THE OXYRHYNCHUS PAPYRUS 1786 AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANCIENT GREEK AND EARLY CHRISTIAN MUSIC

BY

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It must be stated beforehand that the topics involved in the heading of the present article are each of a very controversial nature. Studies in ancient Greek music in this century have gone far to demolish former certainties, and quasi-certainties, and to arouse new doubts on almost every topic. This may be illustrated by two instances of some relevance. The musical relics so far as they yield rules for melodic structure had left the impression of corroborating ancient testimonia about the Greek tonic accent. Recent investigations, however, led to stating that "the strict observance of accent in melody was not a classical, but a Hellenistic phenomenon, due to pedantry and snobbery". In matters of musicology proper, the scales which we thought we were able to gather from Greek musical theory in a recent and well-considered study seem to have been built exactly contrariwise to what has been accepted for a long time, and in this way a number of mysteries left might be unriddled.

In the field of Christian music the situation is not any better. Scholars of the 19th century as Gevaert and many a classicist of this century too thought Christian music to have developed from ancient Greek music, and Medieval musical theory seemed to corroborate this view. Again, a recent investigation shows that the theory of the eight modes (octo-echos) in liturgical music, Jewish as well as Christian, had its origin in the very old (Babylonian) cosmological calendaric principle of the pentecontade (7 x 7 + 1) of liturgical seasons (cf. Fr. Pentecôte), and in that proves its Oriental descent. Abraham Idelsohn in the beginning of this century...

1 For a well-balanced picture of these doubts see I. Henderson, Ancient Greek Music (in The New Oxford History of Music I), 1957.
2 Thus R.P. Winnington-Ingram summarizes the results of W.B. Sedgwick in Ancient Greek Music 1932–57, Lustrum 3 (1958), p.43.
3 R. Tanner, La Musique Antique Grecque, spec. nr. 248 of La revue musicale, 1961.
4 E. Werner, The Sacred Bridge. The Interdependence of Liturgy and Music in Synagogue and Church during the First Millennium (London–New York 1959), part II ch.2: The origin of the eight modes in music, p.373–409. This work is the best intro-
made his amazing discoveries of archaic Jewish music in Yemenite and Babylonian communities, which furnished striking parallels to Christian ecclesiastical music, whereas subsequent decipherings of the earliest (ec-phonetic) neumes considerably modified the views on these Medieval notation-systems of liturgical music and clearly showed the parallelism between ecclesiastical and synagogal musical practices.\(^5\)

Nevertheless, in recent publications still the old view of cultural history notably about Christian music developing organically from classical Greek music is maintained. Carsten Høeg combated this view as advanced in *Geistesgeschichte des antiken Christentums* by C. Schneider (1954).\(^6\) Günther Wille in his almost encyclopedical *Musica Romana* (1967) took up position “gegen eine Herleitung der altchristlichen Musik des Westens aus der Musik der Synagoge”.\(^7\) When he adduces the Christian hymn of Oxyrhynchus as a welcome piece of evidence for his stand, however, his references to literature about the hymn do not exceed the year 1935 – strangely enough, as will be demonstrated presently. The term hymn is used here traditionally to indicate a doxological chant without stipulating any strict form. Already in the Apostolic age the terminology was confused: Mt. 26, 30 and Mk. 14, 26 in all probability use ὑμνέω for psalmody, while Eph. 5, 19 and Col. 3, 16 still are much debated with regard to their meaning. Tertullian – one of our earliest authorities on liturgy – *De or. 28* uses the expression *inter psalmos et hymnos* in the context much as a tautology. When he speaks of the impossibility of a marriage between a Christian and a heathen because of the impossibility for them to sing together (*Ad uxorem* 2, 6), this does not prove the incompatibility of Christian and pagan music, but it certainly is a strong indication of the difference between them.

For my part I do not intend to exclude any and every interrelation between early Christian chant and Hellenistic pagan music. Undeniably there are many testimonia in the writings of Christian authors, mostly ecclesiastical authorities at that, which attest to the danger of bad influences spread by pagan musical practices, notably as regards the funeral

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