

# Reading Psalmodia

An introduction to modern Byzantine Notation.

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This Book  
is dedicated, with great respect and  
affection,  
to  
Protopsaltes Andreas Stylianou,  
whose fine psalmody has,  
for well over quarter of a century,  
enriched the worship of the historic  
Greek Orthodox Church  
of the Annunciation,  
Manchester.

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## INTRODUCTION

This book offers a basic introduction to the notation in which the traditional chant of the Byzantine churches is written.

Many people automatically associate Orthodox worship with the rich choral traditions of music that developed in Russia and the Ukraine. Georgian, Serbian, Romanian and Bulgarian choirs also possess an extensive repertoire of choral liturgical music. Greek and Arabic Byzantine churches, however, have retained a very different style of monophonic chant, a tradition which also lives on, side by side with the Slav choral tradition in many churches in Romania and Bulgaria, and a closely related form of chant in Serbia. This music is known as *Psalmodia*: it has common roots with Latin plainchant and with the chant of the Syrian and Armenian churches. It originates in the musical traditions, both Jewish and Pagan, of the Eastern Mediterranean.

When Christianity was established as the official religion of the Roman Empire the Church acquired new and splendid buildings for worship. The rites and ceremonies of Imperial Christianity took on the solemnity and the grandeur of court ritual. A rich tradition of hymnography developed, poets, composers and singers bringing their skills to the service of the Church.

Side by side with relatively simple styles of music used for scriptural readings and the chanting of the psalms, more elaborate melodies were composed for the church's new poetry and for the liturgical texts. In the main cathedrals and churches, the **Psaltēs**, the ordained singer who played an important role in the services was expected to attain a high level of musical expertise. As the sacred chant developed through the Medieval period, new forms of notation were created to record it. The notation developed over the centuries until it became a complex system of signs capable of expressing fine nuances of melodic movement, intonation and expression.

The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman armies in 1453 paradoxically brought new opportunities for the Church's musicians; their musical skills and artistry were greatly appreciated by the Ottoman Sultans and their nobility, and several of the famous Psaltai found lucrative part-time employment as court musicians. Many became experts in the "Arabo-Persian" music of the Ottoman court, some learning the Arabo-Persian music before studying *Psalmodia*. In the eighteenth century Peter Lampadarios, whose compositions shaped the entire psaltic repertoire in the modern period, was an expert in Islamic music and taught the musicians of the dervish tekkes of Constantinople. Konstantinos Protopsaltēs in the nineteenth century was the source for a small but useful and informative manual on the modes of classical Ottoman music, or, as the book calls it "exoterike mousike".

Not surprisingly, during the centuries of Ottoman rule, the style and tonality of *Psalmodia*, always a living, developing musical tradition, took on a degree of Oriental colouring. In the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some singers and composers were influenced by the melodies of the Italian opera.

The notation system in which Byzantine chant is recorded derives ultimately from the accents added to classical Greek texts by Alexandrian grammarians and rhetors, and then adapted for use to aid the musical declamation of scriptural texts. Eventually, the notation became complicated in the extreme, signs indicating the principal intervals of the melody being accompanied by a wealth of Great Hypostases, usually written in red ink, determining in minute detail the precise execution of the melody. In the modern period scholars have work hard to decipher the mediaeval musical manuscripts. The meaning of the signs for intervals seem reasonably solidly established. There remains, however, considerable disagreement as to the interpretation of other signs.

Facing the complex and difficult notation they inherited from their mediaeval predecessors, and an emerging gap between the musical texts used by expert psaltai and the traditional liturgical melodies handed down by ear, several musicians attempted to reform the notation to produce something simpler and more intuitive. Indeed, there is evidence that there had already emerged ways of writing a rapid "short-hand" version of the signs which could even be used to note down a melody as it was being sung. A particularly successful simplification was designed by Peter Lampadarios [+1777], but this was eclipsed by the great **Reform of the Three Teachers**, Houmouzios, Grigorios and Chrysanthos, who designed a new, more analytic notation and transcribed into it a colossal number of texts from the psaltic repertoire. The new notation indicates the precise duration of notes, something lacking in the old notation. The Three Teachers began their Reform about 1814 and the new notation was soon in wide use. Interestingly, the Protopsaltes (Archcantor) of the Patriarchal church, Konstantinos, disliked their new system, and continued to use the old with the right-hand choir, while his colleague, the Lampadarios, and the left-hand choir were using the new. This brief text is an introduction to the nature of the Reformed Notation and the chant written in it.

## 1. NOTES AND SCALES

Byzantine chant (*Psalmodia*) makes use of a variety of different modes, and in order to sing the chant it is necessary to know the different scales proper to each mode, and the other characteristic features of the modes.

The modes of Byzantine chant are organised into **Eight Tones** or **Echoi**. Each echos encompasses a cluster of related modes. (*Other modes also exist which are produced by combining the typical modes of different tones. Some of these are of considerable musical interest and importance, but none of them is used more than occasionally in Psalmodia.*)

A psaltic mode is not simply a scale. Different modes sometimes use the same scale. Each mode uses both a specific scale and a set of typical melodic formulae, or melodic loci; as the formulae typical of a particular mode become familiar, the musical "logic" of the mode becomes intelligible.

In order to be able to identify and discuss the notes of the chant, we need a way of identifying them. Syllables are used to name each note, just as the syllables "doh" "re" "mi" are often used to name the successive notes of the scale in European music. The syllables used in Byzantine chant are as follows:

**Ni Pa Vu Ga Di Ke Zo Ni**

If we are singing the diatonic scale, they correspond to

**Do Re Mi Fa So La Si Do**

**[Ni Pa Vu Ga Di Ke Zo Ni']**

Church music is normally written within a compass of two octaves from low di (So) to the high Di' (So) fifteen notes above. The Middle of this, from Ni to Ni' is the most commonly used part of the range. In transcribing the chant, we shall read the lower Ni as corresponding to the note C - the Middle C of the piano for women's voices, the C an octave lower for men's. *(This is slightly sharper than the tuning laid down by the Patriarchal authorities in 1881 [Ni = 512], but is convenient for purposes of transcription. Moreover the precise pitch laid down by the Patriarchal authorities had little justification beyond the general late nineteenth century obsession with the exact mathematical analysis of musical pitches and intervals.)*

If, then, we sing an ascending diatonic scale starting from C, the psaltic syllables will correspond to the notes of the scale as follows:

**Ni Pa Vu Ga Di Ke Zo Ni**  
**C D E F G A B C.**

## 2. THE TYPES of SCALE:

Psalmody uses four main types of scale, **Diatonic, Hard Chromatic, Soft Chromatic** and **Enharmonic**.

The way we hear the scales used in modern European music has been greatly affected by the "Even Temperament" system of instrumental tuning, so that we hear the white note scale C to C on the piano as a diatonic major scale. A well-trained psalter hears that scale as something subtly different, as the Enharmonic scale on Ni. The Enharmonic scales of Psalmody are sung to precisely the same tuning as the corresponding piano scale: i.e. the steps of the scale makes use of only two kinds of interval, Enharmonic Tones and Enharmonic semitones, the tones being exactly double the size of Enharmonic Semitones.

The octave is divided by psaltic theorists into 72 micro-steps - for simplicity let us call them "steplets." The steps of the Enharmonic scale can be defined very easily in terms of the number of steplets to each step. Let us take the **Enharmonic scale** on F (Ga) as an example:

F	G	A	B <sup>b</sup>	C	D	E	F
12	12	6	12	12	12	6	
Ga	Di	Ke	Zo	Ni	Pa	Vu	Ga'

Here each of the steps of the scale contains precisely the same number of steplets that the corresponding interval between the notes of the scale as it is played on the piano would contain. The sequence Di Ke Zo Ni', that is to say, is produced by singing a sequence of notes starting from Di such that the successive notes are respectively 12, 6 and 12 steplets above the note preceding. Playing the successive notes G A B<sup>b</sup> C on the piano produces an identical sequence of notes starting on G and rising by 12, 6 and 12 steplets successively.

The natural **Diatonic scale** is different. It contains three different sizes of interval, not two. Here is the interpretation of the diatonic scale on F (Ga) generally accepted by modern psaltic theorists.

F		12		G		10		A		8		12		C		12		D		10		8		E		8		F	
Ga				Di				Ke		Zo				Ni				Pa		Vu				Ga'					

Here we have **large tones** of 12 steplets, identical in size with the Enharmonic tones, but accompanied by **lesser tones** of 10 steplets and **large semitones** of 8 steplets. It is important, however, to remember this is a *theoretical* analysis of the difference between the Diatonic and the Enharmonic types of scale: in practise the intervals singers actually sing may not correspond exactly to either pattern: some singers make less distinction amongst the diatonic intervals than the analysis would suggest, some actually make no distinction between the sung versions of the Diatonic and the Enharmonic type.

The **Hard Chromatic Scale** is most familiar in Psalmody as the scale of a mode used in both the Second Tone and the Second Plagal Tone which has Pa (D) as its basic note.

D		6		E <sup>b</sup>		20		F <sup>#</sup>		4		12		G		6		20		C <sup>#</sup>		4		D	
Pa		Vu				Ga		Di		Ke		Zo		Ni'		Pa'									

The **Soft Chromatic Scale** is used mainly in the principal mode of the Second Tone, but also provides the scale of an important mode in Tone Four and the second principal mode of Tone Plagal Two.

C		8		D <sup>b</sup>		14		E		8		12		G		8		14		B		8		C	
Ni		Pa		Vu		Ga		Di		Ke		Zo		Ni'											

This scale is much easier to sing than might at first sight appear. One thing, however, should be noted: the flat A/Ke of the Soft Chromatic scale is a large (diatonic) semitone above G/Di, it is definitely not an enharmonic semitone above. It is acceptable to sing the Di less than 14 steplets flatter than B; it is not acceptable to sing it more than 14 steplets flatter than B. Attempting to play melodies in this mode on the piano produces

something quite wrong-sounding: the flattened Pa and the flattened Di sound completely out of tune.

### 3.THE THREE SYSTEMS:

In addition to the octave-based scales described above, modern Byzantine music also uses two other kinds of scale. **Tetrachordal** and **Pentachordal**.

#### The Octave System.

In the most used system, the eighth note of the ascending scale is also the fundamental note of the next octave of the scale. The note an octave above C is also a C, the octave above a D is also a D, so that this system has firm roots in the natural structure of musical scales.

#### The Pentachordal & Tetrachordal Systems.

It requires very little modification to make a repeated Pentachordal or Tetrachordal pattern of notes on a scale. Consider the Pentachord

[ C D E F G ]

if we read this as

[ Ni Pa Vu Ga Di ]

then, if we transform the note Di into the Ni of a new ascending scale of five notes we produce the following sequence:

Ni Pa Vu Ga {Di =Ni} Pa Vu Ga Di

and the same process can be repeated indefinitely many times:

Ni Pa Vu Ga {Di=Ni'} Pa' Vu' Ga' {Di'=Ni''} Pa'' Vu'' Ga''  
 [ C D E F G A B C D E F# G ]

It is easy to see from the example just constructed, that the first eleven notes of a scale based on Ni using the Octave System are the same as the first eleven notes of a scale based on Ni using the Pentachordal System. The twelfth note of the Pentachordal System scale, however, differs from the equivalent note of the Octave System scale. And from this point on, the scales progressively diverge. The next eight notes of the two scales, for example, are as follows:

8ve Scale:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
	Ke	Zo	Ni	Pa	Vu	Ga	Di	Ke	Zo	Ni
5al Scale:	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A	B	C#
	Ni	Pa	Vu	Ga	Di/Ni	Pa	Vu	Ga	Di/Ni	Pa

The **Tetrachordal System** provides a further series of scales. In this system the fourth note of a scale becomes the foundation note of a new Tetrachordal scale, the fourth note

of which in turn becomes the foundation note of the next level. Here are the first twelve notes of a Tetrachord System scale based on C compared with the parallel notes of the Octave System and Pentachordal System scales:

8ve Scale: C D E F G A B C D E F G  
 5al Scale: C D E F G A B C D E F# G  
 4al Scale: C D E F G A B<sup>b</sup> C D E<sup>B</sup> F G

The construction pattern of a Tetrachord-System scale is

Ni Pa Vu {Ga=Ni'} Pa' Vu' {Ga'=Ni'} Pa'' Vu'' ...

The pattern of a scale based on the Tetrachordal System diverges more rapidly from the scale of the Octave System than does one based on the Pentachordal System.

*Confusingly, the Byzantine musical texts also refer to the Pentachordal System as "Tetraphonia," the Tetrachordal System as "Triphonia" and the Octave System as "Diapason." Even more confusingly, the musical texts normally use the syllables Ni Pa Vu Ga Di Ke Zo Ni' Pa' Vu' &c. to name the successive notes of the Tetrachordal and Pentachordal scales, although this is both inappropriate and thoroughly misleading.*

#### 4. THE INTERVAL SIGNS

European music uses signs which tell the musician which note to sing or play. Byzantine notation is quite different. Melodies are written not as a sequence of notes, but as a **sequence of intervals**, and the fundamental set of signs it uses are interval signs. They are known as the "**signs of quantity**" since they tell us how far to move from one note to the next. The exact interval the sign indicates will depend on the note before the sign and on the specific mode in which we are singing. So, for example, a downward step of a second from Di in the first echos will take us a tone lower to Ga, but a descent of one note from Di in the main mode of the plagal second echos will take us only a fraction of a tone to the very sharp Ga used in the hard chromatic scale.

Ten basic signs are used:

**a) For upward movement:**

Oligon	—	Step
Petasti	∪	Flutter
Kentimata	∩	Doublestitch
Kentima	∖	Stitch
Psili	∫	Leap

**b) For downward movement:**

Apostrophos	↘	Apostrophe
Elaphron	↪	Light
Yporrhoi	,	Cascade
Hamili	↵	Low

**c) For no movement:**

Ison	—	Level
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**d) Combined signs for larger intervals:**

Seventh	up	↗	down	↘
Octave	up	↖	down	↙
Ninth	up	↕	down	↔

Combinations are created in the same way for still larger intervals, though in Psalmodia these are very rare.

**The Execution of Interval Signs**

Besides indicating the interval the voice is to move, the Interval Signs also indicate the manner in which the note is to be sung:

Unless otherwise indicated (eg by a time-sign) each note is one rhythmic beat in length. [The Cascade is an exception: the Yporrhoi instructs us to sing **two** successive notes, each a second lower than the preceding note. Each note of the Cascade is a single rhythmic beat in length.]

The Step [ — ], the Flutter [↘] and the Double Stitch [↕] all indicate a rise of a second.

The Stitch [↗] indicates a rise of a third when written below or after a Step [↘ —↗], but if written above the Step or the Flutter [↗ ↘] combines with that note to indicate a rise of a fourth.

The Leap [↖] of itself indicates a rise of a fourth, but is only found in combination.

Written above the middle or end of a Step or a Flutter, it combines to indicate a rise of a fifth, written above the beginning of a Step or Flutter, a rise of a sixth.

The Apostrophe [↘] indicates a fall of a second.

The Light [↪] indicates a fall of a third.

The Cascade [ , ] is the equivalent of two apostrophes and indicates two successive notes, each a second below the preceding note.  
Larger intervals are indicated by combinations of signs.

The Step, the Apostrophe and the Light are sung without any particular emphasis. They are sung naturally, moderately.

The Flutter is sung in a more lively manner. It begins on the note it indicates, rises a little, and returns with a sort of fluttering effect. If the Flutter is lengthened to two beats, the decoration occurs during the latter part of the first beat.

The Double Stitch is sung softly and linked with the preceding and succeeding notes with no break. It is always sung to the same syllable as the note which precedes it.

The Cascade is sung softly, smoothly and linked with the preceding and succeeding notes with no break.

The Stitch and the Leap take on the characteristic of the sign which supports them.

The combination Level/Step [ ≡ ] (*which also indicates no movement*) is more accentuated than would be the Level by itself. This combination is always followed by a level.

In the paradoxical combined sign Apostrophe-Light, [ ˘ ˘ ] the Apostrophe is sung softly, the Light normally. The execution of this combination requires considerable care; apart from the effect the elements of the combined sign have on each other, they also affect the preceding sign in such a way that the apostrophe takes half a beat from the preceding sign and itself is sung to a half beat. In this combination, the Light indicates a downward movement of a second not a third.

The execution of most other combined signs is fairly obvious.

## 5. TIME SIGNS

In addition to the interval signs which determine the pitch of the note to be sung, Byzantine notation makes use of a number of signs which affect the duration of notes and combinations of notes.

**Klasma or Roll:** the sign ˘ is used above or below an interval sign [ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ] to indicate a doubling in the length of the note sung. When the Roll sits below a Flutter [ ˘ ˘ ], the lengthened note is sung with a slight tremolo or trill at the end of the first beat, the voice touching the note a second above.

**Apli, (dot)** a dot placed beneath a note, adds another beat to its length without any other ornamentation.

More than one dot can be used; each adds another beat, so that the total duration of the note is always one more than the number of added dots.

**Gorgon**,  $\text{r}$  sits above or below a sign and indicates that the note preceding the one on which gorgon sits is to be reduced by 1/2 of a beat and the note over which gorgon sits also reduced by 1/2 of a beat.

If the gorgon sits on the first note of a piece or on a sign following a pause, then only the note on which it sits is reduced by 1/2 of a beat. Other Time Signs described below are treated analogously.

Above the Cascade, Gorgon is read as written over the first of its two notes.

**Dotted Gorgon** exists in two forms:

**Left-dotted Gorgon**  $\text{r}$  reduces the note before the one on which it sits by 1/4 of a beat and the note on which it sits by 3/4 of a beat.

**Right-dotted Gorgon**  $\text{r}$  reduces the note before it by 3/4 of a beat, and the note on which it sits by 1/4 of a beat.

**Double Gorgon**  $\text{r}^{\text{r}}$  sits above the second of a group of three notes: it reduces the note before the one on which it sits by 2/3 of a beat, the note on which it sits by 2/3 of a beat and the note after it by 2/3 of a beat. It produces the rhythmical figure known in European music as a triplet.

**Dotted Double Gorgon** exists in three forms:

**Left-Dotted Double Gorgon**  $\text{r}^{\text{r}}$  sits on the second of a group of three notes; it reduces the first by 1/2 of a beat, and the second and the third by 3/4 of a beat.

**Middle-Dotted Double Gorgon**  $\text{r}^{\text{r}}$  sits on the second of a group of three notes; it reduces the first by 3/4 of a beat, the second by 1/2 of a beat and the third by 3/4 of a beat.

**Right-Dotted Double Gorgon**  $\text{r}^{\text{r}}$  sits on the second of a group of three notes; it reduces the first and the second of the group by 3/4 of a beat and the third by 1/2 of a beat.

**Triple Gorgon**  $\text{r}^{\text{r}^{\text{r}}}$  sits on the second of a group of four notes: it reduces every note in the group by 3/4 of a beat.

*[Four varieties of Dotted triple Gorgon exist, as do Quadruple, Quintuple &c. Gorgons. These exotic creatures are very rare in church music, and when they do occur their interpretation is usually obvious.]*

**Argon**  $\text{r}$  appears only in combination with Double-stitch+Step; it acts on the Double-Stitch as a gorgon and on the Step as an apli.

**Double Argon**  $\text{r}^{\text{r}}$  is also found only on Double-Stitch+Step; it affects the Kentimata as a gorgon would and doubles the length of the Step.

**Triple Argon** is also written only above Double-Stitch+Step, and affects the Double-Stitch as a gorgon would and quadruples the Step's length.

**The Pause** √ indicates a silence of one beat's duration. Additional dots can be added to a Pause, each dot adding a single beat to the duration of the pause.

N.B. the Pause lasts the same number of beats as the number of dots its sign carries: a Pause sign with two dots lasts two beats, not three.

The pause can be affected by an argon or gorgon on the note following it or preceding it. In such a case, the argon or gorgon affects the Pause in the same way it would affect a sung note.

A gorgon can also sit on a Pause - in order for this to happen, the Pause is written with a dot, and the gorgon is written above the dot: in this case the Pause becomes a Pause of 1/2 of a beat.

## 6. QUALIFYING SIGNS:

An important group of signs indicates specific modifications to the notes which are to be sung. There are five such signs normally used in church music.

a] **The Bareia or Heavy Accent;** √ This is, of course, the same sign that is used for a pause. It gives a strong emphasis to the note which follows it, and makes it stand out from those preceding and following it. Unless the music is moving at a rapid tempo, the note following the Heavy Accent is sung with a slight grace-note sung a step higher than the pitch indicated by the written note, to emphasize the drop into the accented note. Sometimes the final half-beat of the note before the Heavy Accent is raised a step, to the same effect.

b] **The Psiphiston or Accented Diminuendo;** ∩ This is written under an interval sign that is followed by at least two more signs in a descending passage. It accentuates the note it sits under and operates on the whole group as a diminuendo does. If, however, the note following it is accentuated because, for example, of its meaning, the Psiphiston merely accentuates the note it sits under.

c] **The Omalon or Ripple;** → This sits beneath a sign and indicates the note is to be sung with a gentle ripple of the voice; the actual figure sung varies from a slight tremor to a clear brief trill on the note above, to a kind of turn rising above and falling below the note beneath which the Omalon is written.

d] **The Antikenoma or Shake;** ↗ This accentuates the note under which it is written and adds a shake to it.

e] **The Eteron or Link;** ∩ This unites two notes so that they are sung on one breath without a break, but with the flutter typical of a Petasti at the end of the first.

## 7. THE TYPES OF HYMNS AND MELODIES

The hymns and melodies of Psalmodia are classified in several different ways. One important classification is into:

- ✂ **Idiomelon**, a hymn sung to its own unique melody. The verses sung at a Lity are normally idiomela. (*Paradoxically, there have been rare occasions when a second hymn has been set to an existing idiomelon. In such cases the original hymn is still known as an idiomelon, although it now shares its tune with another.*)
- ✂ **Prosomia** are hymns or verses sung to a standard melody which is the tune of an existing hymn. The text of a prosomion should follow the exact metrical structure of its prototype, but in practise minor degrees of variation do occur. Unfortunately, many musical texts call automela prosomia!
- ✂ **Automela** are the hymns to whose melodies the prosomia are sung. The hymn is an automelon because it is sung to its own tune. Despite the role of automela as standard melodies, their melodies exist in very many different versions in both written and oral traditions.
- ✂ **Prologoi** are so called, according to the theorists, since they are the automela whose first words are set before the text of the prosomia in the liturgical books to indicate to which tune the prosomion is to be sung.
- ✂ **Irmos**: each ode of a Kanon consists of a sequence of prosomia known as troparia which are sung to the tune of an automelon which stands at the head of them in the liturgical books and is known as the "irmos" of the ode. Most irmoi are also used as automela by many other prosomia. The "*Irmologion*" is a book containing the irmoi of all the most used kanons and usually the most common prologoi. It is an important reference work for a psaltes.

Melodies are also classified into:

- ✂ **Irmic** - melodies sung in the style of the troparia of the kanons,
- ✂ **Sticheric** - melodies sung in the style of opening verses of the Kekragenaria or the Ainoi. Idiomela are always sung in the sticheric style.
- ✂ **Pappadic** - melodies sung in the elaborate, slow, melismatic style used in the most solemn settings of the Cherubikon or Koinonikon.

A different pattern of classification divides melodies into:

- ✂ **short** or **simple**, (*syntomon*), where generally each syllable is sung to one note,
- ✂ **slow** or **solemn**, (*argon*), where each syllable is normally sung to two or three notes of melody (often then called **argosyntomon**), or to longer melismatic phrases,
- ✂ **elaborate** or **ornate** irmic style, (*kalophonikon*), where the singing of a single syllable of text may use very many notes. The elaborate style also uses **kratimata**, passages of pure melody sung to meaningless syllables, "tererem" or "nananu" or suchlike.

**Pappadic** melodies are written in either the slow sticheric style or the elaborate irmic style and are the longest and most ornate of all.

Psaltic theorists also classify melodies according to their **emotional quality**:

- ✂ the **expansive** or **exultant**, (*diastaltikon*),
- ✂ the **poignant, sorrowful** or **sad**, (*systaltikon*),
- ✂ and the **serene** or **tranquil**, (*isychastikon*).

The distinctions amongst the different kinds of melodies is important, since the Tones use different modes for different kinds of melody; sometimes the differences are subtle, sometimes they extend to using different scales.

## 8. ISOKRATIMA

Isokratima is an important element in the performance of Byzantine chant. In addition to the Psaltai who sing the melody of the hymn or verse, there should normally be two or more singers who hold the *ison* in order to underpin the modal structure of the chant and to give it stability of pitch. In short or slow melodies it is possible for the isokratima to sing the words of the hymn with the psaltes, in more elaborate pieces the isokratima is normally wordless, being sung with closed lips.

There are five main types of isokratima

- ✍ **Stable Ison:** where the isokratima holds the basic note of the melody without moving from it, unless, perhaps, to join the psaltes to sing the melodic cadences of the hymn. *In all forms of isokratima the ison may be replicated an octave higher. It is usual to avoid an ison which would sit in the middle of the Psalmodia, and when such would happen, a note an octave lower is usually sung.*
- ✍ **Isokratima on the Basic Note of the Tetrachord:** a more common form of isokratima which moves as the melody moves from one tetrachord to another of the mode in use and supports the psaltes by singing the basic note of that tetrachord.
- ✍ **Mobile Isokratima using the Dominant Notes:** a more flexible isokratima that makes use of any of the dominant notes of the mode in order to support the successive phrases of the melody. Normally each phrase is supported on the note on which its melodic cadence will come to rest.
- ✍ **Semi-Harmonic Isokratima:** some choirmasters are tempted to give the Psalmodia a harmonic enrichment by using a freely moving ison that makes use of whatever notes give what is felt to be an appropriate effect. Such pseudo-harmonic effects have no place in true Psalmodia and should be avoided.
- ✍ **Compound Isokratima:** besides the isokratima which supports the Psalmodia with a single line of sound, there exists a second ancient tradition of isokratima which uses the Basic note and one or more of the Dominant notes of the mode at the same time.