of them have offered detailed analyses of congregational participation. The complete lack of congregational singing in some East-Slavic, especially Orthodox, Churches may suggest that this practice

is foreign to the Orthodox tradition in general. Without a history of this question, it is hard to accept such a conclusion. On the one hand, congregational singing has been preserved among the Subcarpathians and Galicians, while, on the other, is almost non-existent in the current practice of other East-Slavic Churches. It is the hypothesis to be advanced here that the former communities have in fact preserved an older and more genuine tradition of liturgical worship. Mystagogically and allegorically speaking, in liturgy, the medium is the message, and a crucial part of that medium is singing. Much of what we communicate is remembered due to the *way* in which we express it. Expression of the text through proper liturgical music enables liturgy to fulfil its epiphanic function.

In order to demonstrate this hypothesis, we will employ primarily an historical method. Thus, after summarizing whatever findings do exist in the literature, we will review chronologically a variety of East-Slavic sources and manuscripts for evidence of congregational singing. More specifically, one of the highlights of this thesis will be the analysis of ancient *leitourgica* (*sluzhebnyky*) consulted on microfilm at the Hilarandar Research Library (Ohio State University) for the purpose of studying the evolution of liturgical singing from the late fourteenth to the late nineteenth century. Finally, we will synthesize and offer an evaluation of the discoveries stemming from the aforementioned literature and sources.

We begin with a contextual analysis of two crucial Byzantine liturgical sources, namely the Codex Barberini gr. 336, and the *Typicon* of the Great Church, in order to establish the characteristics of liturgical singing near the end of the first millennium. Following this, we next delve into the primary sources and liturgical manuscripts containing key data regarding liturgical singing in general, and congregational participation in particular. These crucial texts will offer insight into the traits of liturgical singing of Rus from its inception to the late nineteenth century.

Our final section will explore the polyphonic era and the rise of the choral tradition, as well as the survival of congregational singing in more isolated areas of Rus', leading eventually to the awakening and gradual restoration of congregational

singing in some territories of East-Slavdom. This will conclude with the *Decree Regarding Church Singing* of the arch-eparchial Synod of Lviv, whose prescriptions not only encapsulate the thrust of our study very succinctly, but also illustrate the concern to maintain and disseminate congregational singing in western Rus'.

I. Late Byzantine Antecedents

a) Codex Barberini gr. 336, and the Typicon of the Great Church

Codex Barberini gr. 336 is the oldest extant Byzantine *euchologion*, dating from the middle of the eighth century. Significant parts of it reflect usage that also entered *euchologia* used in other Churches of the Byzantine tradition, such as the Church of Kiev. The Codex is composed of the manuscripts containing the texts of eucharistic prayers, presidential prayers of the liturgy of the hours, numerous sacraments, and a wide collection of prayers and blessings for various needs.

Similarly, the *Typicon* of the Great Church, which was compiled in the tenth century, provided the necessary framework for the various liturgies inherited by the Slavic Churches. It consists mostly of concise outlines directing numerous services prescribed for both the immovable and the moveable liturgical cycles, as well as various prayers prescribed for those services.

The following will explore the patterns of liturgical singing inscribed in the texts of the services contained in these two documents. More specifically, the study of Barberini gr. 336 and the *Typicon* will be directed by the overarching question of who is given the responsibility of singing various chants and responses at the divine services.

Due to the ample references to those who sing the responses at liturgical gatherings, the texts of the three eucharistic liturgies found in the Codex prove to be of special interest. These texts are permeated with references to the *people*, who appear to be the principal respondents. More specifically, in the texts for the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great and