

On the Sunday Axion and on *The Athonite Axionar*

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Abstract: A valuable volume of psaltic music is about to be printed soon. It is a new collection of Axions, elaborated in the “St. Gheorghe” Romanian cell - Kapsala in the Holy Mountain. The collection contains works by older (19th century) or contemporary Greek composers. Most of the Greek axions belong to an Athonite monk who wished to remain anonymous and who entrusted Father Gheorghe from the “St. Gheorghe - Livadogheni” Romanian cell on Holy Mount Athos with a valuable collection of personal axions, to be adapted and printed. It is so that these axions are now being printed for the first time directly in Romanian. These anonymous compositions are a pleasant surprise by their carefully maintained balance between originality and classic features, which is not at all easy to achieve. This important collection of Axions will be the subject of this article, through a historical presentation of the genre of axion and the meaning and importance of this genre in the liturgical framework of the Orthodox Liturgy.

Keywords: collection of Axions, athonite tradition, Romanian language, Greek composers, Mount Athos.

1. Introduction

A valuable volume of psaltic music is about to be printed. It is a new collection of Axions, elaborated in the “St. Gheorghe - Livadogheni” Romanian cell – Kapsala in the Holy Mountain. It will be the subject of this article, through a historical presentation of the genre of koinonikon and the meaning and importance of this genre in the liturgical framework of the Orthodox Liturgy. This *Axionar*¹ [Book of Axions] is a completely original² work, as it is the first

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¹ *Axionar*, vol. I, “St. George – Livadogheni” Romanian cell, Holy Mount Athos, in the process of being edited. Edited by Ierodiacon Gheorghe. The term *Axionar* [Book of axions] is sometimes found in the description of manuscripts that contain only a few axion-filled pages, such as ms. rom. BAR 4338, *Heruvicear-Axionar* [Book of cherubika and axions], ms. Agapia 504, *Chinonicar-Axionar* [Book of koinonika and axions], ms. BNR 4559, *Heruvicear-Chinonicar-Axionar* [Book of cherubika, koinonika, and axions], ms. Vorona 9 (fragment), ms. Agapia 79 (inv. 1581) fragment, ms. Vorona 9/960, *Axionar coligat* [Colligated book of axions] (Bucescu, 2009).

² Under the same title of *Axionar*, as far as we know, there has also appeared in recent years Nicu Moldoveanu (ed.), *Axionar* (2018). We also note the axion collections by Archim. Clement Haralam and Cezar Cocuz (eds.), *Axioane. Antologie psaltică* [Axions. Psaltic Anthology] (2023), and Pavel Lungu (ed.), *Axioane tradiționale de la Mănăstirea Neamț* [Traditional axions from Neamț Monastery] (2003). However, this *Axionar* [Book of axions], prepared for printing

collection in the history of Romanian psaltic prints that brings to light unique Greek axions³.

2. Argumentation of the topic

2.1. The originality of the work

Comprising over 700 pages of old and new axions, the work makes a lasting impression because it proposes a careful selection for each church tone, presenting to the discerning reader a collection which is not only generous in size but also a fine assortment of high and undisputed quality. The extensive bibliography used for this selection is predominantly in Greek, but many of the works are less known even to the informed audience, which undoubtedly contributes to the originality of the collection.

Not succumbing to the usual temptation menacing any compiler of psaltic music, that of including works that are spectacular but sometimes deviate from the classical lines, the editor successfully filters a series of axions unitary in their concise, classic style, written in a less analytical manner, with phrases that are melodious and approachable by any group of psaltes.

The collection contains works by older (19th century) or contemporary Greek composers. Most of the Greek⁴ axions belong, as mentioned, to an Athonite monk who wished to remain anonymous and who entrusted Father Gheorghe from the “St. Gheorghe - Livadogheni” Romanian cell on Holy Mount Athos with a valuable collection of personal axions, to be adapted and printed. It is so that these axions are now being printed for the first time directly in Romanian. These anonymous compositions are a pleasant surprise by their carefully maintained balance between originality and classic features, which is not at all easy to achieve. Without praising a monk who wanted to remain hidden behind his pen, one must nevertheless note his musical intuition, his thorough knowledge of the compositional rules specific to the axion, his remarkable ability to compose very similar and yet very original variants, each one unique in its own way, his impeccable knowledge of the rules of psaltic orthography (an art skilfully mastered by the book editor as well).

The book of axions captures the most diverse melodic versions, from the traditional melodic lines of the great teachers, such as Gregory the Protopsaltis,

since 2019, is a first, since it contains the largest number of Greek axions, mostly previously unpublished and appearing for the first time in Romanian. On other Romanian works that study axion manuscripts (Șapcă, 2020, p. 72).

³ Most of them composed by an anonymous Athonite monk.

⁴ In Greek, we note several collections of axions such as Hierodeacon Benediktos, *Ἀκολουθία εἰς τὸ Ἄξιόν ἐστιν* (1854) or Holy Monastery Filotheou (ed.), *Ἀγιορείτικη Μουσικὴ Ἀνθοδέσμη* (no year), *apud* Nikolaos D. Tsaprantzis (2021), undergraduate thesis under the guidance of archim. Nektarios Paris.

Chourmouzos Chartophylax, Nektarios the Prodromite, and others, to some new creations that carefully preserve the classic style. The great diversity of the scales in which these chants were composed is remarkable. From the classic tones of the Octoechos to their branches (diphonic, tetraphonic, pentaphonic, heptaphonic, antiphonic, etc.) or to the more distant scales, identified by the names of the maqams (agem ashiran, etc.), this generous palette of sonorities betrays the teachers' interest in composing and interpreting the axion through multiple melodic variants. For various reasons, sometimes, the editor opted to use slightly changed names of tone branches (e.g., *pentaphonic* instead of *pentafonón*, etc.).

The rhythmic writing is also remarkably diverse. If most of the axions selected are characterized by simple, synoptic writing, some chants are written more analytically⁵, being intended mainly for soloist interpretation.

The arrangement of authors in chronological order helps us observe the stylistic differences and similarities between the old and the new, between the traditional and the innovative. The bibliographic sources for each axion are carefully specified at the end of the book.

The use of psaltic notation is exemplary and has been thoroughly checked in collaboration with a team of specialists⁶ well versed in the rules of psaltic orthography according to the New Method.

Depending on the tone of the formula that they accompany, the isons were carefully noted, becoming a helpful tool for the isokrates, a guide to be used, a proposal, by no means an imposition (Χατσηχρονόγλου, 2020). In many cases, certain melodic passages are particularly challenging when it comes to notating the ison. It is important, however, for it to be based, as much as possible, on psaltic modal principles and not on harmonic ones. Isons are not an accompaniment meant to achieve delightful harmonies. It is true that the ison constantly creates consonances with the melodic line, but its main purpose is not to achieve these harmonies at any cost, but to mark the base of the tone in which a melodic formula is located. It should be mentioned, on the other hand, that many psaltes opt for an ison with fewer changes. This vision is strictly interpretive and does not always show the modulations from one structure to another, from one tone to another. The “M” symbol shows that the isokrates must also chant the melodic line, either because it descends below the base of the tone or to highlight a melodic passage between two parts of the chant. Often, the conductor of a psaltes group may opt for *tutti* (μαζί in Greek, hence the letter “M”) for a particular phrase, even if the “M” is not written down.

⁵ The use of rhythmic subdivisions such as the dotted gorgon, the digorgon, the trigorgon, etc.

⁶ Pr. Virgil Ioan Nanu, Ierom. Ioan Lacoschitiotul, Dimitrios Persinakis, Giannis Liakos, Pr. Mihai Ciolpan, Ion Minoiu, Adrian Sirbu ș.a.

2.2. The Romanian adaptation of axions

To anyone who endeavours to proceed to it, the process of “Romanianization” reveals itself as difficult, demanding. The interpreter needs to have a good grasp of both ancient Greek and Romanian, including their liturgical, archaic vocabulary, and all aspects of psaltic composition, tones, compositional genres, tacts. Detailed knowledge of the melodic formulas (theses) in each tone, genre, and tact is also required⁷.

The Romanianization of the chants remains, therefore, a very contemporary and challenging topic, in constant need of polishing, finishing, and of keeping the fragile balance between preserving the original melodiousness and adapting it to the natural, fluid expression of the Romanian hymnographic text, which – and this is particularly important – should not be subjected to exaggerated topical permutations merely to satisfy the obsession of preserving the original melodiousness⁸.

As for the present work, we can affirm without reservation that it represents an important chapter in the centuries-long process of “chant Romanianization” – a long journey and a “craft with many controversies” (as the researcher Costin Moisil called it). This *Axionar* can take pride of place on the shelf of church service books in Romanian, being a diligent and careful effort to reach the most suitable form of adaptation into Romanian, with the fewest (undesirable but unavoidable) compromises, keeping, as much as possible, the original melodic formulas undiluted, and paying particular attention to natural expression in the Romanian language⁹.

⁷ On the complexity of the psaltic compositional process, citing Manuel Chrysaphes, the great researcher Griorios Stathis mentions the following: “In Byzantine music manuscripts, different compositional genres can be clearly observed, and the names of these genres usually come from the content of the liturgical text of the songs. [...] From a strictly musical point of view, they are of fundamental importance, because they show the different uses of melodies and, at the same time, the variety of musical forms in Byzantine composition. Among the ancient masters, Manuel Dukas Chrysaphes Lampadarios also tells us about this variety of forms in the Psaltic Art: «Don’t let anyone think that the use of the psalter is easy, because it is complex and multi-faceted. And so, there is a big difference between chanting stichera and kratimata, supplication troparia and megalynaria, ikoi, etc. It is one thing, therefore, to use a sticheron, and another to use a supplication troparion, another a kratima and another a megalynarion, another an ikos, and another a cherubikon, and another a hallelujah».” [Manuel Chrysaphes, *Περὶ τῶν ἐνθεωρουμένων τῆ ψαλτικῆ τέχνης καὶ ὧν φρονοῦσι κακῶς τινες περὶ αὐτῶν*, ms. Ivion 1120, autograph Manuel Chrysaphes, year 1458, f. 12r ff. (transl. from Stathis, 1975, *Introduction*, p. 25)].

⁸ The original melos must not remain rigid, but can and must be flexible to small adaptations according to the text. It is important not to change 1. the structure of the melody, 2. the order of cadences, 3. the characteristic melodic formulas and 4. the metric feet.

⁹ As proof of the importance given to the relationship between the preservation of unaltered melodic formulas and natural expression in the Romanian language, the editor chooses, among other things, to make flexible the textual incipit of the axion almost every time (either *Cuvine-se cu adevărat* [It is truly right] or *Vrednică ești* [Worthy are you]).

2.3. The history of axion chanting

The *axion* is a chant dedicated To Our Lady, Saint Virgin Mary (Fig. 1) that was introduced in the Holy Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom in the 11th -12th centuries, especially since the story of the Holy Mount Athos miracle started to spread, being linked directly to the first part of the chant (Andrei, 2013, p. 59). It



Fig. 1 Icon of “Our Lady Axion estin” from the church “Protaton” in Kareia, Holy Mount Athos

seems that before this moment, the tradition had been to chant the irmos from Ode Nine of the Ordinary Matins Canon during that part of the Liturgy (Vintilescu, pp. 277-279; Pruteanu, p. 169, note 1). The term *axion* comes from the Greek text that would be etymologically translated as *worthy, right*, taken from the incipit “*Vrednic este cu adevărat să te fericim*¹⁰... [It is truly *right* to bless you...]” and represents the verse that precedes the irmos *Ceea ce ești mai cinstită* [More honourable than...] in Ode Nine of the Great Thursday composed by Cosmas the Melodist (c. 8th century). The “*antiaxion*”¹¹ chants sung during the great feasts are actually the irmoi of Ode Nine in the Canon of that feast. Therefore, these irmoi should not be called *axions*, but, for instance, irmoi “in place of *axions*”¹².

As the musical manuscripts show, for centuries, before 1814, when the New Method opened the doors to the most diverse melodizations, the most traditional *axion* chanted (which appears in numerous musical manuscripts, including Romanian ones) was the one in Tone 2 (Fig. 2), being reduced in register and balanced in its ethos.

¹⁰ There are also other equally valid variants such as *Cade-se cu adevărat* or *Cuvine-se cu adevărat* [It is truly right/meet] (Pruteanu, 2013, p. 169, note 1, p. 251, note 2). On other aspects related to the correct translation of the *axion* text, see also Pruteanu (2013, p. 231, note 1 and p. 251, note 3).

¹¹ The expression “in place of *axion*” should be preferred (from Gr. *avτί* = instead of) and not “*antiaxion*” which in Romanian obviously suggests the idea of opposition (“*anti*”) and not replacement.

¹² However, the expression “*axion* of the feast” has taken hold, as we can also see in 19th-century manuscripts: “The starets sets off towards the starets’ house, dressed in a robe, accompanied by a procession of six hierodeacons, with all the servants dressed in robes in front of him, while the psaltes sing the *axion* of the feast all the way to the starets’ house, in the uninterrupted sound of the bells” (ms. BAR ro. 1525, f. 33r).

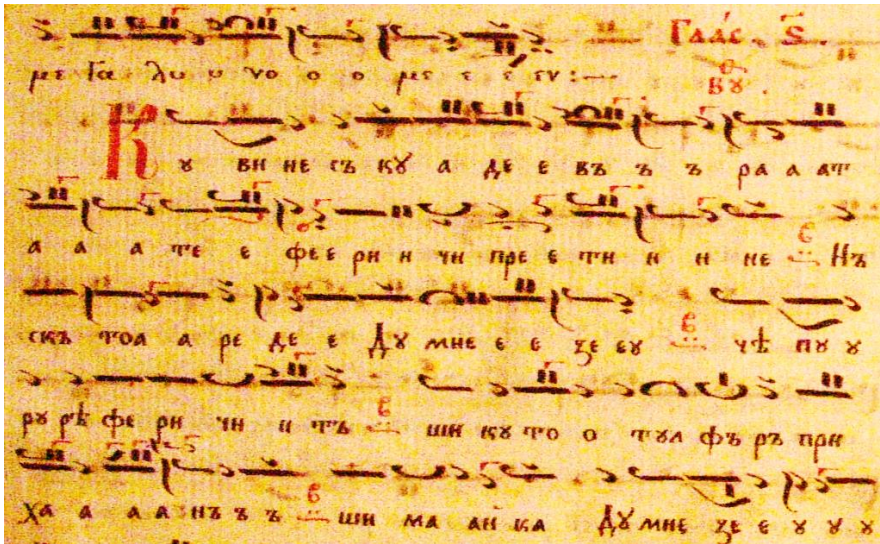


Fig. 2 The traditional axion in Tone 2 “when the icon is carried to the refectory”, in Romanian (followed by the variant in Greek), brief exegesis by Visarion the Confessor (ms. Neamț ro. 13, p. 16)

The New Writing Method allowed for analytical writing and, unprecedentedly, facilitated the recording of the countless melodic variants that circulated in the 19th century, especially in the oral tradition: melodies in the Octoechos and the Tone branches, but also in various musical scales and combinations of tones that were preserved with names taken from the Arabic-Persian maqams.

In his study of over 400 19th- and 20th-century musical manuscripts hosted by 10 important libraries in the country, the researcher Victor Șapcă (2020, p. 73) identifies 295 melodic psaltic variants to the axion in Romanian in the New Method notation. The first axions were translated, expounded, and composed in the New Method by Romanian cantors such as Makarios the Hieromonk, Visarion the Confessor¹³, Anton Pann, Ghelasie the Bessarabian, Nectarios the Prodromite, Nectarios Frimu, Saint Joseph the Merciful (Naniescu), Emanuel and Ioan Zmeu, *et al.*

Researching the manuscripts, we can figure out the tones preferred by the composers or the copyists, by a particular monk, or even by a community. Of the 295 axions studied by the researcher Victor Șapcă, the most numerous are in the plagal of Tone 4 (64), in the plagal of Tone 1 (59), Tone 1 (41), the plagal of Tone 2 (35) and Tone 2, with 31 axions. Perhaps surprisingly, there follow, in order, the Varis Tone (26 axions), Tone 4 (22 variants) and Tone 3 (17 axions).

¹³ Before Visarion, Iosif of Neamț had also been writing at Neamț Monastery, composing axions in Greek, which Visarion, his direct disciple, translated into the New Method.

Moreover, the manuscripts also contain some axions that were obviously more cherished because of their compositional style¹⁴ or even because of the scale in which they were composed¹⁵. For example, in the Neamț manuscripts, representative of the Paisian tradition, some axions seem to be more “special”, including special indications. One of them is the one composed in Slavonic (Fig. 3) but “on the Romanian ifos” (ms. Neamț ro. 14, f. 7v - 8r, copyist Dorothei Monahul), in the plagal of the heptaphonic Tone 4, with the mention: “*Russian axion, with Romanian ifos, so that it is not completely erased from the Romanian’s mind such as it was once chanted, and therefore I put it here*”.

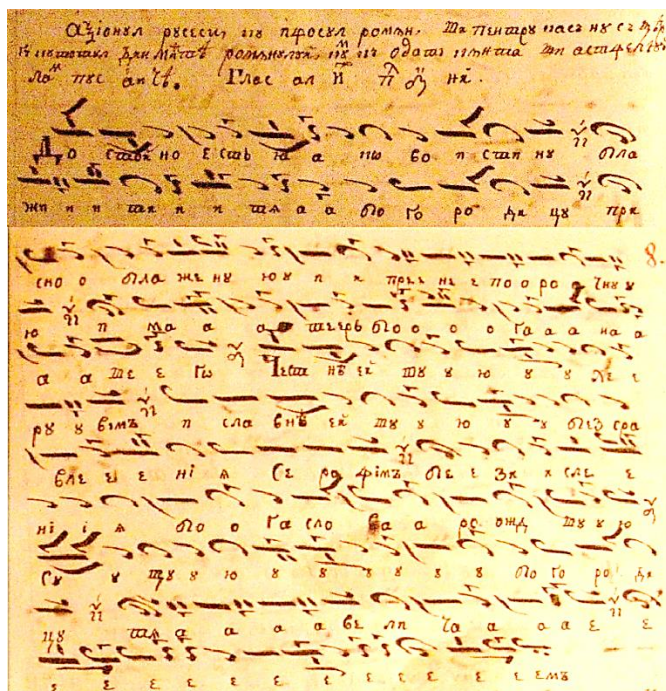


Fig. 3 Axion composed in Slavonic but “on the Romanian ifos”.
Ms. Neamț ro. 14, f. 7v - 8r, copyist Dorothei the Monk

In the 19th century, the axion was a chant loved not only by the psaltes but also by the aristocrats, who asked renowned teachers to compose one or several axions “at their special request”. This is also the case of Boyar Gregory of Iasi for whom his friend, Gregory Lampadarios, composed a set of axions by Tones (including the diatonic Tone 2) (Fig. 4).

¹⁴ On ifos in Psaltic Art in general see also Sîrbu (2019).

¹⁵ Another similar case is a lengthy doxology by Gregory the Protopsaltis in the plagal of Tone 4 in the scale of “fioricesc sozonake (sic!)” (suzinak) called “too beautiful” (ms. Secu 70, f. 340r-344r).

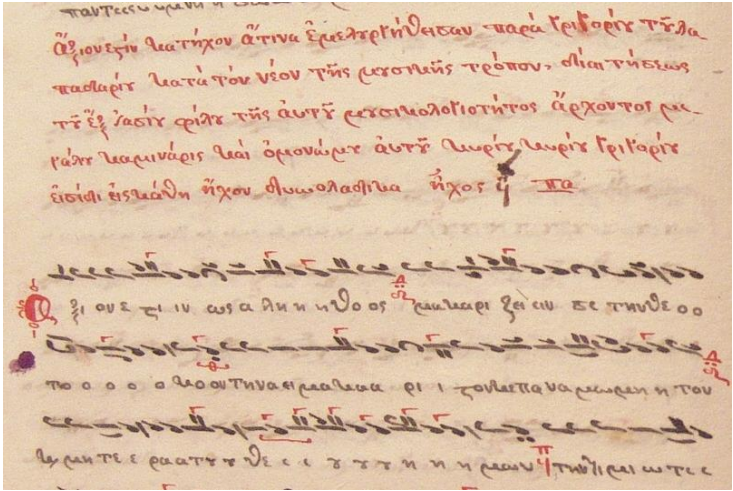


Fig. 4 “Axions in melodized tones by Gregory Lampadarios, in the new way of musical writing, at the request of the great boyar of Iasi, an honest musician and friend of the same name, Mr. Gregory. Every tone, one after the other, was put here”
(ms. Roman 96, f. 194v-196v)

Apart from the Divine Liturgy, the axion is chanted in two other circumstances: 1. at the end of the meal, during feasts, on certain important holidays, when the service of “elevating the Panagia” is performed, and “when the Artos is shared with the brothers”¹⁶ (Fig. 6-9), when the axion can be chanted in different tones and 2. upon receiving important guests, during the official reception, when only the usual axion in Tone 2 is sung from the gate up to the church¹⁷.

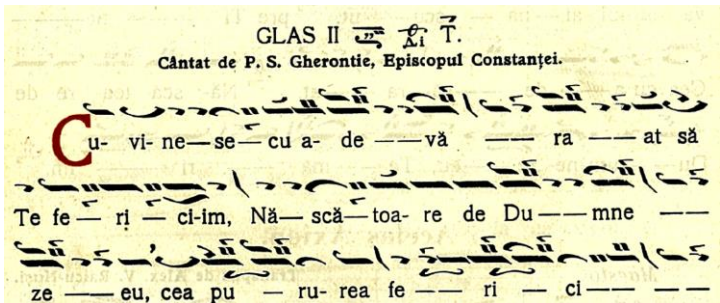


Fig. 5 Axion in Tone 2 chanted at the official reception of the bishop

¹⁶ See the study on “Rânduiala mesei de hram în obștile monahale paisiene” [The Ordinance of the Patron Day Meal in Paisian Monastic Communities] (Bălan, 2023, pp. 653-660).

¹⁷ This custom of reception is not only found in Athonite monasteries. Gherontie Nicolau, the Bishop of Constanța, states in his work that upon officially receiving the bishop in their parishes, the psaltes used to sing the traditional axion, in Tone 2. The author himself used to sing it on these festive occasions (Nicolau, 1939, pp. 9-10) (Fig. 5).

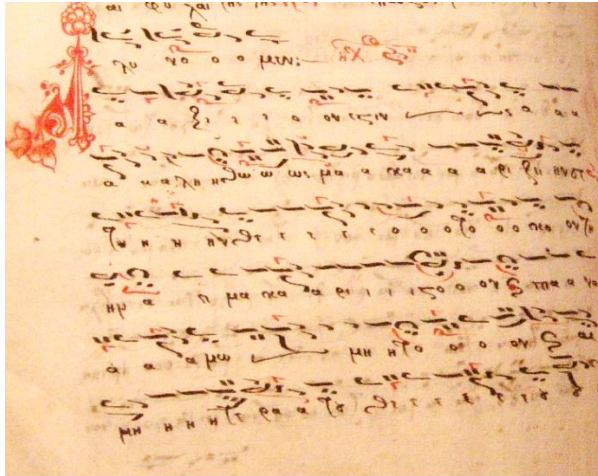


Fig. 6 The axion in Tone 2 in Greek, the traditional full version (sung in the refectory and at feasts), in Middle Byzantine exegetical notation (ms. Neamț ro. 119, f. 111v - 112r)

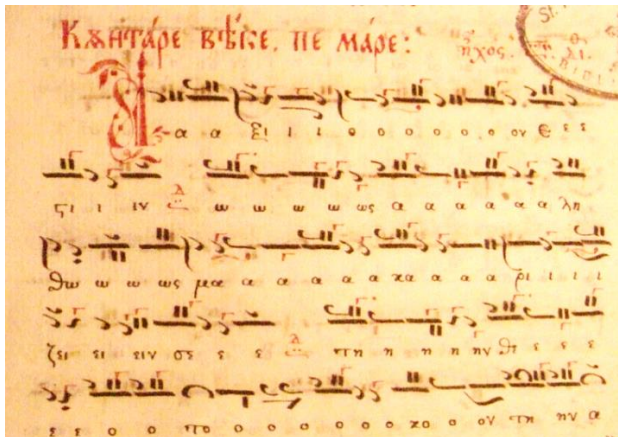


Fig. 7 The axion in Tone 2 in Greek, in full, exegesis by Visarion the Confessor (ms. Neamț ro. 13, f. 11r)

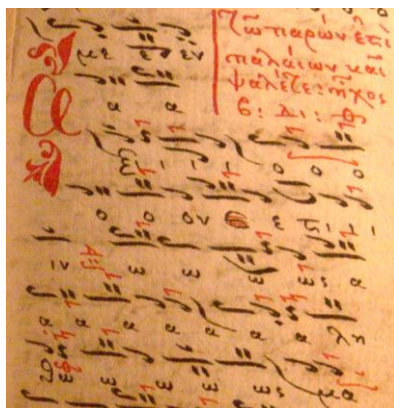


Fig. 8 The axion in Tone 2, „această (cântare) străveche” [this ancient (chant)] (ms. Neamț gr. 01, f. 147r)

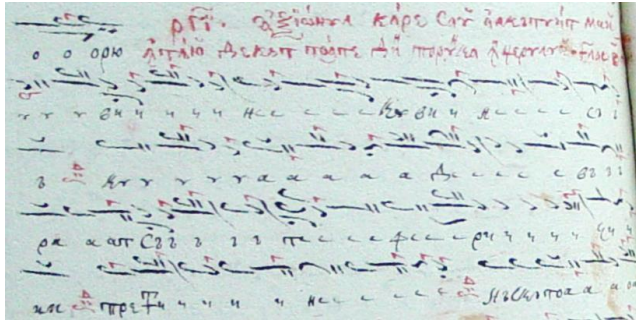


Fig. 9 Axion, Tone 2, “which were formed first of all on the angel’s command”, exegesis by Makarios the Hieromonk¹⁸ (BAR 1685, f. 170v - 171r)

Evidence of the custom of singing the axion in the refectory has existed ever since the 15th century. An Athonite manuscript from Iviron (ms. Iviron 1006, dated 1431) mentions the ordinance of singing an axion in the plagal of Tone 2 (Cernătescu, 2019, p. 62, *apud* Șapcă, 2020, p. 72). In ms. Sinai 1299, f. 271v (dated 1715) reference is made to the custom of singing the axion in the plagal of Tone 2 “when the elevated ones are shared”¹⁹. Another variant of the axion that is sung in the refectory, and which is particularly interesting, is the one composed by Matthew of Vatopedi (1774-1849) in the Varis Heptaphonic Tone, on the melody of the kalophonic irmos *Ceea ce nu prin ispitire* [O Mother who knewest not man] (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10 Axion in the Varis Heptaphonic Tone sung in the refectory: “Also composed by me, the writer, on the melody of the kalophonic irmos *Ceea ce nu prin ispitire* [O Mother who knewest not man], as the pious music-loving brothers in the holy community of Rosikon liked to sing it in the refectory. That is why I fulfilled their request and composed this one too” (ms. Panteleimon 1207, f. 215v)

¹⁸ The *Irmologhion Calofonicon* [Irmologion Kalophonikon] by Saint Makarios the Hieromonk has been recently printed in two valuable publications: Gheorghită & Cernătescu (2023), *Makarios the Hieromonk - Irmologhion Calofonicon*, and Bălan (2023), *Calofoniconul Paisian* [the Paisian Kalophonikon].

¹⁹ «Εἰς τράπεζαν, ὅταν μοιράζουσιν τὸ ὕψωμα. Ἦχος πλ. β' Ἄξιόν ἐστιν».

2.4. How do we relate to the chanting of the axion during the service?

Perhaps the most important aspect dealt with so far relates to the believer's state of mind while singing the axion during the Divine Liturgy. Our participation in the holy services should be mindful, and we should be constantly aware of the liturgical moment we find ourselves in. Why have I come to church? What service is this? What is the purpose of this service? What is happening in the altar, what is being sung by the choir right now? Here are some questions that every Christian should know how to answer. Otherwise, our presence in the church risks being reduced to a formality that we tick off out of inertia.

The Holy Fathers of the Church were the ones who taught us what thoughts our minds should turn to when we hear the chanting of the axion dedicated to the Mother of God. On the one hand, they explain to us what happens in the Holy Altar and what prayers are read by the priests during the axion. On the other hand, during the services, the Holy Fathers were many times witnesses to divine revelations, through which they could see with their spiritual eyes what happens in the church and remains unseen to the physical eye. It is necessary for the priests to constantly catechize the faithful about what happens in the altar, for a deeper understanding of the services and the chants, and it is of great benefit to read about these priestly views for us all to learn about the unseen power of the Holy Liturgy and of common prayer in general.

2.5. The liturgical context

At this moment, the priest is praying that the gifts received have their effect on those mentioned during the Proskomedia, says St. Nicolae Cabasila (1997, p. 49). But our sacrifice is not only one of request, but also one of thanksgiving. The priest gives thanks for the saints, because through them the Church reached its goal and saw its prayer for the kingdom of heaven being fulfilled. And the prayer of supplication, on the other hand, is for those who are still incomplete, who need prayer:

“Again, we offer You this spiritual worship for those who have reposed in the faith: forefathers, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and for every righteous spirit made perfect in faith; (*then, censing, the priest says, our note*) especially for our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary”.

After mentioning the Most Pure Theotokos, while the choir chants *Cuvine-se cu adevărat* [It is truly right], the priest first mentions Saint John the Prophet and Baptist of the Lord, then the saints, the glorious and praiseworthy Apostles, and the saints of the day, all those fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection to eternal life, the fathers and brothers who fell asleep, all the bishops, all the priesthood, the diaconate, all the priestly and monastic

communities. Next, the priest prays for the entire world, for the holy and apostolic Church, for those living pure and reverent lives, for the leaders of countries, cities, villages. The priest then prays for the city or village or monastery where he serves, for the whole country and its inhabitants, for those who travel by water, land and air, for the sick, for those who suffer and for the enslaved, for benefactors, and for all of us.

Therefore, while the choir is singing *Cuvine-se cu adevărat* [It is truly right], every Christian is called to remember the living and the fallen asleep in his mind, in the same way that the priest in the altar remembers, through the ordained prayers, the living and the fallen asleep (Anagnostopoulos, p. 370). Moreover, during this moment we should think about “the special, incomparable, unspeakable glory and joy that the Mother of God receives from her Son through our humble sacrifice, through the Divine Liturgy” (Papadaki, 2012, p. 166).

2.6. The visible miracles

In the liturgical context, the axion is placed within the Anaphora, after the preparation of the Gifts, filling a time interval in which the priest reads the rest of the prayer. That is why it is important to know what the Holy Fathers saw at this time.

During the Preparation of the Gifts, some Fathers of the Church received divine revelations by divine permission. They were called to see “a great crowd before the Altar above the heavens, of forefathers, patriarchs, prophets, righteous people, hierarchs, saints, martyrs, confessors, apostles, evangelists and other groups of saints and of the saved, before the Throne and before the Lamb” (Anagnostopoulos, 2005, p. 367).

A crowd of people from all the tribes, peoples, and languages of mankind, all together around the Throne of God, the Holy Table and before the Lamb of God, “He who takes away the sin of the world”. There, at a great height, before the Throne, the Holy Fathers saw tens of thousands of choirs of saints standing piously, dressed in white clothes, and saying: “Salvation comes from our God who sits on the Throne and from the Lamb...” (Anagnostopoulos, 2005, p. 367).

The *Sinaitic Patericon* tells us about a monk who was tempted by the devil to think that the Holy Gifts are only bread and wine and, therefore, to stop attending the Divine Liturgy to receive communion. As the monk sat in his cell full of doubt, the brothers from the monastery looked for him, and taking him to work with them, they prayed for him for a long time so that God would reveal to him the power of the Mystery. At the end of the Liturgy, they came to him and asked him if anything had been revealed to him. And he confessed the following:

“When the reading from the Apostle finished and the deacon prepared to read the Gospel, I saw the roof of the church split open, the sky appeared, and every word of the Holy Gospel became a fire up to the heavens. After the Great Entry and after placing the Holy Gifts on the Holy Table, I saw

again the heavens open and fire descending together with a multitude of Angels and Archangels and, above them, two holy people whose beauty I cannot describe, because their appearance was like lightning. Among these was a Child of extraordinary beauty and brilliance. Then, the angels lined up around the Holy Table, and the Child was among them. When the divine prayers finished and the moment came to break the Lamb into four pieces, the two young men began to divide the divine Child, although, unusually, He remained the same, whole. They pierced him in the rib, from which blood began to flow and the Holy Chalice was filled. After that, the time came for me to go with the other brothers to take communion... Then, in my right palm I received his true Body... With a broken heart I said and confessed, sobbing: I believe, God! I believe...! And on the spot He changed into the Body of the visible bread. I thanked God and partook of the Holy Gifts. After that, the priests put the Lamb in the Holy Chalice and I saw the church tower open again and the heavenly powers, the two shining youths and the divine Child, rising and disappearing into the heavens.” (Anagnostopoulos, 2005, pp. 372-373)

Finally, we cannot omit the wonderful vision that Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ, a Scythian who lived in the days of Emperor Leo the Wise (886-911), when Constantinople was threatened by the danger of an invasion. From Saturday to Sunday, an all-night vigil for help from the Most Holy Mother of God and for the rescue of the city that was besieged was held in the chapel adjacent to the church of Our Lady of the Blachernae in Constantinople, where the mantle, the robe, and a part of the belt of the Mother of God were kept. Below is the account taken from the life of St. Andrew the Fool for Christ:

“In this chapel there used to be an all-night service. Saint Andrew and Saint Epiphanius used to go there to pray. It was the moment when the priest said: «Especially for our Most Holy...», and the saint saw the Mother of God advancing through the Royal Doors towards the Holy Altar, passing right through the middle of the church. The place was shining, the whole church was lit up, and a fragrance filled the whole space. The Blessed One seemed very tall and had a retinue of shining saints, among whom stood out Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Theologian, walking to her right and left. Among the shining saints who surrounded her, some went ahead, others followed her singing «It is truly right»²⁰. All this special procession full of light was surrounded by a lot of angels who censed the Mother of God, the Christians and then the Holy Altar. [...] The Mother of God knelt

²⁰ Most likely, it is about *More honorable than*, because, according to the accounts, the miracle of the Holy Mount Athos, with the angel who sang the verse *It is truly right*, took place only in the year 982. The life of Saint Andrew was narrated by his own confessor, Nikiforos, the priest of the Church of Saint Sophia, most likely between the years 910-920, so approximately 70 years before the miracle at the Holy Mount. Moreover, there is not a single source for the life of Saint Andrew, but there are several manuscripts preserved in the libraries of the Holy Mount and in Europe (Paraklitu, 2011, pp. 7-8, in the *Prologue* to the first edition).

down and prayed for a long time. She was praying to her Son and God for the salvation of the world and tears were running down her face. After that, she entered the Holy Altar and prayed for the believers who were holding the vigil that night and for everyone. When she finished her prayer, with a happy and humble movement, she untied the shining scarf from her immaculate head and spread it like a veil with her immaculate hands over all the people. The veil became so large that it covered the entire church. The two saw it lying like that for a long time, radiating divine glory and light. As long as she remained there, the Mother of God and the holy scarf spread grace around. When the Lady began to ascend to the sky with her retinue, the veil also began to shrink little by little and disappeared into the air of heaven.... Everything was surrounded by an unspeakable, divine beauty” (Paraklitu, 2011, p. 198).

3. Conclusions

Therefore, the way in which we should perceive, interpret, and also compose (!) the axions should take into account their place and role within the Holy Liturgy, namely, that of a chant that completes the end of the liturgical Anaphora. The axion cannot suddenly be a moment of spectacle and vocal display, but an extension of the mystical atmosphere of chanting *Pe Tine Te lăudăm* [We praise You, we bless You], even if the axion requires a certain amount of extroversion in its interpretation²¹.

The participation of the priest, the psaltis, the believer in the Holy Liturgy must be a mindful one. We are called to know, as much as possible, the purpose and interpretations of the Fathers of the Church regarding the main moments in the service, to the “knowing” glory of God.

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²¹ Even if it has been melodized in countless variants, the axion remains a chant that covers a period of time in which the priest is reading in secret the rest of the Anaphora dedicated to God. The moment when the axion is chanted is often perceived separately from the rest of the chants in the Great Answers (which in ancient times were sung in the ephonic style, i.e., recitative, with an introverted, simple, sober ethos) and the psaltes sometimes choose a spectacular interpretation. The psaltes’ moving to the icon of the Mother of God is not justified at this time dedicated to the Anaphora and, moreover, it scatters the mind and attention of the believers, as the Archon Protopsaltis Panagiotis Neohoritis opines. Even if it has been melodized in countless variants, the axion remains a song that covers a period of time in which the priest reads the rest of the Anaphora in secret.

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