

## Byzantine Matins in Fourteenth-Century *Akolouthiai*

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### Abstract

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After the Latin occupation (1204–1261), Byzantines hoped to restore the former glory and splendour of the Great Church. The monastic rite was adopted as the ordinary Liturgy of the Hours, but the “Sung” Office was sometimes retained for major feasts. Subsequently, a new anthology emerged, the *Akolouthia*, containing a selection of the chants for the soloist and choir. In the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries radical innovations in the music itself also appeared: the addition of meaningless syllables (*ἄσημοι σύλλαβαι*) into the liturgical texts; the lengthening and elaboration of chants for the all-night vigil’s ordinary; and an increased attention to purely musical techniques and new attitudes toward their application during worship. These innovations were not liturgically neutral, as they diminished the traditional one-to-one correspondence between words and melody. The reasons for such innovations are subject to various hypotheses, and are reviewed in the present study. Nonetheless, the music, as well as the additions, show continuity with previous traditions.



### Sigla and Abbreviations Used in this Article

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### ***Introduction***

The fourteenth century holds a special place in the history of Byzantine music. The “Chanted Office” that mingled with the preponderantly recited monastic rite gradually evolved into a synthesis of both. At the same time, a new type of liturgical-musical manuscript appeared – the so-called ἀκολουθία – a kind of Byzantine *Liber usualis*. The fusion of liturgical usages was accompanied by musical modifications that were significant enough to be called a reform rather than just an embellishment, although some scholars would not agree with this description (see below). The all-night vigil of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries<sup>1</sup> was dominated by the most elaborate

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, I did not have access to the magisterial dissertation, *Vesper und Orthros des Kathedralritus der Hagia Sophia zu Konstantinopel*,



chant that Byzantium ever produced,<sup>2</sup> and this “reform” was connected with “masters” (μαίστωρες), the most famous being Ioannes Koukouzeles.

As the musicologist Oliver Strunk pointed out, the problem of the “chanted” office is fundamentally a musical problem, which means that it cannot be solved satisfactorily without taking music into account.<sup>3</sup> Simply by virtue of the fact that Byzantine services were (and still are) sung, music is vital as the medium through which liturgical texts are perceived in a specific time or place.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Development of the Akolouthiai Manuscripts*

Anton Baumstark long ago pointed out that it is a fundamental characteristic of liturgy to adapt to the concrete circumstances of time and place.<sup>5</sup> This highlights the obvious fact that politics, social questions, theology (etc.) modify and shape the ritual itself at every step of its development. Circumstances in the era we are concerned with here are the best proof of the accuracy of Baumstark’s statement. The Byzantine, i.e. the East-Roman Empire (Βασιλεία Ῥωμαίων), was experiencing much turbulence. The most significant factor in the beginning of its decline was the Latin occupation of Constantinople (1204–1261). Following the capture of the capital city, the Empire had to face the ambitious Balkan kingdoms, Mongol turmoil, civil war, and rising Turkish power. The Church suffered from inner divisions, as well as political strife, internal rivalries, patriarchal resignations and depositions, territorial

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by Gregor Hanke, as it was being prepared for publication when I did most of the present research. I admit that this constitutes a significant lacuna, which will have to be filled by anyone interested in a truly comprehensive treatment of the topic at hand. I was also not able to include the important insights of Stefano Parenti outlined during his plenary address at the Bi-annual Congress of the *Societas Orientalium Liturgiarum* in Volos, Greece, 2010. *Inter alia*, he notes how the adjective “Constantinopolitan” should usually be nuanced in any discussion of worship in order to factor in the city’s disparate usages.

<sup>2</sup> Lingas, “Hesychasm and Psalmody,” 167.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Strunk, *Essays on Music*, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Lingas, *Matins*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy*, 18.