

# **The ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ as a diachronic and intercultural paradigm of music definition**

**Το ‘Θεωρητικὸν Μέγα τῆς Μουσικῆς’ ὡς ἓνα διαχρονικὸ καὶ διαπολιτισμικὸ παράδειγμα ορισμοῦ τῆς μουσικῆς**

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## **a) On the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’**

### **The ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ and its historical conditions**

It often happens with diachronic pieces of literature that, for the time-space in which they are diachronic, even a glimpse of their titles-page compresses the meanings of the whole. Chrysanthos’s ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ is surrounded in its page of titles, apart from the persons that have contributed to its creation, by an ancient Hellenic musical and philosophical passage, some objects of music and art, a place, and a year-number. The page of titles of the book thus positions it in a four-dimensional historical picture of persons and *techne* (the Greek term *techne* is meant at this point by its present-day meaning, that is the fine arts and music); if the only actual book of the page of titles – which is, the book depicted in it – is considered, then this book is entitled, by its page of titles, to immortality. By this last reference, the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ presents an approach to the field in which its main practical conception of music as ecclesiastical music originates, which is the spiritual field.

**In terms of content, the overall ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ generally deals with music in theory, practice, history, and education.** Theory and practice of music in the context of Chrysanthos’s work covers the fields of music definition, division, quantity, quality, genus, echos (“mode”), phthora (“alteration”), and music performance. **In terms of epistemology,** this paper on the ‘Great Theoreticon’ is based on Michel Foucault’s theory of *archaeology* as introduced to musicology by Gary Tomlinson. The work of Gary Tomlinson that has particularly helped this presentation to connect with contemporaneous European currents is the article ‘Musicology, Anthropology, History’<sup>1</sup>, which discusses the developments of these three branches of research in Europe around the 19<sup>th</sup> century and presents intellectual trends that resemble those taking place in the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’.

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<sup>1</sup> Tomlinson 2001

## On the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ and its history

The compilation of the ‘Great Theoreticon’ by Chrysanthos must have taken place around AD 1812-1816 Constantinople, its edition by Panagiotes Pelopides from AD 1820 to AD 1832, while its publication in the latter year from the Austrian imperial and free, multiethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual city-port of Trieste at the Imperial Typography of the innovative businessman-typographer Michele Weis. Given that Chrysanthos was one of *the three teachers* of church music that managed to reform it in early 19<sup>th</sup> c. Constantinople, and with so many reforms of all kinds in history, **the common historical question “what kind of world is behind Chrysanthos’s ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’”** might find the beginning of a complete answer by considering a reform of the idea of music from a practical chanting-originating concept, to a compound philosophical idea with structure and philosophical affiliations. The foundation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century discourses on music and, at the end of the century, *musicology*, on the older, sole, and worldwide category of song, or, as it appears in the present case of the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ and ecclesiastical music in general, chanting<sup>2</sup>, has been stressed by Gary Tomlinson<sup>2</sup> in ‘Musicology, Anthropology, History’ as a European phenomenon, of which Chrysanthos and Greece that was then erected must be considered a part, a border part though, whose extreme position functioned reversely, as we will see in the following discussion of the content of the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’.

Still in the historical field, the answer to the question of the origins of the ‘Great Theoreticon’ could refer to relevant institutions, so that it gained something of their diachronicity: the answer could be the diachronic tendency of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to repair such particular deficiencies as the difficult-to-learn old system of music and to modernize its institutions with respect to its traditions, hence an educational and systematical concern of the Great Church of Constantinople. Thus coming back to the music-theoretical field, the treatise of the x-bishop of Tenos Kyrillos Marmarenos could be positioned behind this reform, or, again, a line of notational *exegeses* starting with Balasios the priest in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A discussion of the resulted music by means of the words of one of its reformers, Chrysanthos, according to his major treatise, follows.

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<sup>2</sup> Op. cit.: 2

b) **On the Music of the ‘Great Theoreticon’**

The Chrysanthine theory of music is grounded in the first chapter of the ‘Great Theoreticon’, which is the chapter which defines and divides music, the rest of the Chrysanthine source expanding this theory to commentaries on categories of Music, concepts connected to these categories, its relations to other concepts, its connection to musical practice, as well as to narrations on its history and didactics.

The Music of the initial chapter of the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ is an autonomous concept under the dipoles definition-division and theory-practice. The Chrysanthine main Aristidean definition (Aristides Quintilianus’s science of melos and its contingents), secondary definitions (mainly Plato’s ‘imitation of *tropes* of better or worse humans’, Nikephoros Vlemmydes’s ‘knowledge of amount that is defined in ratio’, and ‘the order of all things’ of an unidentified Hermes-writing, §.1), and divisions, which present an equal number of penetrations into the structure of Music, introduce Music categories with musicological (particularly, music-theoretical) and philosophical implications, such as Music’s width, name, science, subject, matter, nature, parts, possession, genera, systems, and others. The result of this synthesis of the materials provided by the first chapter regarding music is a theoretical and practical, rhythmical, metrical, instrumental, poetic, and acting, physical and mimetic, melodic and harmonic, defined and divided, qualitative and quantitative, diatonic, chromatic and enharmonic, generic, microtonic and different as to its *phthongoi* (“notes”), modal, and acoustic science of melos and its contingents.

At the stage of defining concepts according to the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’, there is a tension created by the source-use of terms in a general mode and in a specific mode, which underlines, often profoundly, a double definition of these terms. The most shocking example is *Μουσική* (Music), first defined in a general mode and used in an uncountable way (‘Music is a science of melos, and of the concepts contingent to melos’<sup>3</sup>), and then presented as specific and countable (e.g. ‘[...] every locality has a particular Music, which is delighting only to the locals’ (3, fn.)). Other examples are the uses of *χρόνος* (time) as uncountable and as countable, i.e. time and *chronoi*, or *κλίμαξ* (“scale”) as uncountable and countable, i.e. *climax* and *scales*. Often, the second definition and use of terms is person-specific, thus introducing, perhaps for the first time in the post-Byzantine history of ecclesiastical music-theoretical writing, a systematically performed interest in referring to its

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<sup>3</sup> Chrysanthos 1832: 1, citing Aristeides.

own sources. This is a historicization of music theory, but not the only one, as we will consider later. Or, the second definition of terms by the source can be nation-specific, e.g. in the case of Music again ('every nation's Music enriches a certain activity, which is analogous to its natural inclination' (3, fn.)) reminding of two – distant today – subject matters, the nationalism of the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as ethnography – today's research branch occupying itself with culture. A few words on Chrysanthos's approach to the latter follow.

### **Possession of Music in space: Chrysanthos's early music ethnography**

Footnote (α) of §.7 of the 'Great Theoreticon of Music' offers a point of view that approaches what we might today call the matter of musical culture. However, as musical culture is a matter of music anthropology, it is important to bring it to the field of musicology in the terms of the latter, not in anthropological terms, as musicology and anthropology are different branches of humanistic research. In musicological terms, therefore, the matter of "music of a people" could be comprehended as musical possession. For, if one has decided to study the music of another group of people, there is a hidden pre-decision in their thought, namely that music can be possessed by these other people, all the more so in a different way than by their own people, and, most of the times, as a different music. According to the 'Theoreticon', and as already quoted, '[...] every locality has a particular Music, which is to the liking of the locals only.' (3, fn.) Music, in other words, is an object of possession by localities. What is more, this matter of possession of music opens a gate to locally defined *Musics* that are particular. The source then performs a widening of the statement: apart from local places, every nation has its Music as well; as again quoted, 'every nation's Music enriches a certain activeness, which is analogous to its natural inclination.' (3, fn.) Musical possession, apart from its locally defined resulted *Musics*, introduces nationally defined *Musics*. This is early *music ethnography* and an early hint to *national Music* in Hellenic music literature.

Relating these thoughts back to the text of the 'Great Theoreticon', we could find even deeper relations to the music-theoretical developments of around 1800. **The obvious distance of the reference to other places, nations, and times that has led to locally, nationally, and by-means-of-the-past defined musics, that is the concept of musical others, from the reference to a single and defined music** that the source primarily presents already in its title (even so as an object under many definitions) results in a hypothesis of a co-existence of the defined and the undefined, the theoretical and the historical, the familiar with the other, within

the context of the ‘Great Theoreticon’ of this single ‘Music’. This co-existence might be partly attributed to (given the early position of the ‘Great Theoreticon’ in the history of Neo-Hellenic theories of ecclesiastical music) the root of the change of the ethnographic accounts around 1800, from the creative naivety of the proto-ethnographic accounts up to the 18<sup>th</sup> c. to the hegemony of those of the 19<sup>th</sup>; this root might be what Tomlinson has described in his article as the exploration of the *other* by European musicology ‘not much before 1800’, in the era of nothing less than the erection of modern musicology ‘[...] as a discipline erected on propositions of cultural difference, European vs. non-European.’<sup>4</sup> It is reasonable that the discovery of the other is accompanied by our distancing from the other. Chrysanthos’s theory is an interesting case in relation to this observation not only because it comes at about the same time, i.e. in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, not only because it may be the first in the history of post-Byzantine music theories to do so, but mainly because it is in the edge of Europeans and non-Europeans and it seems to build this part of the book on both what it considers its own music-theoretical heritage, the ancient and Byzantine theoreticians, and the opinions of others, hence on a proposition of cultural difference (NB: the ‘Great Theoreticon’ does refer to the European as someone else (p.6 (§.9 (fn.)))).

### **From early music ethnography to a diachronic music-making**

Back to the source-text, national Music is described at this point of the source as *enriching*, and its object of enrichment is a certain *activeness*, which is illustrated by the aforementioned examples of national dances (§.3, fn). According to the commentary on European dances that follows, if the mentioned enrichment of Music is described as excitement by the British and as instilling by the French, then the activeness that is enriched by Music would be a taste to dance with liveliness by the French, and a simple running or dancing by the British. Accordingly, the British activeness would appear more physical than the French, which would seem to be more sentimental. The Polish example, however, would beat this canon. By the Polish, Music seems to enrich such an activeness of exaggerated sobriety that the idea of Musical dance is lost; ‘it is more elegant to walk according to them, than dance as them.’ This early-short music ethnology of Chrysanthos seems to originate in an interest in musical variety and activeness, which is connected with musical composition, or, as called in Hellenic ecclesiastical music, *melurgy*: ‘for, the more a Musician deals with getting-to-know these various musical habits, the more she/he can find various and active *mele* [chants]’ (§.3, fn.). As the definition of music is ‘a science of *melos* and its contingents’

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<sup>4</sup> Tomlinson 2001: 8-9

(§.1, italics mine) according to the beginning of the ‘Great Theoreticon’, the latter indirectly presents at §.3 the opinion that the road to making a diachronically defined music passes through an inter-national interest in it. Let us keep this conclusion for the summarizing conclusion coming after the following last thoughts.

### **Another diachronic aspect: musical possession by the olds**

Beside the mentioned two possessions of Music, which are signified by place (locality) and nation, there is another one, which performs a connection to time: Music is possessed by *the olds* (§.7, p.4, fn (α)). The attribution of Music to *the olds*, apart from giving the idea of possession of Music in time, strengthens its diachronic aspect. This second historicization of Music is closely connected with the first, i.e. the use of older definitions of music, and it seems to find, in the field of Hellenic ecclesiastical music, one of its first explicit expressions in the ‘Great Theoreticon’ (whose whole second part is a ‘Narration on the Origin and Progress of Music’), and becomes a fashion in many of the later treatises on Music, reaching its first peak in the solely historical work of Georgios Papadopoulos at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a second peak around the year 2000 of our contemporary historians of ecclesiastical music.

### **Conclusion**

Summarizing the partial conclusions of this text, the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ has presented a historicization of music in its definition of the subject by means of ancient and Byzantine source, but also, as it is explained in the full text, by comprising one of its ideals by means of the olds’ ideal Musicians; on the other hand, it has become an early music ethnography, by presenting European national dances, and it has done so based on a proposition of cultural difference, in the words of Tomlinson, according to the European fashion of its time - difference between what it considers its own music-theoretical heritage, the ancient and Byzantine theoreticians, and the *others*. This borrowing of ethnography from the European intellectual culture by the ‘Great Theoreticon’ and its return to describe European cultures gives a strong intercultural feature to this part of the book. That Chrysanthos’s work can be called an early music ethnography is also supported by another argument, namely that the road to making – that is, to defining practically – a diachronically and theoretically defined music passes through this intercultural interest in it. All these might allow us to accept that the ‘Great Theoreticon of Music’ is a diachronic and intercultural paradigm of music definition.