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The Treatise on Music by John Laskaris

WHILE most of the Byzantine composers of music are known by their names and little if anything is known about them as persons, John Laskaris is, at present, relatively well documented as a person. On the basis of data from Venetian Archives one now has a vivid picture of the flamboyant character and of some aspects of the life of Laskaris.¹ Amongst other things he was the author of a treatise on music. One copy of his treatise has been located in a manuscript in the National Library in Athens and another copy (though it remains uncertain at the time of writing whether this is an exact copy) in a manuscript in Rome.² Laskaris' treatise has never before been published.

The theoretical treatises about music by Byzantine writers have so far been unavailable in an English translation, though a few of them have been published in the original Greek.³ In view of this, at the suggestion of Prof. Velimirović this writer has undertaken to prepare English translations of some of them. The treatise by Laskaris is the first to be chosen, due to the availability of the text on a microfilm of the manuscript, MS 2401 from the National Library in Athens. The microfilm was kindly placed at this writer's disposal by Professor Velimirović. Besides the full text and its translation, this writer is offering a few comments in hope that they may provoke a dis-

¹ Cf. Miloš Velimirović, 'Two Composers of Byzantine Music: John Vatatzes and John Laskaris', in *Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music—A Birthday Offering to Gustave Reese*, edited by Jan La Rue (New York, 1966), pp. 818-31.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 823-4; cf. D. Lorenzo Tardo, *L'Antica melurgia bizantina* (Grottaferrata, Roma, 1938), p. 148.

³ For instance in Tardo's book cited in n. 2 above.

cussion which will ultimately lead to the clarification of a number of moot points in the complex problems of the theory of Byzantine music.

The text and its translation read:

Athens, Nat. Lib., MS 2401, fol. 223r.

Ἡ ἐρμηνία καὶ παραλλαγή τῆς μουσικῆς τέχνης.

Ἐτέρα παραλλαγή τῆς μουσικῆς τέχνης, σοφωτέρα καὶ ἀκριβεστέρα εἰς ἄκρον. πονηθεῖσα δὲ καὶ συνταχθεῖσα παρὰ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Λάσκαρι. ἐναντία μὲν τῆς πρώτης, καὶ οὐκ ἐναντία. ἐναντία γάρ, πρὸς τοὺς μὴ εἰδότας ὡς γέγραπται. εἰς δὲ τοὺς ἐντέχνως κατέχοντας αὐτὴν ἀκριβῶς, βεβαίωσις τε μάλλον καὶ ἀναπλήρωσις, καὶ μεγίστη ἡδύτης ἐντεῦθεν ἀναφανεῖσα τῇ τέχνῃ, καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῆς ἰδιώματα, σαφέστερα καταγγέλουσα. ἀποδεικνύουσα δὲ ἅπασαν τῶν τεσσάρων ἡχῶν, τὴν ὑπόστασιν τε καὶ κίνησιν, καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων πλαγίων ἡχῶν αὐτῶν, ἐν τε ἀναβάσει καὶ καταβάσει. ἐν μὲν τῇ ἀναβάσει τοῦ ἡχοῦ ἐκ τῶν πλαγίων, διφώνους τε τριφώνους καὶ τετραφώνους ἀπατελοῦσι, καὶ εἰς τοὺς πλαγίους αὐτῶν καὶ ἄλλους καταλήγουσιν. ἐν δὲ τῇ καταβάσει αὐτῶν ἐκ τῶν κυρίων εἰς μέσους ἐκπίπτουσι καὶ παραμέσους. εἰς πλαγίους τε καὶ παραπλαγίους, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ θεμέλιον καταλήγουσι. γέγραπται γάρ, ὅτι κύριοι ἡχοὶ εἰσὶ τέσσαρες, καὶ τέσσαρες πλάγιοι, καὶ κύριοι μὲν εἰσὶν, ὁ πρῶτος, ὁ δευτέρος, ὁ τρίτος τε καὶ ὁ τέταρτος. πλάγιοι δέ, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ πρώτου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ δευτέρου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ τρίτου ἡγουν ὁ βαρὺς, καὶ ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ τετάρτου. ἔχουσι δὲ οἱ κύριοι ἡχοὶ, καὶ μέσους ἐν ταῖς κατιούσαις, ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ πλάγιοι μέσους ἐν ταῖς ἀνιούσαις, οὓς λέγομεν διφώνους. ὁ μέσος γὰρ τοῦ πρώτου, ἐστὶν ὁ βαρὺς.

καὶ ὁ μέσος τοῦ δευτέρου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ τετάρτου. καὶ ὁ μέσος τοῦ τρίτου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ πρώτου. καὶ ὁ μέσος τοῦ τετάρτου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ δευτέρου. ἔχουσι δὲ καὶ οἱ πλάγιοι ἡχοὶ ὡς προεῖπωμεν, διφώνους ἐν ταῖς ἀνιούσαις.

fol. 223v.

ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ πρώτου, ἔχει δίφωνον τὸν τρίτον. καὶ ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ δευτέρου, ἔχει δίφωνον τὸν τέταρτον. καὶ ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ τρίτου ἡγουν ὁ βαρὺς, ἔχει δίφωνον τὸν πρῶτον. καὶ ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ τετάρτου, ἔχει δίφωνον τὸν δευτέρον. ἔχουσι δὲ καὶ τινα ἰδιώματα οἱ μέσοι ἀδόμενοι ἐκ τῶν κυρίων, ὅτι σχηματίζονται καὶ ἀλλοιοῦνται εἰς παραμέσους. καὶ οἱ πλάγιοι, εἰς παραπλαγίους. οἱ δὲ παράμεσοι τῶν κυρίων, εἰσὶν οὗτοι.

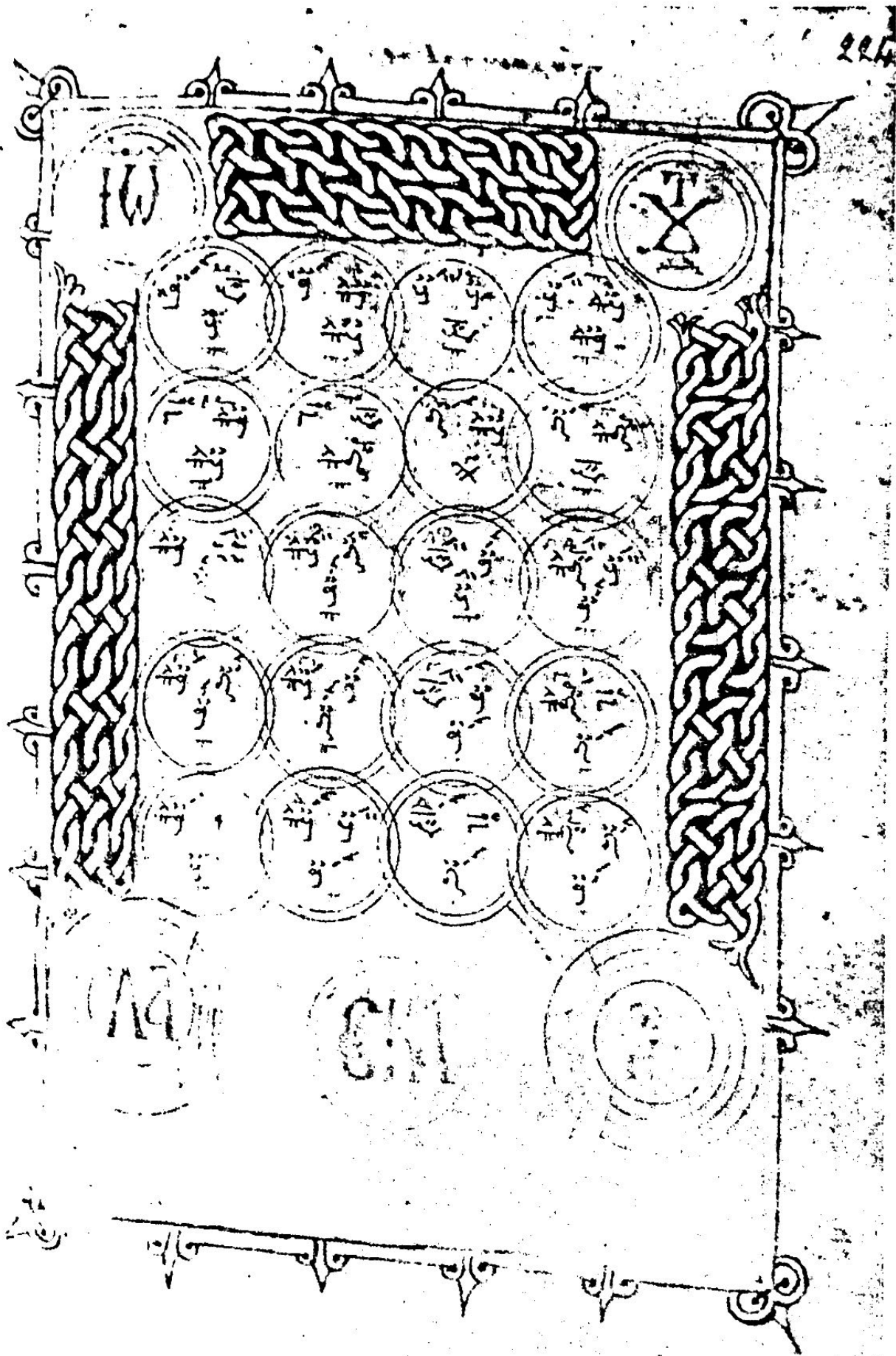
παράμεσος πρῶτου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ δευτέρου, ὁ δὲ παράμεσος τοῦ δευτέρου, ἐστὶν ὁ βαρὺς. καὶ ὁ παράμεσος τοῦ τρίτου, ὁ πλάγιος



1. (a) Tillyard with Egon Wellesz and Carsten Hoëg in Copenhagen, 18 July 1931

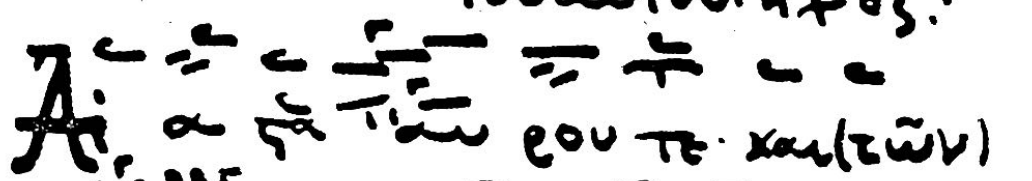
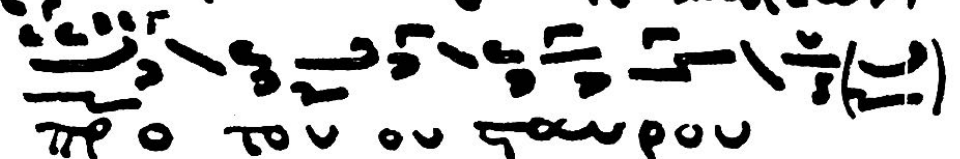
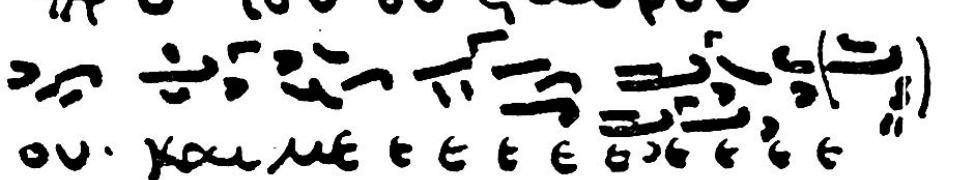


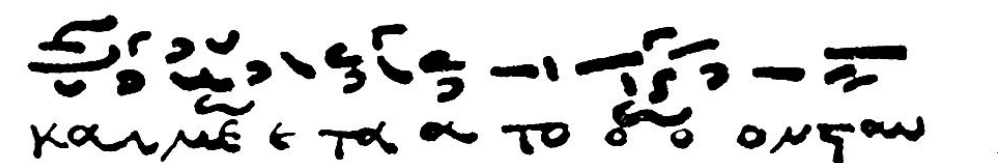
(b) Tillyard shortly before his death

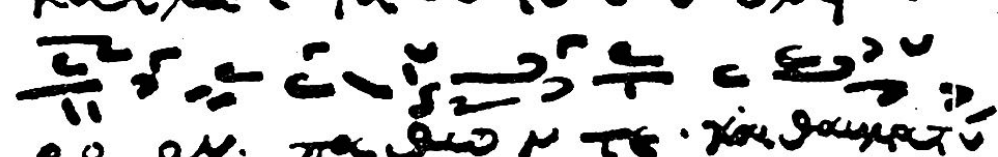


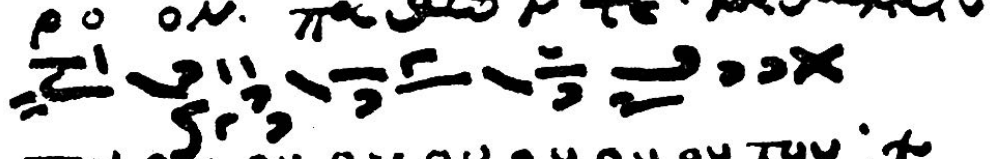
2. Folio 224, Athens National Library MS 2401 (see p. 24)

τοῦ αὐτοῦ. ἡ ψ. 133.


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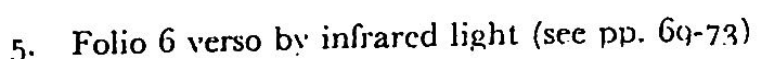


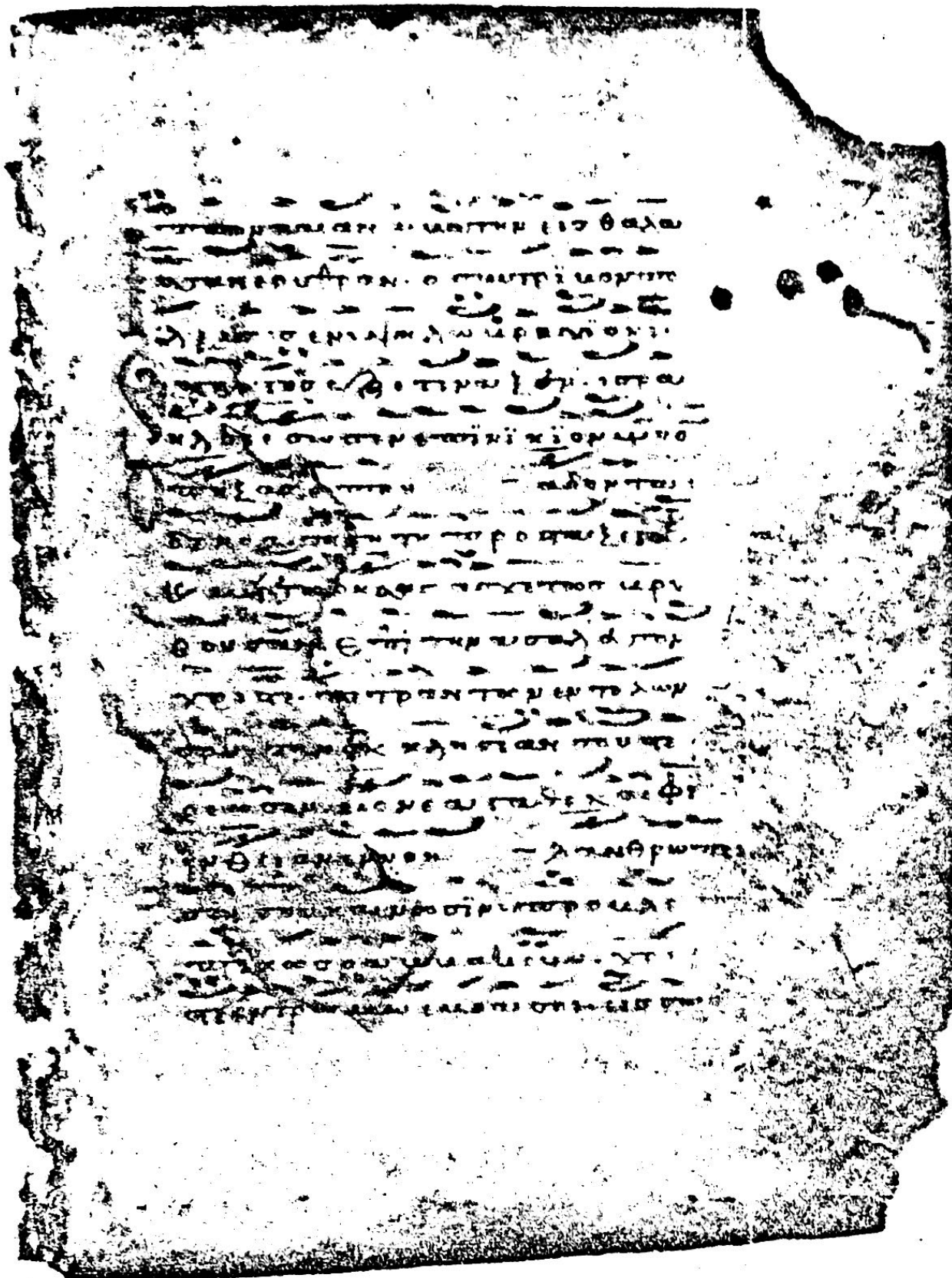


3. The 'Palauzov Copy' of the Synodikon of Tsar Boril. The second musical piece, folios 2 verso and 3 recto (see pp. 69-73)

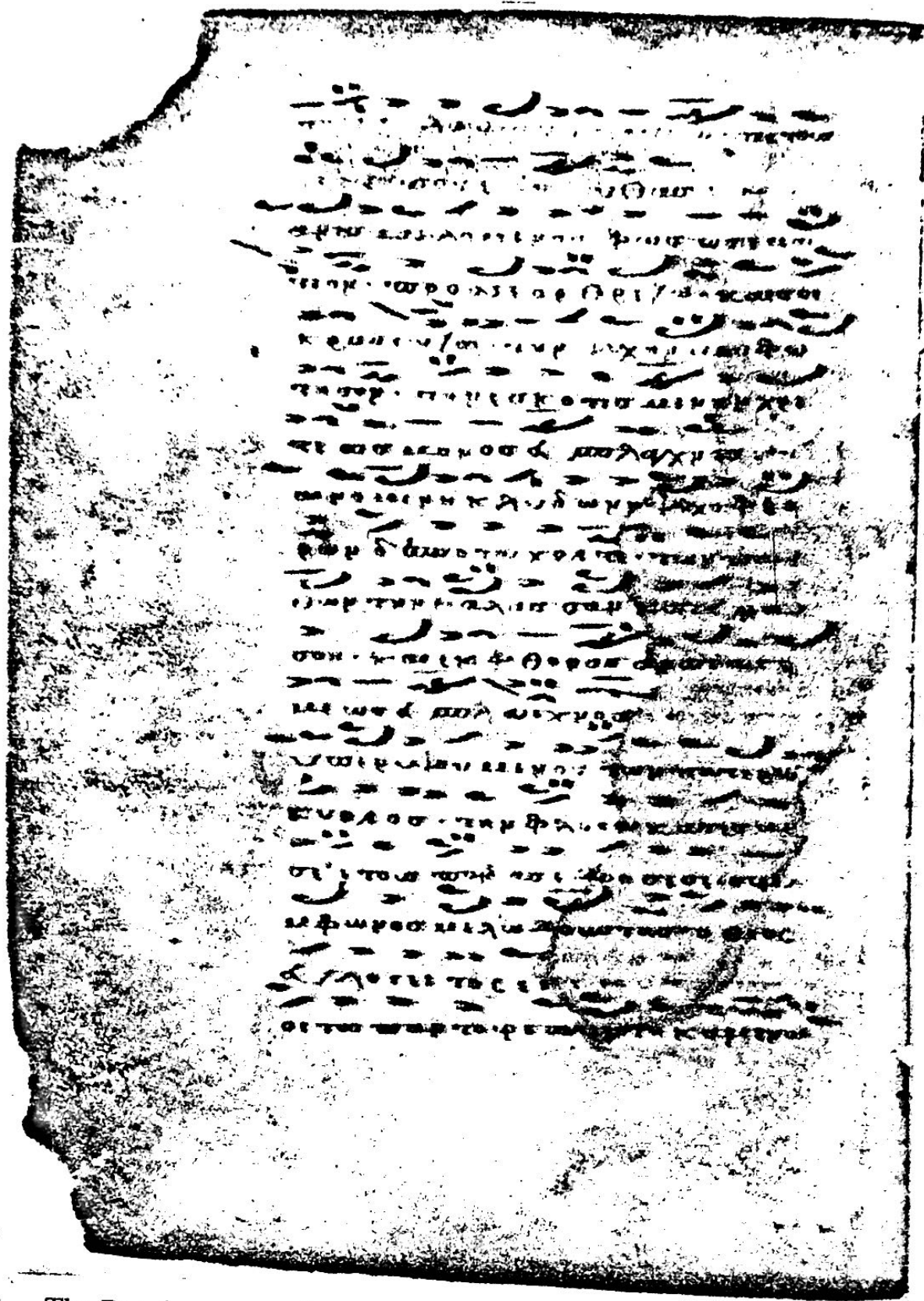
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Handwritten text in a medieval script, likely Latin, arranged in approximately 12 horizontal lines. The text is heavily obscured by dark, irregular ink blotches and noise, making it largely illegible. The script appears to be a Gothic or similar medieval hand.





7. The Dearden manuscript, recto (see pp. 100-102)



8. The Dearden manuscript, verso (see pp. 100-102)

τοῦ δευτέρου, καὶ ὁ παράμεσος τοῦ τετάρτου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ πρώτου. παραπλάγιοι δὲ τούτων εἰσὶν οὗτοι.

παραπλάγιος πρῶτου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ δευτέρου. καὶ παραπλάγιος τοῦ δευτέρου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ πρώτου. καὶ παραπλάγιος τοῦ τρίτου, τὸ λέγετο(ς), καὶ παραπλάγιος τοῦ τετάρτου, ὁ πλάγιος τοῦ τρίτου, ἡγουν ὁ βαρὺς. ἔχουσι δὲ τοῦτοι, καὶ τριφώνους καὶ τετραφώνους. οὗς καὶ παρακυρίους λέγομεν. ἐξ αὐτῶν γὰρ καὶ νάοι γεννῶνται, καὶ πρωτόβαροι, καὶ τετράφωνοι. τοῦτο γὰρ γίνωσκε ὧ ἀκροατά, ὅτι τρεπτικῶς <ος> ἐστὶν ὁ ἦχος. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οἱ κύριοι εἰς πλαγίους τρέπονται, καὶ οἱ πλάγιοι εἰς κυρίους τὸ ἀνάπαλιν, καθὼς καὶ ὁ ἀγιώτατος μαῖστωρ Ἰωάννης ὁ Κουκουζέλης, ἐν τῇ σοφωτάτῃ μεθόδῳ αὐτοῦ τῇ παραλλαγῇ, τοῦτο ὑπέδειξεν. ἐν μὲν τῇ ἀναβάσει διὰ τοῦ ὀλίγου, τοὺς πλαγίους κυρίους ἀπέδειξεν. ἐν δὲ τῇ καταβάσει διὰ τοῦ ἀποστρόφου, τοὺς κυρίους πλαγίους πάλιν ἀπέδειξε. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν, περὶ τούτων.

The Explanation and Modulation of the Musical Art

This is another modulation of the musical art, more wisely devised and more exact in every detail, worked out and drawn up by John Laskaris. It is both contrary to the first one and not contrary. It is [appears] contrary to the first one for those [readers] who did not understand it as it was written; but for those who possess full artistic and exact knowledge of it, it is rather a verification and a supplement, as it revealed itself as a great delight by virtue of [a command of] its skill, having clearly indicated its peculiarities by showing the whole essence and movement of the four [main] Modes and of their four Plagal Modes, both in ascent and descent. In the ascent of a Mode from the Plagal ones, one obtains the di-phonic, tri-phonic, and tetra-phonic ones and these terminate into their Plagal ones and other [Modes]. In descent from the Main Modes, these result in Mediant and Para-Mediant Modes, Plagal and Para Plagal ones, and these terminate on their own fundamentals. For it was written that there are four Main and four Plagal Modes and that the Main Modes are Mode I, Mode II, Mode III, and Mode IV, while the Plagal ones are, Mode I Plagal, Mode II Plagal, Mode III Plagal that is the Barys, and Mode IV Plagal.

The Main Modes, in their descent, have Mediant Modes. Likewise the Plagal Modes, in their ascent, have Mediant

Modes which we call di-phonic. The Mediant Mode of Mode I is the Barys Mode; the Mediant of Mode II is Mode IV Plagal; the Mediant of Mode III is Mode I Plagal; and the Mediant of Mode IV is Mode II Plagal. As we have previously stated, the Plagal Modes also have their di-phonic Modes in their ascent: Mode I Plagal has as its di-phonic Mode the Mode III; Mode II Plagal has Mode IV as its di-phonic Mode; Mode III Plagal, i.e. Barys, has Mode I as its di-phonic Mode; and Mode IV Plagal has Mode II as its di-phonic Mode.

The Mediant Modes have certain peculiarities when they are sung [in derivation] from the Main Modes: they are formed and changed into Para-Mediant [Modes], and the Plagal ones into Para-Plagal [Modes]. The Para-Mediant Modes of the Main ones are the following: The Para-Mediant of Mode I is Mode II Plagal; the Para-Mediant of Mode II is the Barys; the Para-Mediant of Mode III is Mode II Plagal; and the Para-Mediant of Mode IV is Mode I Plagal.

The Para-Plagal of these are the following: The Para-Plagal of Mode I is Mode II Plagal; the Para-Plagal of Mode II is Mode I Plagal; the Para-Plagal of Mode III is the [Mode] Legetos; and the Para-Plagal of Mode IV is Mode III Plagal, i.e. Barys.

These also have the tri-phonic and tetra-phonic Modes which we call Para-Kyrioi and from these are then derived those [called] Naoi, Protobaroi and the tetra-phonic [Modes]. Know this, O listener, that the Mode is changeable; and that for this the Main Modes change [modulate] into the Plagal ones, and the Plagal into the Main ones again, just as the Master John Koukouzeles, of Blessed Memory, has shown in his wisest method of modulation. For he has demonstrated that in ascending by means of an Oligon, the Plagal Modes are [made] into Main ones and that in descending by means of an Apostrophos the Main ones become Plagal. So much then, for these matters.

* * *

Following the text of this treatise, on fol. 224 r there is a diagram of twenty circles, in five rows of four circles. (See Plate 2.) Within each circle are the martyriai for three modes presumably representing some of the relationships discussed in the

treatise. Some parts of the diagram are relatively clear whereas others are less so. Basically, the first two rows of four circles each, totalling eight circles, are devoted to the Main Modes and each of the Modes is given two circles. The first of two circles for the Main Modes contains the *martyriai* of the Mode and its Mediant and Para-Mediant (the scheme does not seem to correspond to the textual listing of these Modes). The second of the two circles contains the *martyriai* of a Main Mode and its Plagal and Para-Plagal Modes. The third row of four circles depicts the di-phonic relationship of each of the Plagal Modes. The fourth row does the same for the tri-phonic Modes and the last row for the Tetra-Phonic Modes. There are discrepancies between the text and the diagram which, in the absence of comparative materials, cannot be resolved at this time.

The documented existence of the concepts of Mediant and other types of Modes raises some interesting points, not the least of which is the extension of the basic concept of a Mode in Byzantine chant of the fifteenth century (and perhaps earlier as well?) and an even more intriguing point, namely modulation from one Mode into another if not an outright transposition of a Mode. The relationship of Plagal and Authentic (i.e. Main) Modes appears to be more varied and suggests the possibility of (at least theoretically if not in practice) more than one type of tonal units, i.e. tetrachords and pentachords, in the organization of Modes. Some time ago, during the academic year 1961/62, this writer had an opportunity of discussing similar problems with Dom Bartolomeo di Salvo, and notes taken on those occasions, together with the publication of this treatise, suggest that discussion should be re-opened on the nature as well as structure of Modes in Byzantine Music. It is this writer's belief that the tonal fabric of Byzantine music did not utilize conjunct tetrachords but only disjunct tetrachords and that a Mode could have more than one 'tonic' depending on the position of the tetrachord in the gamut. While the 'central gamut' from *d* to *d'* presents this concept clearly enough, the tonal ranges above and below the 'central gamut' reveal these differences in a more conspicuous manner, as the appended scheme demonstrates. In preparing this scheme no chromatic changes have been introduced, resulting in different structures of tetrachords depending on the position of the tetra-

chord. It is obvious that much more work is necessary in order to determine whether tetrachords ought to remain uniform regardless of their position in the gamut.

		Plagal modes	Solmiza-	Relative	Authentic	
			tion syllable			
		MODE PLAGAL IV	mi	(e'')	MODE IV	A
P		„ BARYS (PL. III)	re	(d'')	„ III	U
L		„ PLAGAL II	do	(c'')	„ II	T
A		„ „ I	si	(b')	„ I	H
G		„ „ IV	la	(a')	„ IV	E
A		„ BARYS (PL. III)	sol	(g')	„ III	N
L		„ PLAGAL II	fa	(f')	„ II	T
		„ „ I	mi	(e')	„ I	I
M						C
O	Central Gamut	„ „ IV	re	(d')	„ IV	
D		„ BARYS (PL. III)	do	(c')	„ III	M
E		„ PLAGAL II	si	(b)	„ II	O
S		„ „ I	la	(a)	„ I *starting note	D
						E
I		„ „ IV	sol	(g)	„ IV	S
N		„ BARYS (PL. III)	fa	(f)	„ III	
		„ PLAGAL II	mi	(e)	„ II	I
D		„ „ I	re	(d)	„ I	N
E						
S		„ „ IV	do	(C)	„ IV	A
C		„ BARYS (PL. III)	si	(B)	„ III	S
E		„ PLAGAL II	la	(A)	„ II	C
N		„ „ I	sol	(G)	„ I	E
		„ „ IV	fa	(F)	„ IV	N
T		„ BARYS (PL. III)	mi	(E)	„ III	T

These remarks do not exhaust by any means all implications of the treatise by Laskaris nor of the appended scheme. On the contrary, they are intended as an invitation for discussion, so that eventually some of the least studied aspects of Byzantine music may be elucidated.

A few remarks about the translation

Byzantine treatises on music are notoriously difficult to translate. As examples, the following remarks are restricted to two terms only: 'parallage' and 'phone'.

The first of these words—'parallage'—has been translated as 'modulation'. Its actual meaning is still uncertain. The term appears in medieval manuscripts, possibly meaning a kind of

practice of expressing various intonation formulae in diagrammatic fashion. The term may perhaps also express the idea of 'solmization.' The decision to translate as 'modulation' has been based on the fact that in the treatise 'parallage' describes a transition from one Mode into another without effecting the type of changes peculiar to the use of *phthorai*. It should be added that in the Chrysanthine practice (19th century) 'parallage' denotes a performance utilizing solmization syllables as a device while instructing students of music.⁴ In such singing the actual text is not used.

The second term—'phone'—poses a number of problems and is capable of several interpretations. It may be translated as 'note', 'tone,' 'sound' and even 'interval.' This last is especially apt for terms such as 'tetra-phonic' where the reference is clearly to a distance of four tones, i.e. the interval of a fifth.

Other terms, like 'legetos,' 'naos,' 'proto-baros' etc. require special study before specific suggestions about their meaning can be made.

⁴ Chrysanthos, *Theoretikon mega*, No. 43-49, pp. 16-19.